



The Annihilation Score

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Hugo Award-winning author Charles Stross presents the next case in The Laundry Files.

Dominique O'Brien—her friends call her Mo—lives a curious double life with her husband, Bob Howard. To the average civilian, they're boring middle-aged civil servants. But within the labyrinthian secret circles of Her Majesty's government, they're operatives working for the nation's occult security service known as the Laundry, charged with defending Britain against dark supernatural forces threatening humanity.

Mo's latest assignment is assisting the police in containing an unusual outbreak: ordinary citizens suddenly imbued with extraordinary abilities of the super-powered kind. Unfortunately these people prefer playing super-pranks instead of super-heroics. The Mayor of London being levitated by a dumpy man in Trafalgar Square would normally be a source of shared amusement for Mo and Bob, but they're currently separated because something's come between them—something evil.

An antique violin, an Erich Zann original, made of human white bone, was designed to produce music capable of slaughtering demons. Mo is the custodian of this unholy instrument. It invades her dreams and yearns for the blood of her colleagues—and her husband. And despite Mo's proficiency as a world class violinist, it cannot be controlled...

The Annihilation Score Details

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From Reader Review The Annihilation Score for online ebook

Stoic_quin says

Oddly keen to attend the proms now.

Cathy says

2.5 stars. When I realized the book was from Mo's point of view I was excited, she's always been a favorite character that we didn't get to see enough of. But it was pretty disappointing. I didn't need her to be a typical urban fantasy kick-ass heroine. I liked that she's a forty-three year-old wife with marriage issues. I wasn't so keen on her self-esteem issues, or at least on the assumption that all women eventually have "middle-aged invisibility syndrome." I'm two years older than her and it didn't even occur to me until half way through the book or more to even think about if it applied to me or my friends, it just didn't at all seem relevant to my experience enough to think about it. But I could see that in major cities like London, New York, LA, DC that it could be more of a factor, cities with more high-power careers and where appearances are judged more harshly. Anyway, a lot of the rest of the book was quite slow, there are a lot of administrative functions and meetings and reports. I've done too much of that myself and while I sympathize with Mo and her team having to do it, I isn't something I actually want to read about it all that much.

Also, I didn't really quite get who Stross was telling me Mo was. For example, on the one hand, she's this strong woman who's carried that horrible bone violin for eight years and in the process had to be the person who fixed a whole lot of absolutely horrendous situations. She not only witnessed truly awful situations, she had to use her instrument to do beyond horrible things to end incursions from other universes or whatever nightmares she was sent to fix. But she also found a dirty litter box to be "icky" and the cat doing her business made her flee the room. That didn't seem like much of a frightening sight compared to the horrors of the multiverse, dead bodies floating in the air, and other things Mo was having nightmares about. I don't think a male writer would write anything like that about a (middle-aged) male protagonist. The box might have been gross or disgusting and he might not want to deal with his spouse's cat's mess or to watch it take a s*** or piss but the language wouldn't be suddenly infantilized, that's for sure. Mo kills demons, blood and guts give her nightmares, some poop might stink but I don't see it making her *Oh Dearing* about how icky it is and fleeing the making of such. She's a grown woman! And she said she's have cats before, for that matter. She grew up in a house with cats. So where's the shock from? She's seen it all before, from the making of the stank to the cleaning up of said stank. It's just a dumb scene that made a strong heroine look weak to no purpose. I just didn't quite get the whole character, what he was driving at. I liked the imperfect, human woman who didn't give up and kept driving forward despite her fears and insecurities. I just didn't get who this woman was, she was so different from the Mo as presented in the past. She really didn't have anything to do with music, except to go to some concerts. She gave up teaching without a second thought. She barely seems to care about her marriage or her husband, despite some lip service to the contrary. She's totally reasonable all of the time with Ramona and Mhari and all of the people she works with, where the heck did her temper go? She felt like a totally new character who happened to be named Mo and be living in the house that Bob and his wife live in. Maybe she really was possessed after all and we'll find out in the next book.

It's very disappointing because it should have been a fun book. Superheroes are fun! Mo used to be a witty, cool character. This Mo was a total downer, bitter and mean-spirited. She had reason to be down about a lot of things, but writing it that way didn't make for a good book. And a plot was really weak, she was just

screwed around with a lot in the end, and it just turns out to be a bridge book to get things to the last two pages. It was just weak, Mo deserved better.

Matthew says

If this were a standalone book set in the laundry universe id give it 4 stars but seeing as its book 6 in a series i give it a 1. Very bummed. I've read all the previous books many many times over and love them.

Dissapointing is an understatement, Stross has gone all George Lucas and crystal skull on us. The way Mo talks about bob makes her seems like a dead set bitch. Was completely blown by how callous she is and her complete lack of respect for him. Even the content of the story steered to far into fantasy for me. The first 4 books(5 went a little south) although containing fantasy elements were still grounded in reality. Sorry Mr stross but i hope the next book redeems you.

Edit

ok after some reflection i have changed my review. It is a good story. Not the story i was expecting or wanted but entertaining none the less.

My above points about being a bit to far fantasy still stand and definetly Mo's attitude and negativity towards bob.

Carly says

"Please allow me to introduce myself...

No. Strike that. Period stop backspace backspace bloody computer no stop that stop listening stop dictating end *end* oh I give up.

Will you stop doing that?"

Meet Mo, a.k.a. Dominique, employee of the UK's super-secret black-ops magic organisation (they call it the Laundry), wife of Bob Howard (a.k.a. The Eater of Souls), bearer of a psychotically evil soul-sucking bone violin, and combat epistemologist. When Mo takes a trip to do a little glad-handing with the Deep Ones (aka BLUE HADES), she thinks she's finally going to get a bit of well-deserved R&R. But before she knows it, a tiny mistake has landed her neck-deep in trouble, and even worse, in bureaucratic paperwork. In Mo's world, the end is nigh, and all hell is beginning to break loose. As the barriers between our world and the Elder Ones of the Dungeon Dimensions break down, more and more people are gaining magical abilities. Magic is rationalized in the context of culture, and given the superhero craze, suddenly there are a disturbing number of people running (or flying) around in Lycra suits that may not precisely flatter them. And a series of mistakes leave Mo in charge of a brand-new superhero ops organization tasked with stopping the superhero singularity. To make things worse, there's a new supervillain Mad Scientist on the loose, and he he's leaving behind messages of the "Tremble, Fools, Before It is Too Late!" variety, and worst of all, the messages are printed in Comic Sans.

I suspect that the most divisive part of the book will be the change in narrators from Bob to Mo. Personally, I strongly preferred Mo to Bob. She's introduced to us in the midst of an unjustified attack of jealousy, but once she gets past that, I really warmed to her. I've grown a bit tired of Bob, and Mo's spiky, sarcastic, vibrant personality revived the series for me. I also wasn't too surprised by their marital issues; intentional or not on Stross's part, I've never sensed any chemistry between Bob and Mo. (Since much of the series is a

Bond spoof, there are quite a few obligatory Bond girls, and Bob doesn't really think of Mo when she's not around.) While the previous books in the series don't really defy their Bond roots in the sexism department, I thought Stross did a pretty good job with his female characters here. He even has a wonderful riff on the Invisible Middle-Aged Woman syndrome. (Sure, there's the obsession on Bob's past partners, but Mo's Bechdel test failure moment is actually called out in-book.) The plot itself is rather measured, dealing mostly with Mo's struggles to get her fledgling superhero team going. I'm pretty sure anyone who has dealt with bureaucracy will find it amusing. For me, however, the ending was a bit of an off note. (view spoiler)

As always, Stross is absolutely hilarious, and this time, you don't need a computer science degree to get in on the jokes. Some of my favourite quotes:

"Yes, she's a blood-sucking fiend. But she's also a superbly competent administrator and has an MBA which I think you'll agree makes up for a lot of sins."

"Scientific research is a bottomless money pit. You can approximate Doing Science to standing on the Crack of Doom throwing banknotes down it by the double-handful, in the hope that if you choke the volcano with enough paper it will cough up the One Ring."

"Despair, dismay, disorientation, and delusion: the four horsemen of the bureaucratic apocalypse."

Unfortunately, though, I don't really think it's possible to read this without the context of the previous books. I skipped only one (#5, *The Rhesus Chart*) and found myself quite bewildered by the references to recent events. I can't imagine how hard it would be to read this without some knowledge of the Laundry, the Eater of Souls, and CASE NIGHTMARE GREEN. However, if you're looking to give the series a try, I think you can start with #2 (*The Jennifer Morgue*) or #3(*The Fuller Memorandum*)--I did.

***Note: quotes were taken from an uncorrected advanced reader copy of this ebook and may not reflect the final version. However, I believe they speak to the spirit of the book.*

~~I received an advanced reader copy of this ebook through Netgalley from the publisher, Ace Books, a Penguin Random House imprint, in exchange for my honest review. Thank you!~~

Robin Edman says

So, seriously, do you think he let someone ghostwrite this one? The book has the advantage of being easier to read than the other entries in the series, but the voice of Mo has no charm whatever. She reveals herself to be a very unpleasant person, and frankly I do not care whether things turn out well for her or not. Bob would do better with the soul-sucking ex than with this one.

I do understand that it may be advantageous to tell the story from another perspective than that of the Eater, but this frivolous, jealous, solipsistic cow is not an adequate replacement for Bob. Whom I love.

Oh, and, by the way, I'm fifty-two years old, and I have no trouble getting a waiter's attention. I do it by being nice to them. Sheesh. Oh, and I don't vomit every time something bad happens. That's just stupid.

Bradley says

Re-read 6/4/18:

Suffice to say, the dynamics between Bob and Mo are rather divisive. I guess I will always find a place to forgive Mo in my heart.

She's been through so much. She's been carrying around the One Ring for Too Many Years. Add that to all the other crap that went on, I'm surprised she didn't crack like a walnut under all that stress. So yeah, I suppose I'm perternaturally disposed to give her a free pass. :)

Oh yeah, and the story kicked superhero butt. :)

Original Review:

I may be a card-toting fan of Charlie, here, but I know this novel deserves a ton of praise despite my bias. For one, he actually shifts from Bob Howard's character to Mo, his smarter, more competent half, and does it so well that even an ex-angry-white-boy like myself can feel like she feels GENUINE. That may be very hard or very easy, considering that I'm actually rather hard on books in my heart, while often giving them a pass in the final analysis or the fact that I am, indeed, still only a boy and have never been a girl.

That being said, Mo struggled like hell against all the pigeonholing that everyone tried to slap on her, and I loved every single second of it. I haven't rooted for a character this deeply in a while. And this might sound a bit like blasphemy, but I'm having a very hard time deciding whether I love her more than Bob. It's that seminal question old Heinlein fans had to ask... after traveling with Lazy so long, did you find yourself preferring his mom in *To Sail Beyond the Sunset*?

Okay, maybe that might be too obscure, and we're actually talking about marital strife, not child-dynamics, but still.

I've very much enjoyed Bob's hyperbole, SO dry humor, the shifting horrors of bureaucracy treading while surrounded with Lovecraftian nightmares. He is a hapless programmer who eventually became (view spoiler) and therefore is a FORCE, especially after the previous novel did everything in its power to crush the Laundry and managed to kill off a lot of good friends in the process, leaving him in the possession *ha, get it?* of 80 years of secrets.

But now comes Domonique, his wife, catching him in a horribly compromising situation, and her own pet demon in the guise of a violin made of bone and eldritch horror decides its time to take vengeance on her man for what appears to be infidelity (it isn't) with a vampire (damn those running for your life circumstances), and Bob's little counterargument by way of tiny glowing worms in his eyes.

I understand why their marriage is breaking down. Truly. But it makes me so sad. Neither of them wanted what eventually happened. It's not like Bob actually wanted (view spoiler)

All this, mind you is merely a setup for the novel that actually came to us. It's like Charlie decided to put his incredibly facile brain to the task of treating the whole vampire phenomenon to a huge dose of this universe in the previous book, and found itself unable to cope, and then decided to do the same thing to the superhero phenomenon in this one.

And again, NOTHING can survive the bureaucratic mangler.

I loved it. I haven't been forced to read this slowly, for such obvious and prolonged sessions of pleasure and horror, in a long time.

These books are funny. They're funny in how they've completely twisted my view of popular culture. The superhero angle was absolutely not derivative. Their origin story is closely tied to the oncoming shitstorm of CASE NIGHTMARE GREEN, the invasion of all the dungeon dimensions onto the earth, and the invasion is only masking itself as popular belief systems. Dreams and hopes. So when superheroes start popping up all over the place, so do the supervillains.

The only way to combat such a nightmare is by using Upper-Middle Management to put together a task force to train and retain new superpowers, transform people in Pervert Suits into Law Abiding Constables, and put a civilized lid on the whole mess. Screw you, Xavier. This is a job for Home Office.

So delicious, and SO dry. :)

I could go on and on about this novel, but I'll stop here. There's a reason this has become one of my absolute top SF/Horror/Humor series, ever, and I can feel the waves of struggle underneath to turn it into something deep and serious, besides. I love Mo.

The whole novel just screams of a downhill slide with truly horrific consequences, and it delivered with prejudice. Hugely entertaining. Heads and above the competition, although, to be honest, I know of NO AUTHOR that fits this mold. Believe me, I've been looking for others that can pull off something like this, and yet, I've never seen anyone that has been able to do THIS.

Dare I say it? I keep looking and looking, and I'm not exactly unread. Dare I say that this series is UNIQUE?

Uniquely good, even, and rising to new heights. I liked the previous novel, but I positively loved this one. :)

Trish says

[cheat on him by kissing Officer Friendly and putting his hand on your knee (yes, that IS cheating) because you want to have fun (your own words) because you're in a midlife crisis and feel invisible which you can't

stand (hide spoiler)]

Will says

Goddam, this book is a disappointment.

After N books of Bob Howard's Laundry, it should be interesting to see Mo O'Brian's Laundry, and see the world through Mo's eyes. Unfortunately, in this book the role of Mo has been filled by Bridget Jones.

Just once, I would love to see a book where the middle aged female protagonist doesn't have a hunky co-worker she finds hard to resist, while her absent husband and struggling marriage labor on in the background. Or find herself in a contrived situation that requires her to work with her husband's ex-girlfriends. It's.... derivative.

This is made worse by the static nature of the plot. The premise of the book is that Mo's and her team is in the middle of London, on call to put down third tier supervillains. (view spoiler)

Oh, and a thinly veiled (view spoiler) was just cringe inducing.

Torie says

[Where do I start?

We finally get a book from Mo's point of view. She doesn't have a very distinct voice, so it's less fun to be in her head. She's unpleasant, actually. And I hate superheroes. But that's okay, right? Mo is a competent trained assassin with a badass weapon of mass destruction! Surely she is going to take part in some badass adventures and show that

C.T. Phipps says

I'm a huge fan of Charles Stross' Laundry Files series.

I'm also a critic of it.

When it's good, like The Apocalypse Codex, it's very-very good.

When it's bad, The Jennifer Morgue, it's really bad.

Don't hate me Charlie, it's just my opinion.

Here?

It's kind of weird because the really-really good parts are on display right next to the parts I found

troublesome. I had to check myself, as well, because I needed to separate what was upsetting characterization from what is bad writing. Which is to say that the characters do actions which are upsetting to me but, which, are perfectly well-written. As a reader, I am merely an observer after all and need to accept the show is not always going to go the way I want it to.

So, where was I?

Oh yes, this is a very well-written novel. It's also got a premise I don't think jives with the Laundryverse as has been established.

Also, Mo is a terrible person.

She's a great lead, though!

The premise of the Annihilation Score is the saturation of the world with magic by CASE: NIGHTMARE GREEN (the rise of the Great Old Ones) has resulted in people spontaneously developing superpowers across the world. A minority of these people have decided to put on costumes and become superheroes.

This, of course, necessitates a cover-up by the Laundry as they create an artificial Superman Crime Department for Dominique "Mo" O'Brien to head up. Joining her is Bob's ex-girlfriend Mhari and his brief love-interest Ramona. Mo is not in the best position to be doing this start-up as she is struggling with her control over the White Violin, which she named Lecter, that is attempting to seduce her both mentally as well as physically into becoming its prey.

First, the positives. This is a delightfully off-beat premise for a story and the unromantic way which Charles Stross handles superheroes is entertaining even if it hits on the same problems which made me dislike the Jennifer Morgue. Which is, to say, that I like superheroes much the same way I like James Bond and he spends much of the book making fun of them. Still, a lot of what he touches on like the silly costumes for women and inherent right-wing fantasy elements are things I've often complained about myself.

As for Mo as the viewpoint character? She is a well-developed three-dimensional character with a lot of hidden depths. Mo's also extremely self-absorbed, shallow, and selfish. It's rather striking given the amount of puppy-dog devotion Bob Howard shows her in previous entries that Mo doesn't reciprocate. She seems to vaguely hold her husband in contempt, constantly criticizing him and missing his deep personal trauma.

Mo focuses entirely on whether she's getting emotional satisfaction from their marriage and wonders whether or not its salvageable based on the benefits it derives to her. Bob's recent losses both emotional and personal are kind of ignored in favor of her career issues. Speaking as a married man, this is rather horrifying. To be fair, this isn't bad writing. It's just a sharp contrast with Bob's concern about Mo's own emotional health.

The choice to start dating while they're not formally separated is minor compared to the general callousness, in my humble opinion.

I'm a big fan of tying the White Violin to the King in Yellow, Carcosa, and True Detective. I admit, though, it's kind of weird to have a world where the latter is on television while Doctor Mabuse is a real person. I enjoyed the homage to the movie Labyrinth which the White Violin conjures in Mo's dreams even if I felt their encounters had more than a whiff of sexual assault about them. Thankfully, this element is downplayed. The supporting cast in this book is excellent with Mhari, Ramona, Officer Friendly, and others all being excellent.

In conclusion, this is a well-written book but an uncomfortable one and my second least favorite Laundry Files volume.

I'm still picking up the next.

7/10

Chris says

A very good addition to the series, this book was from Mo's perspective (instead of Bob's) as her life changes direction abruptly - possibly more than once even. Life is unpredictable when you wield a possessed violin made from human bone...

I can't help but notice that many of the lower ratings are from men and have to wonder a bit about that, what with this book having a strong female protagonist. :/

Lindsay says

This is an excellent entry in the Laundry series.

Dominique ("Mo") O'Brien, the protagonist of this book, is the wife of Bob Howard who has been the protagonist of the rest of the books in this series. She's a combat epistemologist, a fairly unique job description that only really makes sense in the Laundry universe, and the wielder of a demonic necromantic violin which kills demons (and pretty much anything else).

At this point in the series CASE NIGHTMARE GREEN has been going for 18 months. That's the Laundry codename for the point at which there are so many thinking creatures on Earth that things from other dimensions are taking notice of us. One of the outcomes of this is people are manifesting superpowers and this book is how superheroes and villains get integrated into the Laundry universe. Mo gets her normal cover blown while dealing with a supervillain in a public setting, and thus is tapped by the Laundry to be the public director of a Superpower Coordination department.

If you dislike Charlie's sometimes over-smug writing you probably won't get this far in the series, so that's one major flaw out of the way. What I felt were the two other major flaws here are entwined. If you remember the events of the previous book, Mo is in a bad place. Early on she's hauled in front of the Auditors and her service geas is activated and her "monitor" is queried about her. It answers that she's green in terms of operational status, but her internal status is amber approaching red. The rest of this book is about taking her from amber, to red, to whatever is after red. She completely misses the obvious plot twist (it's too obvious which is another of the flaws), but that makes sense given her mental state.

This whole series is a very delicate balancing act, between the abject horror of Lovecraftian reality, the things that the Laundry people have to do and have done to them to combat that reality and the hilariousness of doing so within a government department that acts like an IT department that practices modern management techniques. Bob Howard, the usual protagonist, has a delightful sense of the absurd in all of that and navigates it all with aplomb. Mo, on the other hand, has always been portrayed as the smarter, more

competent one in their partnership. But that comes with a more adult attitude which skews the balance towards the grim, which is the last major flaw with the book in my opinion.

All that being said, Mo's viewpoint is welcome even though grim and deteriorating, and the aftermath of this story to the world of the Laundry should be fascinating and I'll be very interested to see who the protagonist for the next one is going to be.

AMil says

Many readers of the Laundry Files do not like the way the series is heading. I don't mind and personally I enjoyed the last book, *The Rhesus Chart*. However, *The Annihilation Score* really annoyed me. But it wasn't the plot or the superhero thing that annoyed me. It was the protagonist, Mo. Specifically her treatment of Bob. I understand that Mo has to deal with a lot of shit and as a result is traumatized both mentally and emotionally. But so has Bob and he was supporting her that whole time. So when Mo says this at the beginning of the book I was blown away:

"My husband is sometimes a bit slow on the uptake; you'd think that after ten years together he'd have realized that our relationship consisted of him, me, and a bone-white violin...But no: the third party in our menage a trois turns out to be a surprise to him after all these years, and he needs more time to think about it."

Bitch, he spent the last decade getting nightmares from your precious violin and being your emotional safety blanket while carrying out his duties as an agent of Laundry, which if you have read the series know was not trauma free. And what makes my blood boil is that it took one glimpse of the eater of souls in Bob's head to make Mo say wait a minute maybe this won't work out after all. That's all the chance she is going to give to a man who has given her a decade of support.

Not only that but she spends a lot of time being insecure about the possibility of Bob cheating on her and his previous relationships with other women and then she cheats on Bob. Sure, she didn't have sex with Jim but going on romantic dates and kissing in a limo doesn't seem very faithful to me. She would probably flip out if Bob did the same thing, just look at her reaction to Bob letting Mhari stay over at their house, and that was Bob trying to keep Mhari from being killed.

This book could have been more enjoyable if it weren't for Mo. Her lack of empathy and understanding is astounding.

Matt says

Well this has been a complete train wreck.

Stross's laundry files series has been heading off the rails for a while now, staying upright only out of a combination of gyroscopic forces imparted by the earlier works and the magic of the source material Stross

is riffing on. But it's been clear for a while now that Stross has no clear idea where to take the story and that his basic inclinations tend to be at odds with where the story needs to go if it is going to keep any resemblance to what made the original so compelling. In part it must be said that it was Bob himself holding the story up, since if you stayed with it this long it was mostly to find out what happened to Bob – the long suffering civil servant IT nerd turned demon slaying field agent. But, by this point there was no obvious reason that Bob's romantic counterpart, Mo' couldn't carry a whole novel on her own.

But there is very specific reason that she can't – this novel sucks and would have been terrible regardless of who the narrator was. I can't begin to count how many of the rules of writing Stross manages to break.

Probably the biggest one is that the actions undertaken by the protagonist should matter to the outcome. But Mo' never really does anything that actually matters. She doesn't gain any real agency until the story has about 10 pages left, and even then... well, more on that later. Everything leading up to the finale is meaningless, and indeed she knows it to be meaningless because her job is simply to create meaningless theater until the real threat reveals itself. So the reader is lead through about 300 pages of pointless meetings, bureaucratic decisions, memo writing, power point presentations, endless rounds of self-doubt and self-analysis and self-pity sessions none of which ultimately end up contributing to the plot or advancing the story. Tasked with creating meaningless theater, it is ultimately revealed just how meaningless it all was, which raises the question: "Why was I forced to read about it?" An author should strive to tell only the most interesting parts of the story, leaving out anything extraneous and unnecessary to the resolution. About 250 pages of this work could have been cut out and made a tighter story. Chekov's gun is repeatedly violated. Pages and pages are spent on things that end up not mattering to the story in the slightest. If I tried to list the things that were introduced that never have any relevancy to the story at all, it would be longer than this review and possibly longer than the actual meat of this novel.

What makes this even worse is from time to time Bob floats on stage and gives some hints about exciting Indiana Jones type delves in to true Lovecraftian abandoned temples and lost cities which makes us wonder why we aren't actually away reading about that sort of stuff rather than attending Mo's business meetings.

Another big problem is that the structure of the story is a mystery novel, with Mo in the role of detective. But despite pondering the clues given her, Mo ultimately never puts any of the clues together. She isn't even the one who solves the mystery, such as it is. We are left to have a minor character inform Mo he's already figured out the solution to the mystery, shortly before she's caught completely by unawares by the mechanizations of the antagonist. In order to have a sympathetic detective protagonist, the audience needs to have some indication that the detective is actually smarter than they are and has, despite the appearances, actually deduced the facts of the case long ago. We don't get any of that here.

Likewise, the basic commitment of a horror story is to frighten and disturb its readers. But Stross despite keeping many of the trappings of a horror story seems to have long ago relinquished any such commitment in favor of creating a world which is I think rather less disturbing to him than this real world actually is. Stross has been getting less frightening and more campy with each novel. I'm not sure how much further things can go in that direction. The Lovecraftian source material is legitimately creepy, with science as the enemy of man, unrelenting doom inexorably advancing on humanity, and reality being in truth so bug-shit screwed up that merely glimpsing it doomed a pathetic human to gibbering senseless insanity. In the Lovecraft universe, you might forestall immediate doom, but generally only at the cost of your health, sanity, and happiness. In the Laundry universe, humanity not only isn't rendered impotent and senseless in the face of reality, it turns into veritable demigods with cool superpowers whose only problem is maybe attracting cosmic parasites which fortunately they also know how to use magic to ward away. Horrific things happen, but mostly to 'the muggles' and other people Stross doesn't particularly like. This is horror as fantasy

escapism. This is sanitized Lovecraft. Lovecraft is scary because he was a creepy nervous guy channeling all his myriad phobias and anxieties on the page as he saw his carefully constructed Anglophile 18th century Enlightenment worldview fall apart.

I'm not sure what motivates these current stories, but it doesn't seem to be an undercurrent of fear and anxiety. It's more an undercurrent of nerd fanboy that reminds me of those nerds in 'Galaxy Quest' that were so excited when it all turned out to be real. The only thing left of the story that is remotely scary is the author is imagining the modern world as Lovecraftian universe and seems to think that would be totally awesome.

For a moment there I thought Charles was going to start exploring Bob as an unreliable narrator, and perhaps give us a glimpse that Bob isn't nearly as sane or trustworthy as he reports himself to be. But nothing really came of it, which could be probably the entirety of this review. Whatever it is in the story, nothing really came of it. None of the relationships between the characters are ever really explored, nor are any of the conflicts created or hinted at resolved. The whole story is empty filler both taken on its own and in the context of the larger Laundry/CASE NIGHTMARE GREEN story arc.

Stross seems to have gone out of his way to create an explicitly feminist story. It's like the whole story was an exercise in writing a book that passed the Bectel Test, but forgot to actually have a plot. Worse, if the book is to be judged by how well it succeeded in that, having practically every female character with a speaking line be one of Bob's prior romantic interests made the whole thing feel more like a harem style anime than a female empowering exercise, especially given how useless Mo' comes off in the story. And letting Mo' get it on with a hot love interest fails to balance with Bob doing the same thing, because Bob at least if we are to believe the prior stories was never a willing participant in any of the times he was kissed. Mo's dalliance with Jim was both willing and of greater intimacy than Bob's indiscretions, but Mo' doesn't even classify them as a "personal betrayal" (I guess because she stopped herself from going all the way). And let's not forget that Mo's one real act with a meaningful consequence, is to ask a man to help her because she's incapable of helping herself. Mo' has often come off as Bob's better half hitherto. This 'feminist' story relegates her to neither as competent nor as likeable as Bob.

And though it is a minor point, the whole idea that each book is actually the transcript of a classified case file is working less and less well. The idea that this book would be used as debriefing material by a competent functional intelligence agency is just laughable, and the more laughable because of all of Mo' irrelevant personal disclosures that had no real bearing on the case. If this is an actual case file, it ought to read like something a military officer would actually create. The military doesn't waste time with this crap and sticks to clear and relevant facts, which is why when it comes to hiring Project Managers or Business Analysts, I'm always looking for the resumes with past military experience.

Samuel Kleiner says

I really disliked the main character, and, really the entire idea of the superhero stuff as a NIGHTMARE GREEN symptom.

The plot was soap-opera class, so much so that I thought it was going to be another story-setup, that her intelligence had been impaired by a story-oriented magical plot enforcement, like that idiotic James Bond thing Stross did in another book

This also had the same eternal smugness I so dislike about some of Stross's books. Last book was fantastic-

this one was not.
