



Amanecer de hierro

Charles Stross

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Una estrella G2 no explota sin más, así que los supervivientes del planeta Moscú, aniquilado en un suceso así, han lanzado un contraataque contra el responsable más probable: el sistema vecino de Nueva Dresde. Pero Nueva Dresde no es la responsable, y mientras los misiles se aproximan a su objetivo, a Rachel Mansour, representante de los intereses de la Vieja Tierra, se le encomienda la misión de averiguar quién ha sido. Frente a ella se encuentra un enemigo desconocido, y en juego está no solo el destino de Nueva Dresde, sino también el orden del universo entero. Y la única persona que conoce la identidad de ese enemigo es una descreída adolescente que no tiene ni la menor idea de lo que está pasando.... Tras el éxito de Cielo de singularidad, Charles Stross, uno de los mejores escritores del género, regresa con otra trepidante novela. Sus obras muestran un despliegue de conocimientos y de intriga tan perfectamente entrelazados que atrapan y mantienen al lector en vilo hasta el final.

Amanecer de hierro Details

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From Reader Review *Amanecer de hierro* for online ebook

Stephen says

6.0 stars. One of my ALL time favorite novels (along with the first book in the series, Singularity Sky). These two books together are as good as it gets when it comes to grand, epic space opera. The ideas discussed are mind-blowing and the author's skill in discussing them in the context of the story is fantastic. The story never slowed down from beginning to end. I loved the introduction of the genetically enhanced "ReMastered" as an enemy out to defeat the seemingly all powerful advanced AI "Eschaton." HIGHEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATION.

Nominee: Hugo Award for Best Science Fiction Novel (2005)

Nominee: Locus Award (runner-up) for Best SF Novel (2005)

fromcouchtomoon says

Another spy space romp, starring a goth girl who joins up with Rachel and Martin to take on the Borg.

Blagoy Nikolov says

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Kate says

I used to have a religious no-quitting policy when it came to finishing books. Even if the thing was terrible, I would slog through it till the last page, worried I was doing the author a disservice by not giving it a fair shake. Now, however, I'm a busy adult with a full-time job and a to-read list the length of my arm. I've gotten a lot more lax about finishing books I don't particularly care for.

Iron Sunrise is not a terrible book. From what I read, it's okay. The first section is actually very engaging, despite some confusing continuity errors relating to times and dates and the protagonist's age. However...

The underlying premise of this universe is that in the 21st(?) century, a human-built AI got so smart it figured out how to open wormholes in space. *For reasons known only to itself*, it transported most of Earth's population to Earthlike planets elsewhere in space, which it had thoughtfully terraformed for them beforehand. It also wormholed them back in time, so that they'd age and die at the same rate as their counterparts back on Earth. And then it left them a message telling them not to use time travel for their own nefarious purposes, Or Else.

I didn't realize when I picked this up that it was the second book in the series, and I may well have missed some fascinating explanations of all this in not reading *Singularity Sky*. I can't help noticing, however, that the explanation for how humanity got all its fantastic new technology is basically "A wizard did it." An AI did it. Whatever. I mean, sure, it explains how humans could come up with faster-than-light transport within a couple of centuries, but... deus-ex-machina much? Literally, even. You might as well use actual magic-- it's just as believable, to me.

I also feel like Stross did a poor job of imagining a culture 400 years removed from our own. There are some nods to anti-aging devices, equal rights for different sexual orientations, and of course the fantastic new technology provided by the AI Who Is Definitely Not A God, but overall the characters act and speak exactly as they would today. There are even ethnic stereotypes that are already out of date now-- the bluff Hitler-Youth German kids come to mind. The minor antagonists are all cardboard cutouts for the protagonists to knock down with a feather. I just... I can't go into more detail, because I didn't read much of the book all told, but after a very solid first chapter I was pretty disappointed by what came afterward.

I'm not a physicist, obviously, and most of the technical details in hard science-fiction books go right over my head. I read for the story and the characters, not the technology, and that's why I'm going to be putting this one down for a while.

Ben Babcock says

Reading *Iron Sunrise* has been a long time in coming, ever since I read *Singularity Sky*. I finally got around to ordering a copy and dug into it when I realized I needed a good science fiction read. As usual, Charles Stross delivers on all sorts of quixotic ideas that I love in my science fiction. I like the posthuman parts of *Iron Sunrise* even better than its predecessor, and its action scenes are definitely superior. My criticisms of it are similar to the ones I levelled at *Singularity Sky* too.

Though technically a sequel to *Singularity Sky*, *Iron Sunrise* can be read standalone. They share two main characters, so the only real spoiler is that these characters survive the first book. Otherwise, no knowledge of the original book is required to understand or enjoy this adventure. Stross explains once again the premise of this universe: a human-created AI from the future, the Eschaton, relocates 90% of Earth's population some time in the twenty-first century. Fast forward three hundred years, and Earth and these relocated worlds have recovered (but diverged) and humanity is now flourishing on any number of worlds connected by superluminal travel. However, the Eschaton rigorously polices any attempts to turn that superluminal capability into time travel—causality violations are harshly dealt with.

The title of the book refers to exactly such a violation. Someone uses a weapon to destroy the sun orbited by a human world called Moscow. The sun explodes, creating the "Iron Sunrise" that releases a deadly radiation shockwave. This precipitates any number of events that eventually become relevant to the story, from the evacuation of Wednesday from Old Newfie to the fleet of slower-than-light vessels that threaten New Dresden. But the bottom line is that a causality violation weapon happened ... and the Eschaton didn't stop it. That's bad news (for someone).

This book features a shifting and large cast of characters. Wednesday is the first main character we meet and, in my opinion, probably the coolest. She is young and inexperienced, and this shows. But I like her grit; I like that she questions whether Herman has her best interests at heart even as she uses the information and training he provides her. I like that she makes mistakes and isn't a whiz-kid who is always one step ahead of

the bad guys. Finally, I like that when Stross kills off certain people close to her, she does not just shrug and get on with her life; instead, her grief becomes a major plot point towards the end of the book.

Rachel Mansour, also featured in *Singularity Sky*, is the other most prominent protagonist. I like Rachel too, though I find her voice in this narrative flatter than Wednesday's. There is something about the combination of her practised indignation and her self-confidence that rings false to me—or at least, it feels too familiar, like Rachel is just another one of those hyper-capable science fiction heroes we see too often in these stories. That being said, I appreciate how Stross portrays her reluctance to get back into “the game”, so to speak. Rachel is a very capable person, but she also has desires beyond being a soldier or fixer for this UN body.

(I was also not down with the scene near the beginning of Rachel's appearance where she has to use sexual, seductive-type techniques to help defuse a bomb. It's dumb and sexist, and worse, it's dumb and sexist in a book that is otherwise full of smart and diverse female characters, protagonists and antagonists. And I suppose Stross is trying to play it as a commentary on the weaknesses of the patriarchy and the way smart women can exploit those, but I still don't like it.)

I could continue talking about the half-dozen other named characters who get narrative time, but I don't think I will. *Iron Sunrise* introduces almost *too many* characters, in my opinion—at least, I feel like parts of it are very extraneous indeed. In the end, I guess it kind of all comes together; I certainly like how the minor problem Rachel is facing at the very beginning turns into something linked to the larger ReMastered threat, suggesting a much richer story at work in the background. However, this 400 page book took much longer to read than I anticipated, and I blame some of that on how the number of main characters dilutes the intensity of the storytelling.

There are two complementary aspects of this book that make it good for me. First, there are the obvious science-fictional, posthuman elements. I'm labelling this book a “space opera” even though, technically, I don't think it really falls under that genre—though it could if it wanted to. It has the setting of a space opera if not the story elements. It isn't just the “big idea” stuff, like blowing up suns or time-travelling AIs. It's the small things: the communication rings that people use, the smart-fabric that allows them to change fashion so quickly, etc. Stross is really good at imagining not just the technology that will take us to other stars but the ways in which faster and more miniature computing is changing our daily lives. Despite being written over ten years ago now and the fast pace of technological development, *Iron Sunrise* doesn't yet feel outdated or obsolete, nor will it likely be in the foreseeable future.

Coupled to the technology, though, is the thriller plot. Because that's basically what this novel becomes in the third act: the good guys are all aboard a FTL liner with the bad guys, who pre-emptively hijack it, and shit goes down. It's tense and exciting; there is a lot of disguising and doubletalk and backstabbing and double-crossing! The best thing is, most of what happens could easily have been written as a thriller set in the present day. But I wouldn't have enjoyed it as much then. Stross takes the plot, dresses it in the trappings and tropes of science fiction, and makes it more interesting. I'm reminded a little bit here of *The Expanse*, which does something similar with political intrigue. Science fiction is useful as a tool for social commentary (of which *Iron Sunrise* has some, albeit in fairly non-subtle ways), but it is also a fantastic vehicle for breathing new life into old or often-used plots.

Having read a lot of Stross' work now, I can safely say this is neither among his best nor his worst efforts. I like it, and I think people who have never read one of his novels before will like it. At the same time, I'd also caution that this isn't representative of all his novels. If anything, *Iron Sunrise* reminds me how versatile Stross is. While it shares a certain fascination with economics and the wider picture of stochastic changes to complex systems, it is markedly different from his *Laundry Files* series, for example, or his near-future

Scottish crime novels. It will go on my Stross shelf, but it's probably not the first Stross I'll re-read.

Laura says

The Singularity happens, immanentizes as a sapient Eschaton, and is more or less beneficent. Deals with overpopulation more mercifully than it might have, thought with a huge disregard for people who were separated by a city from their friends and family on that fateful day. But it more or less set up communities to succeed and it still takes an interest. A little quirky in how it expresses that interest, and a little blind to the potential danger of planets of self engineered ubermenches, but coincidences seem to work in its favor. A LOT of coincidences.

Also features scary clowns.

Not Stross at the heights of his powers, but a good bus book.

Elf M. says

Iron Sunrise is a sequel of sorts to *Singularity Sky*. Rachel and Martin are back, but they don't play a part until late in the story. The introductory character is Wednesday, a goth chick who goes from seventeen to twenty through the course of the book and who suffers a lot of hardships in between.

My main emotion upon ending the book is disappointment. Charlie has two problems, and they're becoming more apparent the more often I read his work. This book sets the stage for an ongoing battle between the Eschaton, the superhuman superintelligence who keeps watch over humanity while denying humanity the right to engage in time travel, and the "unborn god of the ReMastered," a being who may or may not exist somewhere down the timeline, and who will possess the captured thought processes of everyone ever uploaded into storage by the ReMastered. He's setting the stage for sequels, which is a perfectly good thing for a writer to do.

Except, if you've read Charlie a lot, you know this plot. *Iron Sunrise* is the tale of Nazis with some kind of negotiated relationship to a Lovecraftian dark god, all of whom are opposed by plucky and lucky mostly ordinary humans who just happen to come from Charlie's favorite subcultures: bloggers, geeks and goths. *Iron Sunrise* is Charlie Stross's *The Atrocity Archive... in Space!*. Charlie's not even hiding this: his villain refers to herself as an "ubermadchen" and her boss is referred to as the overdepartmentsecretary [sic]. Wednesday breaks out of her stereotype late in the book and she becomes a well-drawn character, but really, you can just see a seventeen-year-old Christina Ricci (specifically, this one) in the role.

The other thing is that Charlie writes his stories exactly once. He writes the story, figuring out what he's doing along the way. The trouble is, his stories lack the decorative panache that a full re-write gives to a story, and you can almost hear him chuckle with dark glee as he is inspired to a plot point. Everything in the story is broadly telegraphed. His foreshadowing **looms** over you. The plot is obvious almost from the beginning. When the epilogue's crisis began, with a letter in Rachel's apartment mailbox, I knew exactly

where Charlie was going. I could have written the rest of that chapter myself. *Iron Sunrise* suffers from a lack of writerly subtlety.

It'll be a shame if someday we remember Charlie Stross as the Robert E Howard or Michael Moorcock of his decade: churned out a lot of books in a very short period of time that introduced fresh and new ideas to the Venn diagram intersections of the genres he loves, only to flame out in the end, stuck in the pretty new box he'd created.

(And then there's me, who'll probably be remembered as the low-rent John Norman of his decade.)

Iron Sunrise is a rollicking adventure set in a space-operatic universe with a well-thought-out brake holding the characters back from their second Singularity. Charlie has done a good job of thinking around what he made in the first book and realizing how much fun it would be to threaten that brake itself. It has good characters and great worldbuilding (although once in a while I caught Charlie doing the "worldbuilding while the reader is watching"^{TM*}). If you've never read Charlie Stross, this book and its predecessor, *Singularity Sky*, are fabulous introductions to the Singularity subgenre. It's only weakness is that if you *have* read Charlie Stross, you'll find yourself skipping over the familiar parts.

*"Worldbuilding while the reader is watching" TM is a trademark of D. Omaha Sternberg. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Daniel says

Charles Stross is a relatively recent find for me, but after reading his truly awesome Laundry series I made it a point to go back and explore some of his other works. *Iron Sunrise* is actually a sequel (though the author has said that there will be no more books in this universe) to *Singularity Sky*. It brings back the two main characters from that story, Rachel and her now husband, and introduces a whole new spread of characters (slowly weaving the seemingly unrelated plots together). The world of these novels is quite interesting, as it is affected by the post-Singularity intelligence Eschaton, which upon reaching consciousness immediately flung 90% of the Earth's inhabitants onto planets up to thousands of light years (and correspondingly that far back in time).

Humans being humans, we don't quite get along with each other, and the story begins with the planet of Moscow dying due to the sun exploding, and the retaliatory fleet (which can take decades to arrive) is launched at their competitor New Dresden. Of course the story isn't simply the mission to hunt down the Moscow Ambassadors who can recall the retaliation fleet, in a race against time as the Ambassadors are slowly being murdered, because as you would expect that is just the first layer of a multi-level plot that will keep you entertained through out the book.

Overall this is a great book. Enhanced if you read *Singularity Sky* but with enough exposition to allow you to jump in if you have not.

Eli Bishop says

Having only read Stross's SF/horror/satire *Laundry* books— which I think are a lot of fun, but also very

annoying whenever the humor takes the form of actual jokes—I figured maybe I would dig him better writing straight-faced space opera. Well... kind of. The two stars above are an average: half the time I liked it pretty well, and half the time I wanted to throw it across the room.

I haven't read the previous one in this series, but the background was pretty clear— too clear, because Stross explains things and then a little while later he explains them again, and again. Characters for whom this stuff is supposed to be ancient history are constantly saying or thinking the equivalent of "the Eschaton, as we know, is a time-traveling AI that etc. etc..." The same goes for the plot: just because half a dozen main characters all find out the same important plot detail at different times isn't a good reason to have them recap it in conversation every time. Worse, in the last third of the book as things get more hectic (and, possibly, Stross starts getting a little careless/bored), characters often have to be reminded of things that they themselves knew just a little while ago— not little details, but things like "the bad guys are able to turn people into zombies, and that's what just happened to your lover." The tell-don't-show approach even extends to the author's own thoughts about writing: at one point, a villain tells the protagonist that villains don't really think of themselves as villains because everyone is doing what they think is right (which isn't just heavy-handed, but also sort of wrong in that case, since up to that point Stross has depicted that character as consciously venal and driven only by self-interest).

Speaking of villains, the ones here are straight out of Space Nazi central casting, complete with German names, blond hair, hubristic monologuing, and the requisite "terrorize and execute some of your own guys just to show how ruthless you are" bit. What they were up to was treated as a huge surprise toward the end; it wasn't.

The non-villains are a mixed bag. They are all pretty familiar types, and they often can't resist making stupid jokes under pressure, but I was OK with all that except for the one who is pretty much just a retread of all the secret agents from the *Laundry* series (with a little of Iain M. Banks's Special Circumstances agents thrown in)— i.e. the one who does all the super-scary secret dirty work that most people wouldn't understand, usually with the aid of cool gadgets, and is right about everything, and gets no respect from silly bureaucrats. Except since this one is a woman (and this is overall a very straight universe), the dirty work also involves a very unpleasant sexual interlude that reminded me of the less light-hearted side of Piers Anthony.

I've made this sound totally terrible, so, what did I like? I liked the overall feel of the universe, although it's not all that distinctive if you've read any other contemporary books of this sub-genre. There is some really good prose in places. The plot doesn't necessarily hold up if you stop to think, but page by page it's pretty engaging, and makes good use of his rules for space travel and so on (I like that the heroes have to race to stop a thing that will otherwise hit a planet *in 35 years*). And as with his other stuff, the humor worked for me whenever it was situational/social, rather than people making wisecracks. There's definitely something about Stross that makes me keep resisting the book-throwing urge, and I'll probably read the rest of this series.

Evan says

What starts off as some excellent, mind-bending weirdness diffuses into an uninteresting thriller.

There were too many character threads, and too many of the characters began to talk like one another as the book progressed. Not to mention Stross's linguistic tics and frequent cliches which litter the novel's second half. The book became a political thriller thinly disguised as SF.

Which is all way too bad, because the first chapters are some of the best, most original, fun, off-beat SF I have read in a very long time. The Idi Amin Dada scene is worthy of William Gibson or Bruce Sterling. The sense of mystery and anticipation and deep, twisty weirdness that Stross creates around Rachel Mansour's departure in the early chapters had me thinking I was in for an incredible book.

Perhaps *Accelerando*, which is a short story collection, will present Stross's writing only at the level of his finely honed opening chapters.

Rachel says

I actually liked this one better than *Singularity Sky* -- maybe because it was a bit more linear, and spent more time on a smaller cast of characters, so it was easier to be sympathetic to them. The story revolves around Wednesday (also known as Victoria Strowger), a goth teen who happens to be an associate of Herman (agent of the Eschaton). She and her family are evacuated from their space station home, and on the way out, her incessant Herman-prompted snooping causes her to run across a secret that the ReMastered are willing to kill any number of people to keep. In the process of telling the story, Rachel and Martin (from *Singularity Sky*) run across her and are also drawn into the chaos.

I thought this was perhaps the least preachy of Stross' books -- many fewer rants (though still a few) and a lot of ambiguity about both villains and heroes. He does a good job of getting into the head of a goth teen, though he seems to avoid it as much as possible, which I can't really blame him for. It had a lot of striking images that have stayed with me, and some stories that bear more thought. The ending was a bit ambiguous, and would lead me to believe there's another book coming, though I haven't seen one yet. :)

Scott says

What could possibly kill a god?

How could humanity threaten a vast, distributed AI so intelligent that its scale is incomprehensible, its goals opaque, and its power practically limitless? What weaponry could injure a being that can break the laws of causality at will, simultaneously communicating with both its past and future selves?

That's one of the underling threads in *Iron Sunrise*, a rollicking SF ride that goes big on both the action and the stakes. The universe Stross set up in *Singularity Sky* is continued in *Iron Sunrise*, a place where the aforementioned super being exists, but ignores human affairs providing no-one messes around with time travel tech.

Among the many worlds humanity lives on in Stross' universe is a peaceful, moderately developed planet known as New Moscow. New Moscow is a McWorld- a fairly generic human colony created when the Eschaton (The aforementioned godlike AI) used its Thanos-like abilities to instantaneously shift most of Earth's population onto far away planets.

And then suddenly, in a wave of energy New Moscow is left an irradiated ball of rock, every one of its hundreds of millions dead. Someone, for unknown reasons, has used an illegal weapon to destroy the core of

its sun, causing a death-burst of radiation that scours space for light years around.

Wednesday, a teenage girl on a New Moscow space station a year or more from the advancing wave front, is suddenly a refugee, waiting for evacuation and a new, hardscrabble life elsewhere. When the evac begins she stumbles on a secret that will see her hunted across the galaxy by a fanatical sect of eugenics-fascists whose end goal is the destruction of the Eschaton and its replacement with a new god of human construction.

The destruction of New Moscow has drawn the attention of a small part of the Eschaton, but something is preventing the future version of the super-AI from communicating with its ancestors, suggesting a future where it either no longer exists, or it is locked in a struggle with a rival god...

No spoilers, but things get very, very interesting from there.

Charles Stross is fast becoming one of my favourite SF writers. This a pacey, breakneck story full of action and intrigue, underpinned with a strong storyline and some cool characters.

Rachel Mansour from *Singularity Sky* along with her now husband and former Eschaton agent Martin Springfield, returns, crossing paths with Wednesday and once again getting sucked into malevolent machinations that could kill billions of people.

I loved this book. It's a real page turner and full of intriguing ideas. I was completely sucked into Stross's universe and didn't want the story to end.

The only negative for me is that at around the 300 page point I realised there wasn't going to be time for Stross to resolve everything he had set in motion. As a result the book ends a little loosely, and finished with high stake threats still in play.

No problem, I thought- I'll just get the next book in the series, and find out how things end.

Except... there is no next book. Stross never wrote one, and he has publicly discussed his lack of desire to write anything further in the Eschaton series. This story will remain unfinished, which left me feeling as though Stross had led me on- teasing me with the promise of more Eschaton universe books to come.

Overall though, this is a fun read and well worth your time. I strongly recommend it, but read it knowing that the story is left partially unresolved, and we will likely never find out why The Eschaton lost contact with its future self.

Four neutrino wave-fronts out of five.

Michael Battaglia says

Okay, so maybe the second time was the charm.

Stross' first novel, "Singularity Sky" was one of those "A for effort" but a fairly solid B for overall execution, suffering from a lack of focus on which plot exactly I was supposed to be caring about and redeemed mostly by an interesting future scenario and two main characters that seemed like fun to be around. They even fell in love too, which is always nice to see.

Rereading the novel, Stross must have also realized those two aspects were the keepers and reacted accordingly, giving us a book that mostly ditches the sometimes distracting "let's make fun of every government ever by having the characters lecture us on it" while giving us a more understandable bonkers scenario and then running as far with it as he can.

The opening premise doesn't even involve our two now-married heroes Rachel and Martin, choosing instead to focus on a teenage girl who calls herself Wednesday. She and her whole family are refugees from the planet Moscow, which gets to join the ranks of worlds like Krypton by getting blown up when the sun decides to explode. Alas, no one gets cool powers or the experience of being raised by gentle, homespun farmer folk, instead living on space stations and doing their best not to be traumatized. Wednesday keeps herself busy doing whatever it is surly teenagers from the future do, and occasionally getting missions from her invisible friend Herman, a name that should have substantial meaning to people who read the first volume. Before too long she's doing what teenagers in Stephen King novels do, which is find dead bodies and get put in lethal peril, causing her to flee onto a space cruise ship, where she can enjoy endless buffets and the two hundredth anniversary tour of "Rock of Ages". Oh, and people are still trying to kill her.

Enter our happy couple. With Rachel still doing UN Black Ops and Martin doing freelance everything else, they're managing fairly well considering half of Rachel's jobs are top secret and typically result in decent body counts. Both are summoned back to action as Stross gifts us with one of those "only in SF" problems . . . when Moscow's sun went boom years before a counterattack was launched toward the world they thought was the culprit, New Dresden, essentially a whole host of nuclear bombs strapped to slower than light ships that will take years to reach them but reach them they will. As no one but Moscow survivors believe that New Dresden was crazy enough to blow up their sun, people are scrambling to not have this be a last minute problem and as it turns out they can be recalled if the Moscow ambassadors send out a signal, which they are currently debating whether to do (the more science oriented amongst you can ponder whether there's an easier way to intercept the bombs, although it is a bit of a needle in a haystack kind of thing) but being their politicians no one is in real hurry to make a decision, which would be fine except someone wants to do the very opposite of ballot stuffing and start fitting the ambassadors for grisly future murder coffins. The one common denominator turns out to be a certain cruise ship that keeps visiting the worlds in question before the bodies turn up so it's up to Rachel and Martin to prove that spying does make the heart grow fonder. Wonder they'll run into anyone we know on the ship?

It's a lot of setup but unlike the last book Stross has read a thing or two about pacing novels and manages to balance everything nicely, not only giving us the aforementioned threads but adding a couple extra while we follow a warblogger named Frank and a handful of folks from an organization called the ReMastered, which wants to replace the Eschaton with their own personal god and seems to be big fans of spilling blood in the process and turning you into the kind of meat puppets that won't make you alt-rock favorites. Something tells me this is a vacation where the cruise company is going to hand out a lot of comps.

Impressively, he manages to make a tense scenario out of the slowest bombs ever as Rachel and Martin race to keep more ambassadors from getting knocked off while doing their best to save poor Wednesday once they figure out she's involved too. His vision of the future remains as inventive as ever, ranging from the quirky (cruise ships can be done in cryosleep so they do their best to milk the rich, plus the whole concept of McWorlds made me laugh) to the dark (the ReMastered on some level are Nazis with better technology) and it's fun to see the little tidbits he throws into scenes almost an aside, communication devices and clothes generators and whatnot. It feels like a more fleshed out future and not just places he's invented to lampoon some aspect of the modern day. You can believe in how these worlds interact with each other, and the cultural tensions that result.

His characterizations are better too, or at least you care about more than two people this time. Rachel and Martin haven't lost any of their charm since the first book, an interesting flipped script where Martin is the supportive, nurturing partner that is capable of being the brains of the outfit, while his wife is both the brains and brawn of the relationship, a woman who in another scenario probably would a drinking problem (if Stross' future wouldn't solve it so easily) but who is ready to both spy and blow up a roomful of people if necessary. How they play off each other makes for one of the more satisfying aspects of the book and its nice to see a married couple where the focus isn't on martial tension the whole time. But he also writes a convincing teenager in Wednesday, someone who has the wits to stay alive but is constantly on the backfoot. Even the minor characters like Frank (who gets a memorable flashback and an . . . odd romance) or Sven (have clowning, will travel) or the various ReMastered get a turn in the spotlight and feel like believable people for this future. No one feels like a joke or extraneous.

In facts things escalate nicely on the ship and Stross ratchets up the tension nicely as the situation gets further out of hand, focusing on the characters and dialing back the stuff about the Eschaton (which always felt like one of those things that make less sense the more you look at it) so you get a fun fast-paced thriller in space. He's good enough that you barely notice that he tends to use Herman as a combination of deus ex machina and Charlie from "Charlie's Angels" at times, giving the characters orders and paving the way for the plot to move forward but conveniently being out of contact when it would matter (though with one woman army Rachel present it may not be as crucial). He gets a better (or more fleshed out) explanation for his existence this time out but he's still problematic and I wonder if he's the reason Stross was never able to do another novel in this series.

He's doing so well that its downright disappointing that he didn't reach the section of his "How to Write Novels Picky People Like" book that explained how to stick the landing on the ending, which he . . . doesn't quite do. Either because he wrote himself into a corner or he wanted to go the route of surprise, a lot of the ending depends on you believing that a character you meet late in the book is actually a secret master assassin that everyone has to fight (its not the one you think, although I guessed the other one had an ulterior motive) and with most of the solution explained by the villain anyway it hardly seems to matter. Even worse, after the book has climaxed he follows it up with an epilogue that pursues a joke scenario from earlier in the book before turning it out of nowhere into a dark foreshadowing of trouble to come before just ending the book. It'd be unsatisfyingly abrupt even if a third book did exist, but knowing one is never coming makes this last glimpse of everyone downright frustrating.

If he hadn't done such a good job with ninety-five percent of the rest of the book it wouldn't come across as jarring but given how much of an improvement this was on almost every level over his first novel you wish he had taken the opportunity to look at the ending one more time. Still its a fun ride regardless and a nice sign that writers can recognize their own shortcomings and adjust to overcome them. It promises for even better in the future (just not with these people) and if the worst thing you can say about this novel is you may have to stop fifty pages before the end to write your own ending in your head then its quite possible he's doing just fine.

Megan Baxter says

The first Charles Stross book I ever read was Singularity Sky, the first book in this series. I was in a different city, and I'm not quite sure what made it jump off the shelf of the used bookstore as something to read while I went to one of my first academic conferences. I was, however, baffled by the book itself. I thought I liked it, but I wasn't positive, because I finished the book and still didn't understand the underlying principles

underneath that particular science fiction universe.

Note: The rest of this review has been withheld due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at [Smorgasbook](#)

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

Regular visitors will know that I'm currently in the process of reading every novel sci-fi author Charles Stross has ever written; I started last time with his very first, 2003's *Singularity Sky*, which told a surprisingly funny and absurdist tale set in the far future, centuries after the human race was split and flung across the universe one day by a far advanced alien life form, because of a united humanity recently discovering time travel and thus technically now capable of accidentally wiping out this "Eschaton"s very existence. And this is the same universe where his next novel is set as well, 2004's *Iron Sunrise*, although it's not exactly a sequel; for although it features the same duo of main heroes as the first book (a plucky female UN inspector and a male secret agent for the Eschaton, the two now married after falling in love in the first novel), the story itself takes place among an entirely different planetary system, basically starting with the unexpected explosion of a local star and the destruction of the world orbiting it (the "iron sunrise" of the book's title), which leads us down an ever-widening rabbithole of conspiracies, ultra-fascist organizations, and galaxy-domination plots.

And indeed, the either good or bad news, depending on what you think of the subject, is that *Iron Sunrise* adheres much more strongly to the traditional tropes of 1990s and early 2000s cyberpunk, after a first novel that cleverly combined hard science-fiction with the gonzo silliness of countercultural "motley fool" writers like Ken Kesey; the latter now features such familiar genre touches as a rebellious 15-year-old girl as our main protagonist, five or six different small storylines that all come together into one giant climax at the end, spaceship chases and planet-hopping bloggers and all the other things you would expect from a SF tale written in those years. (Also, this second novel makes it clear that the Eschaton is actually a single entity, essentially the result of a cloud computing system like the Google server farm gaining sentience; and while that helps make things clearer from a plot standpoint, I admit that it kind of removes the fun in the first novel of never quite knowing what exactly the Eschaton is/are.) Still, although far from his best or densest or trippiest work, *Iron Sunrise* is definitely an interesting read and worth the time of Stross completists; although I have to confess that I'm looking much more forward to the next title in my reading list, 2005's *Accelerando*, the first of Stross's books to make a big splash in America and coiner of the entire cultural phrase "The Accelerated Age" (a popular way among SF fans to refer to stories that take place in a post-Singularity universe).
