



The Dispatcher

John Scalzi , Zachary Quinto (Narrator)

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Listening Length: 2 hours and 18 minutes

One day, not long from now, it becomes almost impossible to murder anyone - 999 times out of a thousand, anyone who is intentionally killed comes back. How? We don't know. But it changes everything: war, crime, daily life.

Tony Valdez is a Dispatcher - a licensed, bonded professional whose job is to humanely dispatch those whose circumstances put them in death's crosshairs, so they can have a second chance to avoid the reaper. But when a fellow Dispatcher and former friend is apparently kidnapped, Tony learns that there are some things that are worse than death and that some people are ready to do almost anything to avenge a supposed wrong.

It's a race against time for Valdez to find his friend before it's too late...before not even a Dispatcher can save him.

Zachary Quinto - best known for his role as the Nimoy-approved Spock in the recent Star Trek reboot and the menacing, power-stealing serial killer, Sylar, in Heroes - brings his well-earned sci-fi credentials and simmering intensity to this audio-exclusive novella from master storyteller John Scalzi.

The Dispatcher Details

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Author : John Scalzi , Zachary Quinto (Narrator)

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From Reader Review The Dispatcher for online ebook

Robin (Bridge Four) says

This was so interesting. Imagine a world where if you are murdered you wake up in your bed in the same level of health as you were about 12-24 hours before. A world where it is someone's job to ~~murder~~ dispatch someone if they are going to die unexpectedly. It is kinda like getting another life in a video game if you do it right.

John Scalzi made this an incredibly interesting story about what society would be like. Hospitals would have a dispatcher on staff and they could basically get you a do over. It also makes certain crimes a lot harder when you know that the person you killed could come back and identify you.

I really enjoyed this story and the team up of Tony the dispatcher with a detective to find his friend and a fellow dispatcher who has disappeared. This leads us down a bit of a twisted road and it was a lot of fun to see what the world might look like if murder wasn't really a problem anymore and how others would capitalize on this loop hole to life.

Great short story with some interesting concepts. I'd read more about this world for sure.

Audio: Zacharay Quito did a really good job with this and I enjoyed his narration.

carol. says

Written at the proverbial, easy-to-access, reach-all-literacy-levels eighth-grade level, The Dispatcher has an intriguing core idea. Unfortunately, the writing kept it only two steps above boring for me. Dialogue-heavy, it lacks descriptors and imagery that would have made it more immersive. On the plus side, the fundamental concept is decently integrated into the dialogue, always a challenging task in sci-fi/fantasy. Yet, since description is so scanty in other areas, it does make those moments stand out. Seriously, this was pretty close to boring for me; beyond the hook of 'dispatching,' it was very underwritten.

Apparently, it was first conceived of as an audio story, and read by Zacharay Quinto. I read the paper edition, so I missed the dynamicism a talented actor might have brought to the story. Still, when I contrast it with Aaronovitch's novellas and Kobna Holdbrook-Smith, I can't help but think Scalzi provided too little material for an actor to work with.

Note: I read the Subterranean Press edition which contained a few line drawings. They didn't do much for me, and one contains a pretty solidly triggering image ([view spoiler](#))

Here's a sample from page 32, shortly after the main character meets a police officer.

"What if it was a private gig?"

"You mean, if he was working for a client directly, not through the Agency or through an insurance company."

"Yeah. I understand that happens from time to time."

"Sure. I definitely wouldn't know about those."

"Why not?"

"They're kind of a gray area, legally speaking."

"Do you have any private clients?"

"What part of 'it's a gray area, legally speaking' are you having trouble with?"

"You can tell me confidentially."

I raised my cup to Langdon. "I appreciate the coffee, but I'm not that cheap. Or stupid."

"Fair enough," Langdon said. "Who would know if he had any private clients?"

"Katie might," I said. "His wife. You've spoken to her?"

Langdon nodded. "Briefly. We asked her who she knew that might want to do harm to her husband. She wasn't coming up with anyone."

"You might ask her again. She might have thought you were asking about someone who had a grudge against him, not one of his private clients."

"Would she tell us?"

"She might. Jimmy wouldn't like it, but Jimmy's missing."

It makes me a little sad to see so much love for such a poorly fleshed out story, when I think of the wonderful novella writing by Zelazny, Aaronovitch, Hurley and others.

I love Scalzi's public commentary and willingness to take his Mallet of Correction to the troll-verse, so I'm rounding this up to three stars.

Lyn says

OK so you're playing a video or computer game and you're fighting monsters or shooting bad guys or finding treasure and then things start getting sideways. The dragon smacks you with his tail or the Serbian thugs score some hits or you drop into a pitfall and your hit points or energy level or whatever sinks to zero and you fade to black.

"Game over, man!" as Bill Paxton so ably stated in Alien 2. But wait! If you were in the 80s, you may not have to reach into your pocket for another quarter, or modern gamers may not need to reach for another mountain dew. Your character regenerates, or spawns, or comes back to life – maybe somewhere else or

further back in the game than you were, but you get to keep playing.

Great idea man John Scalzi has given us a world where miraculously this same kind of thing happens in real life. In a Philip K. Dick like imagining, murder victims get a second chance, vanishing from the scene of the crime and popping back into reality, naked but alive back in their bed.

So now we have dispatchers. Legal and bonded, these unusual professionals hover around ICU wards and crash scenes and if it looks like the person is not going to make it, that they will die from their injuries, then they legally kill the person. Under the new and unexplained rules, as a murder victim, they almost instantly vanish and reappear at home and in bed. Almost always.

Scalzi tells a distinctive who-done-it within this innovative world building. Fast paced and describing the seedier sides of this phenomenal process, Scalzi is able to give us a very original and entertaining story.

Sr3yas says

3.5 Stars

Imagine you are playing a video game. You are walking down the street with a **Bazooka** in your hand to complete your mission and some jackass throws a grenade at your face.... and you dies. (*spectacularly*)

What happens next?

You respawn and go on with your game life.

Now imagine a world where that happens in real life. Whenever someone gets murdered, they respawn without a scratch. So whenever some poor bastard gets mortally wounded in an accident, the best thing someone (**Read: Dispatchers**) can do for him to save him.... is to kill him.

Seriously.

Two little rules though.

1. You must get murdered to respawn. Suicides and natural accidents don't count. (*Again, seriously*)
2. There is a 0.1% chance that the whole respawning business might not work even for the eligible candidates. In that case, they really die.

The Dispatchers reads like a pilot episode for a regular Sci-fi TV show featuring a handsome male lead acting as a consultant for law enforcement and a tough female cop who joins forces with the consultant to solve an odd case. The selling point of the story would be the bizarre setting and the chemistry between the leads. (You know, like *Castle*, *Dresden files*, *Fringe*, *The Mentalist* and so on)

This is a very quick read and it is undeniably well written. But other than its eccentric premise (*which is conveniently written off as a "miracle"*), there isn't anything Earth-shattering here.

"You look disturbed. What happened?"

"I was murdered today."

But it is fun.

Ashley says

I liked this! (Big surprise there. I've liked everything Scalzi has written.) This novella really acts like a proof of concept, though. We learn about the world, but we don't learn why, and we don't get into the nitty gritty of it all. It's like an urban fantasy murder mystery where the murder victims can't actually be murdered. I would like more of them, please!

Heads up, this is a free Audible novella narrated by Zachary Quinto. It's only free for the next month, so jump on it, people.

Kevin Kelsey says

Posted at Heradas Review

I find that speculative fiction is usually best when married with another genre. Personally, I'm partial to a good mystery. Set that mysterious tale in a science fiction/fantasy setting, and I'm probably going to be on board. In my eyes it's a longstanding recipe for success: Jack McDevitt's Alex Benedict novels, *The Gone World*, *Altered Carbon*, *Leviathan Wakes*, *Zero World*, *Gnomon*. The list of great mystery/spec fic novels is unknowably long.

The basic idea: Would you murder someone if it also meant saving their life? *The Dispatcher* is a tightly constructed urban fantasy mystery, set in a world mostly like ours but with one key difference: When someone is murdered, they disappear and materialize at home, alive and well in their bed. This happens nine hundred ninety-nine times out of a thousand. This small change sets the stage for a truly unique murder mystery, with a main character and setting I desperately hope Scalzi returns to. If there were more stories set in this world, I would read them all. Come to think of it, there's room on my shelf for a nice paperback collection of *Dispatcher* novellas. Got a nice little spot for it, all ready to go. Write, Scalzi, write.

I'm not usually into urban fantasy, but this one is quite different. Most people hear urban fantasy and think werewolves and vampires and magical objects which, while technically true, isn't all urban fantasy is capable of. The way I see it, urban fantasy has two rules: 1. The story is told in a somewhat contemporary setting, e.g., not middle earth and 2. The impossible happens. Everything else is just how the writer wants to use those building blocks to tell their story. Something Scalzi has done a terrific job of here. The fact that he usually writes science fiction serves to make his branching out into fantasy all the more interesting and rewarding.

The Dispatcher is a prime example of how quality fantasy world building can have far reaching ethical, societal, and industry specific ramifications. It also explores that impact pretty thoroughly for a novella. Like proverbial butterfly flapping its wings and causing a hurricane, one little modification to the world we're accustomed to changes so many aspects of human society and social norms. It impacts everything from the

kinds of intimidation organized crime families utilize, to the methods detectives use to investigate them. Insurance policies, experimental surgical procedures, and even frat boy posturing are all changed.

“I know what side of the street I like better. But you don’t always get to choose the side of the street you walk on.”

I listened to the Audible audiobook version of this last year. Zachary Quinto provided the narration, and turned in a graceful performance—bringing each character to life with subtlety. It was nice to listen to a Scalzi book not narrated by Wil Wheaton for once. Not that I have anything against Wil Wheaton, I’ve just grown a little tired of his narrative style.

This year I read the hardcover edition published by Subterranean press. In addition to the text, Vincent Chong has provided several illustrations of key scenes. He draws in an almost airbrushed hyper-realistic style that’s difficult to describe, but it truly brings the story to life. Having experienced this story in both formats, it’s hard to recommend one over the other, so I’ll wholeheartedly recommend them both. Whatever form you enjoy your books in, the Dispatcher isn’t something to be missed.

Char says

Zachary Quinto's narration is exceptional, but the story itself left me... wanting. I noted some dialogue quirks that irritated me, (a few cliches and a lot of he saids, she saids), but I did like the story. I just ended up vaguely unsatisfied.

Thanks for the free audio available through Amazon here: <https://www.amazon.com/FREE-The-Dispa...>

Will M. says

Very first Scalzi book that I read and I'm quite disappointed with myself because why haven't I read his other novels? I own a bunch of them and keep ignoring them on my shelf. I'm really glad that audible had a deal on this short story weeks ago for just \$0.99.

This novel is way too short but really packed a good plot and terrific writing. The whole idea of being a dispatcher was really interesting and explained well even though it's just a short story. I will be reading more of Scalzi's work really soon. Really impressed with this, and my only problem is that why is this so short?

Nikita says

Really cool idea!!

Erin *Proud Book Hoarder* says

An interesting, "different" Urban Fantasy. Short in length at just shy of 140 pages, it mainly stands as a

paranormally-touched novel with a noirish detective vibe. The main character may not be a cop, but he gets involved with an actual detective to help solve the mystery of where he old friend and co-worker has disappeared to. The noir vibe comes from the gritty dialogue exchanges when interrogating suspects and following leads. Throw in big crime bosses and secret cover-ups, and this comes across more mystery than fantasy.

As to the fantasy aspect, the world-building is certainly different. If you get murdered, you come back to life. Other causes of death - natural, aging, suicide, accidents, etc. - will leave you dead. The world doesn't know why or how it works, it just knows it does, so there are certain trained individuals called 'dispatchers' who treat it as a job. They frequently make their rounds at the hospital, with state licenses, to wait for failed surgeries or accidental victims to be willed in. If they know the patient is dying, they kill them first in a particular way, thus changing the cause of death to murder and giving the patient a chance at life again.

It sounds a little silly but there's complexities involved and it comes across pretty cool. The bulk of the story is spent explaining loopholes and pretty much everything you could wonder about this ability. Religion, morals, history, you name it. Written in a dialogue heavy style, the book keeps that intriguing exchange going strong to cause the pages to keep flying by. Not only is the book short, but the writing style makes it pass by even quicker.

If you're in the mood for something very different and well-written, but that won't take up a lot of time, try this one on for size. An honest review has been written after receiving from netgalley

Bark says

This story takes place in a world where insurance companies employ dispatchers to help prevent the costly premature death that failed surgery often presents. They're present during surgery and if the patient is on the edge of death they are there to zap them with a lethal dosage of premature death. Then the person *usually* awakens naked and good as new in their home rather than dead and buried and saddling their families with grief and lots of expenses.

See in this world if you die naturally you're gone for good but if it's accidental or due to murder you typically come back. Why? Who knows. No one knows! You just have to go with it. You'll drive yourself crazy waiting for answers if you're a questioning type like me.

Of course with this type of scenario certain reckless morons do stupid reckless things like cutting off each other's arms for fun or joining a fight to the almost death club. Thus the shadier dispatchers step up to earn a little side cash to fix the mess and keep it quiet. Who can blame a guy for wanting to make a few extra bucks? But this type of work comes back to haunt our main character when a former colleague goes missing.

A mystery ensues and this is where my tired brain started to shut off and daydream about chocolate cupcakes and my next book. Needless to say, it wasn't able to fully engage me after the enthralling beginning but that may be my fault. I went into this one blind and vaguely remembering that I read somewhere online that Scalzi was a funny writer. Or maybe I've mixed him up with someone else? I didn't find this one funny but it may be an anomaly or I may have no sense of humor. Either way, it was just okay in the end.

If you have the chance and inclination, check out the audio version narrated by Zachary Quinto. He does a fine, fine job with the material.

Mike says

This was a really fun, quick listen (since it is an audio book), pretty much what I have come to expect from Scalzi but with the added bonus of Spock (Zachary Quinto) reading it to me.

This book very much reminded me of *Legion* by Brandon Sanderson. Both novellas drop the reader into a world that is very much like ours, but with one difference. In *Legion* it is a man who can conjure (but not dismiss) hallucinations that are extremely knowledgeable in a given subject area. In this one people, save for a small percentage, cannot be murdered. They simply reappear in their homes, naked, after they are killed. The reader is not there at the beginning of these happenings, but several years after they have started, after the world has somewhat gotten used to them. The narrators of both are outsiders due to their circumstances and provide a unique perspective on the problem at hand. They are by no means perfect, but are interesting characters in their own way.

What I have always liked best about science fiction (though this could arguably be fantasy however the impact is the same) was how good authors can take one or two changes to society and extrapolate its affects on society down to the banal such as insurance, operating room politics, and mob hits. This book is no exception and I delighted in the creative ways Scalzi tweaked our modern society to adjust for the change in his world. It was really neat and I we can get more stories in their universe going forward. It is marked by Scalzi's trademarked sarcastic wit, but was a bit lighter on the humor than most of his other works, not that it detracted from the story at all.

The mystery itself was both neat and tragic. I will say it isn't too intricate of a mystery, since I was able to guess it well ahead of the reveal, but it was well constructed and populated with lots of interesting characters. I especially liked the "mob family trying to get legit" characters and the cop that drags the protagonist into the mystery. If you have a few hours to kill this is a great option for temporal assassination.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/03/28/...>

Imagine a world where it is nearly impossible to kill anyone. In *The Dispatcher*, John Scalzi's sci-fi novella which takes place in the not-so-far future, this is exactly the state of affairs. One day, people simply woke up to this new game changer. If you committed suicide, you stayed dead. If you died in an accident, you stayed dead. If you passed away due to illness, you stayed dead. But for some bizarre reason, if you were murdered, your body would mysteriously awaken back to life, naked and whole in your home. In 999 times out of a 1000, those whose lives were intentionally ended by someone else would return to the living like this. No one knows why, no one knows how, no one has any clue what it all means. But what they do know, is that the world is forever changed by this phenomenon.

A good case in point, our protagonist Tony Valdez is a man whose job was created by the government as a result of this new reality. He is a Dispatcher—a trained and licensed professional killer. True, the terms of his position may dictate that he dispatch his clients as quickly and humanely as possible, and there are many rules surrounding his work contracts. But at the end of the day, Tony is aware that his presence is only ever

requested when here's a potential need for him to take a life. For instance, a good number of his assignments involve him being on hand at operating rooms in hospitals, just in case the surgery goes horribly wrong and a patient needs a second chance. In such a situation, Tony would deliver a special "payload" to the dying patient's brain which would result in their death, essentially murdering them—then BOOM, patient reappears in their home, alive to attempt going under the knife another day.

Of course, not all Dispatchers follow the rules. As someone who used to pick up unofficial and lucrative "private" jobs under the table, Tony knows there are still plenty of his fellow Dispatchers who are doing these illegal gigs on the side. So when one of them goes missing, Tony teams up with a police detective to find out if his colleague's illicit activities might have led to his disappearance.

With *Lock In* and now *The Dispatcher*, I truly think John Scalzi has entered a new phase of his career. While his style has always been quite readable to me, in this book I started to see a new level of polish and elegance in his writing. He seems to have moved past his issue with dialogue tags and the excessive "he said, she said", for one thing. For another, gone is much of the "popcorn humor" his previous books are known for. Though it wouldn't be fair to say *The Dispatcher* is completely devoid of levity, for the most part this novella is a very serious endeavor, featuring some thought-provoking yet morbid themes. It may be a short book, but it sure packs a lot of substance.

It's also clear that much consideration has been put into the concept. While it's true that the book never ends up giving an explanation for why people who are murdered just start coming back to life, I never really saw that as the point—rather, I looked at *The Dispatcher* as an interesting thought experiment, and the premise was simply there to provide a framework. What would happen if people couldn't kill each other anymore? Would it hold people back from their impulses, or would it actually embolden them and make them more reckless, so that we would have secret fight clubs fought with hammers or college kids LARPing in the park with real swords and axes? How might people exploit this new phenomenon, or use Dispatchers to their advantage? What would it do to the world's views on war, crime, healthcare, religion and pretty much everything in our daily lives?

This book explores all these questions and more, touching upon the social effects on a population level, as well as the physical, moral, and psychological implications on a more personal level.

Best of all, woven though all of this is a great story. *The Dispatcher* gives off vibes of sci-fi crime noir mixed with a little bit of urban fantasy, making it a little tough to categorize, but what comes through strongly is the solid mystery plot. For a novella, I also thought it was very well-paced, with no filler scenes or lulls. All told, the story was riveting from start to finish, making this one a super quick read.

In sum, this is a book I would highly recommend. Even though I love Scalzi's science fiction and humor, I definitely wouldn't mind seeing him write more like this, or even expand *The Dispatcher* universe with future stories since there's so much potential and possibilities to explore. He has truly created something special here, reminding me once again why he is one of my favorite authors.

Bradley says

This one's a bit hard to classify because it's fully a mystery, a SF adventure, and a Fantasy, rolled in one. :)

Enter in a major universe-changing condition: 999 out of 1000 murdered people come back. They arrive naked in their homes after the moment of their death. There is always that one that doesn't, though.

Enter in the shady and the not-so-shady people who take advantage of this little universal loophole. Dangerous operations in hospitals can be reset for a couple of hours. Horrible accidents on the street can be erased, assuming that the person gets murdered in time. And bloodsports, of course.

There's always consequences, of course, but in this novella, so many of the little loopholes are explored nicely and there's a great little mystery-twist to tie it all together.

All told, I thought this was rather a little gem. :)

Bookwraiths says

Originally reviewed at Bookwraiths.

John Scalzi has really struck gold with his new urban fantasy novella, *The Dispatcher*. This tale a fast-paced, easily digested murder mystery, which is tightly constructed, amazingly simple yet immensely thought provoking. Simply put, this is one damn good read.

Set in the near future, the world is basically identical to our own – except it is impossible to kill anyone. Yes, you can die by natural causes, accident, or suicide, but no one can kill you. Murder is practically impossible, as in you have better odds of being hit by lightning and dying than being killed by a murderer. And no one knows how or why this change in the natural order has taken place. Some believe it is a sign from God. Others point to more fantastical cause, while the rational develop scientific explanations. But what everyone agrees on is that the whole world is now transforming!

Think on the consequences of this single change to death. How do people now fight wars? Is crime of a deadly nature even a threat anymore? How does the death penalty work? Does God really exist? And, more importantly to the governments of the world, how can this phenomenon be controlled?

Well, the answer to the last question are the Dispatchers. These duly trained and licensed government killers monitored, watched, and assigned job duties. Our main character, Tony Valdez, one of them, and he generally works hospitals, always on hand if an ER patient is about to die or an operation goes horribly wrong. In those situations, Tony will put a payload (bullet) in the patients brain so that they do not die a natural death but are murdered; this resulting in their reappearance at their home without any injuries; their life saved. Tony himself feeling no guilt at the “murder” he has committed since no one dies but come back to life. In a strange way, Tony feels he is almost acting as people’s guardian angel.

But there is always a dark side to everything. Even this amazing and seemingly benevolent banishment of murder perverted into something dark and twisted. Some dispatchers selling their services to crime lords, fight clubs, and even less savory enterprises. Others working illegal, unmonitored jobs as the dispatcher for people in dangerous jobs who might prefer to be murdered rather than be disfigured or have life changing injuries.

But Tony isn’t much impacted by the shady side of things until one day when a detective shows up. This investigator announces that one of Tony’s old friends has disappeared, and she believes that he might have been caught up in the dark underbelly of the dispatchers,. And, quickly, tony finds himself coerced into a thrilling murder mystery, where even he might not be completely safe!

Without a doubt, John Scalzi is at his writing best with this novella. The pacing is near perfect, sped along by the constant dialogue and thrilling reveals, even as the usual Scalzi humor adds a bit of levity to the serious tone. And the concept is extraordinary, complex, and develops into a believable reality, where the characters discuss the miraculous in terms of societal, philosophical and religious impact without ever coming across as preachy. This mixture of urban fantasy, scifi, and crime noire elements really a delectable brew.

To sum up, I highly recommend this novella to everyone. It is great fun to read and has loads of potential to become a full blown series for Scalzi. Plus, at 136 pages, *The Dispatcher* is the perfect length for a read during lunch or during a long commute home. Give it a try. I think you will enjoy it.

I received this book from the publisher in exchange for a fair and honest review. I'd like to thank them for allowing me to receive this review copy and inform everyone that the review you have read is my opinion alone.
