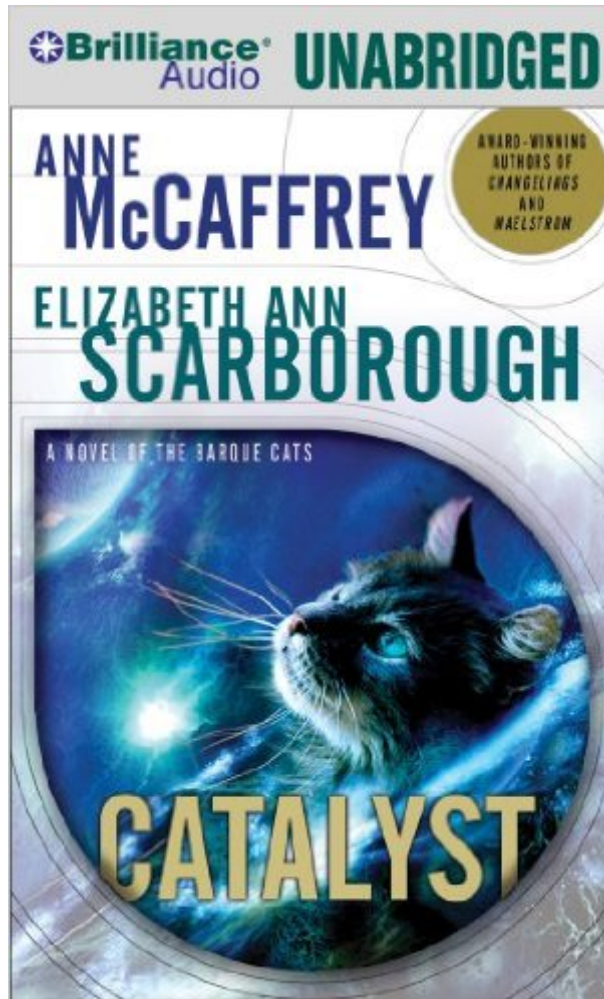


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Catalyst: A Tale Of The Barque Cats (Barque Cats Series)



Synopsis

Since the early days of interstellar travel, Barque Cats have been highly prized crew members, responsible for keeping spacecraft free of vermin, for alerting human crews to potential environmental hazards, and for acting as morale officers. Even among Barque Cats, Chessie is something special. Her pedigree, skills, and intelligence, as well as the close rapport she has with her human, Janina, make her the most valuable crew member aboard the Molly Daise. And the litter of kittens in her belly only adds to her value. Then Chessie is kidnapped—er, catnapped—from Dr. Jared Vlast's vet clinic at Hood Station. And Chessie's newborn kittens turn out to be even more extraordinary than their mother. For while Chessie's connection to Janina is close and intuitive, the bond that the kitten Chester forms with the kidnapper's son, Jubal, is downright telepathic. And when Chester is sent into space to learn his trade, neither he nor Jubal will rest until they're reunited. But the announcement of a widespread epidemic affecting livestock on numerous planets throws the future into doubt. Suddenly the galactic government announces a plan to impound and possibly destroy all exposed animals. Not even the Barque Cats will be spared. With the clock racing against them, Janina, Jubal, Dr. Vlast, and a handful of very special kittens will join to save the Barque Cats, other animals, and quite possibly the universe as they know it from total destruction.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I really enjoyed this book. It has strong, original characters in the cats. As a cat person myself, I found the cats' thoughts very believable. I think that my own cats have thought some of the same unflattering things about this particular human plenty of times, and they are definitely manipulators when it comes to food. The only thing that disappointed me about this book was that I thought it was going to be set in the same "universe" as the T&T novels by McCaffrey, which also has Barque Cats that are unusually intelligent as ships' cats, and which also have COB on their ships so that if there's trouble the cat will be rescued, too. I didn't expect a T&T novel per se, but I did expect mentions. Instead, the human galactic history in this book is completely different from the one in the T&T novels, with the sole exception of the Barque Cats! Still, it was good. I just wish that they had made it more obvious that the universe was going to be completely different. I guess I'll just think of it as an alternate universe and go from there.

The Barque Cats are extremely valuable because they keep vermin off space ships and are adept at finding oxygen leaks or other hazardous gases as well as just keeping people on board the vessel safe. Thomas's Duchess, known as Chessie and her human companion Janina, whose title on the ship is Cat Person, dock on Head Station, where a pregnant Chessie goes for a check-up. Janina and Dr. Jared Vlest fly down to the planet Sherwood to look at the animals that need care. A con artist Carlton Pontius aka Ponty steals Chessie and brings her to his farm on Sherwood as she is worth a fortune especially with a coming litter of Barque kittens. He gives Chessie to his son Jubal who takes care of her and her litter. Chessie loves all of her offspring, but the kitten Chester bonds with Jubal. Chessie needs to reunite with her Cat Person Janina. Unfortunately, they cannot, as a "supposed" plague has arrived leading to the impounding of all animals and those exposed (even the Barque cats). They will be executed. Janina and her allies try to free their companions, but an alien feline Pshaw-Ra with psionic power wants to take the cats to his planet so they can begin the universal domination of the known universe. This is the first tale of a duology that contains the usual strong outer space world building, a trademark of the authors who make a whole galaxy seem real. The Sparkles plague is caused by a harmless beetle but the GG scientists refused to accept a simple explanation. The point of view is told mostly by various feline characters, but it comes across as believable and as important not simplistic cute as the cats understand their troubles. The humans are for the most part empathetic especially Janina and cranky Ponty who has his own pet cat. Although the audience will need to wait for the second entry to see whether Chessie and Chester have more than one life each, fans will enjoy the opening Barque Cat caper. Harriet Klausner

As a longtime fan of Anne McCaffrey I will frequently buy her books based on her name alone; that happened to be the case here. I am, as well, one of the staff members of a beloved cat that honors us by living at our house. I mention that so you may better understand my following comments. This is a book in which cats are the stars; humans serve in various supporting roles as faithful sidekicks, flunkies, and dangerous villains. Where our cat is concerned, I like to think of myself as a faithful sidekick but fear I'm no more than a flunky except at mealtimes when I seem to take on a more important role. The cats also have most of the lines and are the focus of most of the action; I don't really have a problem with that as the writers obviously love cats and have written that love into this book. Other reviewers have outlined the plot so I won't go there again except to say this is more of a cat science fantasy than science fiction. If you are comfortable with cats talking and doing wondrous things you will probably enjoy this book. I'll agree that it got off to a rather slow start as cats and humans were introduced to the reader but then picked up speed as one unprincipled human decides to steal one of the cat stars; things start getting complicated then. The next in the series, "Catacombs," will be released December 7, 2010 and is now available for pre-order on ; as soon as I finish this review I'll be pre-ordering that one so that should tell you something about what I thought of the book.

What a shame - I've always been interested in the idea of Barque cats, and particularly in the young Afra Lyon's link to them. This book wasn't bad, but it certainly didn't live up to my expectations. The book ends in such a way that it's clearly a set-up for a sequel, but I didn't feel there was enough plot in this for one book - let alone a series - maybe the authors were just being careful so they don't play all their cards too early. The sections which mentioned cat behaviour were well thought through, and I can see that a 'cat person' would find these interesting and insightful, but I didn't feel they were enough to get the book over the line. Don't get me wrong, most of what McCaffrey and Scarborough have written (together and separately) is brilliant, and I love their stuff, I just didn't love this.

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