



## The Traders' War

*Charles Stross*

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## **The Traders' War** Charles Stross

Miriam was an ambitious business journalist in Boston. Until she was fired—then discovered, to her shock, that her lost family comes from an alternate reality. And although some of them are trying to kill her, she won't stop digging up secrets. Now that she knows she's inherited the family ability to walk between worlds, there's a new culture to explore.

Her alternate home seems located around the Middle Ages, making her world-hopping relatives top dogs when it comes to 'importing' guns and other gadgets from modern-day America. Payment flows from their services to US drug rings—after all, world-skipping drug runners make great traffickers. In a land where women are property, she struggles to remain independent. Yet her outsider ways won't be tolerated, and a highly political arranged marriage is being brokered behind her back. If she can stay alive for long enough to protest.

## **The Traders' War Details**

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Author : Charles Stross

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## From Reader Review The Traders' War for online ebook

### Impishfae says

I hit the end running and I now must start the next in the series instantly. Right now!

But it also took me ages to get to the final third. I just wasn't motivated to prioritise reading it.

Still, I love that even in a variety of patriarchal worlds, it is the norm that his female characters all are powerful in different ways and have a story of their own, not just as an adjunct to the hero's tale.

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### Mohsin says

Stross is a fun writer, but he sometimes gets entirely too bogged down with minutiae. The constant references to random code names that he's clearly fond of generating, and painstakingly detailed (yet oh so very boring) operations, combined with the severe dumbing-down of the key characters in the series until this point make these two books an utter slog.

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### Dare Talvitie says

The Merchant Princes series: It's like Amber, but it's sci-fi masquerading as fantasy instead of the other way around. It's like A Song of Ice and Fire crashing into The Sum of All Fears, except with more likeable characters and less horrible politics. It's really, really good science fiction.

The Traders' War in particular is a bit of an uneven book that takes a while to get going - but once it gets its groove on, it's thrilling, surprising and immensely satisfying. The plot may not play quite as fair as most of Stross' stories: there are several amazing coincidences and last-minute miraculous escapes, but you really just have to take them in stride. I would love to give this one full five stars, but it does drag a bit, and ends on a bit of a cliffhanger. At least you don't have to wait ten years for the sequel.

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### Peter says

Miriam's gotten used to her recently-discovered family having the ability to pass between parallel worlds, and even has schemes to make their businesses more profitable... but what she hasn't gotten used to is how stuck they are in the ways of the medieval society they started from. Isolated from her allies, she's pressured into a marriage alliance... and as bad as it seems, things are about to get a whole lot worse. Because back on the Earth she grew up in, the US government has discovered the existence of worldwalkers thanks to a defector... and are taking it extremely seriously considering assassins could slip into the White House and be gone again without a trace, and even the traders home base is under threat as a royal coup is being planned by forces hostile to worldwalkers. And if that's not enough, there may be a whole lot more worlds out there than anyone ever expected...

This is a continuation of the Merchant Princes series, and it's not the end of it, either. As such, it's a bit hard

to talk about, nothing really concludes, just things shift around and new complications crop up. My reaction is mostly rather similar feelings to the first book... there were elements I was really into, and elements I wasn't, so much, and mostly, these were the same. The plotting and political maneuvering of the medieval trader's society still didn't excite me much, and I felt myself losing track of the players on a regular basis. However, I did really enjoy the elements where they explored the limits of the world-walking ability scientifically, and where the United States government attempted to respond and deal with a threat of parallel-world operatives. I also really appreciate that although the series seems at first to be fantasy with a sort of science-fictional mindset, with this book it feels much more like science fiction with a bit of a fantasy veneer. So, on the whole, I like where the series is going and I'm going to continue with it, I think. I think it's safe to say I liked it a little more than the first book, although perhaps not enough to get it a full star over my last score.

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## Ben Babcock says

Miriam Beckstein discovered that she can travel between worlds. In fact, she's the lost scion of the Clan, a family of worldwalkers from the other world, which is at about a medieval level of tech development. Discovering the Clan's monopoly on inter-world trade of devices and drugs, Miriam also stumbles into the middle of a Byzantine political situation. As matters rapidly deteriorate, *The Traders' War* raises the stakes significantly for Miriam and friends: wedding bells, nuclear threats, and the watchful eye of Uncle Sam are only a few of the sphttps://www.goodreads.com/review/edit... in this second volume of the *Merchant Princes* omnibus series.

Reading Charles Stross is like sticking your head in an encyclopedia, that is on fire, inside a cart, also on fire, hurtling over the edge of a precipice (into fire). It's an exhilarating and edifying experience but may leave some doubt as to whether you'll survive. *The Traders' War* is a thriller in the most technical sense, but it is full of dense, gooey infodumps. I spent half my time enthralled by the sheer brilliance of the plotting and economic thought required to create this universe ... and the other half kind of waving a white flag in surrender and wondering why the hell I chose to read this instead of another *Animorphs* novel...

In other words, *caveat emptor* and all that: this novel is both exciting and stultifying, and it's going to be up to you to decide which one wins out for you. Obviously from my rating and forthcoming praise, it's the former for me.

This universe (multiverse, I guess), is just **so intricately detailed**. It's one thing to come up with the premise of worldwalking and another to explore it so doggedly as Stross does here—but that's, you know, kind of his thing. He takes a series of knowns and unknowns and tries to extrapolate from there: given *a, b, c* and *x, y, z*, what's the most likely outcome for the future? In this case, if you can flit between two (and then three) different versions of North America at varying levels of technological development, what does that mean? And if your family carries the recessive gene for worldwalking and occupies a fragile, envied economical niche in your home dimension, how is this going to affect royal succession politics?

Reading science fiction is generally immersing yourself in a huge game of *what if*, but Stross takes that and cranks it up to 11. In *The Traders' War*, the US government gets involved. Thanks to the DEA and Matthias' defection, they now know about Gruinmarkt and the Clan, and they are worried this means war. Stross gets to write his most paranoid, most clandestine take on US government operations, batting around all-caps codenames and extrajudicial imprisonment like it's going out of style. It's hard to remember, but these books are set in the Bush era, so you can kind of think of this as an alternative history novel in which the Bush administration fought interdimensional drug smugglers instead of terrorists. (But it's still, as one character remarks, all about the oil.)

Stross also expands on some of the mechanics of worldwalking in this volume. The US government attempts to crack the science behind the genetics and neurology of worldwalking. Meanwhile, Angbard has finally decided to let a small team experiment with using the Lee family knot in our world to try to access a fourth world. This results in some discoveries that seem likely to overturn a lot of the established wisdom regarding worldwalking. As is often the case, however, this hasn't stopped anyone from continuing to prosecute their private little wars.

Miriam is back, of course, and continues to be an irascible yet flawed protagonist. She is always on the move, always rebounding from the latest set-back, reactive and proactive. I'm not sure I actually *like* her, mind you—she has a way of not considering the collateral damage to her friends when one of her schemes blows up in her face—but damn if she isn't a dynamic and fun protagonist! She's the proverbial wrench in everyone's carefully-laid plans, a kind of chaotic good, and she is a force to be reckoned with.

More so than in *The Bloodline Feud* (as far as I can recall), we get other viewpoint characters. We follow Mike Fleming, Miriam's ex and a DEA agent wrapped up in this investigation. We see a little bit from Brill's point of view (I love Brill!) and some other worldwalkers. Stross also uses the conceit of translated "transcripts" included at the end of some chapters, which drop tantalizing tidbits of exposition and plot development but require us to deduce the speakers from context. I wasn't a huge fan, but I think they do serve their purpose.

Above all else, I just relish Stross' ability to balance those intense scenes of exposition with equally exciting moments of pure, adrenaline-charged action. There are gun battles, swordfights, explosions—basically all the stuff you want in a thriller. It's here, in spades, complete with the possibility of an atomic bomb going off and subtle hints that there is more to worldwalking than anyone previously believed....

I'm very much looking forward to wrapping up the original trilogy soon with *The Revolution Trade* so I can pick up the start of the new trilogy. As always, Stross is just the perfect comfort read when I want something that will make me think but also hit me with a nice dose of action. You're best served starting with *The Bloodline Feud* rather than here, but once you've read the first volume, just know that the second volume is even bigger and better than the first.

**My reviews of *The Merchant Princes* omnibus:**

← *The Bloodline Feud* | *The Revolution Trade* →

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## Shaun says

### Rogues, scoundrels & idealists.

Fast paced, a well handled group of viewpoint characters and a heroine you can really cheer for. Plus a plot that keeps coming up with twist and turns so you can't be sure of what will happen next.

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## Peggy Thomson says

Having Cheney as a behind the scenes character is really disconcerting-if not nauseating. The anagram happy US government guys are pretty unsympathetic characters and the growing mass of characters cause some

confusion for me. I think some of this distracts from the stories of our main character and her closer associates.

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### **Tony says**

Continuation of the saga of the parallel world-walking clan. 3 versions of Earth in different states of political and economic development begin to collide because of the clan's ability to move between them and exploit their needs and abilities. This is a really addictive series; good story line, good characters and plenty of cliff-hangers that keep you coming back. Great fun.

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### **Alex Borghgraef says**

Second volume I read in this alternate universe/parallel worlds series, and again it's mainly Stross having great fun and not taking himself too seriously (some character names really made me chuckle). But he's having a blast and so was I. Overall, great worldbuilding, nice attention to detail and the unintended consequences of the rules applying to these worlds, devious scheming and the characters aren't too shabby either (which is often the weak point of this sort of near-rpg-session-log genre). Enjoyed it.

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### **Laura says**

I like that portable weaponry transcends timelines/worlds for continuous boomstick action.

Related: I saw a theory on the philosophical stomping ground that is Twitter that when the Cubs won the World Series, we shifted into a dark timeline. I was just counting on the other three horsemen of the apocalypse putting in an appearance. I THOUGHT WE COULD HANDLE IT. Sorry, y'all.

Alas, this is still the only planet I can live on. Spiking my coffee now.

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### **Melliane says**

Mon avis en Français

My English review

I had a good time with the first novel that compiled the first two volumes and I was curious to see what the author would present us for the following events. I must say that he did a pretty amazing job. Oh yes because he has not only created a world, but three very different along with the characters who continually visit them. Besides, it goes without saying, but we have a lot of different actors in view with this big organization and it is always fascinating to see how they interact together.

Since Miriam found herself propelled into this new world, the troubles are only accumulating. Even if she thought that she had found a way out by presenting a new business plan to the clans while using another source of profit, nothing happens as expected. The attacks against her are not finished, no one in the family

does trust her and Miriam finds herself all alone, forced to stay where they want her to be. And when things work out just even a little bit, her curiosity degrades the advances she had won. But now, the clans want to have a means of pressure on her, especially since they realized that she had a lot more resources than they thought. The solution to keep her under control? Marrying her course! And what a better way than to choose the « idiot » son of the king, so she will take charge oh him and of course will have to bring his children.

You can imagine that Miriam with all her progressive ideas does not like to be confined, much less to be forced to do something against her will. And this wedding? This is something she just hates the idea and we can understand it. Yet the clans here also know how to tip her in their favor by threatening her mother ... No, our beloved heroine has no loopholes, but that does not mean she will make things easy either for them.

I enjoyed seeing our young lady evolving, discovering her next actions despite many obstacles and of course trying to manage everything without really knowing how to do that. She has to go through many things I have to say and I was really surprised that she gets to keep going with this. New characters enter in the scene and we follow them alternately in the chapters. Mike and Lee are the two that intrigued me the most and I must say that I am curious to see what will happen to them afterwards. I must admit though that I was personally still waiting to find Miriam again as she always interests me more than the others, but everything was very well done. Many events are moving in the shades and they will have a great impact on the main story.

So it was again a great surprise and I am very curious to read the last two volumes of the series at present to see how the story concludes.

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## Luke says

I chewed through all three volumes of this trilogy in about 10 days, so I guess I quite liked it! Some light spoilers ahead so take care if you worry about that sort of thing.

The basic setup is that there is an alternate world to ours (actually it's *very similar* to, but not quite the same as, our world; there are a couple of clues in the text which point to it diverging from us somewhere between 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq), where history took a different turn and a bunch of post-Viking principalities scratch out a renaissance-equivalent living along what would be the eastern seaboard of the US in our world. A close-knit clan of 'worldwalkers' have the ability to cross between this less developed world and ours and they have parlayed this family talent into substantial wealth and power. Over there they are aristocrats and merchant princes - capable of moving news and/or cargo that would take months to deliver by mule train or sailing ship in a matter of hours or days, simply by crossing over and then Fedex-ing the package to a family safehouse near the destination. Meanwhile over here they are top tier smugglers - for a fee they will move your consignment of illicit material from Medellin (let us say) to New York; it might take three months to get to its destination in the hold of one of their merchant fluyts on the other side, but it will be completely untraceable and uninterceptable by the authorities whilst it is in transit.

In the first volume our plucky heroine, Miriam Beckstein, discovered that she was a long lost child of this

clan of inter-dimensional shipping magnates. After the initial shock and confusion she resolves to engineer a new business model that will get them out of the drugs and money laundering game for good. In the process she discovers some even longer-lost relatives who have inadvertently stumbled upon a third world (not as modern as our world, but a hell of a lot further along than the home world) and sets a bunch of different hares running.

Having given the initial situation a good hard kick, the second volume is where the world(s) give Miriam a good hard kicking in return.

Not only do the die-hard conservatives in her family (who quite *like* being the only people with access to penicillin and semi-automatic weapons in a pre-industrial world) start to intrigue against her, but we also discover that the Clan are in a precarious political situation with the *true* conservatives of their society (namely the old school aristocracy who regard the Clan as upstart parvenus who dabble in witchcraft and sorcery). Furthermore the Clan have also come to the attention of various three letter federal agencies in the United States, who are one part fascinated and nine parts terrified by the implications of the Clan's talent and starting to make serious plans about what to do about this threat.

Vast wheels set in motion in the first volume thus threaten to crush our protagonist and those that she cares for, with much techno-thrillerish shenanigans, derring do and high stakes intrigue (plus a side order of revolutionary politics along with the theory and practise of development economics) as she and her allies struggle to get out of a series of tight spots with their skins and honour (mostly) intact.

By the end of this volume some of the threats have been negated and new opportunities identified, but the situation is by no means stable - indeed it is rapidly escalating towards a world shaking climax.

Charlie Stross has a reputation as an 'ideas man' in the SF world (which is a genre that isn't exactly short of ideas) and he doesn't disappoint in these books. The writing is clear and punchy, with inventive world-building and plotting around the core hook of the family talent (which was presented as a 'magic macguffin' in the first volume, but revealed in this volume to be a 'sufficiently advanced' technology thanks to the focused research attention of the US secret state).

If I have a criticism it is that the prose sometimes lapses into didacticism (a besetting sin of an ideas-driven novel) and there are a few places where the author repeats variations on a theme (some of these may be holdovers from the original form of these books, when they were published as six ~250 page books rather than three 4-500 page doorstops).

On the whole however, the author manages to reign in the infodump-age to a tolerable level and avoids the worst traps of "tell don't show" and "as you know, Bob". The characters are well drawn and nicely varied, with a few pretty horrible people who are up to some deep-dyed villainy but everybody else plausibly allied or opposed to the main characters according to the situation they find themselves in and trying, for the most part, to do the best in what is a precariously fluid and unstable situation.

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## Wesley George says

I've liked pretty much everything I've ever read from Stross, and have never had concerns about his pacing, but this book(s) took some work to finish. The concept is still intriguing, and the effort put into fleshing out not just one, but 3 distinct worlds is noticeable. Unfortunately, it got really bogged down in the political maneuvering, and the multiple periods of near-imprisonment meant that the reader also felt the character's boredom as it dramatically slowed the pace of the story. It still has great dialog, sharp but appropriately

subtle satire, but it really felt like the majority of the book(s) was laying foundation for things that might happen, like lots of threads are being pulled and woven, but you can't actually see how they fit together. While there is action, it's much less breakneck than in the first book. You also get treated to several more fairly lengthy explanations of the overall concept and history of world-walking, how Gruinmarket's economy works, etc as a character explains it to someone who isn't familiar. You as the reader are left saying, "yup, heard it, got it, can we move on now, Mr. Exposition?"

I also found the amount of shifting between characters, worlds, and subplots, as well as the conversation transcripts that were intended to read like spy intelligence somewhat hard to follow. There are a lot of secondary characters in the worlds that Stross has built, and keeping them all straight, especially with a few months separating this book and when I read the last was a challenge since you're largely not reintroduced to them, you just get the novel equivalent of a ripple wipe, and they appear for a few pages to move a subplot forward. Then, the book ends fairly abruptly, but not exactly in a cliffhanger way. I expect to finish out the last book in the omnibus, on the hope that all of the setup was worth it, but I'd have thought that the opportunity to collapse 2 books into one omnibus release might give an opportunity for some more aggressive editing to improve the pacing.

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### **Dave says**

Part 2 of a three part series, or parts 3 and 4 of the original 6 parter. The adventures of world-walking Miriam and friends run deeper and slower in this second act. Looking fwd to part 3.

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### **Vincent says**

After the fist book, I was prepared to read about the ascent of Miriam a la Connecticut Yankee/Lest Darkness Fall/Cross-Time Engineer/ kind of way in new Britain but that's not what happens at all.

I said that The Bloodline Feud read like the Chronicles of Amber crossed with Lord Kalvan but this one is more like a Tom Clancy techno-thriller than anything else.

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