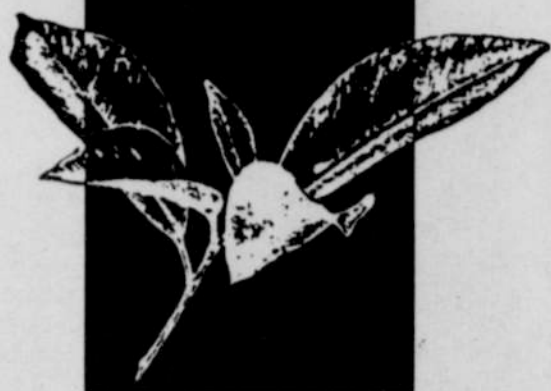




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## books

# Marc My Words

## Humorist returns with sequel to award-winning debut novel

by Glenn Scofield Williams

**M**arc Acito is a busy, busy guy. A popular online blog, commentaries on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, a world premiere of his play at Artists Repertory Theatre this fall and, of course, a brand new novel. And it seems, with all this creative output, Acito has become a kind of Midas man: All he touches turns to gold. Not bad for a 42-year-old Portland boy.

The new novel is *Attack of the Theater People*, the sequel to his comic novel *How I Paid for College*, which won the Ken Kesey Award for the Novel in 2005. In the first book, we followed the comic antics of Edward Zanni and his pack of musical theater pals as they commit numerous felonies to raise money for Edward's entrance to Juilliard. Now, faced with expulsion for being "too jazz hands for Juilliard," Edward and his pals continue their mayhem through the streets of New York to prove he is worthy of his dream.

Honestly, I wasn't sure Acito could pull off something better than his first novel. But *Attack* is so deliciously witty, so expertly paced and so damn funny, I'm forced to eat crow. There is something sophisticated in Acito's careful wordplay, the brilliant situations and the larger-than-life characters. *Attack of the Theater People* is the most diverting comic romp I've read in a long, long time.

I had the joy of sitting down with Acito over a cup of hot dark chocolate at Cacao, a gay-owned chocolaterie on Southwest 13th Avenue. "Cacao

is my favorite new thing," Acito smiles. "I've become something of a chocolate evangelist for Cacao." Below is some of our conversation.

Glenn Scofield Williams: Tell me about *Attack of the Theater People*.

**Marc Acito:** *Attack* is based on one of the biggest failures of my own life, being kicked out of Carnegie Mellon.

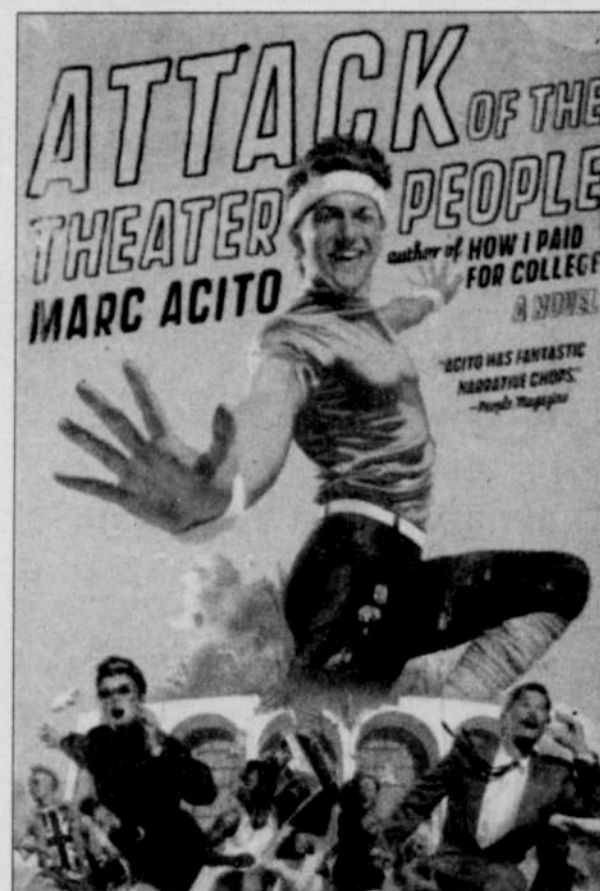
I was in the BFA acting program. In the book I changed it to Juilliard because I didn't think anyone wanted to read a book about a kid whose dream it was to go to Pittsburgh. It didn't have the same romantic cache.

This was my life dream to go to acting school and to go off and be a theater star. And then to have that dream turn into a nightmare at 20 was tremendously traumatic for me. So now, 20 years hence, it's really gratifying to return to the scene of di-

saster and to turn one of my biggest screw-ups into a screwball comedy.

**GSW:** Did you start working on *Attack* right after the first book?

MA: No, there's a whole other book in between. It was too early to know if the publishers wanted a sequel. So I had this holiday story burning in me that I really wanted to tell, because the holidays frequently tick me off and I wanted an alternative to the usual treacly holiday fare. So I had this idea of a soccer mom who takes in a dead pagan street kid and her life gets turned upside down as a result of it. I worked on the thing



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