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My first encounter with John Scalzi was at Capri-con 2012. I was sparring in the hallway with James Bacon (as one does with their one of their best guy friends), but stupidly, because I was wearing a two-inch healed shoe...and cute though they are, they were not the best to keep balance on whilst playing at kicking your friend. I landed incorrectly on my right foot and sprained my ankle.

I had a wonderful local friend who brought me crutches the next morning (thanks Jessie). I still worked the fan table to sell memberships for Loncon (our reason for being there), and John came by and asked how I was feeling. I was shocked that he had heard about my ankle!

"But," he said, "you're still smiling!"

"Of course I am! It's showtime!"

"We call that 'Performing Monkey Mode'. That's when you have to be 'on' regardless of the situation," he said.

From that time on, I now call it "Performing Monkey Mode", and more than anything, I appreciated that he stopped to check on me.

Since then, I've had some time to chat with John, and honestly...my favorite topic to talk with him about is music. I appreciate his taste in music so much.

Letters of Comment to JourneyPlanet@gmail.com

John Scalzi's a good guy. John Scalzi is a good writer. He's also truly hilarious. He's written for the Drink Tank once before, issue 300, but we never actually did the issue dedicated to him that I had hoped we would manage during Drink Tank run 1.0. Such is the way of publishing your fanzine, no?

I've been working on several things, notably Cinequest, finalizing our 2019 shorts program. It's super-solid! Lots of good stuff I'll be writing about in various places. There are also zines!

I think I met him in 2008, the year he beat me for a Hugo.

That's right, he beat me for a Hugo. Of all the pros who have beaten me for a Hugo, Scalzi is my favorite. Well, Gaiman's right up there too. And Pohl. Oh, Dave Langford. Scalzi's top five. Easy. He gave a pretty good speech, too!

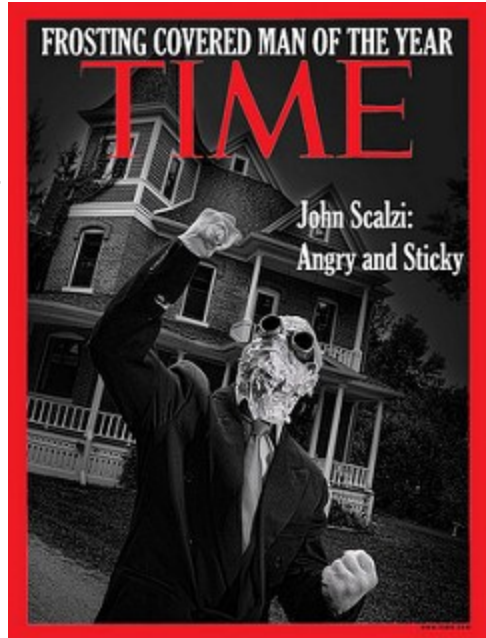
This issue is all about Scalzi in all his forms. Why? Because he's dope! Rad! Amazemore! He's the Bombas socks of the science fiction world; he's everywhere, everyone knows the name, and it turns out he gives more than you would have expected when you finally give 'em a chance.

There's the *Stranger Things* issue coming up. You should send us stuff! It's got a wonderful Espana Sheriff cover! It's gonna be a good one!

OK, let's get to it!

Much Love

Chris



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Cover by Meg Frank!



1) OK, to start - Joy Division or New Order?

TRICK QUESTION IT'S THE SAME BAND, it's like asking, Bauhaus or Love and Rockets, I SEE YOUR SNEAKINESS HERE AND WILL NOT FALL FOR IT GOOD DAY SIR I SAID GOOD DAY

2) What sort of effect did Star Trek have on you as a youth?

As a very small kid the monster that sucked salt out of people scared the crap out of me. As a slightly older kid I was occasionally called "Spock" by the other kids, which I didn't mind. But I have to admit the two things I most wanted as a kid were a lightsaber and a speeder bike, and those came from That Other Franchise.

3) What was the main motivation that led you down the path to being a writer?

The realization at age 14 that writing was easy for me and everything else was work, or, in other words, laziness. The irony is eventually writing stops being all that easy if you want to be good at it, but by then it's too late.

4) Do you have a story or novel or project that you just can't get out of you that has haunted you for ages?

Nah. I have stories in my brain I haven't written yet, but that's because they're not ready yet. When they're ready, they'll drop. In the meantime I have other things to write.

5) Who were your mentors?

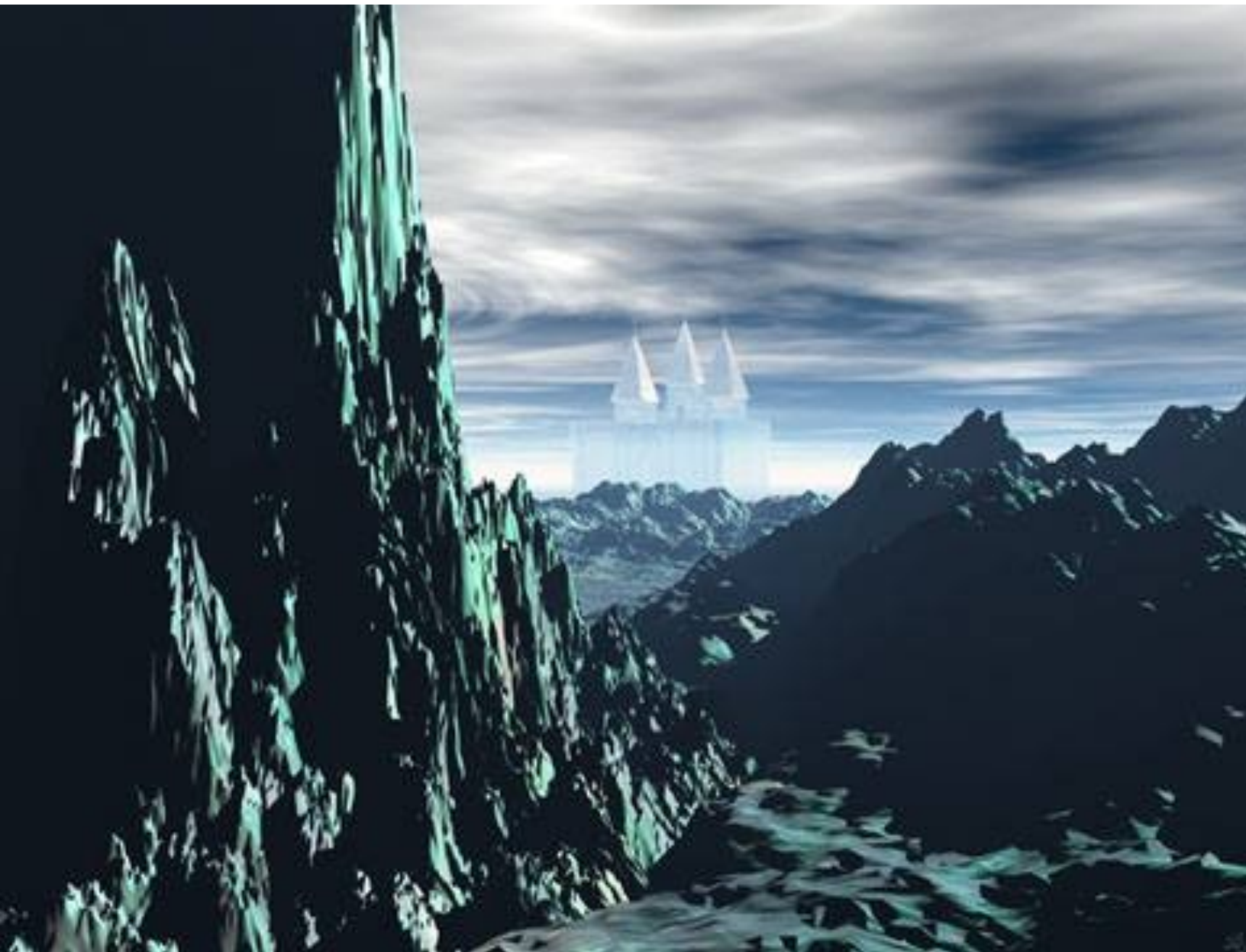
Teachers: Keith Johnson and Laurence McMillin, in particular. They taught and encouraged me to write. My editor at the Fresno Bee, Tom Becker, was also important (more important than I appreciated at the time).

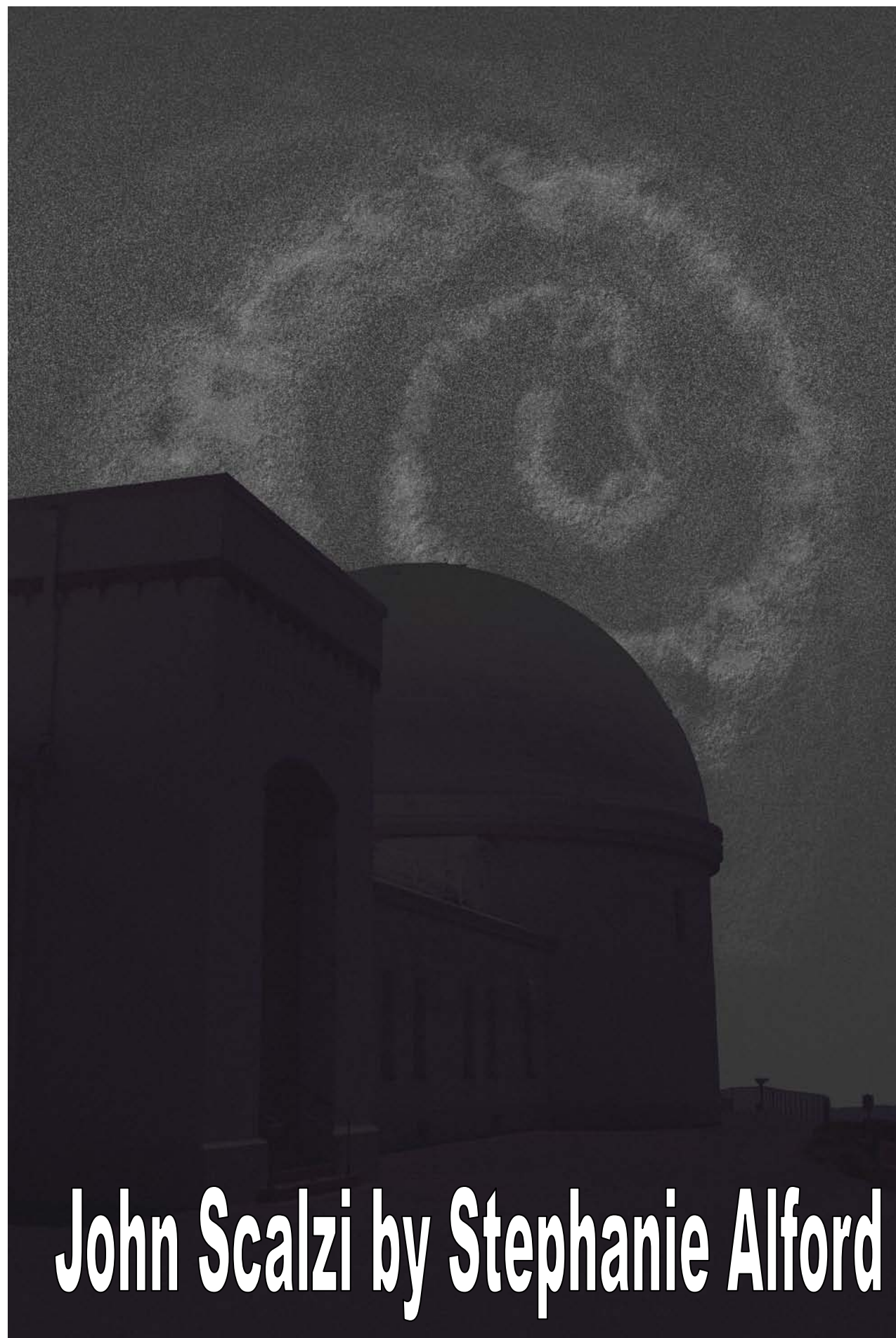
6) Can you share a favorite WorldCon memory?

My very first ever Worldcon reading is a good one. There were only six people in the audience, but they were Cory Doctorow, Charlie Stross, Scott Westerfeld, Justine Larbaletier, Nick Sagan and a very nice lady who was a fan of the blog. That's a pretty good audience.

7) What is the interaction between your blog and your fiction like?

I post some of it there sometimes when I can't be bothered to submit it elsewhere. And sometimes that works out well for me! But otherwise, not too much of an interaction there. The blog and the fiction do different things, and I'm happy to have them do different things.





John Scalzi by Stephanie Alford

[“Being Poor”](#) was floating around the Internet when I first encountered John Scalzi’s writing. It resonated with me at the time because I was, yet again, unemployed. The attendant anxiety was somewhat allayed when I read this piece. “This guy gets it,” I thought. It made me feel better about my own lot in life at that particular time. And since this guy got it, I wanted to read more.

[Whatever](#), the blog became a daily read for me. There I found humor, snark, thoughtful pieces on [politics](#), the [Hugo awards](#), what it means to have [white male privilege](#). I remember the days of the ban hammer fondly. What I got from all of this was that Scalzi does not suffer fools lightly and has a strong enough ego to admit when he’s been insensitive. *Whatever’s* comment section is about the only one I’ll read, not just because they’re interesting but because John Scalzi is rarely a complete asshole when correcting a commenter’s behavior. This doesn’t mean he isn’t a complete asshole when necessary, only that it’s rare.

Then there was his books. “Oh,” I realized, “he writes books too.” And I can consume them!

The first one I remember reading was *Zoe’s Tale*, which I didn’t realize was part of a series (sort of) and out of order. I blame being left-handed for this behavior.

Since then I’ve read all of *Old Man’s War*, his earliest works including *Agent to the Stars* and *Fuzzy Nation* and well ... maybe, not all of his books, but a damned good amount.

I blame him for making me snort out loud over a fart joke. I mean, it was a fart that set off an intergalactic incident in *The Android’s Dream*. And long after the fart joke had faded, there was the search for a particular genetically designed type of sheep called Android’s Dream which was the only type of animal acceptable at the Nidu coronation ceremony. Failing to provide this particular sheep would result in the Nidu declaring war on Earth. I seem to remember something about the sheep being blue. Through some shenanigans only the mind of Scalzi can conjure, the last Android’s Dream is a human woman who winds up being her own species and takes over the Nidu. Thus avoiding war. While not a big fan of fart jokes - I think it’s a gender thing - I thoroughly enjoyed *The Android’s Dream*, laughing and snorting my way through it.

My favorite book by Scalzi is, by far, [Lock-In](#). It’s an interesting thought exercise in what happens if a virus sweeps the world causing most of the population to lose the use of their central nervous system, while their brains and minds remain active. While *Lock-In* is a crime procedural, Scalzi carefully builds a world in which science fiction is pivotal to the story. It’s been long enough since the book was published that saying the protagonist doesn’t have a gender isn’t a spoiler and caused a minor kerfuffle. One of which I was completely unaware as I read.

“But if there were works you prefer better in these categories, please nominate those instead!”

Through his [Big Idea column](#) in which authors write about the big idea that led them to write their most recent book, I’ve found other favorites. [Richard Kadrey](#) and Sandman Slim, Myke Cole and [Heloise](#), [Mary Robinette Kowal](#) and Elma ... just to name a few. His affection for other writers is contagious, and I love when he writes about award [nominations](#), reminding readers to nominate and vote for their favorites, even if they’re not his work.

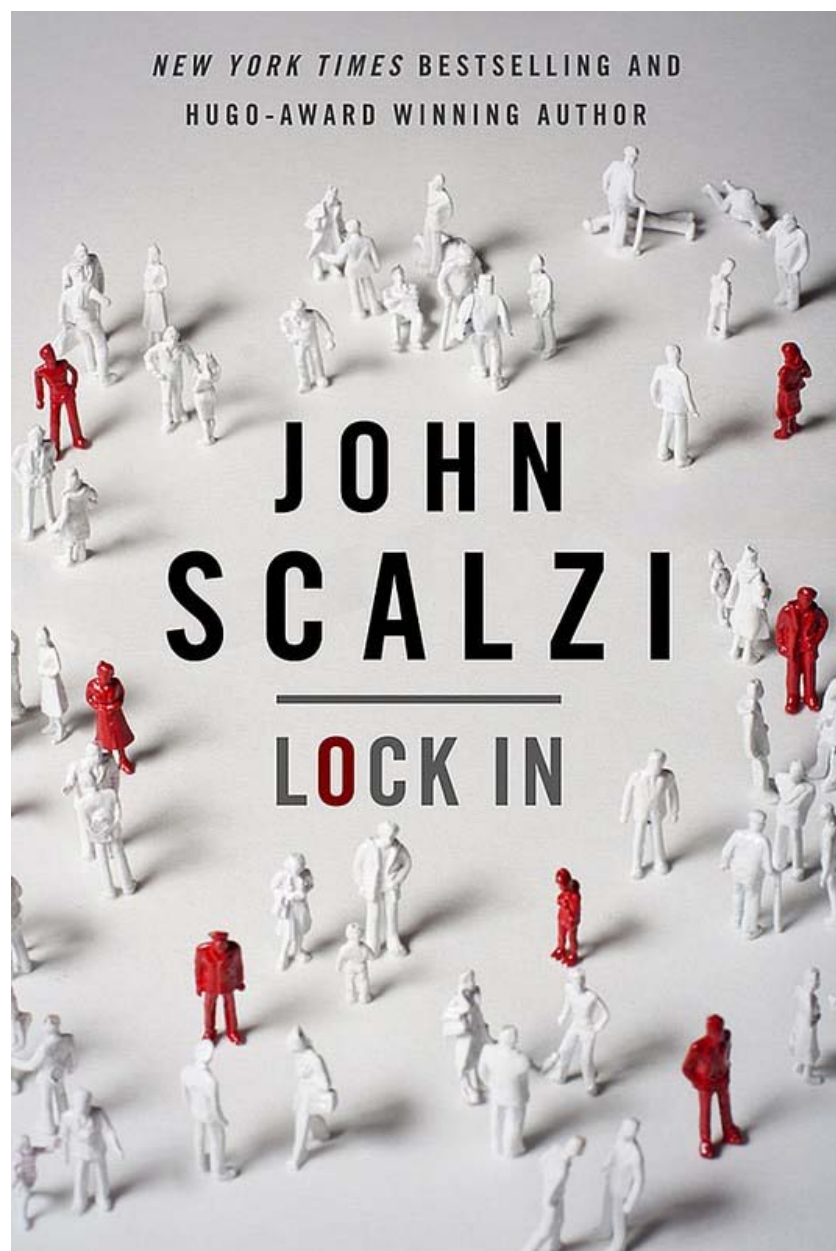
Perhaps what I like most about reading John Scalzi is the enthusiasm he shows for stuff he likes. And a lot of it is, “ZOMG, c’mon this is so great!” And when people complain that it’s not, his measured reaction is, “Okay. You do you and I’ll do me.”

Over the years, I’ve built a picture of a man who loves what he does, recognizes the “lucky breaks” he’s gotten which put him in the upper echelon of paid writers, is a loving father, husband, and cat herder. His words entertain and keep me informed without making me feel small if I happen to disagree. I think he goes out of his way to make everyone feel welcome, while firmly setting boundaries. Someone I could shake hands with and be glad of the experience.

Which leads me to WorldCon 76 in San Jose. It was [Sunday](#) afternoon, I was so exhausted I was walking into walls. Small talk makes my skin crawl and being in line is an activity I’d rather avoid. But there I was, in a line which moved twice, waiting for almost an hour, to

try to make small talk while he signed my copy of *Human Division*. I felt completely awkward when my turn came. “I love your blog, thank you,” I said to his head as he signed my book. He nodded and I left the building still feeling awkward and completely grateful that I’d stepped outside my introversion for the opportunity to have John Scalzi sign a book for me. Yes, there’s an awkward picture. No, you don’t get to see it.

Cons are where creators work. They network, have business meetings, and most of all, are there to promote their work. I’m far beyond expecting a celebrity to do anything but be pleasant to me for a few seconds. What I came away with from that experience is John Scalzi is not much different from the impression I had from his words. Genial and business like in the signature line. I couldn’t have asked for better.



The Android's Dream

by Juan Sanmiguél

The following elements are in ***The Android's Dream***: interstellar intrigue, genetic manipulation, political infighting, artificial intelligences (AI), death by flatulence, a religion created by a SF writer, interspecies relations, a resourceful hero and a beautiful woman who is they key to an alien empire.

The novel takes place in the future when Earth is a part of the Common Confederation. Interstellar travel has been achieved and Earth has dealing with several alien races. One of Earth's closest allies is the Nidu. When a Nidu trade representative dies under unusual circumstances relations are strained. Earth's Defense Department wants to see this in order to improve Earth's stature in the Confederation. The State Department wants to ease tensions. The Nidu ambassador advises the State Department that a sheep is needed for the transition of power ceremony on the Nidu home world. This is not just any sheep but a genetically engineered sheep known as *The Android's Dream*. The state department sends Harry Creek, a former police officer and combat veteran, to find this sheep. Harry's investigation brings him to Robin Baker, owner of a pet store which caters to natural pets rather than genetically engineered animals. Robin contains the key to *The Android's Dream*. Unfortunately there are people who do not want the Nidu get the sheep and this makes Harry and Robin targets for some dangerous individuals. Harry will have to use every skill to keep Robin alive long enough to figure out a solution to this diplomatic crisis.

This just a very simplified breakdown of the plot. There are all sorts of twists and turns. There is a court proceeding to determine the fate of a race. Two AIs confront each other in a virtual world to find the solution to the diplomatic crisis. There are some very intense action sequences. Scalzi is able to take one action sequence to the third dimension with some futuristic sports equipment. All of his plots twists as wild as they seem come off as plausible.

The POV changes throughout the novel. Although Harry's and Robin's plight drive the story, one sees the machinations of both their enemies and their allies. Most of the villains are well developed. The villains in charge have believable motivations. Mainly they want to see their own race or family achieve power. Their minions have more simple motivation of greed.

Harry Creek is the ideal SF hero. He's got brains. A computer prodigy who joined the Army as a plea bargain for a prank gone wrong. During this time Harry became a decorated hero and then went to be a computer forensics expert for the police. Then became the giver of bad news for aliens visiting Earth for the State Department. He knows how to deal with people and how take care of himself in a tight situation. At the same time he is able to create an artificial intelligence of his best friend whom he lost in combat.

Robin acts like person who had been caught in something bigger than her. She is smart and idealistic. She lets Harry take the lead in keeping them safe. When the time comes however she will be vital in resolving the diplomatic problem between Earth and Nidu.

The book has a lot of humor in it. The humor is combination of Kevin Smith and Robert Sheckley. The characters are smart and understand how insane their situation is. The protagonists work it out and come on top of the situation.

The only thing that bugged me about this book is that it seems the Earth government (United Nations of Earth) is seated in Washington. It just seems odd to place a world government in an established capital and not somewhere with a more neutral or international feel like New York or Geneva.



How I met John Scalzi by Kat Templeton



So there I was, attending the Denver Worldcon.

All good stories start with "There I was", don't they? That and "Honest to God, I swear this happened...". Sometimes they get a spin on it, like "There I was, minding my own business..." But for the most part, it's a bit like "Once upon a time..." You know what kind of story you get.

Oh, right. Denver Worldcon, back in twenty ought eight, in some mile high city. Those were basically the facts I knew about Denver: it was a mile high; it was the state capital; and it was where my friend Sean lived. He had offered me a place to stay if I came to his hometown Worldcon, so I suppose you could say that the following was all Sean's fault.

But I also suppose you could say that it was all Chris Garcia's fault. I've noted before that Chris was my gateway to fanzine fandom and had invited me to handle the live feed at the Corflu in San Jose earlier that year. The live feed and chat went off well in San Jose, and Chris had asked me if I wouldn't mind reprising my role in the fanzine lounge at Worldcon.

That request led to a backpack with a laptop computer, a bit of gear to do the live feed, and several books I wanted to get autographed by my favorite authors stuffed inside it. That backpack will become important shortly.

I had to take a late flight from Sacramento the day before the convention because of prior obligations, so I arrived just a shade or two before midnight local. It would be a bit longer before I could get to bed. We were then up early by Colorado standards -- to a Californian lagging about an hour behind and not exactly fond of mornings to begin with, it felt too early -- so that we could catch the light rail into town.

So there I was, at the Denver Worldcon, waiting in a registration line. Anybody who's checked in at a worldcon knows that registration, the first day of the convention, isn't quite Dante's Inferno, but is a bit of a bureaucratic hell. I acknowledge now that the line was moving at a decent pace, but for somebody who just wanted to go attend her first worldcon, it felt like a glacier could beat it.

I've always been prone to fidgeting. Add in that I'm a large person who isn't always quite aware of how much space I'm taking up and that I was wearing a backpack -- told you it would become important -- on my back and what happened next was practically inevitable. I clipped the poor guy waiting behind me in line with my backpack.

He was shorter than my six feet, balding, and to my eyes seemed like just another regular fan like all the other ones at the conventions I'd been attending. I apologized for not paying attention and clipping him, and he accepted the apology, and it was just like any other regular embarrassing moment, soon to be put out of the mind's eye.

I finally got the reg desk and checked in. They had run out of a key component of the welcome pack -- I think it was the water bottle -- so they had me step aside while they went to fetch some and beckoned the next person, the guy I had clipped, to the table.

I heard the clerk ask him his name, and then things went very still with his response. "John Scalzi."

John Scalzi. John Scalzi, the author, the one whose books I'd enjoyed and that indeed were in the very pack that clipped him? The blogger who had decided to challenge Dave Langford's lengthy run of wins in the best fan writer category of the Hugos? That John Scalzi? That's the guy I just clipped with my bag?

Well, *shit*.

I admit the second my water bottle was handed to me, I left at a rather high rate of speed. Of all the people at this convention, of all the people who had a last name with the same letter in the spread of my line, I had managed to hit John Scalzi.

His book was in my bag because he had an autograph session that day. Indeed, for maximum embarrassment possibilities, it was the first one on the schedule. I went and found Chris to let him know I'd made it, stashed my backpack under the table skirt, and with some trepidation, I headed to the escalator.

Then, once again, there I was, at the Denver Worldcon, standing in front of Scalzi for the first time since I'd realized just who I'd managed to catch. I put my books down on the table and proceeded to apologize again, this time very profusely, and he stopped me. He told me it wasn't really a big deal and accidents happen. Then he signed my books.

It was in that moment I knew Scalzi was a decent man. He's shown it repeatedly since, but that one moment of compassion for a fan attending her first Worldcon meant a lot to me. I suspect he'll probably end up reading this, so I want to tell him thank you for that. It's just a small proof of how you can make somebody's day by being kind.

And with that said, all I have to do is say the words "Denver Worldcon" and "backpack" and he knows exactly who I am. I'm not sure if this is a good power to have or not.

As for whose fault it was? Yeah, Sean asked me to come, and Chris asked me to do tech work, but in the end it was my own. I'm the one that hit him.



Like Burritos for Scalzi by Chris

John Scalzi and I were chatting at Con Jose II—the 76ening, and the topic of food came up. Because we’re both humans. I mentioned a fine burrito place not too far from the Convention Centre.

“You know,” he said, in a very Scalzian way, “I eat more than just burritos; it just happens to be what I’m known for.”

This is called having a gimmick, or what the Millennials (and the lamest portion of every company aka Marketing) call ‘Branding’. The problem with branding, and why I refuse to operate as a brand myself, is that you have to operate within that brand or you’re ‘off-brand’ and need to be punished by doing the thing that made you a brand in the first place over and over in the roasty toasty fires of Hell. Or so they tell me.

Thus, being one who never missed the chance to feed a fed horse, I am bringing these recipes to Mr. Scalzi as a way to stay on brand yet still enjoy something just a little bit different. I have, at one time or another, eaten a version of each variation I am presenting here! I am, in fact, as much a burrito-eater as John Scalzi.

Chicken Cordon Bleu Burrrito

Doesn’t John need a little bit more France in his diet? What, you don’t? You want him to be happy, don’t you? And cultured? There ain’t nothin’ more cultured than French food!

Ingredients

1 flour tortilla, suitable for rolling.

6 Tyson frozen chicken nuggets (if you don’t have Tyson frozen chicken nuggets, homemade may suffice, increase amount of mayo and Cheeto powder in recipe)

5 slices swiss cheese

2 slices of shaved ham.

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

½ teaspoon honey

¼ teaspoon chervil.

Salt, pepper, and amaranth to taste.

Dice the chicken nuggets into half-inch cubes. In a small bowl, combine honey and mustard, then toss the chicken in it. Add the chervil... whatever the hell that is. Layout the tortilla, and place three pieces of cheese on it, in the center, extending to within an inch of the top. Place the chicken on top of that, and the ham on top of the chicken, then top with the remaining cheese. Fold the burrito in one of the five approved methods. Salt, pepper, and amaranth to taste. Wrap in foil and put in a 250 degree oven for roughly 10 minutes, just enough to melt the cheese. Enjoy with the boxed wine of your favor.

Burrito: Warsaw Style

John's been to Poland, right? I mean, they give you a free trip to Gdansk every time you win a Hugo... or so they tell me. This will remind him of that trip he certainly took!

Ingredients

1 really big tortilla. Not Guinness Book-level big, but bigger than normal, 'cause you gotta wrap a bunch of stuff.

1 pound pork shoulder, cubed into half-inch... uh, cubes. Salt and pepper, and a touch of paprika it, then brown it and put the lid on it for half an hour, maybe? You might wanna add a little sauerkraut juice after browning, which is good because -

1 cup jarred sauerkraut (if you don't have jarred sauerkraut, feel free to make your own, but don't come whining to me when it takes forever and makes your house smell like vinegar and cabbage!), thoroughly rinsed and drained.

1 kielbasa sliced into those pieces that are perfect for everything.

An onion, cut into small, but hardly tiny, pieces.

One small tomato, seeded and diced.

1/3 cup Rice, but the kind cooked with beef broth in place of half the water, and then you should put it in the fridge until you need it.

Lay out your tortilla, place half the kraut down in the center of the tortilla, top with some pork shoulder (the rest is as a treat for after!), a bunch of sausage, the rice, the tomato, the onion, and some salt and pepper. Fold the burrito in one of the five approved methods. For an extra treat, make it South Warsaw style with the addition of French fries. Use a larger tortilla for that one. Enjoy with a delicious Grade Ni-Hi

Taquito Burrito

Mr. Scalzi will love you most of all if you bring one of these to one of his readings. The crunch! The cheese! The lack of any redeeming nutritive qualities!

3 chicken taquitos, previously frozen.

3 beef taquitos, previously frozen.

3 cheese taquitos, previously frozen.

1 large tortilla

As much shredded Monterey Jack cheese as you can get your hands on.

Lay out the tortilla. Cook the taquitos as instructed on the box. Lay a thin layer of shredded cheese down, and lay upon it three taquitos, one of each variety. Atop these lay more cheese, and another layer of three taquitos. Top that with cheese, then another taquito layer, followed by a dusting of cheese. Fold in any manner you can think of that will work.

Bake for ten minutes. Serve with ranch dressing for dipping. Also bibs.

Burrito du Ukraine*

You know, the Ukraine has pretty amazing food stuffs, and burritos are flexible!

3½ cups instant mashed potatoes, prepared
¾ cup cheddar or processed cheese, shredded
Salt and pepper, to taste
3 slices Salo (kinda like Italian lardo, but tastier!)
3 oz. ground pork
3 oz. ground lamb
3 oz. super-lean ground beef.
1 small onion
1 large tortilla

Mixture of equal parts caraway seeds, dried thyme, dried parsley, powdered garlic, celery seed, chives, and dill.

* - Russians believe this is Burrito du Russia

Prepare the instant potatoes according to package directions, and then add to a mixing bowl with the cheese and mix well.

Quickly sauté the onions, then add the ground meats and brown with a couple of tablespoons of the spice mixture.

Spread the potato mixture across the tortilla, sprinkle with a bit of the spice mixture, top with the meat, the salo, and roll. Wrap in foil, then place in the oven for ten minutes or so. It is a flavor bomb!

The 1910 Tejano Burrito

You're fully aware that Tejano music came about because a while bunch of Czech, Polish, German, and other Eastern Europeans came to Texas out of Mexico, bringing various forms of polka and traditional music with 'em, and thus Tejano was born. Now, here's a burrito I made one time that was basically an excuse to make both stroganoff and goulash. John will love it.

One very large tortilla
1 cup of warm Beef Stroganoff (Hamburger Helper works just fine, but you can also get fancy)
1 cup warm beef goulash (make it yourself, you lazy slacker!)
1 cup Spanish rice
Some Oaxaca cheese

Put everything in the middle of the tortilla. Fold it into a burrito. Wrap in foil, put in a 250 oven for five or ten minutes. Get a mess load of napkins.



by Chuck Surface

In an interview with Petra Mayer for NPR, John Scalzi reports that he thought about the golden age of European discovery, but only in general terms. Empires at that time depended on ocean and wind currents, and other natural phenomena related to travel in forming and maintaining their territories. The same holds true for the Interdependency, a multi-planetary empire formed by the descendants of Earth, possible due to the Flow, an extradimensional zone accessible at various points and allowing for quick space travel and colonization. As easily guessed from the title of the first novel the Interdependency's in trouble. The Flow has become unstable, collapsing in fact, and thus restricting contact between areas of the realm. Add to this collapse competing families vying for economic and political control, and religious prophecy and practice applied toward the same purposes. And, yes, the story reminds readers of many golden ages or ages of collapse throughout the history of human civilization. Scalzi's tale, then, involves these themes related to our current or past history, not the exact details.

As with his *Old Man's War* and *Lock In* series, Scalzi's strength stems from characterization. In *The Collapsing Empire*, he introduces an ensemble cast, each member more unique and amusing than the last. You won't find chapters better suited for science text books here. Imagine instead Shakespearean history plays or Elizabethan revenge dramas to understand the political plot Scalzi develops over the two novels now in existence and hopefully into *The Last Emperox* projected for 2019. Also keep in mind television classics such as *The Thick of It*, *Veep*, and *Yes, Minister*, all shows that portray Machiavellian dangers with darkly comedic twists. Let me stop here for a moment, because Kiva Lagos has entered my thoughts . . .

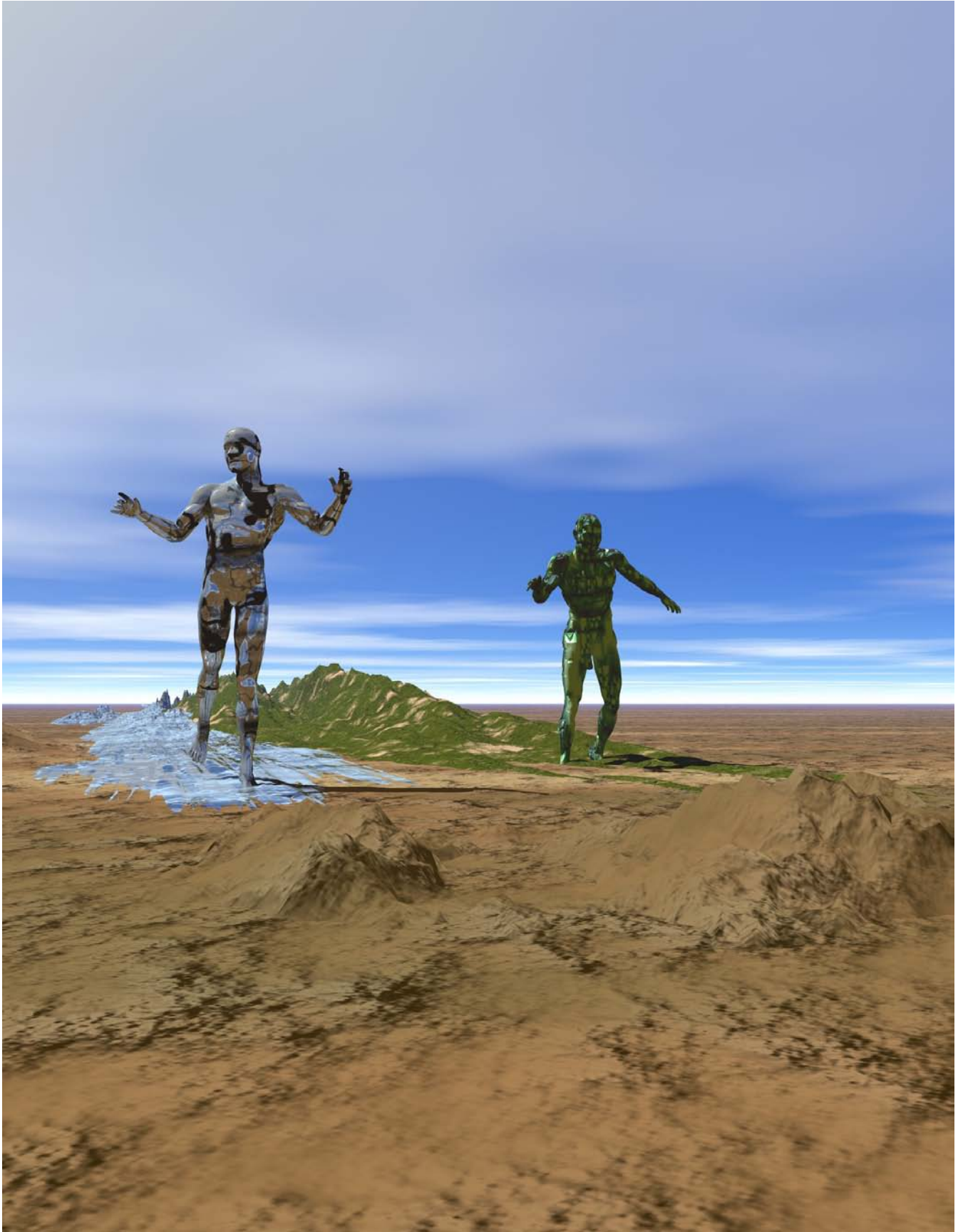
Arguably Scalzi's best character ever, foul-mouthed, straight-shooting Kiva Lagos only fails when we don't see enough of her in the story. In another interview, this one with *The Verge*, Scalzi describes her as someone who could potentially go so wrong. So far in these first two novels Kiva remains on the side of angels, albeit barely. One nudge, I posit, and she could tumble straight into Malcolm Tucker territory without so much as a fuckity-bye. Please, John,

give us a novel centered around Kiva. I'm not impatient. I can wait. Really. But I am waiting.

Kiva's wonderfulness only slightly overshadows her fellow players, including the newly crowned Emperox Grayland II who never expected to rule but proves quite suited to the role so far, and Marce Claremont, son of the count who discovered that the Flow was turning problematic. Oh, and bad guys! We have bad guys! House Nohamapetan will inspire memories of House Harkonnen. What's space opera without an evil family or faction? Divisions here between light and dark aren't so Manichaestic, however. Henry V, you remember, mixed tactics of light and dark to promote England against the French. Expect no less here from Emperox Grayland II or any among her allies.

Scalzi's Interdependency novels represent his best writing. Once upon a time, traditional operas thrilled with scheming revengers or aspirants, clever but flawed heroes, and political intrigue. Space opera should be no different. I look forward to *The Last Emperox* to see where the author will lead us. *The Collapsing Empire* earned a nomination for Best Novel in the 2018 Hugo Awards. I'll certainly support *The Consuming Fire* for such honors in 2019.







The Tormentor and I by Ghlaghghee

So you've read *Old Man's War* and *Whatever*, maybe even picked up *The Rough Guide to Sci-Fi Movies* just to prove you're a real fan. But don't get the idea that you know John Scalzi just because you've read what he claims to be his literary outpourings. You can't really know him unless you live with him. And I do.

No, I'm not his wife, nor his daughter, both of whom are amazingly fantastic people and you have to wonder how they put up with the massive furball of ego that is John Scalzi. I'm Ghlaghghee, John Scalzi's long-suffering feline master, and it is now time to clear the air once and for all and reveal the truth about John Scalzi.

First of all, what you've read on *Whatever*, or in any of those books, or even on his film column over at AMC or Film Critic...I wrote those (and believe me, typing with claws ain't easy...it doesn't take long to scratch those letters off the keyboard. And purr-recognition software just hasn't come far enough). Don't get me wrong, the Tormentor does have a role in the creative process. In the morning, he'll come into my lair and loudly muse about what "he" plans on "writing" on any given day. Once I have my assignment for the day, he drinks himself into a Coke Zero® stupor, only coming out of it when the sun sets and he looks over my immortal prose.

Why do I put up with this, you ask? Let's just say the last time I failed to meet the Tormentor's quota, he discovered that you can do more with smoked breakfast meats than simply eat them (although why you would waste such a delicacy is beyond me).

So, what more is there to say about the Tormentor?

He's a loving father and husband who lives in the wilds of Ohio on a vast estate that allows for plenty of mousing.

He's curious, especially about those things that have an influence on him. When he was elected President of SFWA, the first thing he did was e-mail every single person who did anything for the organization to find out what they were doing and what they were planning. Once he was convinced they knew what they were doing, and that he knew what the organization was involved with, he became much easier to live with.

He's got opinions, too. And while some people might try to pigeon hole him, if you actually read his opinions (well, my description of his opinions, since we've already determined that I write everything you think the Tormentor has written), you'll find them much more nuanced, even thoughtful, or at least as thoughtful as you can be when your brain is being supplied by a steady stream of Coke Zero® instead of blood.

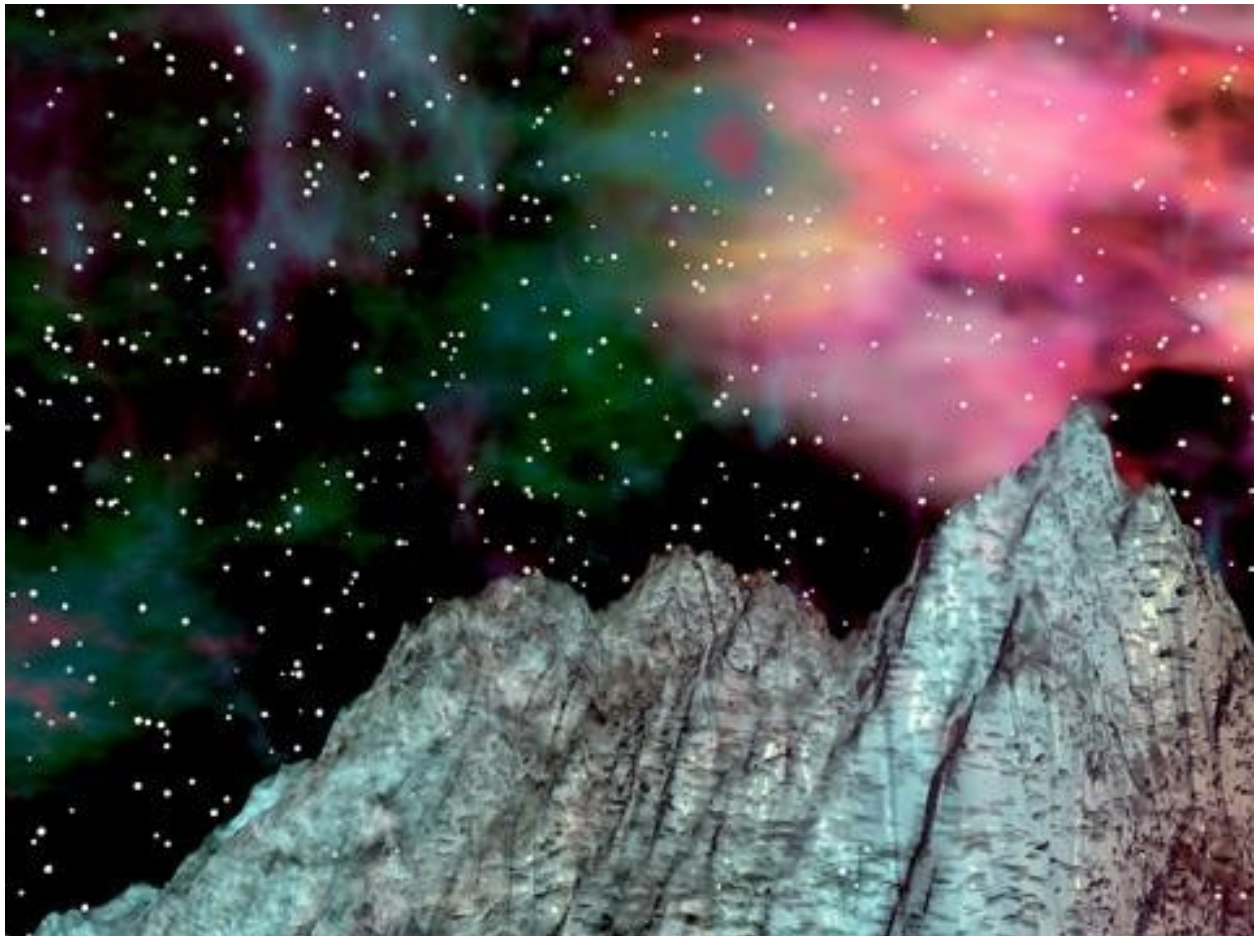
The Tormentor is also a fan. He's read science fiction and has even committed fan fiction, although he managed to convince the original author's estate to let him release the book professionally, so look for *Fuzzy Nation*, a reimagining of H. Beam Piper's Fuzzy stories, at a bookstore near you in May. (And yes, while the Tormentor's agent gets a cut, I'll be lucky to just get an extra serving of Fancy Feast®.)

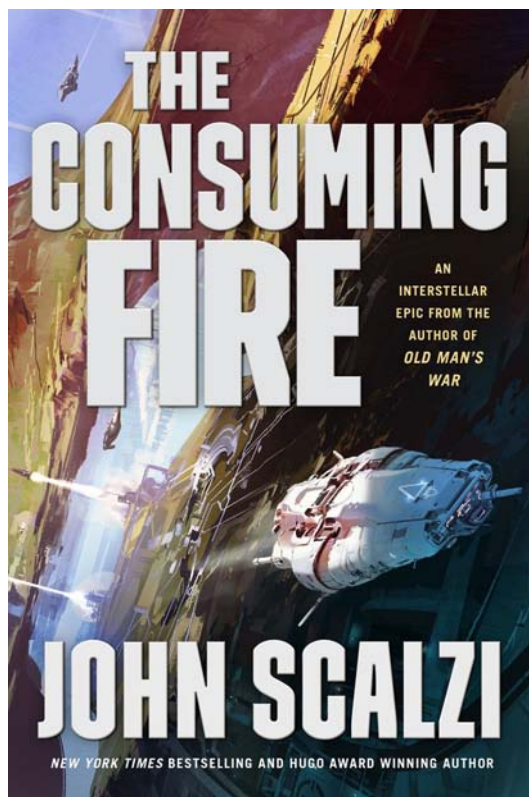
Perhaps the greatest service he has done for science fiction fandom has been the Hugo Nominee packets. When my novel *The Last Colony* was nominated for the Hugo in 2008, he put together an electronic packet of four of the novels for the voters to read (it just happened that the non-included novel won). The following year, when my follow-up novel *Zoe's Tale* was nominated as well as my collection of *Whatever* articles, *Your Hate Mail Will Be Graded* was nominated (and won), the packet was expanded to include practically all the nominated works from the professional categories to the fan categories (and the Tormentor has one of those fan writer Hugos, too).

In fact, one of the other nominees in the fan writer category once commented that John Scalzi was so successful at so many things, he wanted to hate him, but Scalzi was just too nice. Of course, he didn't know that I write everything that appears under Scalzi's name. And, as far as I know, Scalzi has never tried to tape bacon to *him*.

For this one weekend in February, I have the run of Chateau Scalzi and you have the Tormentor in your grasp. Do with him as you like. Ply him with Coke Zero® and electronics. Make him dance the puppet's dance of joy. Get to know the real John Scalzi, not the one who hides behind the sharpened paws of Ghlaghghee.

And that whole bacon-cat thing? Don't do it. The tape is hard to get out of you fur and the bacon grease works its way down to the skin.





A Review by Kat Templeton

I have no idea how to write a review. I get to the point of "I liked it", but trying to parse why I liked it into a coherent fashion seems to elude me. I've been spending the last couple days reading *The Consuming Fire* by John Scalzi, and a friend asked me what I thought of it. The first words that came to mind were, of course, the dread "I liked it." Of course, then I had to try and figure out why I liked it.

First of all, it's John Scalzi. I find Scalzi's style meshes well with my reading. If I want a quick enjoyable read, but with interesting questions to ponder along the way, Scalzi seems to always deliver that punch. This book is no different. I can safely say, if you like Scalzi's style, this book is not likely to disappoint you.

Second, I've been enjoying the series. The *Consuming Fire* is the second in what Scalzi has said is a trilogy with *The Collapsing Empire* being the prior book. I particularly admire the character of Greyland II, the emperox of the Empire, who is both completely unprepared to take the job and has to deal with a major universe-wide crisis that is going to destroy the empire *and* kill a lot of people even if it's handled with the utmost of care -- and of course, these are human beings, there is no such thing as the utmost of care in these situations. Greyland II strikes me as the third of Shakespeare's types, the one that has greatness thrust upon them. If she can navigate this crisis, and the thousands of other smaller crises that surround her, then that will truly be so.

I really do like how this book both continued the overarching story started in *The Collapsing Empire* and then found ways to keep this overarching plotline moving along with some twists that will make the third book interesting. At the same time, there's a plot that's very specific to this book that occasionally overlaps with the overlying plot, but mostly is content to tick on its own -- although if that plot (quite literally) works, it will have massive consequences to the overarching plot of the trilogy.

But what it boils down to is that I liked it. Period. I suppose that's not the worst thing in the world.