THE FAULT IN OUR STARS

JOHN GREEN
# Table of Contents

Discussion Questions from litlovers.com 3  
FAQs about The Fault in Our Stars from johngreenbooks.com 5  
Tweeting from a La-Z-Boy, An Unfinished Book Hits No. 1 25  
'The Fault In Our Stars': Love In A Time Of Cancer 27  
John Green: 'I'm tired of adults telling teenagers that they aren't smart' 29
Discussion Questions

1. John Green derives his book's title from a famous line in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings." (I,ii,139-140). What does the line mean—and why would Green have used it for his title? Even more important, why would he have altered it to read, "The fault in our stars" rather than ourselves? How does Green's meaning differ from Shakespeare's?

2. How would you describe the two main characters, Hazel and Gus? Do either of them conform, in behavior or thinking, to what we normally associate with young cancer patients? How do the two differ from one another...and how do their personality traits and interests complement each other?

3. How do Hazel and Gus each relate to their cancer? Do they define themselves by it? Do they ignore it? Do they rage at life's unfairness? Most importantly, how do the two confront the big questions of life and death?

4. Do you find some of the descriptions of pain, the medical realities that accompany cancer, or the discussion of bodily fluids too graphic?

5. At one point, Hazel says, "Cancer books suck." Is this a book about cancer? Did you have trouble picking up the book to read it? What were you expecting? Were those expectations met...or did the book alter your ideas?

5. John Green uses the voice of an adolescent girl to narrate his story. Does he do a convincing job of creating a female character?

7. Hazel considers An Imperial Affliction "so special and rare that advertising your affection for it feels like a betrayal." Why is it Hazel's favorite book? Why is it so important that she and Gus learn what happens after its heroine dies? Have you ever felt the same way about a book as Hazel does—that it is too special to talk about?

8. What do you think about Peter Van Houten, the fictional author of An Imperial Affliction? This book's real author, John Green, has said that Van Houten is a "horrible, horrible person but I have an affection for him." Why might Green have said that? What do you think of Van Houten?

9. Green once served as a chaplain in a children's hospital, working with young cancer patients. In an interview, he referred to the "hero's journey within illness"—that "in spite of it, you pull yourself up and continue to be alive while you're alive." In what way does Green's comment apply to his book—about two young people who are dying? Is theirs a hero's journey? Is the "pull yourself up" phrase an unseemly statement by someone, like the author or any reader, who is not facing a terminal disease?
10. What did you make of the book's humor? Is it appropriate...or inappropriate? Green has said he "didn't want to use humor to lighten the mood" or "to pull out the easy joke" when things got hard. But, he said, he likes to write about "clever kids, [and they] tend to be funny even when things are rough." Is his use of humor successful? How did it affect the way you read the book?

11. After his chaplaincy experience, Green said he believed that "life is utterly random and capricious, and arbitrary." Yet he also said, after finishing The Fault in Our Stars that he no longer feels that life's randomness "robs human life of its meaning...or that it robs even lives of people who don't get to have full lives." Would you say that the search for meaning—even, or especially, in the face of dying—is what this book explores? Why...or why not?

12. How do Hazel and Gus change, in spirit, over the course of the novel?

13. Talk about how you experienced this book? Is it too sad, too tragic to contemplate? Or did you find it in some way uplifting?

Questions About The Fault in Our Stars

This page is organized into categories:
Writing the Book/Inspiration
The Ending
After the Ending
An Imperial Affliction
Allusions/References
Symbols/Metaphors
*further categories can be found at johngreenbooks.com

Questions about Writing and Inspiration

Q. Did the themes and ideas from stories you had abandoned in the past help shape TFIOS?
A. Yes, in a lot of ways. There are so many lines from the sequel and the desert island book that ended up in TFiOS in different ways. (“It was kind of a beautiful day,” which occurs at the end of TFiOS, was the first line of one of the drafts of the desert island book.) The desert island book was primarily about how we behave around each other when we are scared, how fear makes us both more and less human. I don’t know what the sequel was about aside from trying to prove that I, too, could write fancy metafiction, but then I ended up including a lot of metafiction in TFiOS, so it found its way in as well.
I was thinking a lot about the relationship between books and their readers, and how the author of the book can get in the way of that relationship just as much as s/he can facilitate it, so I think that had a lot to do with shaping my thoughts on TFiOS.
Also, all three projects are about deprivation and how people respond to it. So basically I took so many spare parts from those other stories that there’s no way I’ll ever be able to finish them.

Q. Did you consider ending TFIOS midsentence?
A. I agree with Augustus that there is a contract between reader and writer and that not ending a book violates that contract. Also, I try really hard in my work generally not to do ostentatious things like ending books midsentence.

Q. Can you elaborate on this idea of a contract between author and reader?
A. I think the writer’s responsibility is to tell an honest story (which is also, I would argue, definitionally a hopeful story) and to make it as a gift to the reader.
The reader violates the contract when s/he reads poorly or distractedly or ungenerously. (It seems to me that mutual generosity is kind of the key to the reader-writer relationship. We are basically trying to give each other a gift, but it doesn’t work unless both of us are really trying.)

Q. How do you put so much meaning into a book meant for young adults?
A. Teenagers are plenty smart. I don’t sit around and worry whether teenagers are smart. I mean, most of the people currently reading The Scarlet Letter and The Great Gatsby…are teenagers.

Q. Are TFIOS references in early Vlogbrothers videos (such as talking about hurdles and the title “An Imperial Affliction”) intentional?
A. Those aren’t intentional easter eggs. If anything, I find them unfortunate, because any moment when you’re reading The Fault in Our Stars and get drawn out of the narrative and become conscious of the fact that it’s a story constructed by an author. But inevitably there’s a lot of overlap between my thoughts when I’m writing and my thoughts when I’m making videos, and sometimes the one shapes the other.

Q. Did any philosophers inspire your writing about the universe and oblivion?
A. Well, sure, definitely. Kierkegaard, etc. But the thinker who most deeply influenced my thoughts on the topic, and who gave me a vocabulary for talking about it, is Vi Hart.

Q. Did you intentionally draw a connection between Augustus and Hazel watching kids play on the bones and the reader getting enjoyment from a book about kids who will inevitably die young?
A. hahahaha no there’s nothing wrong at all with playing on bones. We’re all doing it all the time. I was struck by this in Vienna when I saw those kids breakdancing on top of the catacombs. To dance on the dead is not to dishonor them.

Q. Stephanie Meyer has said that her characters were real and that they decided where the plot would go. Is it like that for you?
A. So far as I can tell, if you say that, you’re saying one of two things:
   1. I have this unconscious mind to which I have no access that can write books, and I just have to shut off my conscious mind and let my unconscious mind work.
   or
   2. A supernatural force came to me and whispered the words into my ear and I wrote them down.
Saying the second thing seems really presumptuous to me (like, saying that God wrote your book is a very, very bold thing to say). The first seems more plausible to me—I know that for many people the writing experience does not feel like it involves effort or consciousness—but for me that is not the case. I wrote the book. I was conscious of the fact that I was writing a book while I was writing it. I was conscious of the fact that I was using words to try to tell a story that would find life in your mind.
Q. By answering so many questions about your book, aren’t you kind of teaching it in a way? Or creating sparknotes of reflections?
A. Legit question. My only defense is that this is for people who’ve already read the book, which is rather different from sparknotes. :)

Q. Due to the success of TFIOS, will your books now be marketed to all age groups?
A. I am not interested in publishing books for adults. I like my job. I like my editor. I like my publisher. I am very grateful that so many adults are reading The Fault in Our Stars, but I really like writing and publishing books for teenagers, and it’s difficult for me to imagine wanting to do anything else as a writer.

Q. Did you ever consider having another character tell the story?
A. Yes, Isaac, because it would have fit in nicely with how epics usually work, complete with being told by a blind guy. But in the end I wanted to give Hazel the voice of her own story, particularly since that is so often denied the dying. (We read about them a lot more than we read them.)

Q. In TFIOS, you say that there are fourteen dead people for every living person. However, in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, it is stated that there are more people alive than have ever died. Who is right, Augustus or Oskar?
A. Oh, Oskar is overwhelmingly wrong. (In his defense, I think he is like nine years old.) It’s a nice moment in that book, when he imagines that there aren’t enough skulls for everyone alive to play Hamlet, but yeah, that’s just total horseshit. There are plenty of skulls. We could all have freaking juggling acts with all the skulls.

Q. Does answering all of these questions annoy or offend you? Do you ever want your readers to take the book as it is without asking a bunch of questions about metaphors and deeper meanings?
A. I feel bad that I can’t answer more of them, but I never feel anything except lucky to have readers who read my books with such care and thoughtfulness. That said, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with what Salinger called reading and running—like, I don’t think that critical analysis or whatever is the only reason we read fiction or the only enjoyable thing about reading (or writing) fiction. There are plenty of ways to read a book, and I’m grateful to anyone who finds my work encouraging or useful.

Q. What did you do with previous drafts of the novel?
A. I save every draft of the novel as a different file name (there are several hundred file names related to TFIOS). So it’s possible to chart the edits and rewrites of the novel over time, but the book I published is the only one I want to publish and I’m not inclined to show off all the terrible sentences I wrote before writing the (hopefully not terrible) sentences that ended up in the book.
However, all this stuff will go to a university library when I die, so if you are really inclined, and you outlive me, you can view it eventually.

Q. When writing TFIOS, were you more focused on telling the story at first or the metaphorical meaning and the symbols in the book?
A. I don’t think of story and symbols as separate, really. They emerge from the same place, a desire to go on a journey with the reader that will be interesting (and hopefully helpful) to both of us. So I don’t sit down and say, like, “Green will be the color of all the dreams we were foolish to dream,” or anything like that, because then I think it usually ends up seeming clunky and obvious and inauthentic.
The truth is that metaphor and symbol are all around us, and that we are constantly reading our lives and the world symbolically. I want figurative language and symbols to be as deeply integrated into the story as they are into our lives.

Q. Peter says that the Dutch Tulip Man represents God. Have you ever put in a character that represents an idea like this or something similar?
A. Sure.
The Dutch Tulip Man. :)

Q. TFIOS seems to connect intelligence with atheism as opposed to a willingness and openness to ideas. Why is this?
Well, I think Augustus is pretty smart, and he does not present an atheistic worldview (or at least an inherently atheistic worldview), nor does Hazel’s pretty smart dad, whose argument about the universe wanting to be noticed perpetually is a very theistic/faith-based/spiritual kind of thing to say. (Like, embracing even the possibility of concepts like forever or consciousness that survives death is impossible in a rigidly atheistic worldview.)
Augustus’s parents, who I think are also pretty smart but perhaps not in the ostentatious way that Hazel and Augustus are, are clearly religious people.
And the last words of the book represent a moment where the author himself perhaps interjects his own let-us-not-deem-consciousness-temporary-just-quite-yet with the present tense marriage vows that could be read as a statement about celestial marriage or a marriage that survives death or etc. if you wanted to read it that way.

Q. When you were writing TFIOS, did you also switch from calling him Augustus to calling him Gus? Do you see him now as the boy he was at the end rather than the manic pixie dream boy he was at the beginning?
A. Well, you have to remember that I am 34, so the bravura performances of teenagers do not impress me in quite the same way that they did when I was 16.
(Also, I was writing a novel, and I was very conscious that I was writing a novel. I am not one of those writers who believes that, like, the book is writing itself or that God is telling me which words to write down or whatever.)
So I always saw Gus as fragile and frail, even at the beginning of the book, when he (for example) misuses big words and is clearly not quite the guy he’s trying to play. And obviously I like that boy more.

Q. Have you ever had a similar experience to Van Houten’s in terms of meeting a fan, like Hazel, who was frustrated that you couldn’t give her the answers she was looking for?
A. Yes, this happens all the time. It happens a lot with Looking for Alaska, and now it is happening even more with TFiOS, which surprises me, because I did not think the ending of TFiOS was particularly ambiguous. (To be fair, I have a pretty high tolerance for ambiguity, I guess.)
I understand the impulse, I guess, particularly since many contemporary readers have read a lot of book series, which leave cliffhanger after cliffhanger before wrapping things up with some marriages and crazily named children.
But I genuinely feel unqualified to tell you what happens after the end of the book, and to make something up—as Van Houten briefly attempts to—feels really disingenuous.
In general, I personally agree with a lot of what Van Houten says in the novel. He’s like a drunk, dickish version of myself, basically.

Q. Who is Esther?
A. Esther was a nerdfighter who died of cancer in August of 2010. She and I were friends for a couple years before that, and I am friends with her friends and with her family.
You can watch her YouTube videos here and learn about the organization her family set up in her memory here.

Q. How much of Esther went into the novel? What parts were specifically inspired by her? Did she ever get to see parts of it before she died?
A. Esther did not see any of the book before she died. (It did not feature a character named Hazel with thyroid cancer when she died, either. It was a vastly different story.)
So much of the story was inspired by her and my friendship with her and my affection for her family and friends, but I didn’t take very many specific things (except for superficial stuff like the oxygen and whatnot).
What inspired me most was Esther’s unusual mix of teenagerness and empathy: She was a very outwardly focused person, very conscious of and attentive to her friends and family. But she was also silly and funny and totally normal. And in our conversations about heroism and strength or whatever, she was very conscious of cliches (many of which I threw at her) but mostly unconvinced by them.
I just really liked Esther. That was maybe the biggest thing. I really liked her, and I was really pissed off after she died, and I had to write my way through it, because I was desperately looking for some hope in it. (I am still pretty pissed off about it, for the record.)
All that said, I really don’t want to seem to be appropriating Esther’s story, which belongs to her and to her family and not to me. Hazel is a fictional character, and she is in many important ways very different from the person Esther was.
Q. In Augustus’s first heroic death in pixel form, he covers the grenade to prevent the blast from harming the school children. Later, Hazel refers to herself as a grenade. Was this a coincidence?
A. I was conscious of that connection when writing, yes. I wrote the video game scene in a very early draft of the novel, years and years ago, and then the first time Hazel imagines herself as a grenade appeared in revisions (probably in early 2011? I think before we went to Amsterdam), and I got the idea from the earlier scene.
Whether it’s a coincidence in the story is up to the reader to decide, I guess?

Q. What portion of the novel did you enjoy writing the most?
A. The beginning was really fun to write—Hazel making fun of Patrick and all that. I’m kind of a Patrick in real life, and I’m very conscious of it: Like, it’s super easy to make fun of me for being this hugely earnest Internet persona, and I guess I am really narcissistic because I really enjoy making fun of myself in fiction. (See also, Peter Van Houten.)

Q. You said in a Tumblr post that some of your favorite parts of your desert island story ended up in TFIOS. What are these parts?
A. I wrote like 40,000 words of the desert island story and the only things I really liked were:
1. The sentence, “It was kind of a beautiful day.”
and
2. This rant about Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and its weird, paternalistic, imperialist insistence that humans cannot be fully human when they are sick or deprived of necessities, when in fact the truth is that humanness is always transformed by whatever we are in want of, and we are always in want of something.
and
3. A shoe-shopping flashback.
All three of these things ended up in TFiOS in one form or another.

Q. You said that TFIOS was once a very different book. What was it like? Was it always about two kids with cancer?
A. It was about like a dozen kids with cancer who created a club called the Dead Person’s Society in a cave (ridiculous) near the children’s hospital (doubly ridiculous) and they’d sneak out of the hospital together and visit the cave and convene the DPS (triply ridiculous). It was basically a very flimsy, high-concept way of allowing me to think through my own thoughts and angers about death and suffering and so on. It was not good.

Q. How much of TFIOS came from Sarah? Did she help you a lot in writing?
A. Sarah, did you submit a question anon?
Sarah helped in every possible way; it is impossible to list or even verbalize all the ways she shaped the book through her readings of it, our conversations, our life together, etc.

Q. Does Sarah like the book?
A. She does like it, yeah. It’s her favorite of my books, I think.
Q. What did Hank say when he first read TFIOS?
A. Honestly, I think he said that he thought it was going to change my life a lot and that I didn’t really know what I was getting into. (That proved prophetic, as Hank usually does.) And then he told me that I had to keep making vlogbrothers videos no matter what.

Q. Why do you refer to TFIOS as a “problem” that you’re glad to be done with? Why were you so ready to be done with it?
A. I mean, for ten years of my life, I tried to write this book and it taunted me and it sucked and it kept sucking and nothing I could do for years and years made it suck less, and then finally I was given a way into it and I worked very hard to make it the best book that I could possibly make it, but books will always be a collaboration between reader and writer, and at some point I have to stop doing my job so I can start letting you do your job.
I mean that a book is a problem in that it is composed out of meaningless scratches on a page that must be translated into ideas that live inside your head, and you use a set of skills (literacy, critical thinking, etc.) to make that happen. I don’t mean that it is an UNFORTUNATE problem; I just mean that it is a thing that has to be created by both of us, like a crossword puzzle or something.

Q. Is it hard for you to kill a character? How do you go about doing that and how do you know it’s the right thing to do as opposed to gratuitous hurt for the characters?
A. 1. I don’t feel like I’m killing anyone. The person is dying, and that sucks, but I don’t feel responsible for it any more than I feel responsible when a friend in real life dies.
2. With TFIOS, for me, there is no book without death. You cannot meaningfully confront the universe’s indifference to us without seeing the horrific suffering and injustice and awfulness of what really happens to real people who do not deserve to suffer and die. When writing the novel (and really throughout my writing career), I was very angry about this, very angry that people die for no good reason, and very dissatisfied with all the flimsy, Encouragement-y things that people say in the wake of such tragedies. So honestly, I wasn’t trying to make you feel anything gratuitous; I just could think of no other way to lay bare the absolute hideousness of living in a world where parents have to bury their children. And we live in that world, Humans have always lived in that world, and always will.
3. The challenge—and this is not just a challenge when writing a novel but also when, like, trying to get out of bed every day—is to acknowledge these truth and still live a hopeful, productive life. Are the only options 1. lying to yourself or 2. nihilism? I believe not. I believe there is great beauty and meaning to be found and constructed in this life, but we must find and construct that meaning in this world, and to do that, we must be honest about this world.

Q. Did you have any second thoughts about the way in which you described the degeneration of Augustus’s health in his final days?
A. Well, I didn’t want to bullshit the reader, but I also didn’t want to be gratuitous about it. I left the worst of it off the page, I guess, but I don’t really regret that. You might be asking whether I
regret being so explicit, in which case the answer is definitely not. Our literature has enough novels that glorify suffering as transcendently beautiful.

Q. Was TFIOS edited from the content you created from NaNoWriMo a few years back?
A. No. Everything I wrote for NaNoWriMo was about a zombie apocalypse caused by corn monoculture.

Q. Where do you see yourself in the story? Do you see yourself as Patrick?
A. I do see myself as Patrick-like in a lot of ways, yes. Also PVH. Also Hazel’s dad, I guess. I identify personally closer with the (male) adults in the novel than the teenagers, I guess.

Q. Did your time as a chaplain and your interactions with Esther contribute to your honest portrayal of the mindset associated with illness? What were the other sources? What about the medical details?
A. The time I spent as a chaplain was very helpful, because I got to know a lot of different people with many different kinds of cancer. But for the first several years after my months as a chaplain, all the writing I tried to do about illness was terrible. So I do think knowing and caring about Esther was probably the most important thing in terms of thinking about the mindsets and emotional realities of chronic illness. I also talked a lot to families of people with cancer and I read a lot of books about cancer, which were extremely helpful. But if I hadn’t known Esther, I never would have written The Fault in Our Stars. I might’ve eventually finished a book about adolescent illness of some kind, but it wouldn’t have been this one.

Q. How did the birth of Henry during the writing process affect TFiOS regarding your worldview of parents/children/humanity?
A. I couldn’t write the book until I understood that the love between a parent and child (like many other kinds of love) is literally stronger than death: As long as either person survives, the relationship survives. So my grandmother may be dead, but she is still my grandmother. Augustus may be dead, but he is still the great star-crossed love of Hazel’s life. I didn’t really understand that until I got to know Henry.

Q. It seems like there’s a symbolic reason behind most things in this book. Is that just the way you write or did you specifically choose to write TFiOS in this way? Why?
A. Well, I always want to write books that stand up to re-reading, but to be clear, there’s more than one good way to read a book. The great thing about figurative language and symbols and the like in novels is that you don’t have to be conscious of them for them to work. Like, let’s say you read The Catcher in the Rye and somehow your English teacher doesn’t tell you about the red hunting cap, and so you read the whole damn novel without ever thinking much one way or the other about this hat Holden keeps putting on and taking off. Even if you haven’t thought about any of this consciously at all, there’s still a pretty good chance that something inside you will break open when Phoebe puts the hat on Holden at the end of the
book, because it's such a small and kind and humane gesture. And maybe if you're heavily invested in the red hunting cap, that moment will hit you harder, but it will hit you regardless. But the red hunting cap isn't what makes Catcher good, and if TFiOS is good, it isn't because of any symbols or metaphors in isolation. Catcher is a great book because it lets you see the world out of someone else's eyes; it gives you the rare opportunity to escape the prison of your consciousness and imagine in a big and complex and generous way what it would be like to be Holden Caulfield. All the language in the novel exists to make your experience of Holden's life richer and more compelling and more real.

**Questions about the Ending**

Q. You once mentioned that the last sentence in the book is the biggest spoiler. Why do you believe that to be true?
A. 1. It's present tense.
   2. What do you say at your wedding?

Q. What does the present tense of the last line signify?
A. It signifies something that is still happening, that is continuing, that is ongoing, that is not over. (I'm pretty sure that is what the present tense always signifies?)

Q. So did Augustus's death occur prior to what is happening at the end of the book (a wedding)?
A. The central thing that Hazel has to realize at the end of the book is that she has been wrong all along about how she imagines her relationships with people she loves. She wasn't wrong about being a grenade (although we're all grenades), but she was wrong about how that should shape her behavior.

More importantly but in the same vein, Hazel has to realize that her mom was wrong when she said, "I won't be a mother anymore." The truth is, after Hazel dies (assuming she dies), her mom will still be her mom, just as my grandmother is still my grandmother even though she has died. As long as either person is still alive, that relationship survives. (It changes, but it survives.) So the dual significant to "I do," to me is 1. she's realizing that she can still love Augustus and that there is still value in that love, and 2. there is a permanence to the present tense. An infinity within the finite. The present tense is always present. It is always happening now.

(This can obviously be overread: They aren't really married. You can't—AND SHOULDN'T—marry a dead person. But I wanted to use the language of that ceremony to connect them to each other, to give her the chance to say the words she'll probably never get to say in a church while wearing a dress, and to acknowledge that their love was real and important and, in its way, lasting.)

Q. Why did you end the book so abruptly like Peter Van Houten did with AIA?
A. I was not under the impression I ended it abruptly.
Q. Typically, comedies end in marriage and tragedies end in death. When Hazel says, “I do” at the end, should that be interpreted as a marriage, therefore hope?
A. Well, I was definitely aware that Shakespeare’s comedies end in marriage and his tragedies end in death, and I was rather fond of the idea that my book could end (symbolically, at least) in both.

Q. The last line in TFiOS is important, but what if it does not translate properly into another language? Is that whole idea of marriage going to be lost?
A. Yes. This is inevitable in translation. (Many other lines that are a big deal in English may also get lost in translation.)
But here’s what is often overlooked: Just as there are inevitably losses in the translation process, there are also opportunities. There are ways in which a translation can become richer than the original text.
This is an extension of books belonging to their readers and novels being inherently collaborative. We think, “Well, the author’s original text is the ideal text,” but A. there is no actual “original text” because the entire process of creating the novel is collaborative, and B. it is perfectly possible for a translator to improve an author’s text—at least in places—by working thoughtfully with a different set of linguistic tools.

What Happens After the Ending?

Q. What happens to Hazel?
A. I have no idea. I’m different from Peter Van Houten in many important ways, but in this respect (and some others) we are the same: I have access to the exact same text that you do. My thoughts about the world outside of that text are not any more informed or authoritative than yours.
Textually, Hazel is clearly weaker at the end of the novel than she was in Amsterdam, but that’s all you know, and that’s all I know, too.

Q. What happens to Peter Van Houten?
A. I don’t know what happens to anyone outside the text of the novel. I have access to the exact same text that you do, and any speculation on my part about the characters or events outside the text of the novel would be no more informed or authoritative than your speculation.

Q. Who won America’s Next Top Model?
A. I love you guys so much for continuing to believe, despite my repeated protestations to the contrary, that I can tell you what happens outside the text of the book. I can’t! I’m sorry! I’m Peter Van Houten! I can’t do it! I have no idea! I have no idea what happens to Isaac or Hazel or Gus’s parents or who wins America’s Next Top Model or whether the Dutch Tulip Man was God and if so whether He is benevolent. I promise you: I DON’T KNOW.
I have access to the exact same text that you do. I do not have access to any information outside of that text, because then it would just be me speculating about what might happen, and...
my speculations are no more valuable or authoritative than anyone else’s. Books belong to their readers! Own it! Make it yours!

Q. Do you think that imagining our own ending to your stories, through fanfiction, is bad?
A. No no no I love fanfiction and I love it when people imagine worlds outside of the text for the characters. I just think that if I do it, then my opinion will be privileged over other opinions, and people will be like, “Well but John Green said that Isaac miraculously recovered his sight and became a ballet dancer, so that is what happened.” I don’t want to close off the reading experience in that way.

Q. Any really good TFIOS fanfiction?
A. There’s some great fan fiction about Isaac meeting a girl at a movie theater, but I can’t find it at the moment? Maybe someone in comments will have the link?

Q. After you wrote the book, however much time has passed, do you think back and wish you could write more, or that you could somehow create more of their world?
A. I never wish I could go back and write more, no. I spent a long, long time trying to write the book that became The Fault in Our Stars and to be completely honest with you, I am entirely happy that the story is no longer my problem and is now your problem.

Q. Deep down, do you have a sense of when Hazel dies? Do you picture her inevitably dying young or living to be older?
A. No.
It’s not my book. It’s your book. I don’t make decisions about things that happen outside the text of the book; I can’t read something that isn’t there any more than you can. Anyway, there is no definitive way to end it or any other book. No story is ever over, because every human life ripples into every other one, and there is no way to end a story definitively and the search for a definitive end is (imho) the wrong search.

Q. Do you miss Hazel’s world? Do you never lie awake at night creating more situations?
A. Honestly, no. That book was my problem for many, many years. I am really, truly, entirely glad that it is your problem now.

Q. Hypothetically, if you didn’t write TFIOS, what would you think of Hazel? Does she live, and for how long?
A. Jesus Christ, guys. I DO NOT HAVE AN ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION. But boy, you sure have found a lot of ways to ask it. ;)

Q. I don’t understand the purpose of actively avoiding the question about Hazel’s ending and whether she dies.
A. I just don’t have an answer. It’s like asking me to answer the question, “When is asehiuhqwebhjfguuzudefbuaasjdflnsdf?” The question does not make any sense to me. I do not have an answer for it.
I will never answer it, just like I don’t answer any other questions that ask questions pertaining to matters outside the text of any of my novels. I admire the thousands of you who have asked these questions in thousands of different ways (currently 6754 unanswered messages in the inbox, of which more than half seem to be about this). But I do not have an answer.

Q. Why won’t you answer questions about what happens after the book? You answer so many questions about why Gus and Hazel did specific things or how they felt. Isn’t this a double standard?
A. I answer textual questions and occasionally questions about intent. I cannot answer a question about something I intentionally left ambiguous, because I intentionally left it ambiguous, and to answer the question would be to undo the thing that I spent ten years trying to do, which I don’t want to do.
I adore you guys. I really do. And I admire your perseverance. But it will never happen. In fact, the more you ask, the less inclined I am to talk about it, because it only further confirms if I ever offered an answer to that question, my voice would be privileged over the voices of other readers, which I don’t want.

Questions about An Imperial Affliction

Q. Is AIA a real book? Can you make it one?
A. I get asked this question all the time, often by journalists. (I won’t name any names, but a pretty well-known journalist once asked me how Peter Van Houten felt about my depiction of him.)
An Imperial Affliction is not a real book, and Peter Van Houten is not a real person. However, An Imperial Affliction is in some ways based on two books I love. The first is David Foster Wallace’s Infinite Jest. Most of the references Hazel and Augustus make to AIA are related in some way to something from Infinite Jest, and I wanted readers of IJ to be able to make those comparisons.
But Infinite Jest is not about cancer. Peter De Vries’ amazing and beautiful and hilarious novel The Blood of the Lamb is about cancer, and most of the broad observations that Hazel makes about An Imperial Affliction—how it is a book about cancer without it being a cancer book, how is is funny and respectful and reflects the reality of experience in a way she has rarely encountered—come from my own experience reading The Blood of the Lamb. I can’t make An Imperial Affliction real. It’s not the kind book I could write well, and on some level, the thing that we imagine will always be better than any real approximation of it that might come to exist.
But if you wish to read An Imperial Affliction, I’d encourage you to read Infinite Jest and The Blood of the Lamb and then try to blend the feeling of those two books.

Q. Aren’t you even a little tempted to write An Imperial Affliction?
A. No, I could never write a novel like An Imperial Affliction, and I don’t think I would enjoy writing it. There’s a variety of writing that David Foster Wallace once described as, “Look, mom! No hands!” AIA, as I imagine it, is very much that kind of novel: prodigious and ostentatious and full of that Pynchonian need to show every possible thing that words can do. I love reading those books, but I’m not interested in attempting to write one.

Also, one of the magical things about books (or bands) that don’t exist is that they can achieve a kind of greatness that isn’t available to real artworks. Writing An Imperial Affliction would only ruin it, sort of by definition.

Q. How much of An Imperial Affliction did you write?
A. Only what you read in The Fault in Our Stars. (There are a few AIA lines that I wrote into TFIOS and eventually cut, but they were pretty bad.)

Q. What is the opening line of An Imperial Affliction?
A. The first line is “My mother’s glass eye turned inwards,” at least according to Gus’s reading to Hazel.

Q. Was the Dutch Tulip man a con man?
A. I suppose that depends upon your perspective. Van Houten tells you that the Dutch Tulip Man is God.

Q. Is the Dutch Tulip Man God within TFIOS as well as An Imperial Affliction?
A. Right.
I mean, it’s no coincidence that throughout the novel, Hazel and Augustus keep talking about whether they think the Dutch Tulip Man is what he is claimed to be, and when they talk about this, you could very easily replace the words “Dutch Tulip Man” with the word “God.”

Q. Can you explain the Dutch Tulip Man / God thing?
A. All we ever know about the Dutch Tulip Man is:
1. He claims to be very rich (which in our world is equivalent to powerful), but he might be a fraud.
2. He may or may not really love Anna’s mother.
3. Peter Van Houten, who created the Dutch Tulip Man, claims he not but an unambiguous and obvious metaphor for God.
4. The way that Hazel and Augustus talk about the Dutch Tulip Man is very similar to the way that Hazel and Augustus might talk about God. Like, when Augustus says the Dutch Tulip Man is “not a con man, but not as rich as he’s letting on,” if you were reading the DTM as a metaphor for God, you could conclude that Augustus was saying something about his beliefs re. God and the limits of God’s power.
5. So my joke about going to church was based on that reading of the novel. Like, if you take Peter Van Houten’s word that the Dutch Tulip Man is a metaphor for God, and you see everything Hazel and Gus say about him through that lens, then asking me what I think about the Dutch Tulip Man is just asking me whether I believe in God.
Q. Did you put the fact that Anna died mid-sentence in the book just to rule out the theory that Hazel would die (because she was the narrator)?
A. Well, that was certainly on my mind. There’s an argument to be made that first-person narration takes the teeth from the monster in any story, right? The I survives: You know, because the I is telling the story in the past tense, as something that happened to that I, and here the I is, still writing.
I guess it’s true I didn’t want to offer readers that luxury in this story, because it seems like a cheap kind of hope, you know? (I really tried to make TFiOS a hopeful novel, but I did not want it to be the kind of easily won or ill-considered hope that both Hazel and Augustus find so little consolation in.)

Q. An Imperial Affliction is supposed to be written in Ana’s point of view. Why, when you use an extract of AIA as the epigraph, it is written in a third person point of view?
A. This has been fixed. But yes, YOU ARE A VERY CLOSE READER. I was pretty mad about this when I first discovered it; it should only be a problem in the first two printings of the book.

Questions about Allusions/References

Q. What inspired you to include a reference to Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse Five?
A. I didn’t really think of it as a reference to Slaughterhouse Five. Vonnegut didn’t invent the sentence “so it goes,” although he did invent pairing it with death. I didn’t do the Vonnegutian thing of announcing a character’s death and then following it up immediately with “So it goes,” so I didn’t think of it in that directly referential way.
Vonnegut was playing with something that predated his book: our ability to express in a very short sentence the universe’s disinterest in us. I was trying to get at something similar, I guess.

Q. Why did you mention the Red Wheelbarrow?
A. Just a really good poem about the pleasure and importance of observing the universe.

Q. Were the references to The Great Gatsby in this novel intentional? Like, Isaac’s “disembodied eyes,” the green light in Amsterdam, etc.?
A. Yeah. Also the green car that looks like all the hopes that we were foolish to hope, etc. (But again, just because I intended it doesn’t make it more or less useful/real/whatever.)

Q. Is there a meaning behind “The Hectic Glow”?
A. In a journal entry, Henry David Thoreau wrote, “Decay and disease are often beautiful, like the pearly tear of the shellfish or the hectic glow of consumption.” (People with tuberculosis get reddened cheeks—a hectic glow.)
There were two things I really liked about this: first, the problematic (but not totally untrue) statement that disease is beautiful/attractive, and second, that Thoreau would write this about consumption, a disease that was famously capricious and mysterious: It attacked the young and the old. Sometimes it killed you and sometimes it didn’t. Treatment was brutal and ghastly and
socially isolating. In short, the way people in the 19th century experienced and thought about consumption was similar in a lot of ways to the way we think about cancer today. In earlier drafts of the book, there was a lot more stuff about lung functioning and tuberculosis and blah blah blah it was really boring, and back then I wanted to call the book itself The Hectic Glow, but in the end we decided A. it wasn't the right title for the book, and B. it's pretty hard to say out loud if you're trying to recommend it to a friend, so we went in a different direction. But I liked it too much to let it go all the way. Hence the band name.

Q. What made you choose “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” for Hazel to recite?
A. I picked “Prufrock” because A. a lot of teenagers have memorized it, and B. it has drowning in it, and C. it is concerned with what Eliot famously called “an overwhelming question.”

Q. Do you think that Prufrock’s hesitance to disturb the universe is similar to Hazel’s walking lightly? Were you trying to show the heroic side of this as opposed to the feeling of cowardice portrayed by Eliot?
A. Yes and yes.

Q. Have you read David Foster Wallace’s Everything and More? Because it verbatim says that it’s possible for some infinities to be larger than other infinities.
A. Yeah, I reviewed Everything and More in Booklist Magazine when it was first published, and I was really fascinated by the book—although the math confused me, partly because some of it turns out to be wrong/oversimplified.
I wanted An Imperial Affliction and generally some of PVH’s thinking to resemble some of DFW’s thinking, although obviously DFW was not an alcoholic and not (at least so far as I know) cruel to his teenage readers. But the relationship that Hazel has to AIA is similar in a lot of ways to the relationship I had with Infinite Jest (which in college I basically believed to be, like, scripture) and certainly DFW’s arguments re. attentiveness and focus and the pleasure/significance/responsibility of observation were very important to me and to this book. So, yes, I borrowed a lot from his work, definitely.

Q. Can you elaborate on which of David Foster Wallace’s ideas you used in TFIOS?
A. Well, to the extent that An Imperial Affliction exists, it is similar in some ways to Infinite Jest. (The first line of AIA, for instance, which is something like “My mother’s glass eye turned inwards,” can be read as a quiet reference to the IJ character Nell Gunther, whose glass eye often faces inward. This idea—of the unseeing eye turned not out toward the world but into the self—is a really beautiful symbol, and always struck with me.) Previous drafts of TFiOS made the connection between AIA and IJ must more explicit (for instance, they had the same last sentence), but that stuff got stripped away as the role AIA played in the novel changed. Mostly, though, I was influenced by Wallace’s famous commencement address at Kenyon College and to a lesser extent by some of the passages in The Pale King, where Wallace extolls the many virtues of noticing and the daily business of paying attention, which Hazel comes to believe is the core responsibility and privilege of being a person.
Q. There are references to the poem “There’s a Certain Slant of Light” on pages 18 and 274, as well as the title of An Imperial Affliction. How did you decide to use this poem?
A. I read Emily Dickinson’s collected poems when I was in college, and of course that is one of her most beloved poems. (That said, like a lot of her poetry, it suffers from this kind of failure to make up its mind in re. faith and fate and so on, which I generally see as kind of a weakness in her work, but in that particular poem it really works for me.)

Q. How did you come up with the idea that Hazel and Gus were in a shared third space while they were talking on the phone?
A. The idea of the third space was stolen from the brilliant artist Joshua Mosley. He mentioned it in a talk he gave while introducing a new artwork.

Q. Were you aware of the last phrase of Ulysses while writing the last line of TFiOS?
A. Yes.

Q. “If I should die[…]I have left no immortal work behind me-nothing to make my friends proud of my memory—but I have loved the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remembered.” Did you ever think about John Keats when you were writing Gus? Each worries over whether or not he will be remembered, and has to confront his own impending mortality. Did you ever think about Keats’ epitaph? Is Augustus’s name writ in water?
A. Well, in a lot of ways, Keats was still a kid when he died. To me, he is the romantic poet of innocence (which I mean as a compliment), but the whole idea of “immortal work” is a faulty one. Keats never really recognized this; he genuinely believed that you could write something that could last “forever” and never seemed to consider the nonexistence of forever or the implications of its nonexistence.
But in the end, his loyalty to beauty, his worship of it, his seemingly sincere belief that beauty and truth were the same thing, is what makes his work so powerful to us today.
And it’s true that he would’ve been a better poet if he’d lived, but his name still would have been written in water. All names are written in water, which is what Keats never had to reconcile himself to.
Anyway, that Romantic urge to be remembered and to create immortal work certainly isn’t unique to Keats but that sort of thinking was very much on my mind when I was writing about Gus.

Q. Did you think about Susan Sontag’s famous essay “Illness as Metaphor” while writing TFiOS? Sontag talks a lot about the seductive danger of wrapping our experiences with illness in mythos and symbolism, which seems pretty relevant to the novel.
A. Yeah, I reread “Illness as Metaphor” and also her brilliant Regarding the Suffering of Others while writing The Fault in Our Stars. In fact, there were a couple Sontag quotes as epigraphs in earlier drafts.
Sontag was a brilliant public intellectual, and I don’t know of anyone who wrote about suffering with as much thoughtfulness. So, yes, her work definitely shapes the way I think about illness (and metaphor).
Questions about Symbols/Metaphors

Q. Was everything in the novel a symbol that the reader should have picked up on or were there some things that were just what they were? Was the swing set actually a swing set? Was Augustus’s prosthetic leg just a prosthetic leg? Were the people actually people or were they symbols like in Lord of the Flies?
A. The people in the Lord of the Flies are people; just because it’s possible to read them symbolically doesn’t mean they stop being people. (For example, it is possible—and in fact all of us to do this—to read the real people in our actual lives symbolically, to see so-and-so as A Cautionary Tale and what’s-her-name as the Definition of Cool, etc.) You shouldn’t feel like an idiot. There are more than one ways to read a good story, and my first job as a writer is to write something you’ll enjoy reading. I hope that I also write something that holds up to critical reading; i.e., the deeper you look, the more you will be rewarded for looking, and the more you will be able to see into questions that are hopefully interesting and important. To repeat something I’ve said again and again, the writer’s intention is irrelevant. So you decide whether the swing set is just a swing set; you decide whether Augustus’s prosthetic leg is just a prosthetic leg. Whether the author intended a symbol or a theme or whatever is irrelevant; if you find that it aids you in your observation and interrogation of the universe, then it succeeds regardless of authorial intent.
I’d argue this is the case with Lord of the Flies, too: It’s a fun adventure story, and also a very sad one, but the more you think about it, the richer and more interesting it becomes.

Q. Did you mean to add every metaphor and connection in the book or were some just beautiful accidents?
A. Well, I’m sure some are just beautiful (or not so beautiful) accidents, but I did try pretty hard to make sure the book is fun and interesting to read and offers some rewards to those who choose to read closely. But again, not to beat a dead horse, I don’t think authorial intent is all that important. Like, even if I didn’t think of the Dutch Tulip Man as a metaphor for God, he still could be read that way, you know? And it would (if the metaphor works, anyway) still be an interesting way into thinking about what role God(s) play(s) in the contemporary, hyper-secularized world.

Q. What’s the significance of the swing set?
A. I guess I intended the swing set as a metaphor for childhood. Several times Hazel tries to go back to it but for various reasons can’t. Then finally Gus helps her realize that she needs to get it out of her backyard.

Q. What is the significance of Hazel’s Magritte shirt?
A. Magritte was exploring the relationship between a thing and a representation of a thing. I wanted it to be clear that Hazel is aware of this distance. She’s not, like, mentally ill. I hoped that would make it all the more powerful that she still wants to know what happens after the end of
the book, especially what happens to Anna’s mother. (This is of course because she wants to know what will happen to her own mother.)

Q. Is there a link between Augustus Waters’ smoking and Holden Caufield’s red hat? A. Yes.

Q. Was there any symbolism to Isaac? A. (First off, I did not call Isaac Isaac because his eyes are sick. I’m not punny enough to make that connection! I called him Isaac because of Isaac, who went blind.)

There’s a strong tradition of epics being told by blind people: In 300, for instance, only the blind guy is left to tell the tale. Homer was said to be blind; Milton went blind; etc. I was trying to write a little epic of star-crossed lovers—one that would be painted on a small canvas and that wouldn’t be about politics or war or family strife or whatever but about disease.

Assuming that Hazel’s lifespan is shorter than average, Isaac would be the only one left to tell the story. (So, like, if you imagine a world outside of the book, one of the things you can imagine is this future in which the only peer who can tell the story of Hazel and Gus’s love is Isaac, which gives you the typical romantic epic bard, but doesn’t adhere to the convention because for once the girl gets to tell her own story.)

That’s what I was thinking, anyway. (But like all that stuff aside, the most important thing is that I liked Isaac and wanted Hazel and Gus to have someone who could provide a different worldview to both of them—one where true love is real and triumphs everything.)

Q. What’s with all the water references? A. Well, for Hazel and for a lot of people (and also a lot of places), water is both a creator and destroyer of life.

So let’s look at this from the perspective of a person, Hazel, and a place, Amsterdam. Water makes life possible for Hazel, but the fluid in her lungs (which she refers to as water) is killing her.

Amsterdam would never have become a great city if it weren’t surrounded by water, but the city—which has benefited so much from its geography—is also drowning, and at constant risk of disaster from flooding.

I am of course not the first person to make this observation; the Latin phrase quod me nutrit, me destruit (that which nourishes me destroys me) goes way back. But I wanted to write a novel about the things that make life possible (and valuable) and how many of those things are also what makes life painful and temporary.

Water seemed like a good metaphor for getting into some of that stuff. (Plus water does all kinds of other convenient things, like follow the path of least resistance.) But you shouldn’t feel like you’re not doing a good job of reading the novel if you’re not conscious of that kind of stuff when you’re reading. There are many good ways to read a book, and if the metaphors work, you don’t need to be overly aware of them for them to move you and make you think.

Q. Why is there so many mentions of the color blue? Was it a symbol for sadness or water? A. WATER. I AM A LITTLE OBSESSED WITH WATER.
Q. Is Hazel’s obsession with the ghettoization of scrambled eggs as breakfast really about the ghettoization of sick people as enlightened? And, following that, is Augustus’s choosing a hamburger for breakfast really him choosing to see sick people as just people?
A. That reading certainly makes a lot of sense to me.

Q. The scrambled eggs are supposed to be a metaphor? I thought it was reasonable that someone would agree that food are discriminated against by the time of day in which they are eaten. I have been trying to tell my parents that forever!
A. Right, but I would submit that you have been telling your parents that as a metaphor. (That something can be read metaphorically does not make it untrue or less valid.) The reason that you and I both find it unfortunate that some foods are discriminated against by time of day is not just about food; it’s also about our values we’ve inherited regarding equality and fairness and this particular view of justice that we share with other people who do not ghettoize scrambled eggs.
You cannot separate metaphor from reality. Metaphor is part of reality. Metaphor is an exploration of the nature of reality.

Q. Can you explain what the elevator and stairs signified?
A. The stairs were for healthier people; the elevator was for sicker people.
(This is also true outside of novels.) It’s one of the few places in the novel that you can clearly see from an objective perspective Hazel’s condition deteriorating: She chooses the stairs at the beginning of the novel even though it’s a struggle; by the end, she’s choosing the elevator.

Q. Can you explain the cigarette metaphor? And the implications of having a character so concerned with metaphor and grand romantic images over the reality of their lives?
A. Right, so there are a lot of ways to answer this question, I think.
The very straightforward way: If you think of symbols as “enchanted objects,” Augustus associates the unlit cigarette with taking control over his health, which often feels (and is!) out of his control. So he puts the killing thing in his mouth but denies it the power to kill him.
The less straightforward way: Augustus is a very performed character, right? He delivers monologues, for God’s sake. He’s one of those kids who is super self-conscious and always assumes that people are watching him and/or listening very closely to him. So this is one of the ways that we see him performing the role of Augustus Waters instead of just being authentically himself. (This changes over the course of the novel; even though he clings to the IDEA of the cigarettes to the very end, it’s worth remembering that he never actually GETS them in that scene at the Speedway.)
3. There are even less straightforward, metafictional ways to read Gus’s obsession with symbol and metaphor (like, he’s a character in a novel that’s about how fiction is important and ‘real’ even though it is made up and not real, etc.), but I find that stuff a bit much, personally.
Q. If the cigarette metaphor means that Augustus controls his own life, does the scene where he buys cigarettes (because his old one was taken away from him) foreshadow his death? Because he no longer has control over his health?
A. Well, the feeling of control is always an illusion, but it’s a pretty easy illusion to cling to while you are well, right? That’s why people say things like, “I am going to the mall tomorrow,” when what they actually mean is, “I hope to go to the mall tomorrow, but I might die before then or experience a Major Life Event that prevents me from going to the mall.”
Gus very much wants to cling to this feeling of power over his illness, but he can’t. The circle of what you can do with your life inevitably begins to close, whether at 16 or 116.
That’s why to me the hero’s journey is the journey from strength to weakness. Gus must reconcile himself to the world as it is, and still find meaning and hope in that life, instead of being able to hold onto (as we almost all do almost all the time) a false sense of power and autonomy.

Q. It seemed to me that Van Houten was a metaphor for God. Why is the Dutch Tulip Man a metaphor for God, rather than Van Houten?
A. Well, I don’t think these ideas are mutually exclusive. Van Houten imagines the Dutch Tulip Man as a metaphor for God, and the way Hazel and Gus talk about the Dutch Tulip Man reflects something about how the characters think about/imagine God: Is God (or the Dutch Tulip Man) a con man, a kind but powerless benevolence, a savior, a mirage, or what?
But that noted, Van Houten is definitely a metaphor (or at least a stand-in) for God (or at least some kind of prophet) to Hazel. Hazel actually makes this explicit a couple times, saying for instance that An Imperial Affliction is as close a thing as she has to a Bible.

This and many, many more Q&As can be found at: http://johngreenbooks.com/questions-about-the-fault-in-our-stars-spoilers/#other
Tweeting from a La-Z-Boy, An Unfinished Book Hits No. 1

By JEFFREY A. TRACHTENBERG, July 1, 2011

In a feat that even the best-selling writers might envy, young-adult author John Green’s latest novel is No. 1 on Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble.com even though he’s still working on it from his comfy La-Z-Boy in Indianapolis.

With “The Fault in Our Stars,” the author has overtaken hot books by Suzanne Collins and Laura Hillenbrand. His book won't be published until the spring of next year.

It helped that Mr. Green, a 33-year-old who first gained attention in 2005 with his debut novel "Looking for Alaska," has more than 1.1 million Twitter followers. Mr. Green is published by Dutton Children’s Books, an imprint of Pearson PSO +0.58% PLC’s Penguin Group (USA), but he does his own thing on the Web. “I don’t take direction from Penguin,” he says.

In only a few short years, the ability to use social networking as a literary megaphone has gone from an afterthought to the focus of most marketing and image shaping by publishers. “Everyone is now focused on it, because when it works, it can be a runaway train,” says Tim Duggan, executive editor of Harper, an imprint of News Corp.’s HarperCollins Publishers Inc. News Corp. also owns The Wall Street Journal.

Mr. Green’s runaway train started like this: On Tuesday afternoon, he posted the title of his new book on Twitter, Tumblr and the community forum YourPants.org. An hour later, he upped the stakes by promising to sign all pre-orders and the entire first-print run, while also launching a YouTube live show. Mr. Green discussed his plans for signing the book and also read a section to give viewers a sense of what “The Fault in Our Stars” would be about. (It's a story of two young cancer survivors.)

The announcement then assumed a life of its own. Fans began to make and post hundreds of potential dust jackets for the book, which doesn't have one yet. They also turned to Twitter and Tumblr to discuss pre-ordering the books. The book then began a steady climb up the charts, says Mr. Green. It hit No. 1 on Amazon before 9 p.m., and No. 1 on Barnes & Noble.com an hour or so later.
"What it tells me is that I'm a lucky guy," says Mr. Green, a graduate of Kenyon College. "But it also says that if you are authentic with your readers, they will trust you when you come out with a new story."

It's still unclear how large the first printing will be, although it will be in the many thousands. "We're still deciding, but it's going to be a substantial number," says Julie Strauss-Gabel, publisher of Dutton Children's Books.

Almost all authors today feel pressure to use social networking tools to try to build their fan base and generate interest in their work.

As the number of big bookstores continues to diminish—Borders Group Inc. has already closed more than a third of its stores this year—the issue of how new titles will be discovered is of increasing concern. That fiction readers are increasingly embracing e-books has made digital channels even more important.

"People are finding their news online, and as long as they're there they take a trip to YouTube and follow their favorite blogs," says Patricia Bostelman, Barnes & Noble's vice president of marketing. "There's a tremendous amount of do-it-yourself in the marketplace today, and it's essential."

Publishers say that the issue of discovery has become critical, but it's unclear whether all books can benefit from social networking. "Clearly these are the tools we need to learn how to use, but they will work better for some books than others," says Robert Miller, group publisher of Workman Publishing Co. "Books that need to be seen and held and that are thought of as gifts are different from commercial fiction."

Mr. Green and his brother Hank, a musician, made early use of the Internet, offering videos and zany postings that gave Mr. Green's fans a sense of his personality. In a video posted now on the Web, Mr. Green does a victory dance of sorts, celebrating the fact that "The Fault in Our Stars" was at the top of the best-seller lists.

For now, the book is listed online without any description and with a black-and-white block print placeholder cover. On Barnes & Noble.com, it even has an average rating of five stars.

In his Pulitzer Prize–winning book *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer*, Siddhartha Mukherjee writes that as recently as the 1950s, cancer was so feared and taboo that the *New York Times* refused to print the word in a support-group advertisement. It was the second-leading cause of death in the United States then — just as it is now — but it was as mysterious to most people as mortality itself. There is something monstrous about a disease that kills by wanting to live; cancer's goal is to grow and prosper, with absolutely no regard for its host. It makes sense that people couldn't speak about it — it's not easy to commiserate about a nightmare.

And yet, human instinct tells us to band together to fight our enemies, even on the cellular level. Gradually, with scientific breakthroughs and education, cancer became less of a mum word and more of a buzzword. Hollywood jumped on the drama surrounding the disease, and soon films like *Terms of Endearment* and *Beaches* were keeping tissue companies in business. Novels and magazine articles highlighted survivor stories; television started adding characters afflicted with illness. Even *Sex and the City*'s carousing Samantha had her share of chemo.

In recent years, the trend has gone one step beyond talking about cancer — the goal now, at least for pop culture, is to find the humor in it. Fortunately, John Green is the kind of writer to deliver it.

Green writes books for young adults, but his voice is so compulsively readable that it defies categorization. He writes for youth, rather than to them, and the difference is palpable. He doesn't dumb anything down. His language is complex, his syntax adult. He freely references Kierkegaard and William Carlos Williams alongside bloody video games and action movies. Add to that a raw and real glimpse at childhood illness, and his latest, *The Fault in Our Stars*, may be his best book yet.

The real tragedy of cancer may be that it affects people of all ages, and children suffering from the disease are often hit hardest. Robbed of any semblance of a normal life, "cancer kids," as Green's narrator, Hazel Grace Lancaster, calls them, mark their time in days and weeks.

Hazel, 16, has been battling thyroid cancer since age 13, and only through the use of an experimental drug is she still alive. She carries an oxygen tank with her everywhere, and hasn't attended traditional school since her diagnosis. Depressed and lonely, she tries a support group, where she meets the handsome — and deceptively sick — Augustus Waters, a 17-year-old dreamboat who quickly proceeds to turn her life into an adventure. Green graciously avoids the typical will-they-or-won't-they of most teen reads, as cancer victims don't have the luxury of time to dawdle with their affections. Instead, Augustus and Hazel become fast friends.
Green's novel is elegantly plotted, and as sad in places as one might expect a book about adolescent cancer to be. But it's also brimming with joy. Hazel and Augustus have a zeal for living and for each other that, cancer or not, is rare, and it's a delight to see their plans unfold and relationship flourish even as they both face death.

Green has a powerful online following: He is a YouTube video star with an army of fans he calls the "nerdfighters," a group mobilized "to fight to increase awesome and decrease suck." His draw is so magnetic that just by asking his devotees to donate money, he raised over $100,000 for charity. When he offered signed copies of Fault in a pre-sale last year, the novel leapt to the top of Amazon's list of best-selling books in a single day, and it has remained in the top 20 since. *The Fault in Our Stars* proves that the hype surrounding Green is not overblown. He tells his story with such gumption and tenderness that he almost adds a new genre to cancer-lit: romantic teen angst jumbled with big existential questions. Green shoves adolescent-crush jitters and musings about the afterlife into the same story, and yet it all makes sense. As Hazel says to Augustus, "Some infinities are bigger than other infinities ... There are days, many of them, when I resent the size of my unbound set. But Gus, my love, I cannot tell you how thankful I am for our little infinity."
You will be thankful, too, for the little infinity you spend inside this book.

John Green: 'I'm tired of adults telling teenagers that they aren't smart'

Patrick, theguardian.com, Wednesday 27 February 2013 11.04 EST

John Green, author of The Fault in Our Stars, tells Guardian children's books site member Patrick about how his bestselling teen novel was nearly a zombie adventure, the perils of writing tear-jerkers and what he thinks of being accused of writing 'sick-lit'

The quest to actually come face-to-face with John Green in Glasgow's Royal Concert Hall was like manœuvring through a video game. Level one was negotiating through a hive of Nerdfighters; level two was descending down countless floors – I was surprised not to find the Earth's core – and passing through eerily darkened corridors; the final stage was when we hit the green room to find it empty.

I was left in a strangely surreal scenario: sitting rather nervously in John Green's dressing room. A tower of Marks & Spencer goodies sat awaiting its consumer while a piano was nestled in an alcove to my right.

After I spent far too long deciding on a comfortable position to sit in, Hank Green, John's brother and tour buddy, appeared, rather confused as to why a 15-year-old was sitting on their leather sofa.

When I spoke to Hank, in retrospect, I feel I was a bit unresponsive (probably a side effect of being overwhelmed. If I had let my emotions show I think I would have fainted) and watched, embarrassed, as Hank decided on which sandwich to eat.

John eventually arrived, looking like he was expecting me and, like a professional, delved straight into the interview.

Teenagers are doing so many things for the first time, says John Green, and asking big questions about life, loss, love and politics. He is clearly very interested in teens and what they experience and encounter in their childhood. When he replied to my question about what makes writing for teenagers so interesting, I felt like I was talking to another adolescent.

All of his novels have had young protagonists and he has given us the lovesick Miles Halter, the anagrammatically nuts Colin Singleton, the inquisitive Quentin Jacobsen, the Will Grayson duo and finally the terminally ill Hazel Grace Lancaster – all relatable and interesting characters formed around well-shaped storylines. Each of the characters is unique in their own way and it is obvious Green did his research on them all. He feels he is privileged to sit around the metaphorical table with teenagers. We're pleased to have him there because John Green is the ultimate penman writing for our generation.

If you're expecting another book from John soon, I suggest you don't hold your breath. When I asked him about his next one, he hesitated and sighed. "I wish I knew," he tells me "I don't
know… I'm working on a few things and I never know which one is going to end up being a book."

He goes on to say that, before he wrote his latest book, The Fault in Our Stars, he contemplated penning a zombie apocalypse novel (in the same vein as Charlie Higson's The Enemy series, is my guess). That idea fell through and what surfaced was an altogether drastically different book. As for his next one, he really doesn't know what's coming. So it looks like fans of The Fault in Our Stars, will have to wait a while before the next novel from Green.

Earlier this month, the Daily Mail took it upon itself to publish a rather scathing critique on the so-called 'sick-lit' genre. They claimed that books about teen terminal illness, death and bereavement are becoming a worryingly popular phenomenon, and that youngsters are too undeveloped to deal with issues such as cancer. I asked John what he thought of it and he had this to say:

"The thing that bothered me about it… was that it was a bit condescending to teenagers. I'm tired of adults telling teenagers that they aren't smart, that they can't read critically, that they aren't thoughtful, and I feel like that article made those arguments."

Green was pleasantly honest when I asked him if he cried when he was writing any of his novels and he told me all of them, except An Abundance of Katherines. He was most tearful, he claimed, when writing Looking for Alaska and The Fault in Our Stars because the former was so autobiographical and the latter reminded him of friends who'd passed away.

When he wrote Paper Towns, he cried when he finished the first draft - he thought it was so good. Then, when read it the next day, he thought it was awful. Green's admission that cries a lot seems perfectly reasonable considering the emotional oomph he packs into his novels.

John Green clearly likes being out on the road meeting fans. So what's the weirdest thing a fan has ever said or given to him? He sounds like he's struggling not to tell me about the really weird stuff. But there are always surprises - the night before Green came to Glasgow, he was in Manchester. A man asked him to write "Will you marry me?" in a signed copy of The Fault in Our Stars so Green obliged. The man's girlfriend said yes and John was very relieved - it would have been rather awkward otherwise.

Malorie Blackman, Markus Zusak, Mal Peet and Meg Rosoff are often cited as brilliant authors writing for teenagers. John Green concurs and feels that some of their novels are just wonderful.

However he says that a novel not well-known in the UK, The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing by MT Anderson, is perhaps his all-time favourite. It is evident through what he says that he just enjoys the experience of reading, as he seems to relish the fact that his favourite book spans 700 pages split into two volumes.

As I'd asked John Green what weird stuff fans had given him, I wondered how he would react when I gave him a DVD of one of my favourite Doctor Who episodes. He seemed really pleased to have it and promised to watch it.
Whether he thinks I fit into the category of weird fans or not, I'll never know.

Then Green was off to sign a pile of books for some of the 1000 fans waiting outside for their hero.