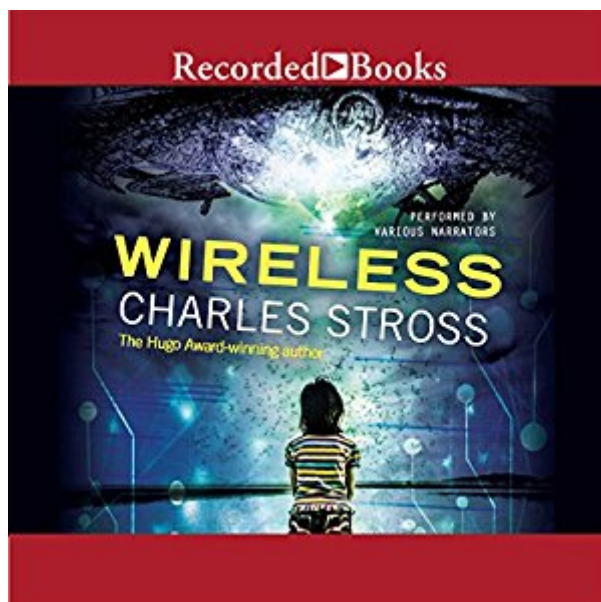


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Wireless



Synopsis

Prolific novelist Stross pauses to collect short stories that have not (yet) been stitched up into his longer work. Stories that move the US - USSR conflict onto a massive disk in another galaxy (Locus Award-winner "Missile Gap"), offer a spam-filter solution to the Fermi paradox ("MAXOS"), and suggest clever bargains with the devil in a newly frozen Scotland ("Snowball's Chance") demonstrate Stross's ability to crisscross genres, blending SF, fantasy, horror, and espionage.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've been a fan of Charles Stross writing ever since I encountered his homage to Lovecraft in A Colder War. This volume reprints that story together with eight others of varying lengths. If you prefer novel-length stories you should be aware that two of the titles (Missile Gap and Palimpsest) are substantial enough to hold their own with much longer works. The first story, Missile Gap, is set on an Earth that has been translated to a giant flat disk and set in an ocean with many other translated worlds. It's a little bleak - don't expect a bunch of plucky humans to triumph because of their native can-do-it-ness. The vast godlike forces that could do something like this would be practically oblivious to the survival of species, let alone individuals. The second is Rogue Farm: A farmer has to deal with a post-human entity that wants to use his farm as a launching site. It's a very short (and light) work and I didn't really care for it. A Colder War is one of my favorite stories. Charles Stross uses Lovecraft's stories as the basis for an alternate history Cold War thriller. It's *very* bleak - the best possible outcome is the annihilation of humanity. I'd love to see this as a graphic novel. Maxos is a vignette originally published in Nature. It's quite funny

and deserves more elaboration. *Down on the Farm* is set in Stross's Laundry universe (*The Atrocity Archives*, *The Jennifer Morgue*) which use Lovecraftian horror as their background (they're related but not connected to *A Colder War* which also appears in this collection). The Laundry stories seem to follow a standard pattern - the narrator is thrust into a crisis where things are not what they appear and he has to save the day through improvisation, facing eldritch horrors which are often less frightening than the nightmare that is government work. I liked this story, but it doesn't really stand alone. I'd recommend reading Stross's *The Atrocity Archives* first. *Unwirer* was written with Cory Doctorow. The hero is part of a team that sets up wireless networks against government and MPAA interference. It's surprising how well the two authors' styles merge but it's not a very deep story. *Sonwball's Chance* is a deal-with-the-de'il story (I once read that every author has to do one of these) that taps into Stross's interest in planetary engineering and government bureaucracy. It's short and slight but worth the read. *Trunk and Disorderly* is a Wodehouse pastiche. I used to like Wodehouse but I just couldn't get into this story. The author notes its relationship to *Saturn's Children*: if you were a big fan of the latter you might appreciate this more. The last story, *Palimpsest* is nearly worth the price of admission by itself. It's more than a little reminiscent of a famous story by Isaac Asimov but so, so much better. The key to time travel is held by an organisation that wants to stop humanity going extinct. To do this it periodically re-seeds Earth with populations taken from earlier iterations of humanity and, between epochs, does things like re-ignite the sun (which ought to have burned out within a few billion years). This story has it all - deep time, stellar engineering, time travel, paradoxes, the Singularity and more. The author notes that it's a novella that wanted to be a novel, and I think it feels a little constrained. None the less, it's an amazing read and highly recommended. I gave this book five stars. There were a few stories I didn't care for, but that's true of any collection. The gems of this collection would be worth buying on their own and justify the ranking.

From the short and funny MAXOS to the long and dark Missile Gap, *Wireless* is an amazing tour through Stross' futuristic world view. Central to this view is the observation that if there is anything out there in the stars it will surely defy our comprehension. To some extent, Stross is an atheist theologian. He draws equally from the various Abrahamic traditions as well as literary, pop, and tech culture and speculates on what an incomprehensible godlike intelligence could be like. When he isn't exploring Lovecraftian horrors or post-singularity strong-AI, we get a glimpse into the near future or alternative near-pasts. From a content to volume perspective, *Wireless* is the anti-Baroque Cycle. While both Stephenson's and Stross' work cover a broad conceptual

space, Stephenson does so in a single story that spans three volumes and thousands of pages. Stross delivers numerous stories that together fit within hundreds of pages. Readers familiar with Stross' previously published works will enjoy the new explorations of familiar ideas presented in *Wireless*. Readers encountering Stross for the first time will have an opportunity to drink from the fire hose, one gulp at a time.

For a fan of Lovecraftian fiction there are some good reasons to get this collection. If you don't have a copy of *Toast*, *Wireless* will give you a print copy of *A Colder War*. In my view this is one of the most brilliant Cthulhu mythos stories of the modern era. For other top stories I suggest *The Doom That Came to Innsmouth* by McNaughton and *Final Draft* by Annadale). It is true to Lovecraft's cosmicism and to his essential bleakness. It also was genre bending when written, in the same sense *Delta Green* was. The nightmares lurking behind corners are not secret; they are well realized by governments that try to keep them secret or exploit them for gain. Another good reason to get this book is *Down on the Farm*, the latest *Laundry* novella. If you have *The Atrocity Archive* and *The Jennifer Morgue*, and are impatiently awaiting *The Fuller Memorandum*, here is your latest fix. So far *Down on the Farm* is unavailable in print elsewhere. As is typical for his *Laundry* series, I was grandly entertained. Finally, some might argue, but I think the cosmic vision of *Missile Gap* has echoes of Lovecraft for its non-humancentric viewpoint. There was not one story here I did not thoroughly enjoy, although *Trunk and Disordely* was amusing rather than hilarious. Fans of *Wodehouse* may like it better. *Palimpsest* has many similarities to *Accelerando*. It seems to me that Stross is just seething with clever ideas and short stories allows him to explore those that might not sustain a novel. If you have not sampled his compact and witty prose before, here's your chance.

There are dozens of authors out there whose opinions I respect who love Stross' writing. I read "*Saturn's Children*" when it was nominated for a Hugo and didn't really like it; so when the publisher offered a review copy, I thought this would be a GREAT chance to read more of his writing. Obviously he's good. And "*Saturn's Children*" was just one book. I tried to read the stories in this book and found I didn't really like them, either. I think the grim lives and hard science mixed with Cold War politics in "*Missile Gap*" may have put me off the rest. After that everything tasted bitter. And yet, I can see why others like his stuff. It's unusual and different. The science is there and thoughtfully fictionalized. He's got a good grasp of story and imagination.

Mr. Stross gives us a taste of his short form prose, and a glimpse of his creative process in editorial

commentary. While he seems to doubt his talents in this demanding form, I found excellent reading.

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