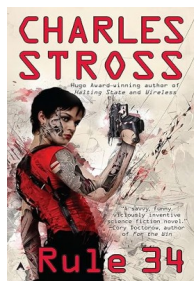




Lambda Sci-Fi
DC Area Gaylaxians



Rule 34
By Charles Stross
Discussed October 2012

Discussion Questions

1. Did you enjoy *Rule 34*?
2. *Rule 34* is the sequel to *Halting State*. If you read *Halting State*, how do you think *Rule 34* compares to *Halting State*? Is *Rule 34* properly a sequel? Does *Rule 34* stand on its own?

Rule 34 takes place in a very near future. Arguably, all the technology either already exists or is in immediate development stages, with the possible exception of emergent strong AI.

3. How realistic a view of the near future do you find this?
4. Does this view of the future worry you? Is the society depicted as a dystopia, a near-dystopia, neutral, or something else?
5. Is the world of *Rule 34* post-singularity? Is it the start of singularity? Do you expect the singularity to arrive in your lifetime? Can you expect to notice, if it does? Would you welcome it or dread it?

The emergent AI has either been touched on or central to several of William Gibson's novels; and lately Gibson has largely kept his novels in the present day or very-near future.

6. Does *Rule 34* seem like an intentional homage?
7. How do you feel *Rule 34* compares to Gibson's vision of similar events?
8. Is the emergent AI an ethical being? Are its actions justified? Do you think it actually is an emergent AI?

The main characters in several of Charles Stross's other popular works have been "supermen": people capable of extraordinary feats. In *Glasshouse* (which the reading group discussed earlier this year), the main character was a

warrior of supreme excellence, who had been centrally involved in the creation of the background of the novel. In the “Atrocity Archives” series (a series of short fiction centering around a sys-admin's interactions with users), the main character is a “Bastard Operator from Hell” without peer.

9. Are the 3 main characters in *Rule 34* also “supermen” – or are they more like run-of-the-mill people, leading standard lives and reacting to their situations in ways that are generally consistent with a normal person's reactions?
10. If you see them as non-supermen, did you react positively or negatively to being put into their shoes?

The reader looks through the characters' viewpoints (the second person singular).

11. How effective is the author's use of second person singular? Did you find it jarring, or an easy-to-parse method?
12. Were you able to equally invest yourself into each of the main characters?

The book's title is taken from the internet meme of Rule 34 which states: "If it exists, there is porn of it. No exceptions." This has been variously interpreted as an expression of the size and all-encompassing nature of the net, as an expression of the far-ranging nature of human desire, and as a command.

13. Is there a direct relation between the internet meme of Rule 34 and this novel?
14. Did you notice any in-jokes (or just in-the-know references to internet memes) in the novel? If so, did they make this more immersive? Were they a distraction? Did they feel natural?

GLBTQ+ content: All of the main characters are sexually non-vanilla, to varying degrees. Liz Kavanaugh is lesbian. Anwar is ambiguously bi or closeted. The Toymaker is a sadist without apparent specificity. Dorothy is (from her self-description) a “bi-poly femme” who is intrinsic to the interaction between Liz and the Toymaker.

15. Does the GLBTQ+ content seem grafted on, or an afterthought? Is Inspector Liz Kavanaugh's sexuality important to the narrative? Is Anwar's sexuality important to the narrative?
16. Toymaker is arguably a product of the state of his early nurture vs. his nature. Did you like this character? Is he a sympathetic character?
17. Is Dorothy a sympathetic character?