



Ship of Fools

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Home to generations of humans, the starship Argonos has wandered aimlessly throughout the galaxy for hundreds of years, desperately searching for other signs of life. Now an unidentified transmission lures them toward a nearby planet-and into the dark heart of an alien mystery.

Ship of Fools Details

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From Reader Review Ship of Fools for online ebook

David says

This is the book that the movie *Prometheus* should have been: tense, scary, intelligent, with a building sense of dread that starts working its way up your spine the first time things start going awry, and gets worse and worse after each time the characters reach another level of We Are So F***ed.

The *Argonos* is a generation ship, run by an Executive Council with nominal authority over the Captain. The first part of the book is largely political machinations: we learn that the *Argonos* has lost its original mission, or any connection with human civilization elsewhere in the galaxy. They occasionally find human-inhabited colonies, but infrequently and there is no substantial trade or diplomacy. Instead, they've become an insular, closed community, several thousand people divided into "downsiders," who are virtually serfs, and the ship's officers and crew, who spend most of their time playing petty political games.

The main character and first-person narrator is Bartolomeo, an orphan born with stunted limbs and a misshapen spine, which he compensates for with an exoskeleton and prosthetic limbs. Nikos, a childhood friend of Bartolomeo, is now the Captain of the *Argonos*. Bartolomeo's gratitude toward the man who befriended him when no one else would and whose friendship now gives him a great deal of privilege he otherwise wouldn't have, is sorely tested when a group of downsiders try to enlist his help in a covert insurrection.

The Captain's chief rival is Bishop Soldano, the leader of the ship's Church (never explicitly named, but clearly a futuristic Catholic sect). Although Soldano is an antagonist, the Church is not the villain here: one of the secondary characters who becomes Bartolomeo's close friend (and the object of his unrequited love) is Father Veronica, who brings a somewhat philosophical spin to the book, though really her conversations with Bartolomeo are pretty rote discussions of free will, the Problem of Evil, and so on.

All this background serves to set up the interpersonal and societal conflicts after the *Argonos* reaches a world called Antioch, and finds the remains of a human colony. The colonists were slaughtered, in a horrific, nightmarish way. But when the *Argonos* leaves the planet, they pick up a signal from the erstwhile colony beamed to another point in deep space.

Well, how can they not investigate? Of course it turns out that they really, really shouldn't have.

They find an alien ship — the first encounter with aliens ever recorded — seemingly empty and abandoned. The scenes where Bartolomeo and his boarding crew explore the ship are all the scarier because there *aren't* any monsters.

Yet.

The ship is creepy and scary and even the most innocuous discoveries are just *wrong* in all kinds of ways, and you know the whole time (as Bartolomeo does too on some level) that this is Not Going To End Well.

This is a book to which I find comparisons to movies come more readily than comparisons to other books, and that's not a bad thing. Think *Alien*, *Event Horizon*, or *Lifeforce*. (Okay, maybe not *Lifeforce* — that film was kind of crap.) But you will also find this kind of grimdark pessimistic sci-fi in another little-read favorite of mine, *A Grey Moon Over China*.

Ship of Fools is space opera + cinematic horror, crossing Big Dumb Object SF with a haunted house. If any of these concepts sound intriguing to you, then you should read it.

Allie says

Such an excellent sci-fi read. I loved it. As soon as I finished reading it -- no joke -- I went right back to the first page and started reading it again.

I am almost always thankful for short chapters, but I was especially thankful for them in this book because there was a section that was **so intense** I needed those breaks to let my heart get back to a normal rhythm. Full on!

This book had the same atmosphere as the movie Event Horizon. And Ghost Ship. I loved it. I've also watched my husband play two Xbox games that reminded me of this book: Inside and Limbo. It also reminded me of Diamond Dogs, Turquoise Days. Just thought I'd throw that info out there for you all. I'd whole-heartedly recommend it to sci-fi fans.

●A big thank you to Jacob at Red Star Reviews for recommending this to me●

Karin says

I didn't initially feel like this was going to be a five star book. It was pitched to me as a religious generation ship (which it is) and a big dumb object (which there is) and it was interesting, but seemed to fall pretty squarely in the Venn diagram of those tropes. The writing lacked the gravitas that I normally find in books that I rate 5 stars. But I loved what the book had to say about religion, societal stagnation, and helplessness. The writing helped all of those things, on the surface by not getting in the way by being overly stylistic, but deeper, but letting things speak for themselves, by showing without always drawing conclusions for the reader. I've read plenty of big dumb object and generation ship books and this one doesn't transcend or turn the genre on its head, but it is a very very good book.

Colin says

Titled "Unto Leviathan" in England from whence it came, this story really captured my imagination. As I am a sucker for atmosphere, the generational starship on which most of the story takes place is filled with it. The dynastic aspect of the leadership, the striation of the crew by social class, the religious influence on the masses; all of it subject to the view of the protagonist. He is perhaps the sole well rounded person in the story, and though he is intelligent, he is not the only smart character. Indeed, the others are smart enough to be dangerous and this fills the story with intrigue from the first page.

They don't have anyplace to go, they are generations removed from their original mission. Their origins are clouded in mystery as is the fate/condition of the rest of humanity. But they encounter an alien site during planetfall, and later, a ship where nothing makes sense.

While the climax is indeed set to race your pulse, what it lacks is a definitive BANG! Still, it satisfies because the best explosions are sometimes the ones that happen when we're running away and not looking back to see them.

Chris Berko says

I liked reading this book and thought the pacing was great and the story was pretty cool but upon finishing I was left unsatisfied and felt sort of let down. Nothing too memorable on any front from this, and the story for me at least slowed down towards the end. Overall I'm left with the impression that there was a lot of buildup but not a lot of payoff.

Santiago L. Moreno says

Ciencia ficción a la vieja usanza, de la que no necesita explicar cada gadget o innovación tecnológica que sugiere, lo cual es de agradecer cuando lo que buscas es un libro que te saque del estancamiento. Atrapa de principio a fin, pero no deja secuelas más allá de un par de magníficas imágenes, de esas que solo la cf puede crear. Una historia que suma subgéneros y temáticas. Cf terrorífica de tintes religiosos con una nave generacional y un misterioso artefacto extraterrestre en el centro de la trama. A ratos Event Horizon, a ratos Esfera, a ratos El laberinto de la Luna, aunque no acaba de decantarse por ninguna de esas referencias. La naturaleza de la amenaza no queda nada clara, como mandan los cánones. Personajes poco complejos pero bien definidos y alguna decisión argumental desacertada, como el intento de asesinato en la catedral, de un modo totalmente innecesario. Un libro muy entretenido y recomendable como remedio antibloqueo.

Bandit says

Recently I read a scifi book that made me rethink my normal avoidance of the genre. With that in mind, I tried Ship of Fools and it didn't disappoint. The things that interest me in books are primarily the inner worlds of characters, psychology and so on and Ship of Fools certainly satisfies in that respect, the scifi aspect is merely the framing within which the story unfolds. In fact, except for the very end, which got somewhat genre technical, the story wasn't even strongly genre specific. If a genre had to be ascribed to it, it would be something along scifi horror, resonantly on the darker side. A ship traveling through space for generations, destination and goals forgotten, a ship that has long become its own almost entirely self sufficient micro universe down to the social castes, encounters a devastated planet and subsequently a seemingly empty (terrifyingly so) eerie alien spacecraft. That's the basic plot, but of course like in any good story there are many subplots and themes, meditations on freedom, beliefs, love, free will and choices. The reader experiences this world through the eyes of a something of an outsider, a topside (elite) denizen, who isn't particularly liked or popular, an intelligent, somewhat aloof loner. And yet he makes for a very compelling narrator and actually serves as a moral compass (and a propeller for that matter) for the story throughout all its twists and turns. Very enjoyable read. Recommended.

mark monday says

spoilers ahead

last week my mom and i had a conversation about God that devolved into an unpleasant argument, with mom saying some things that i found to be ludicrous beyond belief and with me responding with comments that were condescending and offensive. last week i read a book called *Ship of Fools*; it is a dark and grim science fiction narrative about a colony ship trying to find a new home, written in a polished and straightforward style, and it has one major concern: the question of evil in a universe created by God. my mom used to be an "existentialist" who eschewed organized religion and it has only been in the past few years that she's found Jesus; her newly found faith has helped her enormously through some tough times. the crew and the passengers on the colony ship *Argonos* are at different places in their faith, believers & non-believers & those who don't give a crap about such things, all put together in one place, all trying to find something to help them make sense of their lives, to cope.

when mom and i talk about God it will often lead to talking about why God allows evil to exist, why children have to suffer, what "Evil" actually is... all that fairly typical stuff, conversations that end with an uncomfortable and probably typical dearth of answers and lack of resolution. a survey team from the *Argonos* explores a new planet they name "Antioch" and there they discover an old colony and the bodies of the colonists - terribly tortured and murdered men, women, and children hung up on hooks; full of horror and confusion and despair, the surveyors flee back to the *Argonos*. in our conversation last week, mom wanted to talk about Satan, about a revelation she had had about Evil and its origin - she comes from a perspective that sees Evil as a tangible thing, a purely evil angel that falls from the sky or a purely evil human that walks upon the earth; i see evil as something more intangible, as a choice that can be made or as a situation that is allowed to continue or to even exist in the first place. after their horrific experience on Antioch, the *Argonos* comes across an unsettling abandoned alien ship; strange things happen during and after the exploration of this ship - a contagious feeling of free-floating anomie and depression, even more widespread feelings of dread and loss of faith, attempted murder, suicide, death... are all these things the result of human failing - or something more tangible, some dire threat from within the ship, some unearthly influence?

mom follows this televangelist named Joyce Meyer who she connects with due to a shared history of childhood trauma and a shared desire to move past that trauma in order to become empowered, enlightened women who can be defined by their strength; i see Meyer as a study in typical hypocritical excess, using the name and word of God to line her own pockets - although i will acknowledge that there is some truth and some beauty in some of the things she says, even in some of her actions. on the *Argonos* there is a bishop, a corrupt man and man who secretly has no faith, and yet this character - the novel's "villain", i suppose - is just as often right as he is wrong - in the end he assesses evil as a tangible thing and urges the ship to flee that evil; the other characters, including our hero, have deep doubts about such a thing as "tangible evil" - they see no logic or science in it, and so they rationalize actions that lead them closer to that evil and closer to their own doom.

a few days later when i called my mom back to apologize for my harsh words and my sarcastic ridicule, i was inspired to read her a part of *Ship of Fools*, one that was all about God and "Free Will" and why bad things are allowed to happen; in that passage, a sympathetic clergywoman outlines a key part of her faith: the idea that bad things happen and evil exists simply because God has endowed humanity with Free Will, to choose as they see fit and to react in their own ways to the awful things that the world puts before them - and so to stop these bad things from happening or to somehow make people choose to do good would be to take away that gift of independence and of self-determination... my mom listened to all of this and was satisfied

with what she heard, and called the author a "soldier of God". at the end of Ship of Fools, the protagonist and most of the crew and passengers of the Argonos flee their ship to establish a new home on Antioch; our hero remains a resolute atheist, denying the existence of God and of any afterlife, yet somehow finding the idea of something intangible and powerful - a higher power? - to be present in the memory of his love (the clergywoman), in the ability to share and cooperate with others in a new colony that will be built, in the basic concept of hope in what the future may hold, for him as an individual, but more importantly, for him as a part of a larger whole, a community... i would say that this character is my own version of a soldier of God.

Mars Rising says

4 stars ? - mild spoilers below

Dark, religious, explorative, big object in space sci-fi.

Excellent characters with no good guys and everyone mentioned makes mistakes - thus the story explores the issue of right/wrong in a universe that allows pure evil to penetrate everything.

Without mentioning spoilers, this book contains a spectacular moment of fear and terror.

A character reveals something the character shouldn't know. At first I thought it was the author being lazy because I caught it.

Then when I realized it was intentional, I crapped my pants.... As did other characters, and the chaos and terror continued.

Great book. Don't expect answers to all the questions, just enjoy the ride.

Read it twice and the second reading was as breathless as the first as I tried to unravel the motivations (was there any?) of the evil that pursues the humans.

Caleb Combs says

Unbelievable. Absolutely one of my favorite works of all time. This novel took every one of my silly institutionalized expectations developed over the years of literary criticism and research and simply undermined them into unnecessary formulations of prose. Russo, killed the game right here if you ask me.

Although, this may not be one of the most literary pieces; I still find that analysis could take place on several channels. There is plenty to observe, learn and discuss in this book. The economics of the ship, the powers of the church, the mission of the Argonos, the agency of the characters, etc.

After reading the final few chapters today I am hoping there is a sequel to this book. I haven't looked it up yet because I'm just too excited about getting on here and expressing my satisfaction. So, if you're thinking about picking a copy of this. Do.

Veeral says

Ship of Fools reminds me of the prevalent hubris in current world politics. "You are either with us, or against us". There is no middle ground. You cannot debate about political ideology without alienating one or the other camp. You are either on the extreme left or extreme right. And good luck to you if you try to convince the group who you are debating against to believe otherwise. That's why I have stopped discussing politics on the internet. And to be honest, everybody wants to toot their own horn, nobody is here to enlighten themselves. They are already here to tell us their preconceived views and ideas. We are drifting in the endless universe, believing that we know the right direction in which we should take our world, if only the idiots on the other side would leave us in peace and let us do our work.

'Argonos' is one such generation ship in Ship of Fools, whose objective was lost generations ago. The ship is divided in mainly two factions. One religious, the other not. The story follows a character named Bartolomeo, our protagonist and first person narrator. Richard Paul Russo sacrifices all the usual tropes of space opera to develop the characters. As the story progresses, the line between 'good' and 'bad' starts to fade, and in the end it is left up to the readers to decide what they would have done in a similar situation.

I generally avoid talking about the exact plot of the books that I read, because I have found that sometimes they give away way too much. And while the plot of the book is secondary here (amazing really, I never thought that I would say something like this for a space opera/ science fiction), I still believe you would enjoy this book much more if you dived right into its pages (not literally, but it would be mind-boggling if you could accomplish that).

Jason says

5 Stars

Ship of Fools by Richard Paul Russo is a surprise of hit to me. This is the first time that I have read this author, but surely not the last. Russo has created a wonderful piece of survival science fiction that has a bit of a horror feel as well. This is not hard science, and it is easily accessible to those that normally veer from the genre.

Russo drops us right into the middle of the story. I am not going to summarize much as it would spoil this adventure. The writing, the plot, and the strong cast of characters make this a fast paced easy read. Bartolomeo is an exceptional main protagonist and I found his story and his point of view to be the highlight of this great read. Russo ramps up the dread and doom with a slow hand and by the end result of this book all seems lost. I loved the way the story, the characters, and the setting all followed in the build up of the "we are all totally f@&\$ed" scenario. It was brilliant.

This book would make a spectacular movie. I loved this book and so will you.

Fred says

A promising start, interesting characters, and some ambitious questions. Unfortunately, it all falls apart in an

anticlimactic ending.

Imagine this conversation and -- SPOILER WARNING -- you'll have the book in a nutshell:

"That ship is evil."

"There's no such thing as evil."

"That ship is evil."

"Evil may exist, but that ship isn't it."

"That ship is evil."

"Oh my god! That ship is evil!"

Jack Tripper says

I see a lot of mixed reviews here, but to me, *Ship of Fools* was an extremely eerie and intense hybrid of horror and space opera*. Though considering *Alien* is probably my all-time favorite horror film, and a top two or three science-fiction film (*Blade Runner* will always be tops in my book), I may be slightly biased, as this does have a pretty similar feel, in that a seemingly-abandoned alien spaceship is discovered by the crew of a human-occupied ship. The horrors here are much more psychological than in-your-face, however.

It's told in the first person by Bartolomeo, resident of the upper levels of the generation starship Argonos, which is where the more privileged citizens of the ship reside (government officials, ship crew, etc.), while the bottom levels are reserved for the lower classes. It's pretty much a city in space. The ship has been traveling through the galaxy for so long in search of a habitable planet that no one really knows the ship's origin. Some, like the ship's bishop, believe it has always existed.

The early sections of the novel deal a lot with ship politics, and it's actually pretty interesting due to all the shady plots of insurrection going on behind the captain's back. But things get *really* interesting once the ship comes across the gigantic derelict craft, which gives off such an ominous, evil vibe that many feel they should just leave it behind, even though it's a monumental discovery (no signs of alien life have ever been discovered before as far as they know). But Bartolomeo is eventually chosen to lead a hand-picked crew to explore the awesome and awe-ful ship. Terror ensues.

I've left a LOT out of my description, due to the fact that I'd rather not give away too much of what makes this novel so compelling. Suffice to say, it's creepy as hell, and the first-person narration by Bartolomeo is very engaging, so much so that I read all 370 pages in two sittings. And I'm not really a fast reader. There's an ever-present sense of *wrongness* throughout the latter sections, which I loved, and the alien ship is truly just that. Alien. And unknowable.

I'm not sure what others were expecting, but I was expecting a good space-based horror novel, and instead I got a great one, with memorable characters and a fast-paced narrative that's constantly moving forward. I'll certainly be reading more Russo sooner rather than later. But for now I'm off to search for more space horror (and I wish there was more out there).

4.5 Stars.

*Though not really space opera in the sense of interplanetary adventure, but more "new space opera," a sub-genre which emphasizes character development more so than the old-school definition, and is darker and

more "literary." It's usually more science-based as well. At least that's how I understand it.

Maciek says

Ship of Fools is atmospheric science fiction with a great premise, which unfortunately runs short out of realizing its full potential. It combines motifs traditionally associated with classic science fiction - space exploration and first contact - and establishes a creepy and suspenseful mood throughout, slowly building its central theme: who are *they*, and who are *we*?

The eponymous ship is the *Argonos*, a massive vessel traversing through the deep space for decades, its original mission long forgotten. No one remembers origins of the ship, and life beyond it; generations of crew and other inhabitants wonder about its - and theirs - purpose. The ship is full of interesting characters, with friendships being formed and rivalries being fought. Various factions struggle for power over the *Argonos*, and Russo does a good job of involving the reader with life on the ship by employing a first person narrator - Bartolomeo Aguilera, a man born with physical disabilities which forced him to dependency on prosthetic limbs and an exoskeleton.

Claustrophobic, insular existence on the *Argonos* would itself provide enough material for an entertaining novel, but there's more to the book than that. On its voyage the ship receives a transmission from a mysterious planet: the expedition sent find remains of a settlement, or colony - with all colonists slaughtered in a bloody and gruesome way, their bloody remains implying a possible ritual sacrifice. Soon after the crew of the *Argonos* receives another signal, this time coming from ship - an enormous, seemingly abandoned vessel. The new ship. Despite concerns about the new encounter - some crew members sense a mysterious evil and darkness emanating from the ship - another expedition is sent to investigate and explore it.

Despite there being plenty of dark imagery in the book, it's not survival horror as presented in the game *Dead Space*, which features a lone protagonist trying to find his way out of a spaceship infested with all sorts of scary creatures and occurrences. The mood of the book is much slower and the mood more meditative; as the alien ship is explored, the protagonists focuses more on his inner thoughts and doubts, asking the big questions: is there a God? If there is, how can evil exist in the world? This is commonly known as the Problem of Evil, debated by philosophers and theologians for centuries. However no matter how interesting it is, I felt that it is never really resolved - the book ends suddenly and unexpectedly, and left me wanting. I could definitely read more about these characters and their exploration of the mysterious colony and the brooding spaceship, but unfortunately this is a case when the slow and atmospheric buildup was not accompanied by an equally atmospheric and shattering payoff.
