

Science Fiction Book Club
Interview with John Scalzi (February 2022)

John Scalzi's debut novel, "Old Man's War" won him the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. His New York Times bestsellers include "The Last Colony," "Fuzzy Nation," and "Redshirts" (which won the 2013 Hugo Award for Best Novel), and 2020's "The Last Emperox." Material from his blog, "Whatever," has also earned him two other Hugo Awards. His latest novel "The Kaiju Preservation Society" comes out on March 15.

Robert Knuckles: In Old Man's War there was a scene where the Drill Sergeant tells the lead character that one of his advertisements got him through the aftermath of a bad relationship with a "poisonous woman". Please tell me that was based at least somewhat on a true story

Not at all. I have very good relationships with all of my exes.

Kevin Kuhn: Love your books! Are you a fan of Japanese Kaiju movies? Were they a major influence for your upcoming book, or more by Crichton's 'Jurassic Park'? I hear it's a fun read - can't wait!

I enjoy kaiju movies generally: Grew up on the Japanese versions, and continue to enjoy them now, as well as the US version. Both they and Jurassic park were on my mind when writing.

Andrzej Wieckowski: Might seem an obvious question - what was your inspiration for 'Redshirts' and the way the universe developed? (trying to avoid spoilers in my wording).

My inspiration was "why has no one written a novel about redshirts? The idea is just sitting there! Is no one else going to do it? Well, then, I guess I will."

Paul Flanigan: The Old Man's War series is one of my all-time favorites. Can we expect to see it going to film or TV one day? Thank you.

It's currently under development at Netflix. I am optimistic!

Reg Coppicus: I loved OMW all the books. I understand you found "Zoe's Tale" a struggle. Would you elaborate more (if not too painful) thank you.

It was mostly a struggle because I never was a sixteen-year-old girl, and writing one authentically was a challenge. Fortunately, I know a lot of people who were sixteen-year-old girls growing up, so I was able to learn from their expertise.

Rick Parker: I love your books and look forward to reading Kaiju Preservation Society. Can you tell us what you're working on next?

Another standalone novel but other than that I'm going to be cagey about it for now!

Fee Heitland: I love Lock In/Head On. Is there any hope for another case for Chris?

There will be at least one more, yes!

Steven Nicholls: Do you still enjoy the process of writing and do you see a future where you will not be writing?

I do still enjoy writing, and also I'm not especially good at anything else, so I imagine I'll continue to do it for the foreseeable future.

Ivan Martens: What sci fi ability from your books would you most like to have now in real life?

I mean, the ability to travel the galaxy would be pretty cool.

SFBC Member: I loved "Fuzzy Nation". Was Jack Holloway based on a real person?

No, Jack Holloway was an updated version of the Jack Holloway of "Little Fuzzy," the H Beam Piper novel I rebooted. I wanted to do a 21st century version of a (he thinks) charming rogue.

Marco Cimarosti: The protagonist of "Zoe's Tale" is about the age your daughter Athena was when you wrote the book, is this just coincidence?

Actually, Athena was eight when I wrote the book. I did try to imagine what she might be like when she was sixteen, though, and I got pretty close.

Did she really have pets called Hickory and Dickory, and how much have you been fined when the wildlife rangers found out?

Her pets at the time were Kodi, Ghlaghgee and Lopsided cat. I SWEAR

Gilbert Lanny Huey: Will SubPress (or someone) ever publish a S/L edition of Red Shirts?

If SubPress wants to do a limited version, they know where I am!

Osmo Flamp: When will we see your work adapted to the big or small screen?

Some already exists: Several short stories of mine have been adapted into episodes of "Love Death + Robots." As for the rest of it - it's not all up to me. Lots of hoops have to be hopped through first.

Randy Link: I have always wondered what motivated you to re-write Fuzzy Sapiens? I mean, I enjoyed it a lot, as I did the original novel, but I am just curious why you would want to re-write a novel that someone else wrote?

Personal curiosity about what it would be like to update a "Golden Age" novel. Little Fuzzy is in the public domain, so it was one I could play with without legal issues (although when we went to market with it, we sought out and got the Piper Estate blessing).

Jon Zeiderman: Some might say that having survived to age 52 you can now be considered to be an old man. From your present venerable perspective, what is the earliest memory of real life that you can still recall, and what is the first imagined thought that you manifested into a story that you shared with others?

First memory was lying in bed as a two-year-old, watching someone walk past a window. The first short story I ever wrote was when I was 14, about two friends of mine.

Ryan Dash: Having read your OMW series, the Interdependency, Redshirts, and Android's Dream, I have noticed that your later books tend to have substantially more dialogue than earlier books. Is this something you have done deliberately? If yes, why? If not, why do you think you might have done so?

I have enjoyed all of your books, but I find the amount of dialogue in later books a tad too much.

I don't think there's been a real increase in the amount of dialogue; it's always been something I use to move the plot along. Also, it's always been something people have noted that I do. So... maybe? It's working for me generally, so I will probably keep doing it.

Anastasia Hilvers: Some of your novel writing is on the snark/silly side. Some is very intense and thoughtful. Then there is your blog which can be a little of both. Which do you spend the most time on; which do you prefer and why?

It all exists in my personality and I don't generally keep track of how much I am at any one time. I think it all depends on circumstances. I'm generally a happy person, however.

Eva Sable: Who did you read growing up, and do you identify any of them as influences on your work?

I read pretty much anything I could get my hands on. In science fiction, Heinlein is an obvious influence, but people like Dorothy Parker and Nora Ephron outside the genre are in there too.

John Thiel: What contributions do you consider yourself to have made to science fiction and its readership? Have you had anything to teach in this and your other books?

That's not really for me to decide; other people will do so. I think mostly what I've contributed are the books, and perhaps the idea that humor in science fiction is not a bad thing.

Peter Wynd: Greetings John - In "The Kaiju Preservation Society" why do refer to the Kaiju "symbionts" as "parasites"? (Great book but I really stumble when this comes up as it does over a score of times.)

As noted in the book, "parasites" is being used as a general word for a collection of creatures, some of whom are parasites, some of which are symbionts, and some of which are something else entirely. I picked one word so as not to confuse readers who might not all know the distinction, and picked "parasite" because it's the word I figure most people know.

Tom Alaerts: Did you like The Foundation series?

It's fine.

Eva Sable: From reading Whatever, you are an advocate for new talent. Are there any strong writers on the horizon that you can let us know about?

The ones I'd note are already here! Ryka Aoki and Tochi Onyebuchi are two newer authors whose latest work I very much enjoyed.

Kenny Casanova: Agent of the Stars was great! What is it like as an author on audible? Hearing Wil Wheaton perform your work was an incredible experience. Do you review some things with the narrator before it is recorded?

When Wil has questions about something in the work he's recording he'll text me (we're pals), but otherwise I mostly leave it up to him (and other narrators) to do their thing. They're pros, they know what to do.

John Grayshaw: When did you start to feel like you'd made it as a writer?

I've never done anything else, professionally, then be a writer, so the answer is: My first job, at 22, being a movie critic. I got paid to watch movies! And tell people what I thought about them! That was pretty awesome.

John Grayshaw: What science fiction writers are you friends with? Any fun stories about these relationships?

Many! Most of our stories are pretty commonplace, though: Just enjoying each other's company. There was that one time I was covered in buttercream frosting on Neil Gaiman's lawn by roller derby players, however. Yes, that really happened. Google it.

John Grayshaw: Do you enjoy going to science fiction conventions? Have any fun stories from going to them? Or have you gotten any interesting reader feedback from your works in general?

Mostly I enjoy going to conventions. The very first one I went to, I have a lovely conversation with an older gentleman I met at a party, who I did not recognize but who seemed nice. I later learned it was Bob Silverberg.

John Grayshaw: What was it like to work as a consultant on Stargate Universe?

It was awesome. I looked at scripts, identified what I saw as problems and offered advice, and sometimes they took that advice!

John Grayshaw: What was it like to see your stories used in the "Love, Death and Robots" series? Can you say if you have stories in the 3rd season?

I will have an episode in the third season! It's been a great experience so far. Everyone I've worked with on it is the best.

John Grayshaw: What are some of your hobbies other than writing?

Music and photography, and examples of both are online.

John Grayshaw: Do you have a writing routine that you stick to?

Yup. Between 9 am and noon I turn off the Internet and write on the current book. It's good to have a routine.

John Grayshaw: What are your plans for the future?

Immediate future: I'm going to walk the dog. Beyond that: Write more!