

★ **Singer Distance****Ethan Chatagnier**

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Singer Distance is an exquisite first contact novel in which interplanetary communications expose the infinite and infinitesimal distances between human hearts.

At the close of the nineteenth century, scientists carved out a rudimentary greeting to Mars in the Tunisian desert. It was an audacious project that produced immediate rewards: Martians responded, in the language of math. Blue equations lit up Mars's surface, beginning with arithmetic and proceeding to more complex proofs. Einstein was the last to nod a theorem to Mars in the Arizona desert; the Martian response stumped Earth's greatest scientific minds for decades after. Until Crystal. The precocious MIT student thinks she's finally decoded the message.

In the 1960s, Crystal heads out into the desert with four colleagues, including her doting fiancé, Rick, who is enchanted by scientific wonders, even when their nuances elude him. Their team hopes to jar Earthling-Martian communications back to life. When the Martian surface beams out a reply, their credentials are sealed—as is Crystal's fame. Hoping to decode one more level of the Martian language, but needing peace to do so, she slips from the grasp of her Stanford post-doc—and from her future with Rick.

Directed by scientific and mathematical wonder, a sense of the poetry of the universe and its untapped dimensions, and by the searing yearning of committed love: *Singer Distance* is the most piquing and arresting science fiction novel in recent memory. It poses questions about entropy, metaphysics, and humanity's place among the stars alongside explorations of the bonds between people, which it renders just as pertinent. Its turns are both intelligent and magical, and its surprises are heartbreaking and boundary-testing. As Rick, Crystal, and their ever-inquisitive colleagues learn after painful seasons of searching: true communication, even on interplanetary and interspecies scales, requires art and heart, just as much as it does ingenuity.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2022)

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