

THE TERROR IS **REAL**  
THE AGENCY IS **UNDERFUNDED**  
THE HEROES ARE **NERVOUS**

# **THE LAUNDRY**

Based on the *Atrocity Archives* Novels by Charles Stross

## **INTRODUCTION**

Charles Stross' *Atrocity Archives* series has a great and unique conceit: it uses the tropes of British literary spy fiction to tell horror stories much in the same way that *The X-Files* used the tropes of law enforcement as a way into the paranormal.

*The Atrocity Archives* was a Len Deighton pastiche, his second book, *The Jennifer Morgue*, was a riff on the original Ian Fleming James Bond novels, the third, *The Fuller Memorandum* was an homage to Anthony Price, the fourth, *The Apocalypse Codex*, is a takeoff on Peter O'Donnell's *Modesty Blaise* books.

What Stross does very cleverly is use a genre that everyone who has ever heard of James Bond - or Harry Palmer or George Smiley - can understand as a gateway to a tales of psychological horror. He starts with defections, document exchanges, and weapons trades, and ends with visions beyond the imagination.

We plan to use the same conceit, but with an American feel.

## **THE LAUNDRY IS AN ESPIONAGE SHOW**

Our villains would not be out of place on *NCIS* or *24*: Mexican drug cartels, former KGB agents working for the Chechen Mafia, Peruvian mercenaries running software pirating rings, Chinese human traffickers, crooked defense contractors, Singaporean cyber-terrorists contracted by North Korean spies, Afghan warlords seeking to bring the fight to our shores...

... only our Mexican drug cartel Sicarios have been diseased by contact with the netherworld into soul-sucking lepers, our Chechen Mafiosi can be lycanthropy cultists trying to tap into another dimension where they hope to get the secret to transformation, our crooked defense contractors are looking to

use the occult to spy on their competitors, and our Chinese human traffickers may be seeking to perform a mass human sacrifice in order to revive a fallen leader.

### **THE LAUNDRY IS ALSO A MONSTER-OF-THE-WEEK SHOW**

But our stories will always have a footing in the world of espionage, and national security.

This story engine also means that we will approach the horror genre a little differently than most: the only way *The Laundry* works without becoming *Men in Black* or *Grimm* is if we imbue our demons with the stone-cold horror of a nuclear weapon, a virus, or a knife to the throat.

This is a series about bad people trying to summon horrors to our world - thinking that the horror will be in their control, and often being horribly wrong.

The monsters in this series will be the nightmares our monsters are based on: inscrutable, vicious and unspeakably cruel. We won't be having pages and pages of dialogue with them, they are the kind of awful things that drive people insane just for looking at them. They are the realities of which our worst conceptions are mere echoes.

So our bad guys - the villains we actually hunt down week after week - are people, the same kind of people who try to weaponize anthrax, smuggle plutonium, and blow up buildings.

Our villains will have human motivations - they want power, to terrorize, to effect political change, to bend the system to their will. The terror will be primal: the way-worse version of everything that has become commonplace and banal about the horror genre on television and literature... the horrors that were eventually toned-down to become digestible as folklore.

Put it this way - if you ever hear us use the term "vampire" you won't be seeing Bela Lugosi in a suit and tie, but rather this:



### THE MYTHOLOGY - HOW DOES IT WORK?

By now, you've all watched your screener of *The Imitation Game*, in which Benedict Cumberbatch breaks the Enigma code and wins World War II.

The truth is Alan Turing - not Benedict Cumberbatch - did in fact crack Enigma... but, by building the first computer, he also did something that fundamentally changed the world, even if we don't know it.

He discovered magic.

Apparently, we have had it all wrong - magic isn't all eye of newt and Harry Potter wands: Magic is mathematics.

In short: Merlin wasn't reading spells, he was doing equations.

When we solve certain theorems (as when Stephen Hawking uses math to prove the existence of a black hole) - we are using math to crack the fabric of reality...

And alien universes hear the echoes.

There are billions of parallel universes, and some of them are populated by horrible things most people witness in nightmares. By performing certain derivations and manipulating mathematical functions, we can make extra-dimensional entities show up: and sometimes get them to do what we want them to.

Just as World War II triggered the Arms Race, and the Space Race, it triggered a Supernatural race: it began with Nazis summoning demons to use against the Allies, continued with the United States and the Soviet Union trying to close the "Supernatural Gap" and now exists as a corollary to the War on Terror.

With cheap computers, the Internet, and higher standards of education, anyone with enough computing power and a triple-genius level IQ can bring monsters into this world.

And that's a problem.

### **ENTER THE LAUNDRY**

The Laundry is a secret government organization that was established in 1940 above a laundry in Los Angeles' Chinatown. In the time since, the organization Imagine CTU from 24, but tasked with hunting down demons...

In a real world of budget cuts, bureaucracy, and capricious official support.

Unlike Tom Clancy's spies, or James Bond, or Jack Bauer, our heroes are grounded by dint of living in the real world... the world where NSA contractors have to wait 8 months to get decryption software because of the paperwork involved, the world where the CIA and the NSA miss terror targets because they don't both use the same instant messaging client and can't talk to one another, a world where - yes - the government can intercept every email that's ever been sent, but doesn't have the manpower to actually read them.

Have you seen the film *Argo*? The character played by Ben Affleck and his magnificent abs, Tony Mendez, is in fact a short, stubby guy who wears a lot of gray...



When interviewed by Errol Morris, Tony Mendez made the case that most successful spies look more like John Q. Public than Roger Moore. The world of espionage tends to be like that: a lot nubbier, a lot less perfect, and a lot more eccentric than what makes it to movies and TV.

Our model isn't *Men in Black* with chrome weapons and leather Jacobsen Egg Chairs, and it isn't *Skyfall* with a situation room that looks like Mission Control - our model is *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (the 2013 version with Gary Oldman).

The Laundry will exist in an unsleek but visually textured, world: an interesting place full of intelligent people working in difficult situations, with gear built by the lowest-bidding contractor, worried that the government shut down might keep them from carrying out their work, concerned about their health care benefits... and occasionally staring down a goat-faced monster from another dimension.



All of which brings us to BOB HOWARD (29, not his real name... because in magic your real name can be used to cast a spell against you: and by that I mean turned into numerical values, and plugged into an equation that makes you spontaneously combust)...

Bob, our protagonist, is a specialist Applied Computational Demonology: the summoning and binding to service of unspeakable horrors from other dimensions, by means of mathematical tools.

Or rather - in his case - stopping bad people from summoning and binding to service of unspeakable horrors from other dimensions, by means of mathematical tools.

Bob ended up in this line of work because once upon a time, his perfectly innocent Master's Thesis nearly summoned up an undead alien god at Michigan Technical University.



Luckily the Laundry caught him in time and made a job offer he wasn't allowed to refuse: take a nice civil service job in an obscure department doing math for a living.

This is how most of the Laundry's wonks come to be in the service of King and Country - they are the ones smart enough to stumble on the truth about the relationship between math and magic.

Now Bob is stuck. For the past five years - an eternity in the tech sector - he has worked in a Top Secret Government Department in a field no one knows about... all he has is the Laundry, so he has to make it work.

Bob is not that different from you and me - he's more Howie than Howard, and not a "Bob" at all. His hobby is craft brewing and bicycles, and unlike what most people think of math and science prodigies, he's a Jimmy Stewart/Tom Hanksian everyman who just wants to be good at being decent and being alive - and who, in spite of his knowledge of a vast world of supernatural evil, still manages to be shocked when bad things happen to good people and wishes he could do something to help.

When we first meet Bob, he's having an argument with his pathologically unfaithful on-and-off-girlfriend, MHARI, who insists on telling him all about her other boyfriends... Bob receives an urgent message from work and races his bicycle to The Laundry, where he meets ALAN BARNES - his best friend and head of The Laundry's Counter-Possession Unit.

Just think of Barnes as Captain America by way of Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson.



No really, he's THAT awesome, and he's that good a friend to Bob, even though Bob is a mild-mannered mathematician and Alan is a badass Special Forces guy, they clearly have a shit ton of mutual respect, and even though Bob has only recently become an active duty officer, he has already proven his mettle. They are brothers.

Alan leads a team of equally badass Special Forces Jarheads - and Bob - to a hotel by LAX... led through back corridors, unseen by the LAPD and the guests to the penthouse, where a gate to a parallel Universe has been opened by Jihadists seeking to shut down LAX.

Unlike the rest of the hotel - and the hallway leading in, which look completely normal - the bank of windows at the penthouse is dominated by a crater-like opening that looks like a peculiarly toothy version of H.R. Giger's *Penis Landscape*.

The walls are covered with black ooze, and the remains of a jury-rigged supercomputer - and the cut-into-pieces bodies of the men who built it are everywhere.

Beyond the intact windows is a view of the city - but inside the crater, violating the laws of all known physics, is a hole leading down into an infinite abyss.

The team fans out. Bob heads for the computer to diagnose what kind of demon has been summoned. He and Alan are a great unit, brothers working in concert. Bob quickly surmises what kind of a rift has been opened, and Alan prepares a bomb to detonate on the other side and close the rift...

But as he does, a hideous creature merges from beyond the rift - the sight of which immediately drives Alan and his team insane and causes them to open fire on one another!

Bob springs from his computer, tears the hotel TV from the wall and THROWS it at the demon - briefly staring into its eyes before sending the bomb in after it. The abyss closes with an awful pan-dimensional SHRIEK...

Bob is left standing alone in the aftermath, breathless, stunned, and utterly horrified.

In the bureaucratic aftermath of this successful mission that just happens to have cost The Laundry the best - and only - strike team in the Pacific Southwest Region (the budget for boots-on-the-ground Counter Possession has been slashed mercilessly and channeled into the DHS), we meet the rest of the ensemble of the series...





HARRIET, the Laundry's Compliance officer, think of her as the office manager, a humorless martinet more obsessed with making sure the paperwork is done properly and that the cost-benefit analyses support the mission than on saddling up and saving the world.

Technically, she is Bob's boss.

There's also PINKY and BRAINS - who are also Bob's roommates at a Laundry safehouse. Pinky is basically a mad scientist - one of those types that seem to exist only in television shows, whose field of specialty is SCIENCE and seems able to build any machine or analyze any problem. He's also a bit of a nudist, which is awkward. Think of him as Reverend Jim with abs and a soldering iron.



Brains can best be described as Matthew McConaughey in *True Detective* reincarnated as Daria. Once she was a philosopher on her way to earning a PhD, until her work on applying game theory to religious faith caught the eye of a former KGB death cultist who tried to use it to harness the power of the Russian Orthodox Church to resurrect Lucifer through social media.

Anyway, as a result of the incident, Brains had a run in with a massive psychic shockwave that left her slightly clairvoyant - and more than a little despondent over the innate good of humanity.



Rounding out the group is BORIS, the team's cleaner and PR man - he's the one who makes sure that the laundry's covert work remains covert, and that anyone who threatens to expose the thick veil of secrecy surrounding The Laundry is hounded by the media forces of darkness into an assisted suicide.

Boris doesn't just know where the bodies are buried - he buried them, then raised them from the dead as zombies, decapitated them and buried them again. He's a dark guy. He's here to interrogate Bob.



Harriet has forced Bob into a battery of invasive medical tests to discover why he did not go insane upon seeing the face of the demon. Bob is despondent over Alan's fate - he survived the



bullets, but is now irrevocably insane - could not be less happy to be poked and prodded.

Bob is less happy to find himself under suspicion because of his resilience in the face of a demonic assault. Harriet and Boris believe he might have been protected because of an allegiance to the dark side.

Bob's interrogation ends with the arrival of ANGLETON - head of the Los Angeles office, and keeper of the **Atrocity Archives** - the cavernous basement where all of America's supernatural secrets are kept - being the keeper of the Archives is the seat of Angleton's power: the laundry started in California (because of the connection between computing and demonology, and the brain drain to the west as a result of the Manhattan Project and the founding of JPL in Pasadena, which has a long history of attracting practitioners of the occult).



Anyway, think of Angleton as John Hurt in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* - a chain-smoking wreck of a man who has given everything to the cause.

Harriet wants Angleton's job more than she wants anything else, but for today, Angleton is the leader, and he makes it clear that Bob is no traitor - based on Bob's MRIs, Angleton has concluded that he merely has a unique brainwave pattern that made him immune to the demon's gaze.



To replace the members of the strike team who were killed or driven mad in the demonic assault, Angleton has had the Laundry's computers do a survey of military databases too find out who else might have had MRI results matching Bob's...

Out of sheer necessity, Bob is being promoted to full field agent and sent to San Diego to track down DOMINIQUE "MO" O'BRIEN - a Navy Sergeant recently promoted to combat status in the Coastal Riverine force... on paper, she seems like the perfect replacement for Alan, a devoted, dedicated officer with multiple decorations and commendations for valor above and beyond the call of duty.



In person, Mo turns out to be a nightmare Bob wouldn't wish on his worst enemy's dog: a heavily tattooed hotshot who's crazy in that way that makes Martin Riggs and every character ever played by Schwarzenegger incredible action heroes, but not exactly the kind of people with whom you would want to share a condo.

She's also completely without a sense of humor or irony, not into banter, sees explosives as the best solution to any problem, uses men like tissues with no desire for long-term attachments, and really likes cheap booze and raunchy heavy metal music.

Of course, not realizing that Bob is there to recruit her for duty in a top secret agency dedicated to supernatural espionage, Mo quickly seduces him and then kicks him out of bed when she gets bored - which takes about fifteen minutes...

Disgusted with himself, Bob is ready to go back to the Laundry and report to Angleton that Mo is not going to "work out" but when she is kidnapped right from under him, Bob quickly realizes that her (and his) ability to face down demons without going insane makes her (and him) a perfect McGuffin - someone who can communicate with beings from the dark side... and she has been kidnapped by the same terror cell behind the attack that killed Alan's team, who plan to use her to perfect their supernatural weapon!

Now Bob has no choice but to save Mo and bring her into the fold - it's the only way to avenge his driven-insane best friend, not to mention redeem himself for losing a prized asset during his first real field mission.

But most importantly, Bob's bid to rescue Mo results in a dangerous discovery - the reason Mo was targeted was a leak from inside. There's a mole in The Laundry, and the only person above suspicion is Mo... these two are now stuck together,,,

### **THE SERIES**

Bonded as a team by the events of the pilot episode, Bob and Mo now work as a team, chasing down the enemies of democracy... when they go about using applied mathematics to summon supernatural threats.



Although there is no way that Bob Howard and Mo O'Brien would ever be friends in real life, their trajectory over the life of the series - mitigated by a bond forged between them in a line of work beyond most people's imagination - is going to be a rocky road to romance and eventually marriage.

Adding to the intimacy between these two is the truth that in the mole hunt, Mo is the only one Bob can truly trust - since she was a victim of the mole and had no knowledge of the laundry until the case seen in the pilot.



Moreover, these two have complementary skills in an internal affairs investigation - he has a keen analytical mind and absolutely no ability to fathom the petty cruelties that people inflict on one another on a day to day basis.



He's a likable and sometimes naive optimist, and she has spent the last four years patrolling the United States on a joint task force hunting down the enemies of decency and democracy.

She knows the dark side, has seen it, and her devil may care, hard-partyin', hard-livin' ways are a response to the life she has led.

The Laundry may be an espionage show - and a supernatural show - but it's also a romance, and at its core, it's about two people who fill a gap in each other's concept of the world: even though it will take years for these two to realize that they belong together.



While the romance and the mole hunt serve as long-term arcs in counterpoint to our procedural cases, there will also be one series-defining element that will continually change the dynamic - six episodes into the series, Angleton will be assassinated and be replaced by a highly-well known stunt cast replacement.

This new character will bring a great new tone to the Laundry...

And will die six episodes down the line...

One of the themes of the laundry is that authority is capricious, always changing, always changing its mind, and very difficult to pin down.

By making this into a motif of the show we are both giving a revolving door to an eminently high-profile role which can keep bringing new life and interest to the series week-in-and-out but also driving home the ultimate theme of the series...

- 1. Bad people will get in way out of their heads with powers they can't control.**
- 2. Good people in power will lose sight of their goal for trying to get ahead.**
- 3. Heroes have each others' back - because when you take into account #1 and #2, that's the only thing that matters.**