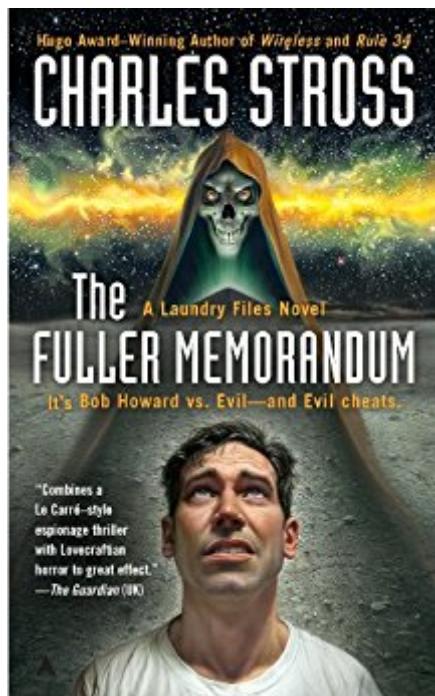


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The Fuller Memorandum (Laundry Files Book 3)



Synopsis

View our feature on Charles Stross' The Fuller Memorandum. National bestselling author Charles Stross brings back Bob Howard—"a British super spy with a long-term girlfriend, no fashion sense, and an aversion to martinis" (San Francisco Chronicle) Bob Howard is taking a much needed break from the field to catch up on his filing in The Laundry's archives when a top secret dossier known as The Fuller Memorandum vanishes—along with his boss, who the agency's executives believe stole the file. Determined to discover exactly what the memorandum contained, Bob runs afoul of Russian agents, ancient demons, and the apostles of a hideous faith, who have plans to raise a very unpleasant undead entity known as the Eater of Souls...

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Customer Reviews

If you've read a previous Laundry book, you'll want to read this, and if you haven't, then don't start here, start with the first Laundry book. Reviewing this book on its own merits is hard. It is so clearly part of a series and is bound tightly into a saga I have enjoyed repeatedly. Still, it's tightly plotted, edge of the seat page-turner stuff. There's a bit more slack here than in the Hidden Family/Merchant

Princes series; it's not quite so intense a read, but it's not a fault. The author knows we're hooked into the Bob Howard story, and can take his time to deliver a bit more character depth and background because of it. Stross writes a bit more like Neal Stephenson here than Ludlum or Child, but it's almost unfair to say that. By any measure, Stross stands as significant as sci-fi author as Stephenson. Accelerando is possibly the definitive 'technological singularity' novel, but I should probably say more about this book... This feels like the end of the beginning of the series. The protagonist seems to have matured significantly from his early days but probably can't change too much without losing us. This is the book where the Laundry really settles down and makes good on the promise that it wasn't just a one or two book wonder. I think there's a promise of several more books to come here, and subsequent publications have borne that out.

This is Charles Stross's third novel in the ongoing story of Bob Howard, a career computer programmer and IT guy who happens to work at "The Laundry," the British Civil Service arm designated to protect against threats mystical and magical. Stross here cooks the familiar stew of geek references, office politics parody, spy thriller, and Lovecraftian occult esoterica that's flavored the Laundry series so well so far, and if you liked the first two books (The Atrocity Archives and The Jennifer Morgue) you'll like this one (although it's closer to the post-cold-war spy-thriller tone of the first book than the Bond-esque stylings of the second). Fans of the series will find out more about the mysterious past of Howard's boss, Angleton, and you'll see some further development of Howard's relationship with his now-wife, Dominique O'Brian. The book maintains a thriller-appropriate level of tension throughout, with some lighthearted moments, and numerous references to geek culture (such as a series of comic descriptions of an iphone, and a buried allusion to Jim Butcher's *Dresden Files* books). Where this volume does differ from the prior two books is in its sense of escalation. The occult players in Bob Howard's world are all moving towards "CASE NIGHTMARE GREEN," the coming apocalyptic incursion of Lovecraftian Elder Gods into our reality, projected to happen sometime in the next few years of series-time. This volume has a definite sense of players shifting for position in game with increasing stakes -- if the first two books were set to "warm," this one cooks at a simmer, and it's pretty clear Stross plans to take us all the way to boiling in the next few books. If he maintains this level of quality, I'll be looking forward to them. If you want a free foretaste of the Laundry series, there are two Laundry/Bob Howard short stories available on the web for free, respectively titled "Overtime" and "Funny Farm". "Overtime", at least, can be grabbed for free from the Kindle store, here: [Overtime: A Tor.Com Original](#)

What started as a novelette ("The Atrocity Archives") about the Laundry, a super-secret British intel agency fighting Cthulhoid deities, infovores from other universes and other seriously bad ju-ju, is rapidly becoming a franchise, with its own Chaosium game package and other goodies cranked out every year. This is the fifth story (and the first full-length novel) of the series, with a sixth on the way, and I couldn't wait to get into it. The easily depreassed should be warned, however -- this is also the darkest in tone of the series to date, and a sequence where Bob falls into the hands of a blood-drinking group of Lovecraftian cultists is definitely not for children or the squeamish. It even starts off on a low note, with hero Bob Howard botching a routine field job and being hauled up on the carpet first by oversight agency Oscar-Oscar (in the person of ex-police inspector Jo Sullivan, from an earlier episode), then by the dreaded Auditors, and is put on paid leave. From there, things just get worse: his lovely wife Mo and her Erich-Zann-model violin are being pursued by someone, possibly the shadowy Thirteenth Directorate of the KGB (all right, FSB, for purists), somebody tries to kidnap Bob with the help of a visiting Hound of Tindalos, and a key top-secret document from the 1930s disappears. More worryingly, Bob's boss, the enigmatic James Angleton, spook in residence and lynch-pin of the Laundry, goes AWOL at the same time. And this is only the first half of the book! One of the charms of this series is Stross's ability to hang his stories on pegs fashioned from some of the darkest and most cobwebby alleys of human history (e.g., the very real Ahnenerbe SS of "The Atrocity Archive" and the equally real saga of the Glomar Explorer in "The Jennifer Morgue"). In this case, he has resurrected one of the Twentieth Century's nastiest characters, Baron Roman Ungern von Sternburg (also unfortunately very real - sells the definitive biography of him, "The Bloody White Baron", by James Palmer, who calls him "an appalling human being in almost every way"). A sadistic psychopath who made Himmler and Beria look mild-mannered, Ungern von Sternburg took advantage of the Russian Civil War to make himself briefly virtual dictator of Mongolia, as part of a scheme to restore the Tsar and commit genocide against Jews, Communists and anyone else who annoyed him, aided by a stolid executioner nicknamed Teapot (also unfortunately quite real). He failed, of course, and was eventually handed over by his own outraged White Russian army to the Reds for execution, after impaling, crucifying and otherwise killing thousands of Mongols, Chinese, Communists and others unfortunate enough to cross his path. My only gripe, and it is a mild one, is that Stross is somewhat harsh on Ungern von Sternburg's nominal boss, the blind Reting Hutuktu, puppet Great Khan and last Living Buddha of the Mongolian variant of Tibetan Buddhism (at least until 1991, when a successor was installed in Ulan Bator in a purely religious capacity). From my reading of other Westerners who were

gallivanting around Mongolia in the 1920s before the Stalinists took over and closed it to the outside world, like Ossendowski and Roy Chapman Andrews, the Hutuktu seems to have been guilty more of alcoholism, self-indulgence and advanced senility than of a desire to slaughter his subjects en masse and drink their blood (which may be why it works in the story - to a Westerner, the idea of a sect of murderous blood-drinking Buddhists is so bizarre as to induce cognitive dissonance!) While the story, like all the others, ends on a quiet note, with Bob holding hands with his Mo at the Laundry's seaside get-away, a crumbling town formerly known as Dunwich (which also really exists - like I said, Stross has a knack for digging up these things), the thunderclouds continue to loom on the horizon. Bob tells us that he and Mo refuse to have a child, or even adopt a pet, because they know the horror that is coming and refuse to subject something they love to it. On one issue, however, he has found peace - he knows now who (or what) Angleton really is, what he did to office harpies Bridget and Harriet after their attempted failed coup in an earlier story, and what motivates him, and finds out that in the end, he and his ageless and spooky boss have more in common than anyone would have thought. In summary, this is a great yarn and a work that easily keeps up the quality standards set by earlier stories in the Laundry series.

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