

A conversation with **Alexandra Siy**



Debunking myths about spiders, SPIDERMANIA: Friends on the Web takes an extremely close look at creatures that have both fascinated and terrified humans. Author and photographer Alexandra Siy talks about her process of creating this unique book.

Alexandra, please tell us about your new book, *SPIDERMANIA: Friends on the Web*.

SPIDERMANIA zooms in on spiders, revealing their fascinating lives through stunning microscopic imagery. Spiders are like “action figures” that have amazing abilities—from spinning intricate webs to paralyzing their prey with a pinprick of poison. SPIDERMANIA was inspired by my arachnophobic son, because I thought if he got to know spiders he would come to like them, and could even become friends with them. I dedicated SPIDERMANIA to him!

SPIDERMANIA contains extensive factual information about different spiders. Tell us about your research process for this book.

My research involved reading journal articles and books and watching videos by scientists who research spiders. I contacted several scientists and asked specific questions that came up during my research. A few scientists allowed me to publish photos created during their own research, such as the photo of the diving bell spider.

During your research, what was the most surprising, or interesting, thing you learned?

I was amazed to learn that the diving bell spider lives its entire life under water where it builds an underwater web that holds air. I was also fascinated to learn that spider silk starts out as a liquid protein inside the spider’s body and transforms into a solid silk thread by the tension exerted on it as it’s pulled out by the spider’s claw.

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What do you hope young readers will learn about the world of spiders from this book?

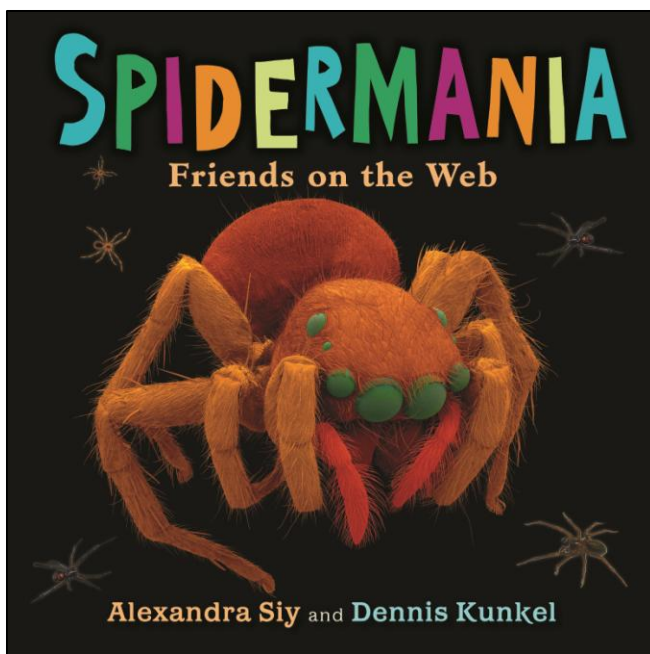
Spiders have a superpower: no other animal on earth builds webs made of silk that's pound-for-pound stronger than steel. I hope readers won't squash spiders but will observe them spinning webs, moving using "four-leg drive," and leaping great distances while suspended from drag lines. Spiders are the ultimate Xtreme athletes!

In many of your books you incorporate both photography and scientific writing. When did you know you wanted to fuse these two together to create books for young readers?

I taught science to high school students before I was a writer. My students would gasp out loud when looking at protozoa, insects, spiders and even plants through the microscope. I wanted to share the excitement of the microscopic world with my readers. Images created by an electron microscope are both beautiful and scientifically exciting. So are images taken in space of the moon, planets and stars.

If you could give any advice to young authors, what would it be?

Read a wide variety of books and write every day. When I was a kid I wrote every day in my diary. When I didn't feel like writing, I forced myself to write anyway, even if it was just one sentence that said, "I don't feel like writing today."



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Color micrographs by Dennis Kunkel
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