



Code Blue - Emergency

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To the doctors and nurses of Sector General Hospital, Cha Thrat was just another trainee, but for Cha Thrat, life at Sector General was a most unnerving experience. Because her world had only recently been discovered by the Galactic Federation, she had never experienced the multiplicity of life-forms that populated Sector General—and no one knew what to expect of her.

Cha Thrat was a skilled healer, diligent, careful, and—according to her world's strict medical ethics— very responsible. Chief Psychologist O'Mara tried to help her adjust to her new life, but time after time, her best intentions caused only catastrophe. And even after she had been barred from nearly every ward in Sector General, O'Mara was still surprised by just how much havoc one nurse-trainee could cause...

Code Blue - Emergency Details

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Faith says

HOSPITAL IN SPACE.

Therefore, awesome.

Okay, serious review time. I picked this book up for \$2 off the street because I thought it looked pretty entertaining. I was not at all disappointed! The premise was very engaging and I loved that the book was written from a nonhuman POV. I thought the author did a pretty good job writing through the eyes of an alien, considering that he is not (as far as I know) an alien himself :)

I did find some of the reactions to Cha Thrat's antics irritating, as I thought some of the fault lay with the hospital staff. I'm still not sure if that's because they were in fact overreacting, or if White just did a really good job of getting me to sympathize with his protagonist...

A couple of odd things. Does the huge, multispecies space hospital really only have one ambulance ship? Also, being a medically minded nerd, I would have loved a thorough explanation of the species classification system. But that's just me.

In any case, pretty darn entertaining and certainly good enough for me to keep an eye out for the rest of the series. Because hospitals in space.

Linda says

Cha Thrat is a female Sommaradvan Warrior-Surgeon. Through a combination of circumstances, she winds up as part of the staff of Sector General Hospital, where things become -- interesting -- to say the least.

Cha Thrat is one of the most intriguing life-forms to be introduced in this series. Although, personally, the empathic insect-alien, Prilicla, is my all-time favorite.

Valerie says

This book comes so closely on the heels of Star Healer that the Protector of The Unborn delivered in Star Healer would still be wet behind the ears, if newborn Protectors have placental fluid.

I've encountered the idea that Conway became uninteresting when he became a Diagnostician, and I find it ridiculous. Did Thornnastor become uninteresting when IT became a Diagnostician?

My own opinion is that White became aware that stories all told from the point of view of members of one species tend to become a little ethnocentric (anthropocentric, in this case). So he began experimenting with other viewpoint characters. The remaining (counts...) five books in the series are all but one from the position of non-DBDGs (parenthetically, I would like a more complete explanation of the four-letter code. For one

thing, it's just plain untrue that plants came before fish. Many species of plants are quite a bit more recent than some of the older fishes.).

This book is from the point of view of the (literally and figuratively) unbending Cha Thrat. From the beginning it's made clear that one of the reasons Cha Thrat was unpopular at home is that she (and, since the story is told from her point of view, it's made quite clear that she is female) was so inflexible a traditional purist that she was unable to comply with what she regarded as corruption of values.

This is not a good place to start from at Sector General. It's made clear that if Cha Thrat hadn't correctly treated an injured Earth-human, she wouldn't have been accepted for training at Sector General, not only because she hadn't sufficient experience with other-species patients, but also because she was so intolerant of other viewpoints.

But she's a more than competent surgeon, and so the Sector General authorities (meaning, in this case, o'Mara) decide to give her a chance, and hope that she can adapt.

And she makes a go of it, although she's clearly having a hard time with what she considers unforgivably lax standards. By the point I've gotten to, she's made rapid progress with her education, and is working regularly in the AUGL (Chalder) ward. What could possibly go wrong there? (NB: the phrase 'what could possibly go wrong?' is one of the most powerful curses in the English language).

Cha Thrat questions the practice of relegating highly trained doctors to menial (the word she uses is 'servile' roles as part of their training. I confess I wondered at it myself. At first blush it would seem more reasonable to hire highly trained nurses to do the bulk of the on-the-floor patient care, and have convalescent patients do the routine work (fetching bedpans, socializing with the bored bedridden patients, fetching meals, etc). And the evidence indicates that this was the original plan. So why was it changed?

My conjecture is that one original reason was to get the interns to see themselves as very low-status rookies. They may or may not have come up from the mailroom on their home planets, but if so, probably it was some time in the past, and they need to realize that they're once again tyros.

But there's more. High ranking people need to be periodically reschooled in empathy for those doing 'servile' tasks. These tasks are much more skilled and supplemented by mechanisms than in many other places, but they still tend to be relegated to lower status. And particularly for haughty members of caste-level societies, such a reminder should not only take place on moving to a new place, it should also take place at least annually. One good model is the various Boxing Day status reversals in British social groups.

Cha Thrat, who apparently hasn't encountered such customary reversals before, and who therefore regards the 'servile' work she's doing as humiliating and dishonorable, can't resist the tendency to meddle with patient medical care. And in this case, the Sommavardan caste system leads Cha Thrat to engage in meddling ABOVE her station in life. This calls for a quote:

"You are NOT a psychologist!" Cha Thrat said...(to o'Mara)
..."On Sommaradva a psychologist is a being, neither servile-healer nor warrior surgeon, who tries to be a scientist by measuring brain impulses or bodily changes caused by physical and mental stress, or by making detailed observations of behavior. A

psychologist tries to impose immutable laws in an area of spells and nightmares and changing realities, and tries to make a science of what has always been an art, an art performed by wizards."

"A wizard will use or ignore the instruments and tabulations of the psychologist," she continued, "to cast spells that influence the complex, insubstantial structures of the mind. A wizard uses words, silences, minute observations, and intuition to compare and gradually change the sick, internal reality of the patient to the external reality of the world."

This represents one of the most cogent criticisms of present-day psychology I've encountered, and makes me wonder if White wasn't speaking from personal experience. If this is the distinction of the difference between a psychologist and a wizard, give me a wizard any day.

Cha Thrat's amateur attempts at wizardry have unexpectedly traumatic results, nearly wrecking the AUGL ward. Though she succeeds in brokering a successful cure, it's not surprising that Charge Nurse Hredlichli (of whom more later) doesn't want Cha Thrat in its ward anymore.

And since rumor spreads rapidly, there's little chance Cha Thrat will be able to get another job in Sector General. But in fairness, the staff have to admit that Cha Thrat has failed largely through bad advice and cultural misunderstandings--and the Geriatric FROB ward is always short on staff (If you've read the immediately prior *Star Healer*, you'll know why). Cha Thrat is NOT familiar with the emotional and physical problems with aging Hudlars, and is unsurprisingly horrified. But the problem which the horrified Cha Thrat faces as a consequence of the proposed solution to the problem is a good example of why you can't just rely on universal translators to solve your communications problems.

After this incident, no ward in the hospital will have Cha Thrat on staff. Cha Thrat is (sort of) offered one of three choices: return to Sommaradva as a cultural envoy, go somewhere other than Sector General, or transfer to maintenance inside Sector General. All of the choices involve joining the Monitor Corps.

Cha Thrat, based not only on her strong code of honor, but also on her fascination with Sector General, chooses the last (not really serious) choice. She joins the maintenance workers in Sector General, leading to fascinating tours through the maintenance tunnels (I have to say, as a sidenote, that I don't agree with the decision to keep bright lighting in the maintenance tunnels. Maintenance staff have to wear uniforms, anyway, and it would be a better plan to light the staff than the tunnels. But that's based largely on my own light-averse condition). In the process of training, Cha Thrat begins to break down her previous strict distinction between servile, warrior, and ruler occupational statuses. Much of the work done is what she would heretofore have regarded as servile, combined with work for 'warriors' (actually usually scientists, engineers, and technicians by her own lifetime) and some of the work she would regard as appropriate to rulers: administrative and executive work.

Subject to the vicissitudes of fortune, Cha Thrat may have thought that she could stay in this work lifelong. Knowing o'Mara, I doubt it. But wheels do swing, and what looks like a temporary job setting up quarters for the healer Khone inside Sector General and on Rhabwar ends up becoming massively more complex.

Thus we come to the cover picture. I know that cover pictures are often less than satisfying to readers of books, and this one's no exception. I personally would NOT have considered the Healer Khone to look the

way she's depicted. I mean, does the being in Cha Thrat's arms look like a multicolored haystack, or even remotely like a cactus?

The transportation of the Healer Khone to Sector General to give birth should NOT have resulted in telepathic melding between Cha Thrat, Khone, and Conway. Conway isn't even present, but (see Star Healer) there had been a previous melding between Khone and Conway. It's a particular quirk of fate that Cha Thrat happens to resemble a Gogleskan doll. But the successful take the gifts of fate, however burdensome, and make use of them.

This episode, frankly, should completely put an end to the stereotypic notion that women can't use the Educator Tape system. Here are women who HAVE done so. And while they don't have an untroubled experience (there are serious threats to their sanity), I would say it's not much worse than what males face. In some ways, it's even easier. Cha Thrat is able to use the acquired data to arrange a successful delivery of a transverse breach birth, using Gogleskan anatomical knowledge and knowledge of Federation technology from various sources.

The trip back to Sector General with the Healer Khone and its newborn son should have been a milk run. But of course it isn't. Rhabwar, of course, is on call at all times--and an emergency call comes in. Captain Fletcher is of two minds whether to drop mother and child off at Sector General before answering the call. This would add several days to the trip, but it would protect Khone from being exposed to possibly menacing ship accident survivors.

Khone itself argues that emergencies take priority, and that any survivors would likely be incapacitated anyway.

In the event, the ship seems to be crewed by idiots. Literally. They don't seem to be able to speak, or even to figure out how to unwrap food packages, or disconnect their restraints. I disagree with the idea that with no dangers to compete against, no creature has a need to develop intelligence. Much of intelligence is things like foraging strategies, anyway. Threats of violence are much less prevalent than threats of food shortages in any known environment. But I also disagree with the policy of not providing creature comforts to the animal hosts. It's just not plausible that they wouldn't care about comfort and beauty. An aesthetic sense is almost certainly a survival characteristic in ALL creatures. If this were not so, why would it be necessary to provide enrichment programs to captive animals? Anybody who has seen animals pacing in their cages (a sure sign of psychosis) would understand that sapience is NOT a prerequisite for a delight in the beautiful and a hatred for the ugly. Probably one of the best things the Federation can supply the Rhiim with is an understanding of the importance of providing an enriching environment for their host creatures. If the FGHJ hosts were provided with a better environment, anger might stop being their primary emotion.

I don't remember if I've mentioned it before, but I don't believe in the Gogleskan antediluvian 'monsters'. I don't believe such a large creature COULD be as mindlessly ravenous as is proposed (it'd starve to death, for one thing, if it used more energy getting food than it got from food, even if it was in no danger from its prey), or that the FOKT precursors couldn't come up with ways to detect, escape from, hide from, or discourage the predator. For one thing, the proposed creature wasn't able to come out of water, and the Gogleskan people could--so why not live close to land, with an easily accessible escape route nearby?

I also object to the argument that on Sommaradva large insects often have toxic stings. This isn't so on Earth. Most insects on Earth are quite a bit smaller than Prilicla (though this wasn't always so). But very few of them have stings potent enough to be fatal to megafauna--and Sommaradvans are quite large indeed: one of them would probably make three Nidians, for example. The really toxic bites come from arachnids, which

are still arthropods, but not insects. And not many of them, either. The only arachnids in the US capable of injecting fatal amounts of venom to humans are black widow and brown recluse spiders, representing only 2 species out of more than 4000.

And in general, large creatures are more serene than small ones. My father used to say that a small dog will bite you as soon as it sees you, whereas you really have to provoke a big dog to get it to attack you.

Note, by the way, that there's a subtle correction in this book of an earlier mistake. The symbiont which some Tralthans use to increase their surgical dexterity are described in earlier books as OTSB. But as the system was later developed, this would make them chlorine breathers. So in this book they are tacitly reclassified as DTSB.

There's also the question of why it should be considered particularly perverse that a person who has essentially become a default Diagnostician should be sexually attracted to a same-sex member of another species. Granted, as the situation is set up, this would mostly not happen, since tape donors and their families are not supposed to meet tape recipients. But while I can see why Cha Thrat should resist romantic and sexual feelings for Murchison on grounds that they couldn't possibly be reciprocated, I CAN'T see why they should be extra disturbing because the individual is not only of another species, but of the same sex. I do recognize that White's feelings on this matter had evolved somewhat: in Countercharm, Mannen argues without reflection that such an attraction would be wrong. Here it's a little less doctrinaire: but it's still disturbing to Cha Thrat personally. A little progress, anyway.

By the end of the book, it's pretty obvious to most readers what Cha Thrat's permanent assignment will be. But it's not as obvious to the participants, including Cha Thrat herself. O'Mara has to argue pretty fiercely to get the obvious solution accepted. And Cha Thrat has to face the consequences of being a very rank-conscious individual who nevertheless often feels morally compelled to be 'insubordinate'. To see how the situation works out, it's necessary to read the last books. Next is The Genocidal Healer.

On rereading this; I realize that I meant to develop Hredlichli's character a little more. Hredlichli is; at the time of this book; the Ilensan charge nurse in the AUGL ward. It appears again later in the book; after Cha Thrat is translated (whoops--I meant transferred--same root; different part of the conjugation) to Maintenance. I'm pretty sure it's one of the Ilensans in The Galactic Gourmet as well. The question of why so many Ilensans end up as charge nurses is often raised; and rarely successfully addressed.

Emperador Spock says

The novel is a welcome change of perspective in the series. I think the author caught the exact moment when Conway as the main character had exhausted his potential, and moving the focus to the clumsy female non-Earth human is a breath of fresher air.

I quite liked the description of Sector General from the viewpoint of someone alien to it, and not as already well-established as Conway has always been, and of someone who does things beyond doctoring — the chapters on Cha-Thrat's work in Maintenance are delightful, revealing how all the snooty doctors are actually enabled to do their work in the station. Too bad this part is a bit short, and quickly enough it's all back to medicine.

However, Cha-Thrat's character does feel forced at times, she screws up a little too often: I approve that the

author used this to show different sides of space medicine and the station, but it doesn't completely mask the impression of fakeness (oh, and in between the cock-ups, she always conveniently manages to have read everything there is to read about that thing that this sudden deadly crisis is about).

Joy says

Cha Thrat was an unpopular healer on a planet newly discovered by the Federation, but she healed one of the Earth-human officers, so her people offered her as their ambassador, to train at the multi-species space hospital. Cha Thrat has had no training in the acceptance of foreign cultures, much less off-planet cultures, and even among her own people she has not been adaptable.

The title, CODE BLUE - EMERGENCY, is an example of the ways marketing people sometimes seem to try to put me off a book. So is the blurb, which shows Cha Thrat to be an accident-prone nurse. In actuality, she is such a talented medic that she can't be made to fit any mould. Additionally, CODE BLUE continues the stories of Khone the Gogleskan and of the Protectors. So in spite of the marketing department, this book is one of my best reading experiences of this year.

My favorite science fiction new read of 2011

John says

1989 grade A

series book SG7

Fishface says

Wonderful story about a misfit surgeon coming to train in a vast general hospital serving species from all over the known universe.

Roy Kenagy says

The Sector General novels are a comfortable example of optimistic science fiction, though dated in their treatment of human gender relations. Rather like the early episodes of DS9, they portray a liberal milieu in which multiple species coexist in relative harmony, with plots centering around how differences among the species may be successfully resolved. In the case of Sector General, a huge multi-species hospital complex on the edge of the galaxy, the plots turn on brute physical or emotional differences that are typically resolved through clever technological advances. Not terribly realistic, but enjoyable exercises in Utopian escapism.

Pamela Su says

My favourite book from the series, but only by a small margin since I LOVE every single book.

By "Star Healer", the main character, Conway, had reached the top of his career. What to do when your main characters are at the peak of their careers and there's nothing much more you can write about them?

Write about someone else, of course! The best part for me is that this time, it's not an Earth Human.

This is the first book in the series from the POV of a non-Earth human character. I started to read this book at night and I just could not put it down until I had finished it in the wee hours of the morning.

The character of Cha Thrat is fascinating to me. Through her, we get an understanding of the type of cultural misunderstandings that can occur. Things that we take for granted are so different in the eyes of someone from a different culture.

In so many ways, this story mirrors the kind of turmoil that occurs in our world today. In this book, it's presented in a humorous, witty and touching way.

A truly enjoyable read.

Rob says

This seventh book in the sector general series added a lot to the world by developing some of the behind the scenes happenings and focusing on a completely different side of the hospital (by or through multiple accidents). I didn't like this book as it started by by the end it was one of my favorites in the series.
