

A Voice in the Wilderness

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Albert Birnbaum was once one of the biggest political talk show hosts around, but these days he's watching his career enter a death spiral. A stranger offers a solution to his woes, promising to put him back on top. It's everything Birnbaum wants, but is there a catch? And does Birnbaum actually care if there is?

A Voice in the Wilderness Details


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From Reader Review A Voice in the Wilderness for online ebook

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.

Scott says

Brilliant! This is why Scalzi is world famous and I work 9-5 everyday.

So in this episode we're back on earth still with the question of "Should Earth be with the Colonial Union? Or separate from it?" and obviously people don't learn from history - whoever controls the media, controls everything.

All new characters in this short episode but all wonderful characters that were beautifully written.

Can't wait for the next episode/issue/part...

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.

Luiz Fabricio says

Fun. As the previous two stories were a bit disappointing, this one is unpretentious and fun. The story of a jerk, losing money, credibility and fame due his abuse of jerkness, when he has an opportunity to capitalize and focus this jerkitude towards an overall jerky quest. Barely sci-fi.

Annabeth Leong says

A clear pattern has emerged -- I am happy on the "main story" weeks, and disappointed when the serial goes off main story. The story seems to be settling into a rhythm of one on and one off, which so far means I'm a bit disappointed every other week.

Scalzi's writing remains lively and competent. He has said on his blog that this format has been exciting to him, and listed the alternation as something he particularly likes. Because of this, I've searched myself to understand why it puts me off so much.

I think it's hard for me to attach myself to the characters in the off weeks. Birnbaum, the viewpoint character in *Voice in the Wilderness*, doesn't feel like a protagonist to me. He doesn't change or develop. Things happen in the story, but it feels a bit like a *Twilight Zone* episode -- an account of an oddity. Being very caught up in the story of the Clarke and its crew, and the fascinating, developing, well-drawn characters in that main arc, these off weeks really frustrate me.

I've thought a lot about the metaphor that this is like a television series, but this pattern doesn't actually match one. There are TV shows (like *The Twilight Zone*) that deal with different characters each week, and I'm OK if that's the expectation that's set. However, if you watched *Firefly* and didn't see a member of Mal's crew, it would be a weird episode, and maybe a difficult one. At any rate, the technique should be used sparingly. So I'm having a lot of trouble with these "interlude" weeks when we have the crew of the Clarke waiting in the wings.

A *Voice in the Wilderness* has mystery and world-building, but it lacks depth. It offers the reader a viewpoint character who is quite unsympathetic. I could not really invest myself here, despite knowing this episode will tie in to the larger story.

I am, however, waiting with baited breath for the Clarke to reappear.

Peter Anargirou says

A *Voice in the Wilderness* is another side-story to the overall arc of *The Human Division* (and a great one at that). For the first time, Scalzi shows us what everyday life is like on Earth. Episode 4 follows a political commentator on Earth and shows us some of the conversations surrounding Earth's relationships with the Colonial Union and the Conclave. It's extremely fascinating and something we haven't seen in the Old Man's War universe previously.

This episode provides great content for the current state of humanity in the universe. As might be expected by an episode still early in the total work, however, it also leaves us with questions. I'm anxious to find the

answers to those questions in future episodes. A Voice in the Wilderness is easily worth the \$0.99, and I'm thoroughly enjoying the episodic format of The Human Division!

Jaime says

The fourth entry in Scalzi's The Human Division provides a vision of what is happening on Earth now that they are aware of the the Colonial Union and the forces arrayed against them spread across the galaxy. The dialogue is tight and quick, the wit is well written and the secret and mysterious deal that talk show host (and main character) Birnbaum accepts is intriguing and enticing all at the same time.

Of special note is the back and forth between Birnbaum and his assistant. The rapid fire barbs and friendly insults are very well written and just as believable. This is the best dialogue in the series thus far, and is well worth the price of admission.

I'm very much enjoying this serialized novel and hope that other authors will think about using this format in the future. It gives me something to look forward to each Tuesday, and I'm happy to read the entire episode on my afternoon lunch break. It's fun and reminds me of my love of comic books in my teens...the waiting for the next issue and wondering where my favorite authors and artists would take the story. Scalzi is tapping into that nostalgia, and I appreciate it.

Alice says

This is the fourth in John Scalzi's serializations of *The Human Division*, a story taking place within the same world as *Old Man's War*. There will be thirteen in total.

This installment takes us to Earth, to radio personality Al Birnbaum. As the story opens, his ratings are on a downward spiral, and he's planning a tryst with a "groupie," when he's approached by a man who calls himself Michael Washington. Washington offers increased ratings in exchange for Birnbaum's slanting his show into pro-CU rhetoric. He does, and the ratings come, but at what price?

This is a departure from the main plot, though I'm sure we'll find out how it ties in once all thirteen episodes are out. After all, *Walk the Plank* seemed so out of the blue, but *We Only Need the Heads* tied it back in to the main characters nicely. So, I trust John Scalzi knows what he's doing.

Scalzi is using his format to great effect, I think. With a novel, it's difficult to switch back and forth for entire chapters or long sections to seemingly unrelated plotlines. But, with the serial format, it invites the disparate elements, tied together in later episodes.

I listened to this on audio, as with the last three. William Dufris really seemed to enjoy narrating with the near-religious fervor of a radio personality. Other reviewers have compared him to Glenn Beck, but I thought of Rush Limbaugh. I guess there isn't that much difference. In any case, it was a pleasure to listen to.

I'm looking forward to the next part.

j says

Oh ha ha, I get it. He's like Rush Limbaugh. How funny that political discourse will be the same 200 years after we've expanded into space. What an imagination.*

**is not in evidence.*

Pierre says

This is a review for the series of the Human Division. I have read all the 13 books in a row, this was my first time reading John Scalzi.

I was at first disturbed by the series: more than 400 different races, some with very unfriendly intents toward each other, but all at about the same technological development level and strength which makes it none really prevails? It just does not fit with my idea of technological advancement and species competition. Anyway, I decided to forget about the impossibility of this situation and focus on the story, which I must admit is quite good and interesting.

The concept of releasing several stories, which at first sounds independent from one another is also quite attractive.

This book will not be among my most favourite books, but still a good read which makes me want to discover more the work of John Scalzi.

Ron says

Three and a half stars maybe.

This is a cute short story with many classic Scalzi tropes, but not up to the standard of wit and wisdom long-time Scalzi readers expect. Undoubtedly necessary in the greater scheme of the series but, of itself, forgettable.

Still, a good read.

Tim says

Should have been titled "In the weeds" because that's where Scalzi went with this one. Besides that it is off the main line of the story and kills off the character as well (so he won't be back?), there are problems. No character to like or really relate to. An Earth in the future that sounds (boringly) like today. The only SF nod at all is referencing the Colonial Union, and auto-drive cars that weren't used - huh? And then there is the writing - I expect better. These characters were just more of the same and generic. Scalzi is quickly showing that he has a limited repertoire of characters and voices to draw on. This format is really making it obvious.

EVERYONE has the same snarky banter going on! It's just which of two types the main characters are as they bounce lines back and forth. I've liked it in the past, but now with character (names) coming and going it seems like the same actor showing up for a different part. Look, writer's infect their writing with themselves - that's ok. I'd probably like hanging out with the author, it would be interesting, but it wouldn't be interesting to hang out with him and five clones of himself. That's what it felt like in this story when tied to others.

Nikki says

Hmm. Not such an interesting chapter. It furthers the plot, in the same way as the second episode, but it doesn't include characters to hold on to, to stay interested in. It's a clever enough chapter, but I wasn't emotionally engaged at all. There weren't even references back to the crew of the Clarke, which might've helped.

Joe says

While it was a bit darker due to the ending, it fit an important role in the narrative. As always it well written with Scalzi's good ear for making the future sound much like the present, enough to easily see it!

Dan says

Here we see a bit of what's happening back on Earth through the story of a fading audio talk show host who is promised fame and notoriety if he will espouse the cause of The Colonial Union. What he doesn't know, however, is who is really backing him, or why.
