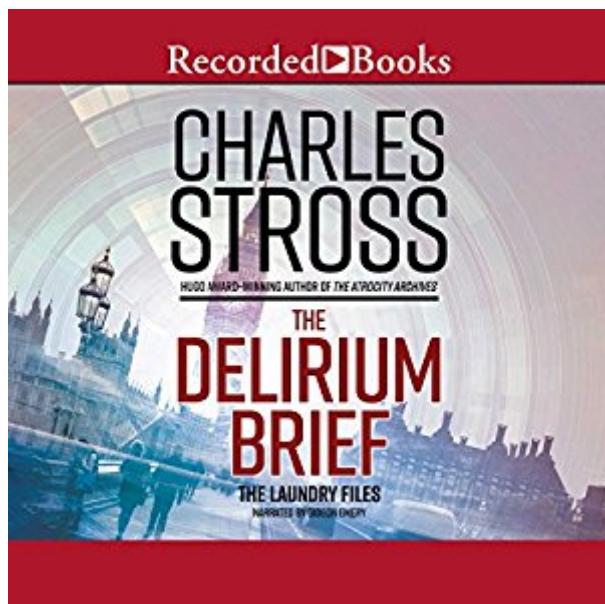


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The Delirium Brief



Synopsis

The eighth case in Charles Stross' Laundry Files, the Hugo Award-winning series described by Kirkus Reviews as "a weirdly alluring blend of super-spy thriller, deadpan comic fantasy, and Lovecraftian horror". Bob Howard's career in the Laundry, the secret British government agency dedicated to protecting the world from unspeakable horrors from beyond spacetime, has entailed high combat, brilliant hacking, ancient magic, and combat with indescribably repellent creatures of pure evil. It has also involved a wearying amount of paperwork and office politics, and his expense reports are still a mess. Now, following the invasion of Yorkshire by the Host of Air and Darkness, the Laundry's existence has become public, and Bob is being trotted out on TV to answer pointed questions about elven asylum seekers. What neither Bob nor his managers have foreseen is that their organization has earned the attention of a horror far more terrifying than any demon: a British government looking for public services to privatize. There's a lot of potential shareholder value in the Laundry's "knowledge assets". Inch by inch, Bob Howard and his managers are forced to consider the truly unthinkable: a coup against the British government itself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Like many of Charlie Stross' novels, there's a serious risk of lost sleep from "must read one more chapter" syndrome. If this had been the (premature) end of the series, it would have been a pretty satisfying ending place, but clearly, there is at least one more page-turner left to go. The following is intended to be a spoiler-free review for this book, but may contain light spoilers for earlier books. I'm thrilled that there are more books coming in the series (and the book ends well, with a lovely set-up

for whatever comes next), but this book is very much a culmination of various Chekov's firearms strewn about the previous books. That said, this should not be the first book in the series you read, for the same reason. The last several Laundry books broke away from the "imitate spy author X, now imitate Y..." (Chandler, Fleming, etc.) pattern. Then there were books that were superficially about urban fantasy (vampires), super heroes, and fantasy (elven SS invaders). I'm not even sure what this book is (in a good way), but it starts out as one kind of a spy thriller (dead drops, car chases, that sort of thing), moves through a... well, consequential things happen and the tension seriously ramps up, an evil plan is revealed... and then there's the last third/quarter. (Boom.) Plenty of twists and WTF moments. Although there's a massive conclusion (playing out across multiple locations simultaneously), this book's important threads are satisfactorily resolved (while threads for the next are laid down). So, you know how in the last book Leeds was trashed and there was a body count? Yeah, things are much worse than that in this book.

Been reading these Laundry Files books since Charles Stross started writing them. This one is different from the previous ones, however, and that much is good. Most book series try to maintain the same basic settings and premises for as long as possible, and then within this unchanging sandbox new stories are hatched. But the problem is that they all have the same general shape, because they were all created against the same backdrop. Rather than crank out one more story out of the old context, in the Delirium Brief Stross starts messing with the formula, and that much is fun. First of all, the whole world is now aware of The Laundry, because the elf invasion of a previous book couldn't be covered up. And then, the Laundry as it has been known has been dissolved in an interesting and fairly plausible way: It gets privatized. Against this shifting backdrop Stross unleashes a story that is closer to a spy novel than one of his previous existential-threat-to-humanity-by-horrors-from-beyond plots which we all know and love. That much is good. But the central plot in this book has a tough time unfolding, and there's repeated cuts to descriptions of bureaucratic politics and behind-the-scenes players. And don't get me wrong--those are at times interesting and even essential elements. But these elements take up so much time that the core plot loses momentum, and when it comes back you find yourself saying, "Oh yeah, right: There's an existential threat to humanity I forgot about". Don't get me wrong: If you've been reading this series from the beginning, you won't want to skip this book, at least when it comes out in paperback. But at hardcover prices I'd wait.

It's Stross. It's the Laundry. Ridiculously meticulous research, crazy facts everywhere, snark

exploding from all sides, nightmarish happenings. The only reason I can mark it down at all is because the casual reader needs to be warned this is not the right place to join on. Too much is dependent on what was set up in previous books and without that experience a lot of it is going to be just a bunch of empty names. If everyone else is sensible it will average out to the full five stars it deserves anyhow. A lot of urban fantasy and similar conceits depend on what the TV Tropes pages call "The Masquerade." It is an annoying assumption; that somehow the outside world goes on like normal, up to and including the protagonist having to get to school on time after a long night fighting monsters. The Laundry series had an extra-strength one going for the previous books, with binding geas and similar Men In Black tricks to keep their existence secret. Not in this one. Spoiler ahead; the events of the previous book made it pretty clear that hiding was no longer an option, but this one is only a few chapters in when all those annoying geases fall apart, the Q-armory of magic toys is locked up, the black budgets pulled, and our heroes are left blinking and unhappy in the bright sunlight (particularly unhappy, in the case of Alex and his Scrum friends from a couple books back). And then it gets worse (this is a Laundry book after all). The dancing stops and the masques come off ...at the stroke of midnight in the seventh room.

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