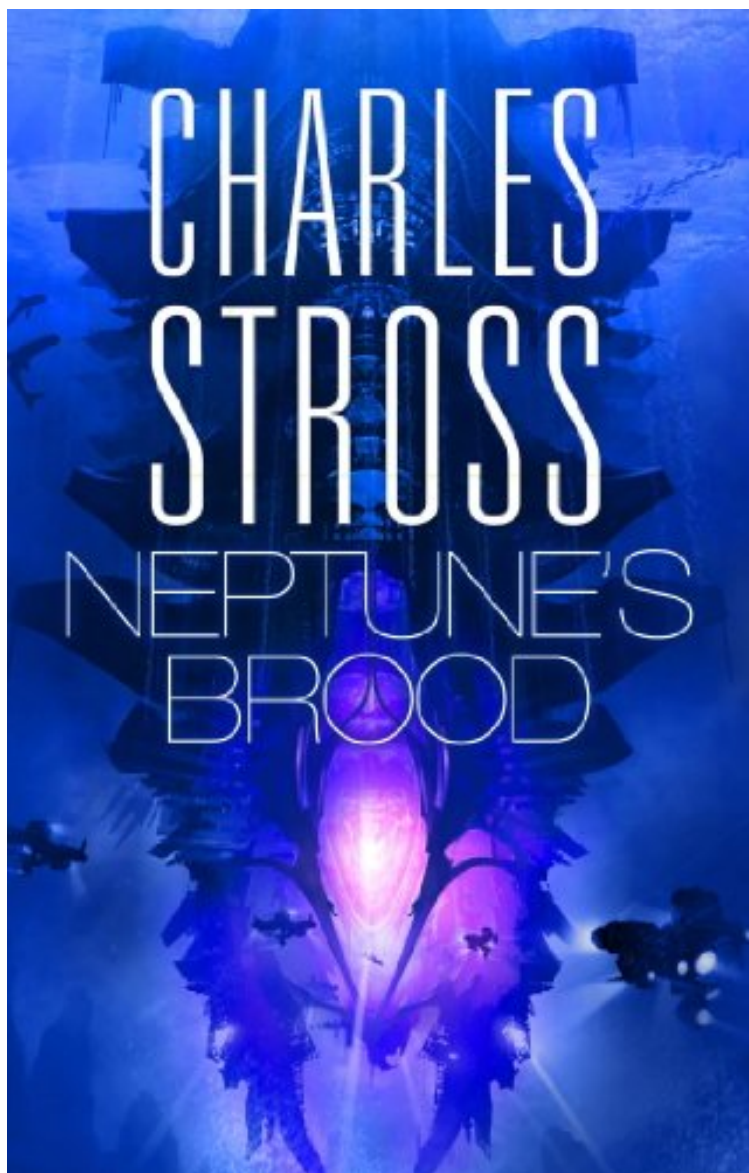


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# Neptune's Brood (Freyaverse Book 2) (English Edition)



*Par Charles Stross*  
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**Par Charles Stross : Neptune's Brood (Freyaverse Book 2) (English Edition)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Neptune's Brood (Freyaverse Book 2) (English Edition):

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurNeptune's Brood is a brand new space opera from science fiction legend Charles Stross. Shortlisted for the Locus Award for Best Science Fiction Novel and the Hugo Award for Best Novel.She was looking for her sister. She found Atlantis. Krina Alizond is a metahuman in a universe where the last natural humans became extinct five thousand years ago. When her sister goes missing, she embarks on a daring voyage across the star systems to find her, travelling to her last known location - the mysterious water-world of Shin-Tethys. In a universe with no faster-than-light travel that's a dangerous journey, made

all the more perilous by the arrival of an assassin on Krina's tail, by the 'privateers' chasing her sister's life insurance policy and by growing signs that the disappearance is linked to one of the biggest financial scams in the known universe. Extrait Beacon Departure I can get you a cheaper ticket if you let me amputate your legs: I can even take your thighs as a deposit, said the travel agent. He was clearly trying hard to be helpful: Its not as if youll need them where youre going, is it? Is it possible to find a better price by booking me on a different routing? I asked. Im very attached to my limbs. (Quaint and oldfashioned, thats me.) Also, I hedged, I dont have much fast money. The agent sighed. His two eyes were beautiful: enormous violet photoreceptors that gleamed with a birefringent sheen. Ms. Alizond. Krina. How can I put this? That could be a problem. He hesitated for only a moment: Do you have any longerterm funds? Anything you can convert . . . ? I shook my head. I only got here ten days sorry, about a million seconds ago, and I havent had time to cash in any investments. I need to get to ShinTethys as fast as possible. He looked pained. It was a warning sign I recognized well he was on the cusp of deciding that I was just another penniless refugee, and any moment now he was going to slam down the shutters: Why are you wasting my time? Id done it myself often enough to recognize the symptoms. I converted everything I had into slow money before I emigrated, as viscous as possible, I said hastily. At least he didnt tell me to get out of his office. I could see his cupidity battling his cynicism: is she delusional? Cupidity won, narrowly: Everything youve got is in slow money? Then how have you been eating? Badly. Hed finally stepped out of role, revealing irrelevant curiosity; that was an opening I could use. Pathos first: Ive been sleeping on park benches and eating municipal gash to reduce my outgoings. (The raw, unprocessed hydrocarbon feedstock is vile but free: the good burghers of Taj Beacon provide it because its cheaper than employing police to pacify the lumpen cattle by force.) What cents I have I cant afford to upconvert in a hurry. So youve gone long? All the way long, everything locked down in slow money? Not even some medium dollars? His eyes widened very slightly at the hint of cents, plural which meant I had his full and undivided attention. Gotcha. He smoothly pivoted into oleaginous deference: But surely youre aware that as little as a tenth of a slow cent could buy you a month in the most palatial palazzo in Yes, Im very much aware of that. I had my opening. Now I narrowed my eyes and cut back on the vulnerability: I wanted him to want to make me feel I owed him some payback at a future time, not drool all over my wallet in the present. I dont want to sell my soul just yet. I really dont. What I want to do is get to ShinTethys with all possible speed, using only fast money, cash in hand. Maybe when Ive completed my work, and its time to head home, Ill be able to splash out, charter a luxury yacht . . . Oh. He looked crestfallen. Well, Im not sure thats going to be possible, Sera Alizond. You see, youre too late. Um?

He appeared to be entirely sincere. This was not what I wanted to hear! What I wanted was for this smalltime hustler to go out of his way to get me a quiet unobtrusive berth, in hope of a payoff down the line. If youd incarnated just ten million seconds ago, I had passenger berths down to ShinTethys coming out of my ears, going unsold! But were past inferior conjunction now, heading toward superior, and you wont get a straight transfer orbit for love or favors. Your only option is to pay for additional delta vee, and that costs real money. Not to mention that theres a huge mass penalty. Youd need to charter a capsule specifically for . . . He trailed off and glanced at my legs again, then did a double take. Unless . . . He glanced into his desktop, fingerdoodled some questions to an invisible amanuensis: Please excuse me, I was looking for passenger vessels. It might be possible for me to arrange a working passage for you if you have any appropriate skills. He paused again, his timing perfect. I couldnt help but admire his expert manipulation even as I resented it. You said you came in from, was it Hector? They have Fragiles there, dont they. Tell me, would you have a problem working with meatsacks? Meat? I didnt have to feign surprise. I dont think so . . . I was about to volunteer my profession, but he focused on his desktop again, shutting me out. Theres an opening for a shiphand in the laborexchange listing. Into which he was, of course, plugged, the better to earn his commission as a recruiter. Let me see . . . He referred to the desktop clipped to the wall beside him. Its on board a religious vehicle a chapel thats en route to ShinTethys. Its not exactly a fast liner, but its better than a minimumenergy cargo pod. They put in for repairs here because of some sort of technical trouble, and theyve only just got it sorted out. Lets see . . . the requirement is for semi or unskilled labor, but you need to be able to work in standard gravity, and more importantly, be of traditional bodily form, which rules out a lot of people. Its conditional on your satisfying the sailing master about your piety, he added by way of a warning. I cant help you there. The interview is entirely up to you. Theyre supposed to provide training on the job. Thatll be fifty dollars fast, refundable if you dont get the berth. Assuming you want it and can afford I do, and I can. It was cheaper than I could have hoped for, and I had no problem with the idea of a working passage; it would help avoid the tedium of a longduration flight. Delayed by some sort of problem.

Their misfortune: my profit. I held out a hand and flashed it, allowing the numinous glow of hot cash to light up the chromatophores in the webbing between my fingers. Its just the Church of the Fragile, yes? Pious worshippers tending to the holy flesh, keeping it from rotting as they fulfill their mission to the stars? Thats my understanding. He nodded. That, and routine cleaning chores. They may be religious, but theyre pragmatists. As long as youre not heretically inclined . . . ?No, nothing like that! Tending meat: In all our years, I dont think any of my lineage has ever done that. But beggars cant be choosersnot even mendicant scholars masquerading as beggars. We shook on the deal, and his palm flickered red, the escrow lock pulsing rapidly. Ill just be going. If youd maybe tell me where . . . ?Certainly. He smiled, evidently pleased with himself, then passed me the coordinates. You want Node Six, Docking Attachment Delta. The Blessed Chapel of Our Lady of the Holy Restriction Endonuclease is parked outsidein quarantine because of the meat. Thats normal in such circumstances, you know. Ask for Deacon Dennett. They will be expecting you. What I was unaware of: I had a stalker. Most people are autonomes; selfowning, selfdirected, conscious. It is the glory and tragedy of autonomes that they experience the joy of selfand the terror of the ultimate dissolution of self into nonexistence at the end of life. You are an autonome: So am I. The stalker was not an autonome. Despite looking outwardly human and imprinted with a set of human memories, the cortical nodes within its skull were not configured to give rise to a sense of self. The person who sent the stalker believed that consciousness was a liability and a handicap that might impair its ability to fulfill its mission: to hunt down and kill me. The stalker had a full briefing on me, but didnt know much about what I was doing in Dojima System, other than the fact of my arrival and its instructions for my disposal. I later learned that my stalker beamed into Taj Beacon barely a million seconds after I did. Wed both been sent more than a decade earlier, via the beacon in high orbit around GJ 785: Our packet streams overlapped for months as the Taj Beacon buffered and checksummed, decrypted and decompressed, and finally downloaded two neural streams onto soul chips for installation in newly built bodies, paid for by the slow money draft signed and attached at the origin of our transmission. I awakened first, my new body molded to a semblance of my previous phenotype by the configuration metadata attached to the soul transmission. I completed the immigration formalities and left the arrivals hall before the killer opened its eyes. While I was on Taj Beacon, I was unaware of its existence. But I found out all too soon. The travel agents office was a fabric bag attached to one of the structural trusses that braced the vast, freefall souk at the heart of Taj Beacons commons. I really hated the souk; having gotten what I went there for, I ran away as fast as I could. I confess to you that I lied to the travel agent about my assets. When I arrived, almost the first thing I did was to cautiously convert a couple of slow cents into fast money. I did it reluctantly. The best slowtofast exchange rate I could find here was usuriousI took a 92percent hit on the public rate, never mind what a relative would have fronted mebut to upconvert with full and final settlement via the issuing bank would take nearly a billion seconds: Its not called slow money for nothing. I was not, in fact, sleeping on park benches and subsisting on raw hydrocarbon slurry: But I saw no need to advertise the fact that I had 7.02 slow dollars signed and sealed to my soul chips, and another 208.91 medium dollars at my fingertips. That much money walking around unguarded was an invitation to a mugging or worse. Taj Beacon is and was the main gateway for information and currency flows entering and leaving Dojima System. It hosts multiple communication lasers, pointed at the star systems with which Dojima trades directly. As commonly happens, the burghers of Taj Beacon have a vested interest in maintaining a choke hold on interstellar commerce. Consequently, they scheme to prevent rival groups from establishing their own beacons. And so it is that, in addition to the high priesthood of financiers and factors who worked the banks and bureaux de change and bourse, the operations managers and engineers who maintained the interstellar communications lasers, and the usual workers you might find on any deepspace habitat, Taj is host to numerous loan sharks, grifters, labor brokers, and slavers. I was traveling alone, and my only contact in the entire system had gone missingso to say I was isolated would be an understatement. Under the circumstances, drawing attention to myself by flashing my assets seemed like a really bad idea. I therefore lived cautiously, using anonymous cash to rent a cramped arbeiters pod in an unfashionable highgee zone, going through the public motions of seeking employment, trying to remain inconspicuousand meanwhile looking for a ship out of this festering sinkhole of villainy. As for the souk: Some combination of the disorienting lack of local verticalia, the density of bodies, the shouting of offers, the mixture of smells, and the fluctuating hash of electromagnetic noise combined to make me claustrophobic whenever I had to visit an establishment there. But what really got to me was the advertising. The souk is a public space. Unless you pay up for a pricey privacy filter, every move you make is fodder for a thousand behavioral search engines, which bombard you with stimuli and monitor your

autonomic responses in order to dynamically evolve more attractive ads. Images of desire bounce off blank surfaces for your eyes only, ghostly haptic fingertips run across your skin, ghostly lascivious offers beam right inside your ears. Are we getting hotter? Colder? Does this make you feel good? I didnt want to draw attention to myself by excessive filtering. But I wasnt used to the naked hard selling: My earlier life hadnt prepared me for it, and the ads made me feel bilious and lovestricken, invaded and debauched by a coldly mechanical lust for whatever fetish the desire machines were pushing at their victims at any given instant.

The mindless persistence with which the adbots attempted to coax the lifemoney from their targets was disturbing. Though I hadnt been on Taj long, I had already learned to hate the sensation. The soulsickening sense of need ebbed and faded from moment to moment as I moved from one hidden persuaders cell to the next, leaving me feeling vulnerable and friendless. Alienated? Friendlorn? Desirous of luxurious foods or eager prostitutes? We can torment and titillate until you pay for sweet release . . . Beacon stations are the choke points of interstellar trade, positioned to extract value from the slow money of the dissatisfied and the desperate as they pass through the network. Taj Beacon is the worst Ive ever visited, possibly a holdover from its foundation in the wake of the great Atlantis depression, over two millennia ago: The result is a frenzied vortex of dionysiac capitalism presided over by a grasping, vicious plutocracy, boiling and churning in the frigid wastes on the edge of the star system. All because the beacon lay in the trailing trojan point of the innermost gas giant, between the outer belt and hab colonies and the populated inner system that generated the traffic. Tajs founders were in the right place at the right time, and they and their descendants took it as a de facto license to seek rent. Surviving the barrage of ads with my sense of purpose intact and my purse unravished required selfdiscipline and a willingness to shut down my facial nerves and chromatophores completely and preferably to shut my eyes and ears as well. Counting features of the ads helped me ignore the content; I kept tally of the products, descriptions, and associated emotional cues as I pushed through, as a tenuous gesture of defiance. (Eleven ads, averaging six iterations per minute, in case you were wondering.) And, after far too long, I managed to make my escape into the civilized lowgee suburbs, then back to my cheap, rented, capsule apartment. Calling it an apartment is, perhaps, an exaggeration. A cube of nearly thirty meters volume, it held my bed (a blood blue cocoon purchased from a thrift store), a couple of changes of clothing suitable for different social contexts, a twometer retina with a ripped corner that Id rescued from a recycler and tacked to one wall for visualizations and entertainment, a readypacked bag in case I had to leave in a hurry, and a crate where I kept my feed. Id visited worse slums, but not often and never to live there by choice. On the other hand, there was nothing here to attract the attention of my neighbors. Most of the other residents were laborers or fractionalreserve servants of one variety or another: poor but sufficiently respectable not to attract the attention of the secret police. (Not that the SPs cared about anything except direct threats of sedition or subversion that might impair their patrons ability to keep their salaries flowing. Accept capitalism into your heart, and you were almost certainly safe, except for the occasional unfortunate case of mistaken identity. Yet another reason not to dwell here too long . . .) I flopped back onto my bed and waved at the retina. Any mail? I asked halfheartedly. Good even shift, Krina! Im sorry, theres nothing new for you today. Id given it an avatar, the facial map and mannerisms of my sib Briony but left the eyes empty, to remind me there was no person behind them. A communique from your cousin Andreaa sib of another generation from mine is buffering now and will be complete within two thousand seconds. Price of release is thirtytwo fast. Do you wish to accept? I swore under my breath not at the retina, lest it misinterpret. But rentseeking intermediaries with a monopoly on interstellar commerce would have been a good candidate for the bane of my life had they not also become the source of my income (by a cosmic irony that I no longer found even remotely humorous). In this case, the stations official receiver had decided that Andreas incoming message was inconveniently large, or that the exchange rate since its transmission began (at least twelve years ago, assuming she was still back home) had fluctuated sufficiently to justify levying a supplementary fee. In any event, what was I going to do? I could pay the additional service fee or miss the message. Which might be something as banal as a were all missing you, come home safe and soon or as vitally important as word that my entire multiyear mission was pointless, that the longlost property had been picked up by a rival syndicate. Accept and debit my account, I said aloud. I paused to update my expenses sheet and stared gloomily at the dwindling cash float: Today was turning out to be very costly indeed. Have there been any more responses to my primary search? I asked the retina. No new responses! I winced. Id spent another chunk of fast money a week ago, buying a broadcast search not merely of Taj Beacons public information systems, but propagated systemwide for news of Ana. Who had now been missing for over a hundred days, since shortly after I began to download into the arrival halls

buffer a suspicious coincidence, in my view, given that she had lived in the same floating city on ShinTethys for over twenty years. Three archived responses. Do you wish to review them? No. I had them off by rote memory: One anxious inquiry from an out-of-touch friend of Anas (I think an ex-lover); a request for an interview from the local police (doubtless wondering why an out-system visitor was interested in a missing person); and a debt-collection agency wondering who was going to pay the rent on her pod. It was depressing to think how faint the mark she left behind must be, that so few people were interested in her disappearance. (Much like me, in fact. Loneliness is our only reliable companion when we fish the well of time for magic coins.) Download and archive Andreas' packet in my second slot as soon as it's available. A thought struck me. Transaction with M. Hebert, travel agent: labor-exchange placement. When does it time out? Your offer closes in four thousand four hundred seconds! Placement vessel preparing for departure! My retina chirped. What? The agent didn't tell me it was leaving so soon! I looked around my cube in a momentary panic, then realized there was virtually nothing here that I couldn't replace easily enough. I grabbed my go bag, already stuffed with a spare change of clothes and a palm-sized retina: Dump Andreas' packet into my number two soul chip as soon as you've got it, then erase yourself, I told my sisters hollow-eyed face on the wall: I'm out of here for good. An hour later, I arrived at a docking node in an old part of the station. It was all grubby metal and delaminating anticorrosion treatments, the lights flickering, ventilation ducts howling mournfully behind rattling panels. Fat umbilical trunks snaked between nodes and across exposed walls, floors, and ceilings, their papery shrouds rippling in the breeze: Odd gelatinous globules hang quivering from leaky pipes, their surfaces fogged and filthy with trapped dust and fluff. There was a marked lack of life in this place, a sense that here the bones of the world were showing through the skin. I found myself afloat in the middle of a desolate six-way crossroads. It took a few seconds for me to compose myself before the next step. At times like this, I have always been susceptible to a weary, familiar dread. I was on my own here; if Ana was dead (as seemed likely), I was the only one of my kind in this entire star system, and my generation in my lineage is not one that is comfortable with solitary working. I'm a creature of habit and a team player by design. I'd been up and alive on Taj Beacon for around a million seconds: time enough to develop a routine, even as a near down-and-out in an unfriendly and highly competitive realm. *Revue de presse* Witty, smart, and more relevant than you'd expect, this is a thoroughly entertaining sci-fi mind-expander from one of the genres' most reliable imaginations. *SFXA* wonderful bouquet of ideas. *Boing Boing* The fun part comes from the way Stross devises his robot-kind to act as humanity's successor species to imagine them not as intellects vast, cool, and unsympathetic but as very much like us, writ not large but as merely durable. *Locus* Agreeable characters, a fascinating backdrop and brilliant plotting, with a further outlook of lengthy grins and occasional guffaws. *Kirkus* s (starred review)