

JAMES GUNN

is the Hugo Award–winning science fiction author of many novels, including *The Joy Makers*, *The Immortals*, and *The Listeners*, and the coauthor, with Jack Williamson, of the classic epic SF novel *Star Bridge*. Founder of the Center for the Study of Science Fiction and a professor emeritus at the University of Kansas, he lives in Lawrence, Kansas.

Jacket art by Stephan Martiniere

A Tor® Hardcover

Tom Doherty Associates, LLC
175 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10010

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Printed in the USA

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ISBN 978-0-7653-3501-2



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JAMES GUNN TRANSCENDENTAL



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AFTER LONG WARS between Earth and the many other civilizations throughout the galaxy, a hard-won peace prevails, but the psychic scars of warfare remain. A new religious movement has emerged, and a starship is carrying beings of many species from diverse worlds on a pilgrimage to the galactic edge. The passengers are journeying toward the far reaches of space—toward what they term “transcendence.”

On this ship of pilgrims, Riley, a bitter, cynical war vet, is on a different sort of quest. Mysterious players in the interstellar power game have sent him on this voyage to investigate the passengers, and in particular, to identify a mysterious prophet whose seemingly benign message could mask a threat to the tenuous peace. While their ship speeds ever deeper toward the unknown, one passenger after another falls prey to foul play, making it clear that some of the ship's passengers are not the spiritual seekers they claim to be.

Amidst the violence and betrayal, a number of those on the starship, like the pilgrims in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, share their unique stories. As tensions rise, Riley realizes that the ship is becoming less like a pilgrimage and more like a ship of fools. Isolated by the demands of his mission and surrounded by aliens who are either hostile or unfathomable, he considers trusting Asha, the only other human passenger. But Asha has her own secrets, and they could be the key to Riley's personal salvation. But if he's wrong about her, it could mean the end of his mission... and the pilgrims' transcendental quest.