



## The Galactic Gourmet

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## **The Galactic Gourmet** James White

When the galaxy's greatest chef, Gurronsevas, travels to a massive hospital space station to make their hospital food more appetizing, he may have to overcome more than a few obstacles in order to meet this challenge. Reprint. *AB. LJ. K.*

## **The Galactic Gourmet Details**

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## **From Reader Review The Galactic Gourmet for online ebook**

### **Beth Lequeuvre says**

I thought for sure I would regret reading a book that was #9 in a series I had never read. I just figured what they hey, I like sci-fi and I like cooking and I'm getting this from a library so it doesn't cost anything to try. I'm glad I did. This was cute. Sector General is this huge 384 level hospital ship that serves a multitude of humans and aliens. Gurronsevas comes on board full of himself and his celebrity chef status and bumbles and fumbles a bit and spends 3/4 of the book trying to recover. Surprisingly not everything takes place on the ship but you do stay with the main character the whole time. I found the inventiveness in trying to devise new cuisine for different species completely fascinating.

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### **Vaughn Ohlman says**

James White is a fantastic author. Light without being meaningless; readable by children yet still interesting and fun for adults.

And the Galactic Gourmet fits right into the best of James White. They say that pride goeth before a fall and our hero is nothing if not proud; and does practically nothing except fall. Without any of it being really his fault, he manages to practically kill half the staff of Sector General Hospital, get everyone mad at him, and then save an entire planetary population. Not bad for an alien, eh?

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### **Danni Green says**

I picked this one up to discuss it with a friend who was also reading it. I liked it, but I wasn't consistently wowed. I felt really "hooked" when I first started reading it, for long enough that the story remained compelling even as my interest floundered, but it just didn't go anywhere exciting enough for me, and the ending was rather disappointing. I really liked some of the minor characters though, and would be interested to read other books in this series where those characters play a larger role. I wouldn't ordinarily start reading a series in the middle like this, but it sounded like a book that could stand alone; I feel like parts of it did, and other parts might have been more enjoyable had I some more context for them from having read the rest of the series. I did really like the explorations of intercultural communication, and the creative descriptions of the eating habits of the invented species, and I could certainly see reading other books by this author and enjoying them more than I did this one.

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### **James Rickett says**

A late entry in the Sector General series; good but not great.

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## **Marcus Gipps says**

I read the first of James White's Sector General novels many years ago, having picked it up from a pile of cheap second hand SF paperbacks. I remember rather enjoying it, in a pulpy way, and a couple of years ago I read the sequel (actually, perhaps that happened the other way around - sequel first. Yes, that was it: <http://marcusgipps.livejournal.com/20...> and <http://marcusgipps.livejournal.com/20...>).

I ended one of those reviews saying that there were another eleven books in the series, and that I would keep an eye out for them. I clearly promptly forgot until last week, when I was in my local comic shop and saw a pile of, yes, cheap old SF paperbacks, including a bunch of James White ones. I picked up the two that looked most interesting, read this one that afternoon/the next day, and then went back and bought a handful more. They're all fun, although there is a little bit of repeated information (that's my fault, though, for reading them in a short period of time, and in a random order).

This is one of the later books in the series, and has a fairly silly title. It was obvious to me that a lot had changed since the two books, but the main elements that I enjoyed in White's writing were still present - basically, ER or House in space, with mysterious illnesses and some soap-opera elements, but livened up immensely with the addition of random aliens and things. In fact, this book is largely told from the point of view of a non-human, which is rather fun (lots of faux-naive descriptions of human traits as 'other' or alien). Our protagonist is a famous chef who decided that the ultimate expression of his talent would be to sort out the unpleasant hospital food (some things never change, obviously) which is more difficult than it sounds, as there are dozens of species who need to be fed. He gets some things wrong, gets into some scrapes, but everything ends up alright in the end, in a rather satisfying way. Not the deepest thing I've ever read, of course, but quite a lot of fun.

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## **Scott says**

Picked this up in a used bookstore; 10 books for \$5, not bad eh?

I've never read any of this series before. It was entertaining enough though slow at times. The book is about the "Galactic Federation's foremost exponent of the highly-specialized art of multi-species food preparation" and his (its?) mission to make hospital food palatable. There are some neat ideas in the book on how the main character applies his craft, though his changes get him into trouble on multiple occasions and his arrogance doesn't help. The author has an interesting take in his world in that inter-species cooperation is the norm and conflicts are resolved diplomatically. It's a nice thought.

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## **Christine says**

It's been a while since I found a science fiction series that I really enjoyed, but I plan to read more by James White.

Sector General is a multi-species hospital filled with strange and unusual creatures that nevertheless come across as believable. Some breathe oxygen, others chlorine, and some live underwater, yet this hospital has created environments to suit them all as it seeks to use medicine to be the tie that binds sentient beings.

I'm not sure where this novel fits in chronological order, but I did not feel that I had to read the series in order to be able to enjoy it. Which was also pleasant if unusual.

The main character in this novel is a Charletone (sp?...sorry, I listen to these on tape) master chef who has made a name for himself by serving savory foods to many different species. He wants to challenge himself at Sector General to find a universal food that might appeal to multiple species. In the meantime, he is taking seriously the idea that patients who enjoy their food will have a better and faster recovery. Through his interviews with patients and staff about the food quality, the reader gets to explore the unique and surprisingly well-thought-out things that made each species tick.

He's quite arrogant and does manage to butt heads with the powers that be, but he was still a fun character to read about. Eventually, he is forced to take a leave of absence from Sector General due to his role in an accident but he finds new adventures in a strange culinary first contact situation.

I found this book fun, cleverly conceived, and even a little thought provoking.

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### **Tracy says**

Recommend by a friend. Rather interesting so far...

I felt like this was a little meandering and thin on plot. The second portion of the book was pretty interesting. They make first contact with a species that had previously all but destroyed their planet with dirty technology and were rapidly chipping away at the remainder through their insistence on maintaining a meat-centered diet (Huh, sounds kinda familiar...). That part just sets the stage for the truly interesting bit, which is how their past history led them to their current beliefs. Best part of the book, really.

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### **Ab says**

cigarettes are safe - was the silly statement in the book, the rest was great.

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### **Annette McIntyre says**

Sector 12 Hospital has a new head chef. The best chef in known space has decided it needs a new challenge and Sector General is that challenge - it wants to make hospital food tasty for the patients and the staff. Sadly it gets into more trouble than is helpful and has to be hidden away on Rabwar, the ambulance ship, which is then sent on a mission to help a dying planet. Can the new head chef of Sector General help or will it cause yet more trouble?

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### **Valerie says**

One of the advantages of a well-established series is that you can tell stories without having to insert too much exposition.

This is one of my favorite Sector General novels. The problems of the catering department at Sector General had been explored before, but this novel gives one a more inside view from the point of view of a chef who has abundant experience with multispecies dining.

The misadventures that end up putting Gurronevas in a position where it must (and perhaps can) save the lives of an entire planetary culture are all logical and interesting, and the recognition that technology doesn't necessarily reduce the amount of chaos in people's lives is an insight that White did a lot with over the nearly half-century run of Sector General.

Starting a book with the arrival of a new character to Sector General became a formula for White. It's a useful introduction for newcomers, and provides old hands an opportunity to act as amused guides. The first interview between Gurronevas and o'Mara, for example, ends with Timmins (head of Maintenance) pointing out that many people try to slam the door of o'Mara's office on leaving, despite the fact that it's a sliding door. I'd remembered this, but forgotten where it was from.

Gurronevas' first challenge is finding his (note the male pronoun--the story is told from Gurronevas' point of view, so only Tralthans are described using sexed pronouns) way to the oxygen-breathers dining hall. It's interesting how often Prilicla is on hand to greet newcomers. I personally think Prilicla is on gossiping terms with people in Reception, and makes it a point to be around but not obtrusive when newcomers arrive.

After considerable researches into the workings of the maintenance tunnels, kitchens, etc, Gurronevas makes a cautious start by trying to improve the cuisine (well, not really--they don't have any kitchens of the Chalder ward. The success of this project is a little uneven--the enthusiasm of the Chalders for free-swimming food gets a little out of hand.

In apology to Hredlichli, Gurronevas next devotes himself to improving the food of the Illensans, with quiet success. But at this point, he realizes that he can't continue to work with low-population groups one at a time--so he sets himself to improving o'Mara's food. This, while it doesn't noticeably improve o'Mara's attitude, does have an effect on o'Mara's decisions about whether to retain Gurronevas later, when more serious problems arise.

The first serious problem involves Gurronevas' attempt to improve the food of the Hudlars, so that they won't collapse in near-starvation because they forgot to replenish their boring food. Gurronevas doesn't blame his Hudlar escort for not accompanying him back to the ship, because it wouldn't do him any good, and would get the Hudlar in trouble. And besides, it shouldn't have resulted in a life-threatening situation and major damage to an airlock. But there are questions Gurronevas should have raised, nevertheless. Questions like "Why do the spacesuits have insufficient air supplies?" Or "Why isn't somebody charged with making sure the spacesuits have their consumables (including thruster fuel) topped up?". Or "Why don't internal suits have distress flares? After all, somebody MIGHT have to go outside." Or, perhaps most importantly, "Why is a Hudlar ship carrying chlorine-based materials, when chlorine is rapidly toxic to Hudlars?" (not, by the way, 'instantly'. In Accident, the Hudlars survived contact with chlorine for nearly half an hour, with no aftereffects).

This incident leads o'Mara, negotiating with Colonel Skempton, to tell Gurronevas that he has to leave Sector General...as soon as it's conveniently possible. In the meantime, Gurronevas is told to keep as low a profile as a Tralthan reasonably can, and to avoid any further accidents, if possible.

But if you're keeping a low profile, how can you figure out how to make Baked Alaska, without warning people not to be alarmed by any ash that gets into the waste stream?

This incident results in Gurronsevas being ordered to leave Sector General immediately--and to stay in hiding aboard the temporarily powered-down Rhabwar, even through the later crisis which results from the bizarre ordering system for Sector General (where you have to order a century's worth of supplies, or risk being conspicuous), and a miscommunication about recipes.

After which, Rhabwar departs on another mission, with Gurronsevas aboard, to deal with the Wemar famine.

The Wemar famine is not a sudden crisis. The Wemar people destroyed their ozone layer, and though it's slowly regenerating, the Wem have seen a significant loss of their food supply, and without reforms of their diet, they almost certainly won't make it through the recovery.

The Monitor Corps don't think Rhabwar can help, since they've failed themselves to make any substantial contact with the Wem. Prilicla manages to argue them into standing back in the only way it CAN argue--over long-distance radio, from too far away for Prilicla to be influenced by the emotions of its correspondents.

Gurronsevas is dubious, at first, about his ability to improve food alternatives for the Wem. And he's right, and wrong. By himself, he couldn't have persuaded the Wem to do something they stubbornly believe is impossible.

But they don't all think so. In fact, the fate of Wemar depends on the mental resilience of three old women, and a bunch of incompletely indoctrinated schoolchildren. The old women are painfully aware that the situation has significantly worsened since their youth, and the children just know that they're hungry, but that what they have to feed that hunger is inadequate.

In this environment, Gurronsevas' advice on presentation, complementary flavors, spices, and textures find a reluctant, but not totally hopeless audience, who are prepared to try the vegetarian dishes the 'hobbyist' (as they term him) Gurronsevas designs.

But this, in itself, is not sufficient. Only the successful rescue of the severely injured Chief Hunter Creethar will win over this community, and thus start the reform movement which will probably make the school involved into the culinary capital of Wemar, at least for a while.

It might seem that Gurronsevas could have no part in this, since he has no medical training. But not only has he learned the medical herbs in use by the Wem (and there isn't time to test Federation drugs on Creethar's infected wounds), he is also probably the only person who can convince Creethar to eat--and if he won't eat, he probably won't survive even if his wounds heal.

The misunderstanding that nearly defeats the rescue is one of the many demonstrations of the inevitable shortcomings of translators. Speaking of translators, it's just plain not true that the sound all people make to simulate a gunshot is 'bang!'. This isn't even true in all languages on Earth, so why would it be true throughout the Galaxy? For example, 'bang' is not even a possible word in Japanese, where syllables can't end in any consonant other than 'n'--and Japanese is a language closely related to European languages.

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## **Dr susan says**

I love this book. I'm so very glad I found a copy to buy. Gurronsevas, a Tralthan chef, is the narrator. He isn't a physician or a healer in the accepted fashion. But food can heal many ills, and great friendships are often

forged over meals. I laughed, I cried, I was sad when Gurronevas was misunderstood. Most of all, I enjoyed this book. I have read that James White was a truly gentle soul, and *The Galactic Gourmet* exemplifies that description, because the gigantic, very alien Tralthan is a truly gentle soul.

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### **Joy says**

The Great Gurronevas isn't finding enough challenge as chef of a five star interspecies restaurant. He wants to transform the hospital diet of Sector General, give it an appeal that will further motivate patients to recovery. The patients love it, the hospital administrators are the ones that have to deal with the problems his ideas cause.

James White's books bring his protagonists through an arc of character development. Halfway through *THE GALACTIC GOURMET*, Gurronevas is still a distillation of arrogance and innocence. He does change, by being dislodged from his field of expertise, but I didn't relate to him and his new friends that way I did in the previous three books.

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### **Jessie J says**

James White is such an underrated author. I adore his Sector General novels. Just imagine that, with all those space battles and impossible conundrums in the sci-fi books and movies you enjoy, there is an ambulance run by a host of well-trained aliens that swoops in and takes care of the situation with skill and understanding.

I've recently tried a precursor to White, and I did enjoy his work, but mostly as a period piece. And I've read the StarDoc novels (which don't compare). I'm sure there are others out there, and I appreciate recommendations. But Sector General is the best, to me.

"*The Galactic Gourmet*" is a slight departure from some of the other Sector General novels in that it adds one part Top Chef to the space opera/hospital station mix. As is often the case, a brilliant misfit finds a place with Sector General; just not using a path you would expect.

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### **Andrea says**

This book mixed three of my favorite subjects: Science Fiction, Communication, and Food! I loved how alien communication and misinterpretation was explored in the book. I also hate hospital food, and enjoyed the humor surrounding a Chef's mission to Make It Taste Better. This is the first James White Sector General book I have read, and while it dragged a wee bit in some places, the humor and subject matter made it worthwhile! I plan to read more in the series.

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