



The Back Channel

John Scalzi

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The sixth episode of *The Human Division*, John Scalzi's new thirteen-episode novel in the world of his bestselling *Old Man's War*. Beginning on January 15, 2013, a new episode of *The Human Division* will appear in e-book form every Tuesday.

The Conclave is a confederation of four hundred alien races—many of whom would like to see the Colonial Union, and the humans inside of it, blasted to extinction. To avoid a conflict that neither side can afford, Conclave leader General Tarsem Gau appoints Hafte Sorvalh to resolve an emerging diplomatic crisis with the humans, before the only acceptable solution is war.

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The Back Channel Details

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From Reader Review The Back Channel for online ebook

Annabeth Leong says

This is the first installment I really liked that did not include the main cast. It was a complete story in itself, with interesting (and sympathetic) characters, some of which I remembered from previous books in the OMW universe. The tie to the main plot felt stronger than with the other episodes that went afield, and I enjoyed seeing Rigney appear (he's been a minor character in several main plot episodes). This encourages me -- I had been starting to think I'd be disappointed every other week by a story I felt less invested in.

An overall strength of The Human Division is its intricate diplomacy and social awareness. This episode showed that operating at a deep and satisfying level.

Karlyn says

I enjoyed the series more as I went through each episode. At first I struggled because it seemed like random stories set in this universe. But as it continued and I realized it was interwoven story lines I enjoyed them more. The main characters were enjoyable. It's pretty traditional sci fi fare but still worth the read.

heidi says

This installment really made me think about the fine line between war and diplomacy. It is mostly from the point of view of The Conclave, the alien consortium. Of course, no political association is all one thing or another, so it's a lot of alien-politics-maneuvering. I thought that was great.

I also really had fun with the writing.

"Well," Sorvalh said, impressed. "Aren't you fierce."

"F you, xig," the colonist said.

"A bit repetitive, however," Sorvalh said.

And then she goes on to intimidate the heck out of a bunch of jerks. Yay!

Also, who doesn't love a good churro?

Keep reading these!

Josh says

Another solid, but short, addition to the ongoing series. The tension continues to mount between Earth, the Colonial Union, and the Conclave. This episode introduces us to some of the main alien characters in the

Coalition and follows from their perspective. It's hard to pull off a complete episodic story in just 45 minutes to an hour, but Scalzi has been doing a decent job so far for the most part.

I still think this guy should take over writing the Star Wars books. He's got the right amount of wit and humor for it, and his way of writing aliens make them feel, well, more alien. Maybe not completely alien as in incomprehensible to humans, but they definitely don't feel like humans in costumes, which most other authors seem to write like.

Ron says

Vintage Scalzi. It's not a bluff if you mean it. Of course, as often as that sort of challenge works, it doesn't because you have to be dealing with a rational person. Many of us aren't.

A good read.

Nilchance says

I love the way Scalzi writes his non-human characters.

Alice says

This is the sixth of thirteen installments in *The Human Division*, a serial novel by John Scalzi. New installments are released on Tuesdays, though the entire book will be released, as well. As much as it might frustrate a reader to jump around between installments all at once, we're almost at the halfway point, which may be too much for some to catch up on.

This episode introduces members of the Conclave, a group of alien races allied for common benefit. Apparently they've encountered humans before, and came out far worse for the confrontation. They lost ships, while the humans lost nothing. Understandably, they're wary about facing them head-on.

The story is told mostly through the perspective of Hafte Sorvahl, a very tall and imposing alien woman, who's sent to encourage the Colonial Union to remove its "wildcat" colonies (colonies who happen to have CDF officers among them) from unauthorized worlds before it starts a diplomatic incident. Along the way, she eats some churros and negotiates with some white supremacist types.

The human who speaks to Sorvahl has shown up in previous installments, and I'm starting to wonder where he stands. His actions in this episode serve the greater good of the CU and all sentient races, but he's involved in so much that I can't imagine his ability to keep secrets hasn't come in handy in other ways.

We'll see.

I listened to the audio version of this episode, as with all the previous ones, and found no change in the quality of narration or sound. If you're an Audible member, these actually turn out to be less expensive on audio than on ebook, and they're a quick listen. If you do want to catch up, I recommend you pick up the

audio versions.

Meghan says

This was a very important episode to the plot, but it required a lot more attention than I was in the mood for. Took me rewinding three times to get the whole thing read. But the ending made up for the rough beginning. Not my favorite but I did enjoy the finish.

Lis Carey says

The Colonial Union doesn't want another war with the Conclave, an alliance of four hundred alien species--a war that might wipe out humans in the galaxy. General Gau, leader of the Conclave, also wants to avoid a war, having noticed that the Conclave did not actually win the last one.

But there's a growing faction in the Conclave that does want war, and wildcat human colonies that just happen to include a few Colonial Defense Forces soldiers, risk giving them the excuse they need. Determined to avoid this, General Gau sends out a very private emissary for "back channel" negotiations to persuade the Colonial Union to "deal with" the offending colonies.

But some of the wildcat colonies aren't interested in cooperating. Can a solution be found in time?

This is the sixth of the thirteen episodes of The Human Division, and it's a good one.

Recommended.

I bought this from Audible.com

Jay Collins says

2.5 Stars

Suzanne Earley says

I am still enjoying this story, although I think I'm going to wish I had just waited and got them all together. If nothing else, it means all this short fiction is pumping up my book count for the year!

Scott says

Almost half way through Scalzi's 13 episode tale. It feels like a t.v. show where each episode has a different POV, a different style, a different purpose. Very cool.

This one takes us to the POV of the Conclave and it's nice to remember that both the good guys in a book and the bad guys both believe they are right if you look at things from their point of view.

Bring on the next one - this is good stuff.

Nikki says

What is a churro, anyway? Must google.

Anyway, this is a fun addition to the series. It still feels way too bitty: I'm not sure it'll work at all as a novel, but it is quite fun as a serial, like this. I liked this 'episode', too, with its focus on alien races. They all feel quite close to human to me, but it's still pretty good.

John says

This review is for the entirety of The Human Division, comprised of The B-Team; Walk the Plank; We Only Need the Heads; A Voice in the Wilderness; Tales From the Clarke; The Back Channel; The Dog King; The Sound of Rebellion; The Observers; This Must Be the Place; A Problem of Proportion; The Gentle Art of Cracking Heads; Earth Below, Sky Above.

My first thought about this, the latest story in the Old Man's War universe from John Scalzi, was annoyance that I hadn't read it whilst it was being released. The individual episodes each come to around 25 or 30 pages on my Nook (except for the first and last parts) and it would have been fun to read them and have the cliffhangers as it happened. In the end, though, being able to read the entire thing in one go was also pretty cool.

At the end of The Last Colony, John Perry and the Conclave revealed the nature of interstellar warfare and diplomacy to the citizens of Earth. This story details some of the fallout from that decision, dovetailing neatly with the B-team mentioned in the first episode and their attempts to remedy the diplomatic events that occur as a result. It's a welcome return to the universe from Scalzi, who has mostly stayed away from writing more tales here for the last five years (since the the publication of Zoe's Tale). I really enjoyed catching up with the universe, and the episodic nature of the story was handled extremely well.

Looking forward to reading Scalzi's next works in this direction, both from the perspective of this universe and the perspective of episodic storytelling.

Dave says

My only complaint is that I wish each of these short stories had more to them!
