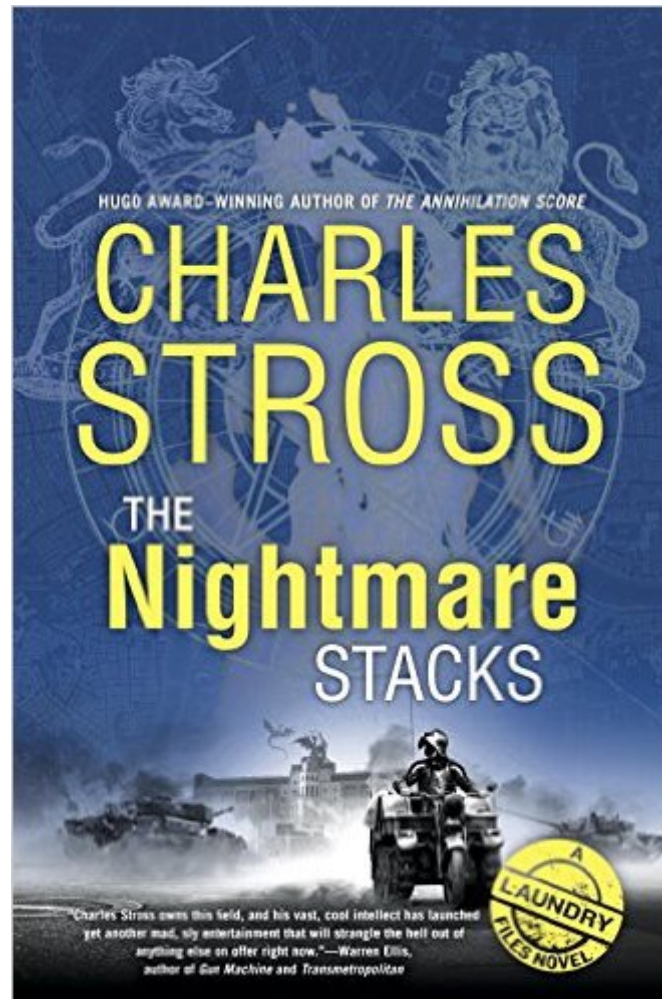


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The Nightmare Stacks (A Laundry Files Novel)



Synopsis

The Laundry Files™ is a fast-paced blend of espionage thrills, mundane office comedy and Lovecraftian horror (SFX) continues as Hugo Award-winning author Charles Stross assigns a day trader to a permanent position on the night shift...After stumbling upon the algorithm that turned him and his fellow merchant bankers into vampires, Alex Schwartz was drafted by the Laundry, Britain's secret counter-occult agency that's humanity's first line of defense against the forces of darkness. Dependent on his new employers for his continued existence—as Alex has no stomach for predatory blood-sucking—he has little choice but to accept his new role as an operative-in-training. For his first assignment, Alex is dispatched to Leeds to help assess the costs of renovating a 1950s Cold War bunker for use as the Laundry's new headquarters. Unfortunately, Leeds is Alex's hometown, and the thought of breaking the news to his parents that he's left banking for the Civil Service, while hiding his undead condition, is causing him more anxiety than learning how to live as a vampire secret agent preparing to confront multiple apocalypses. Alex's only saving grace is Cassie Brewer, a drama student appearing in the local goth festival who is inexplicably attracted to him despite his awkward personality and massive amounts of sunblock. But Cassie has secrets of her own—secrets that make Alex's nightlife behaviors seem positively normal...

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Well, this is clearly the first half (third?) of a new story arc in the Laundry Files, and I'm frustrated to

have to wait to find out what happens next. I hope that the new characters and plot arc developed in The Nightmare Stacks meet up with characters from the rest of the series. That said, it's a damn fun read. I'm going to focus on one thing here. I am a working researcher in evolutionary biology and genomics. I'm used to sci-fi treating my field as a magic McGuffin, informed at a Newsweek-level understanding. There are some really wonderful examples of sci-fi stories that hang on interesting bits of physics, sci-fi's main wheelhouse for a long time. The biology in sci-fi... sucks. The biotechnology is even sillier. If you want to find sci-fi physics as bad as contemporary sci-fi biotech, you'll have to dig up texts from the Edwardian Era. That doesn't mean it isn't fun to read, but the biotech in books like Jurassic Park or The Windup Girl contain nonsense on the level of landing on the surface of the sun and having tea with the little orange fellows that live there. It brought actual tears to my eyes as Stross nailed the technical difficulties of sequencing DNA from forensic samples; nailed the fact that mitochondrial DNA is what you'd get first from a genome sequencing effort; nailed what kind of evolutionary inferences can and cannot be drawn from mitochondrial DNA; nailed the logical next steps -- targeted (probably PCR-based) sequencing of relevant nuclear genes. I love how he placed his fictional excursion firmly within what the science tells us is plausible and comprehensible. Charles -- if you're reading this -- whoever you consulted on the biology is telling you good things. MOAR PLEASE.

I'll be honest, after the disappointment that was The Annihilation Score, I was hesitant to see us following someone beside Bob, in this case, Alex Schwartz, a PHANG originally introduced two books ago. On the whole, The Nightmare Stacks does a well-done look at fleshing out the universe of the Laundry series as well as showing CASE NIGHTMARE GREEN is not the only "end of the world as we know it" scenario that we have to worry about. I'll avoid spoilers, but I kept thinking this bares resemblance to "Occult Casablanca". It could be a decent introduction to the series for new readers as it doesn't directly reference many of the events or characters from earlier novels (as Alex wasn't there), though long time readers will see many references to events going all the way back to the first book. I would highly recommend this to any occult novel lover, but be warned; it's long and you might not be able to put it down until you finish it some 10 hours later.

And once more Stross pulls it off with another excellent and darkly fun Laundry-verse novel. Only this time with nazi elves dealing with the outcomes of their own CASE NIGHTMARE RAINBOW and eyeing our world greedily, but on very limited intel (oh dear). Then there's Alex, a maths nerd and socially inept vampire/PHANG virgin, who's still coming to terms with their condition and being

drafted into the Laundry, whilst being cursed with the twin horrors of Leeds and family expectations and dinner, on top of Laundry work involved with relocating the HQ to Leeds due to prior fun with PHANG's in The Rhesus Chart. Add in "Cassie" (boy meets girl), a Laundry DM, inept management of national security and a magic-based Outside Context Problem, with chlorine-trifluoride powered dragons to boot, and stir. Oh and of course you don't need to have read any of the prior novels to enjoy this either, though doing so will provide even more points of mad merriment, via Alex's opinions of Bob and Mo and prior PHANG-ventures, along with making it even more evident just how bad things are becoming. [edited to fix sleep deprivation induced errors]

Stross' latest Laundry is an interesting ride. As with the previous we've moved away from Howard as the protagonist to one of the other characters in the universe. In this case a PHANG. The timing is interesting, for the first time there is a date to hang things on but in the chronology this novel happens within months of the "Score". While the book is well written and hangs together nicely I miss Howard. This is an obvious segue book, it tells a big story in the universe but serves as a transition to other, bigger things to come. This isn't to say it is bad. Just that it is part of a piece and shouldn't be your first look at The Laundry. It seems as if he's bring in some tropes from The Merchant Princes series (for clarity, I am not a fan of that series).

A new Laundry novel is always a treat. This one is no exception but it's a weaker story than usual. Stross is expanding the team and moving scenarios beyond just Bob, Mo, and crew. Alex, the PHANG-challenged vampire symbiotic host we met a couple of books ago is the main character this time around. He's a good agent and coupled with a few old regulars the story proceeds apace but is just not as satisfying as earlier books. Definitely read this book if you're a fan of the Laundry series -- we're finally in major nightmare scenario time (we've known this was coming) -- and you don't want to miss our first major interdimensional invasion of Leeds. But at the same time I felt let down by the story. It was short, a bit too easily resolved (shame about the casualties but still...), and opens many more questions than it answers. I hope the next book sees a return to high form for this series.

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