



Alien Emergencies: A Sector General Omnibus

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The second three volumes of James White's Sector General SF saga, in a single omnibus edition.

Sector General: A vast hospital complex in the depths of outer space. The thousands who work there, human and alien both, have a single mission: To care for all patients, of all species. At Sector General, anything can happen-and frequently does.

James White's tales of Sector General are lively, humorous, and humane, at times shot through with a healer's anger at violence and destruction. These are endlessly inventive dramas of civility and spirituality, tempered with White's gently wicked wit and his keen eye for the remarkable in the everyday.

Now, in a single omnibus, the second three volumes of the series-Ambulance Ship, Sector General, and Star Healer-return to print in complete and corrected editions, including a sequence ("Spacebird") omitted from previous American editions of *Ambulance Ship*. The volume is introduced by Hugo-winning SF writer and critic David Langford.

Alien Emergencies: A Sector General Omnibus Details

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Author : James White , David Langford

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From Reader Review Alien Emergencies: A Sector General Omnibus for online ebook

Jason says

Although the prose tends to be repetitive at times, and the author indulges in (relatively mild, all things considered) gender stereotypes, this collection of three short novels takes the premise begun in the first three Sector General novels and runs with it at full speed. Alien physiology and psychology are well imagined, and I cannot help but admire and aspire to the sort of quick thinking and problem-solving displayed by Senior Physician, and then Diagnostician-in-training Conway (though I suspect my teenage daughter would consider him a "Mary Sue" for the same reasons). Fun and thought-provoking in equal measure.

Jacqueline Ogburn says

I loved these novels of doctors in space as a teenager. The challenges of treating new species, when communication was impossible and the charming, hypersensitive insectoid empath was my favorite character. On re-reading, the medical mysteries and solutions are just as charming. In the later stories, Murchinson begins to get the respect she deserves. The casual sexism is less in the later ones, but still a bit jarring when contrasted with the understanding shown other species.

Still, a terrific series.

Dagonell says

Book #: 20

Title: Alien Emergencies

Author: James White

Category: Popsugar Basic: The next book in a series you've started II

Rating: 4 out of 5 stars

First, technically I'm still reading it, but I'm into the final story, so ... close enough. Second, I've already covered this category, but this is the only category it fits in. James White wrote a series of stories about Sector General, a multi-species hospital in space. The stories were collected into books, and the books were collected into omnibuses. The first omnibus, Beginning Operations, contained Hospital Station, Star Surgeon and Major Operation. Alien Emergencies is the second omnibus and contains Ambulance Ship, Sector General and Star Healer. As before, I found the stories entertaining and well written. And since they're actually short stories there's a lot of decent pause points. :) I will be tracking down the other omnibuses in this series.

Debbie Zapata says

This second omnibus edition of James White's Sector General stories was much more interesting for me than the first one, *Beginning Operations*. Here we get to go out with Conway and his team in the ambulance ship *Rhabwar* and we meet a variety of new beings such as a Protector Of The Unborn, a cactus-like plant creature with a (sorry) prickly temperament but the desire to change, and a huge worm being with who knows how many legs. Or were they arms? Or maybe both?

Anyway, there was also a story included here that demonstrated the why and how of the creation of the Sector General hospital, and that story (**Accident!**) was truthfully one of the most interesting of either volume so far.

As in the first omnibus, there is a lot of repetition of facts here, to catch readers up on basic Sector General and Conway knowledge. But when you read these stories all in one clump like this instead of over several years the way they were originally published, you can surely be forgiven for skipping most of the history bits.

I'm rating this one four stars because I was more captivated by it than by *Beginning Operations: A Sector General Omnibus*. The stories felt deeper, more polished, and for me were much more exciting.

So, on to my final James White volume: *General Practice, A Sector General Omnibus!*

Terri says

The greatest idea ever: James White's "Sector General" books made into a tv series. What is it? The biggest hospital in outer space. Will need WETA, Henson, and an sfx budget the size of Alaska.

THE PITCH: HOUSE meets MEN IN BLACK. DEEP SPACE E.R.!

Alien patients! Alien diseases! Alien surgeons! Operating on humans! No Andorians or Vulcans here - aliens are ALIEN: six-foot radial lobsters; empathic butterflies; hyper-heavy fire hydrants who eat with their skin; tactless, shiny silver caterpillar/water shrews that talk with their fur; telepathic fetuses; giant paranoid fish; space whales, and communal hedgehogs whose defense response is a natural disaster! (And that's just off the top of my head!)

Absorbing, tense medical mysteries that actually work!

Unique personal dramas. Short, conclusive episodes and LOOOONG character arcs. Truly impossible romances.

Culture clashes and diplomatic crises.

Individuality v. monumental bureaucracy.

Doctors v. military.

Medical research "personality recordings" and the personality problems they cause.

Huge sets, like the artificial beach, and simulated pocket environment wards for alien patients, like "extra-terrariums".

A hulking, grizzled, quiet, scary chief of staff with hidden pain (Ron Perlman, please).

Sympathetic secret lovers who take forever to get it together.

PLUS an ambulance/hospital ship!!

DO YOU NOT WANT TO SEE THIS?

Lisa Feld says

With the exception of the opening short story, "Spacebird" (which was clearly cut from earlier editions for a reason), the second omnibus is every bit as good as, and in some parts better than, the first. One story scared the pants off me, several moved me, and the whole added up to compelling medical mysteries and a good closing note for the careers of Conway, Murchison, and Prilicla. The first two books, *Ambulance Ship* and *Sector General*, mainly involve the trio (plus some new faces) leaving the comfort of Sector General to answer distress calls in hopes of making first contact with new species.

The third, *Star Healer*, involves Conway attempting to qualify as a Diagnostician, wondering what sharing his brain with multiple personalities will do to his sanity (not to mention his marriage). It also sparked a fan theory for me, a way of getting around the paternalist sexism of White's repeated claim that women can't handle sharing their brains with the taped personalities of other species. It's been said throughout this series that the people chosen for these tapes were geniuses, and that geniuses are often real jerks. As Conway tries out a number of tapes, and talks with other Diagnosticians living with tapes in their brains, it also becomes clear that a lot of them are misogynists. The effect on a raging misogynist of finding themselves trapped in a female body would be pretty shattering. My guess is the problem isn't women's inherent capacity to deal with sharing their minds and bodies, the problem is with the available tapes. Which lets me go on loving a series that, on every other level, delights me.

Raj says

Sector Twelve General Hospital is the galaxy's largest multi-species hospital, built to be able to treat any of the many and varied species of the galactic Federation, not to mention any other intelligent life forms they encounter. It is, to quote a line about *another* space station, a shining beacon in space, all alone in the night.

There are three volumes bound together in this omnibus: *Ambulance Ship*, *Sector General* and *Star Healer*. The first deals with the establishment of Sector General's first purpose-built ambulance ship, the *Rhabwar*, headed up by regular series protagonist Doctor Conway. The special purpose of this ship is to respond to distress beacons sent out by unrecognised species and establish peaceful first contact and show that they mean no harm by helping heal travellers in distress. *Sector General* continues this theme, showing more of the bizarre situations that the crew of the *Rhabwar* find themselves involved with. *Star Healer* sees Conway (provisionally) promoted to the hospital's most senior rank, that of Diagnostician and shows us the different class of problem that these most senior doctors must face.

I must confess to having had a soft spot for the *Sector General* novels for many years, ever since I first found *Star Surgeon* in the local library. The stories are often a medical whodunnit, which I enjoy and I love the unusual fact that there is almost no violence in the whole series. The idea of putting medics at the front line of your space opera may not be new, but White's passion for non-violence (the author himself living in the decidedly non-non-violent environment of Belfast during the Troubles) shines through here.

Another aspect of the *Sector General* books that I have always liked is White's attempt to not make it Human-centric. It's made very clear that Humans are just one member (albeit one of the larger species) of the Galactic Federation. The protagonist of the stories is Human but most of his co-workers aren't, and they aren't just Humans with lumpy foreheads either. White imagines aliens that range from fuzzy teddy bears to crystalline entities that exist by the conversion of hard radiation. He makes an attempt to make the aliens really *alien* and mostly succeeds, although the idea of the six-limbed elephantine most senior Diagnostician in the hospital also being its chief gossip does tickle my funny bone.

White certainly believes in saving his imagination for the alien races and encounters, rather than on description. Once he finds a description that works, it gets reused, at least once a book, often more frequently. The same description of *Sector General* as a "cylindrical Christmas tree" or chief psychologist O'Mara having "eyes that opened on a mind so deeply analytical they gave him what amounted to a telepathic facility" or the description of the hospital's four-letter physiological classification system abound. This doesn't annoy me, but often the reverse, like seeing an old friend popping up regularly.

While some of the stories could certainly be described as "corny", the *Sector General* books and the volumes in this omnibus are very entertaining to a fan of space opera, and inspiring to a fellow Ulsterman who shares White's passion for non-violence.

Jake Leech says

The first volume of this set, *Beginning Operations*, is OK but largely consists of a bunch of short stories crudely shoehorned into a couple of novels. And that shows. Here, White has got into his groove, puts together much better stories, and develops Murchison from a sentient pair of breasts into an actual character (although you'll still hear plenty about her shape, and she definitely can't be promoted to diagnostician because women's brains, amiright?) If you liked the first volume, but found it flawed, I think you're going to really enjoy this second volume.

Amy N. says

Even better than the last one. We finally get a glimpse into who Conway is as a person, and Murchison finally *is* a person.

Michael Battaglia says

More stories featuring aliens with bizarre medical problems? Sure, why not? The *Sector General* series remains a beloved locale and series of stories even nearly fifteen years since White's death dried up his seemingly inexhaustible supply of ways for the various beings and personalities on board the giant space

hospital to interact with each other, to clash and come together to solve problems. Some of it is perhaps based on novelty (the number of decent medical SF novels can probably be counted on one three-fingered alien hand) or maybe the accessible format or interesting problems.

But the main reason is that it's hard not to respond to White's inherent decency and his belief that everyone should be treated decently. It comes through in nearly every story, as varied alien species come together, sometimes carrying extra alien species in their heads, to save the lives of patients from worlds they've never even encountered, sometimes for the sake of curious science but more often because it is a Thing That Needs To Be Done. There's a purity to that not often seen in the world of SF without getting too obvious or cloying, as too many times such sentiments devolved into Us Versus Them scenarios. In the world of Sector General there may be a Them but before too long they become part of the Us. That's refreshing and more in line with a vein of SF you don't see as commonly these days, when optimism was a big portion of the attitude of SF. In the years since as we've experienced various dystopias and post-apocalyptic scenarios it becomes hard to remember that a lot of writers believed with all sincerity that things would be better in the future. And they could convey that sentiment without getting all goeey, not turning a blind eye to the problems at hand of the day that would have to be solved, or the problems of the future that would need to be overcome. Sector General takes place in a world where bad things still exist but it can be solved with a little bit of ingenuity and a sense of teamwork.

Over the course of thirty or forty years, it's easy to build up that kind of comforting familiarity, creating this warm and fuzzy place in the minds of readers that they were eager to revisit again and again. But that familiarity can also be a hamstring and never more when you're trying to read many of these stories in a row. In the early stories White definitely felt he had hit open a formula and while none of the stories ever come across as crass or taking the audience for fools, a sense of repetition starts to set in. Read months or years apart, it's like the gentle easing in to visit an old friend. When you bundle three collections together in one six hundred page omnibus and then try to read them all over the course of a week, White's flaws as a writer tend to come more to the fore.

To his credit, he does attempt to break out of his own formula but in the meantime exchanges it for a new formula. Stalwart Doctor Conway, the prime character in the early stories, gets assigned to an ambulance ship that takes he and his crew out of Sector General to respond to crashes and wrecks that are floating in space, to find if there are any survivors and then figure out some way to treat the survivors. The initial jolt of the change is bracing, but it's not too long before the familiarity begins to set in. Even the first two stories in the first collection have the same basic problem (the lone survivor of a wreck makes everyone mysteriously sick, even if the ultimate causes are different) and while the resolutions are inventive, they often come down to Conway once again going out on a limb and trying a solution that no one thinks will work (especially O'Mara, who barely seems to tolerate him sometimes).

What becomes grating at times is White's tendency to repeat known facts from earlier stories almost verbatim in his explanations, whether it's the description of the classification system, O'Mara telling us once again that he's there to shrink heads, not swell them, the various rules surrounding fragile friend-to-all empath Prilicla, how Diagnosticians work, Murchinson's inherent hotness, when we're told the same things in the same way in story after story, it starts to feel like the beginning of Mr Roger's Neighborhood, where the same routines were established and repeated to make us feel welcome. It winds up detracting from the stories themselves, and calls attention to how there's very little forward motion at times, sometimes frustratingly so. There are many times when you want White to delve further into just how Prilicla has everyone eating out of its empathic multi-jointed mouth or some demonstration that O'Mara really is a brilliant psychologist instead of someone who insults everyone all the time.

It's not until the last novel in the sequence, "Star Healer" that we get that forward motion, putting Conway on the path to reaching the highest level of the hospital staff (almost arbitrarily it seems, like O'Mara shows up and says "Hey, I don't really believe you're qualified but ready to go crazy with more aliens in your head?") along with some interesting problems that lurk just on the right side of not being contrived. White also gets better moments of lyrical beauty, like when Conway goes down to the cryogenic section of the hospital amongst the chlorine breathers. It doesn't entirely displace the problem of the novel being a series of problems that Conway has to solve until it's over (something the series rarely seems to shake) but by the time we reach the end we feel we've come to the natural end of him as a main character and are ready for him to be relegated to supporting status. Which in a way winds up being a gift . . . having given us the basic format and structure of the hospital, White can play with his canvas in more inventive ways. It's no real spoiler to reveal that the next two novels in the series are far more interesting, giving us more spine and bristle. Conway was nice, but he was there as a means to solve problems, not be a character. With him out of the way, character and problem can take equal billing, and the series becomes the better for it. But to get there you have to go through here first. Much like "Cheers", the hospital can't be the warm inviting place where everyone knows your four letter physiological classification until you've spent enough time there to become a regular.

Johnathan says

Not as good as the first omnibus. Too repetitive. After a certain point, the reader has understood the concept and does not bear repeating five times. Anyone familiar with the series would've have started from the foundational stories.

Travis says

I know it's quite aged and looks cheesy from the cover/title/subject but I was really impressed and highly entertained. It was one of those where I was sad the stories were over and there were no more to read.

Karl Schaeffer says

Interesting book. An enjoyable read. Interesting premise. Aliens are friendly and they can't transmit diseases between the species. Extraterrestrial relations are advanced via cross species medical treatment. These stories were written between 1962 and 2001. Sector General's lack of violence is maybe White's reaction to "The Troubles" in Ireland. The stories remind me of a science fiction version of James Herriot and Maeve Binchy.

Joanna Chaplin says

This book makes the shift from the first book which is more like "meet new aliens who are injured" to more of a more usual hospital setting just with a common set of aliens and the occasional special one. The main character got to a place career-wise with lots of stress. I'm content to part ways with him and wish him well. I have bought the third book but I don't plan to read it, at least not yet.

Goodbye, Space Healer. Continue doing God's work and appreciating the variety of species.

Andreas says

This is the second omnibus of Sector General novels, comprised of three such. It is very plain Space Opera stuff about a huge hospital serving lots of alien races. The premise is full of potential but the stories are both corny and dull. Yawn...

<http://www.books.rosboch.net/?p=1505>
