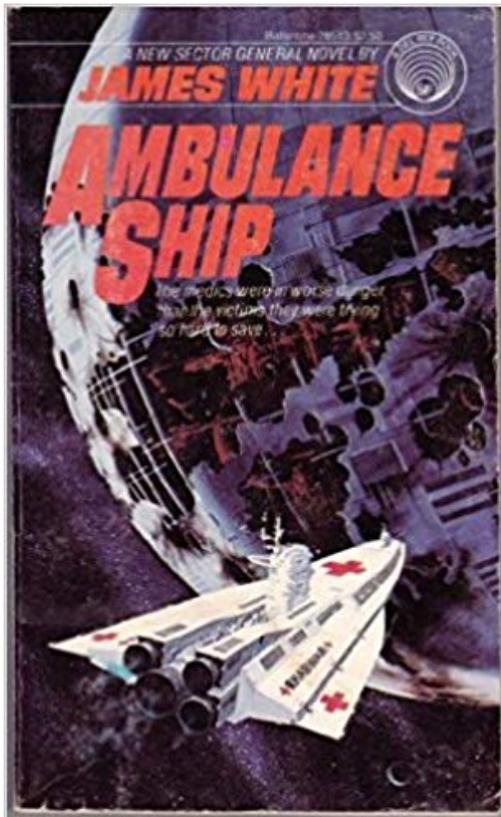


Ambulance Ship *by* James White



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ISBN:	0552115118
ISBN13:	978-0552115117
Author:	James White
Book title:	Ambulance Ship
Other Formats:	txt azw mobi lit
Pages:	224 pages
Publisher:	Corgi Childrens; First Thus edition (1980)
Language:	English
Size PDF version:	1718 kb
Size ePub version:	1760 kb
Size fb2 version:	1361 kb
Category:	Science Fiction

Ex-library copy. 1979 Del Rey paperback edition. Strong reinforced spine. Bright clean cover has shelf and edge wear. Text is perfect. Same day shipping first class from AZ.



Reviews of the **Ambulance Ship** *by* James White

Cyregaehus

The most exciting medical teams of the future!!!

Welahza

Anything about Sector General appeals to me. I love the diversity of characters, and the problems that are like puzzles to be solved.

August

I guess "xenological medical science fiction" used to sound pretty enticing. James White is a notable science fiction author exactly for this reason, having penned the Sector General series. In 2008, I read my first Sector General book--Final Diagnosis (1997)--and loved the entertainment of it;

however, subsequent forays into Sector General have become repetitive where White rehashes many main points and plots the book like a paint-by-number picture. The three parts of Ambulance Ship epitomize this disease as they all suffer from these same symptoms: rehash and monotony.

Rear cover synopsis:

"There was a lot of talk about the vital importance of his new assignment, but it still seemed like a demotion to Senior Physician Conway. After twelve years of outstanding service--and the most incredible experience imaginable--Conway couldn't quite appreciate the "honor" of becoming an ambulance attendant at this stage of his life.

True, the insectile empathy, Dr. Prilicla, would be with him--and so would the eminently desirable Nurse Murchison--but it was definitely a comedown for a Senior Physician of his status to be conscripted as part of a first-aid team for disabled spacefarers.

Then the first call came--and Conway faced the problem of treating a spaceship crew's mysterious ailment... without wiping out every patient and doctor in Sector General!"

Initially, Conway is miffed at being designated to the newly establish ambulance ship. His superior, Chief Psychologist O'Mara, insists that he is the man for the important job as it's able to handle environments and medications for a large range of species. Far from being a ambulance of the pettiest manner, the new ship--donned the Rhabwar--has been fitted to handle the most difficult of all emergency cases: to rescue crews of stricken ships. Conveniently, due to come quirk in physics, all intersolar ships--be they human, of known alien origin or unknown alien origin--operate their distress beacons on the same frequency. These frequencies are monitored and, when discovered, Sector General sends out the Rhabwar to investigate the emergency, be it near or far.

The first story ("Contagion", a novelette, 2/5 by itself) follows Conway, Captain Fletcher and a host of regulars and irregulars who dart off to recover the crew of a human ship that had collided with another derelict of substantial mass. On the way, the Rhabwar intercepts the distress transmission from the Tenelphi and Conway is certain that the speaker is a medic because of his terminology. Going to the scene, they find most the human are incapacitated and, desperate to find conscious survivors, they begin to scan the wreckage of the derelict generation ship. Deep inside the main portion, Conway finds the missing medic while every human back on Rhabwar begins to experience the similar symptoms of headache. If no alien virus can be transmitted to other species of alien, why is it that all the humans are getting sick?

The second story ("Quarantine", a novella, also 2/5 by itself) sees Conway and Rhabwar's crew face the debris of an organic ship which had met a curious fate. The unknown species briefly poses a problem of classification and treatment but Conway and his expertise clear the matter up rather abruptly. They take the tiny survivor--perhaps a juvenile, but they're unsure--back to Sector General while a Contact unit is dispatched to make themselves known to the new species. But while in the surgery ward, the alien awakens and makes most of the Senior Physicians surrounding the being drop unconscious. Conway, however, is one of the unaffected and is in charge of figuring out the source of the distress, which has caused a "Contamination One" warning throughout the entire hospital. Sealed off from the rest of the ship, Conway must understand the problem before he begins to find its solution.

The third and last story ("Recovery", a novelette, moderately better at 3/5 by itself) contains the mystery of a ship which houses two unrelated alien races. The unusual situation spurs a number of

theories, but all theories are useless unless actually applied; while two survivors have been found, physically getting to them proves to be difficult as a bizarre system of defense blocks their way. When accessed and understood, the history of the vastly different small and large race of alien couldn't be more unusual or sympathetic.

As mentioned in the introduction, White has the annoying habit of rehashing generalities into each and every story. If you've a couple of Sector General stories, you've seen everything there is to see regarding the series. White repeats the (1) that no alien virus can cross species; (2) that subsuming tapes can alter the mentality of the physician; (3) that the designation of species depends on a variety of factors; and (4) that the station itself plays host to a very large variety of species, of which he must always mention the most exotic. It feels like these passages have been copied and pasted directly from other stories, so if you're a comprehensive reader of White (like I nearly am), it feels like all of this material is padding for the new reader, which dulls any reward for the established reader.

As for the paint-by-numbers plot, each story (here and in other Sector General stories) has a familiar flow: (1) all is normal in Sector General, (2) an unforeseen emergency arises, (3) Conway is on the case with the empathetic Prilicla, (4) Conway runs the gauntlet of possibilities, (5) the obvious conclusion is reached, and (6) Conway relaxes by flirting with Nurse Murchison. Word for word, you could apply that too all the stories.

Aside from these normal gripes, White is also prone to one huge annoyance of mine: the last-minute all-inclusive revelation that describes all the nuances of the problems faced in the previous pages, leaving very little to the imagination. "Quarantine" and "Recovery" have this same glaring flaw, but the last story manages to be moderately better in its inherent oddity than the prior.

Unfortunately, the reader is not able to procure "Recovery" by itself without having to purchase the entire collection of Ambulance Ship. I guess if you were to buy the three-story collection, you might as well read all three stories, which may hone your tastes for the last story... otherwise, the other two are a waste of time. Like White's *The Galactic Gourmet* (1996), this collection is only for White completists or first-time readers of White.

FLIDER

I enjoyed reading science fiction many years ago, and I've been sampling sci-fi recently. Many writers I find sort of clunky and awkward -- or frankly childish. But some I like. I like the Enders series, for example, and pretty much read my way through them.

On the basis of *Ambulance Ship*, I will read through the books of James White. The universe he creates is one of overwhelming variety -- of species and their worlds. In this universe, the creatures, as they discover one another, learn to get along.

One of their greatest challenges is a sort of comparative medicine. How do you provide emergency medical care to so many different creatures?

This novel, and I suppose the series, follows the exploits of a sort of Mod Squad of emergency care docs as they cope with various accidents and disasters.

And, while your knowledge of earth medicine won't help you much, as you try to think your way

through the dilemmas that Dr. Connor and his crew confront, you are given enough information to follow their logic and to be satisfied with their solutions.

Is it artful prose? No, it's awkward, but manageable. You adapt pretty quickly.

A great break from the gruesome and repetitive bestsellers of today!

Realistic

Senior Physician Conway is not exactly thrilled with his new assignment to the Ambulance Ship Rhabwar but soon finds out it is more important than he thought. The Rhabwar's mission is to answer distress calls from previously uncontacted alien ships thus proving in the most direct way possible the benign intentions of the Galactic Federation. However Rhabwar's first mission is to rescue a Monitor scout ship in distress. It seems like a very simple assignment - until they find out why the ship is in trouble. Rhabwar's next casualty is a bona-fide alien - and may finally disprove the comfortable theory that cross species infection is impossible. In the final section the Rhabwar finds a disabled ship with two species aboard, one apparently imprisoned and being tortured by the other!

Mavegelv

Although it is part of a series, this book stands alone as the main character of the series, Conway, is given a new job as ambulance crew and leaves the station.

Initially he is not happy with the role and does not get on with the abrasive captain of the ship.

However, as usual, there are plenty of new and wierd beasties and problems for him to face. This time, instead of patients arriving at the station, he is going out to find them.

The problems faced are ingenious. All the answers are there in the story but it is often not until the very end that the solution is revealed; very much a mystery story.

The only criticism I would have is that Conway and the captain spend too much time telling each other what is going on, technically - it is a bit like having technical footnotes to the story rather than letting the action speak for itself.

Good story lines, good problems, not as good at the characterisation as some of his other stories; but still an enjoyable read.

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