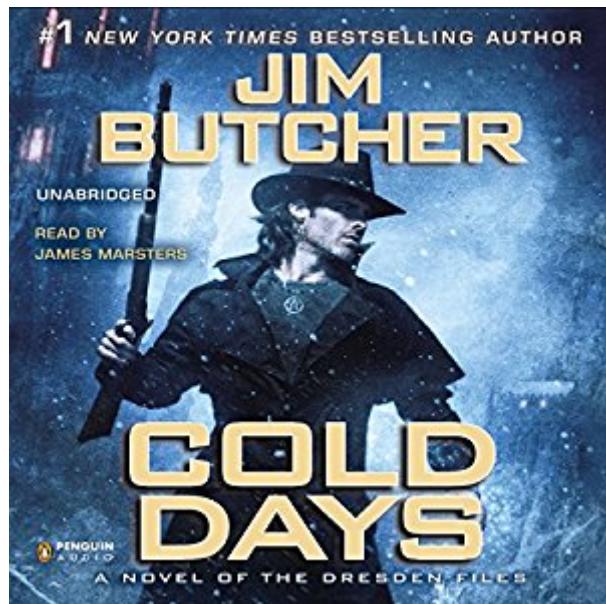


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Cold Days: The Dresden Files, Book 14



Synopsis

Harry Dresden lives! After being murdered by a mystery assailant, navigating his way through the realm between life and death, and being brought back to the mortal world, Harry realizes that maybe death wasn't all that bad - because he is no longer Harry Dresden, Chicago's only professional wizard. He is now Harry Dresden, Winter Knight to Mab, the Queen of Air and Darkness. After Harry had no choice but to swear his fealty, Mab wasn't about to let something as petty as death steal away the prize she had sought for so long. And now, her word is his command, no matter what she wants him to do, no matter where she wants him to go, and no matter who she wants him to kill. Guess which one Mab wants first? Of course, it won't be an ordinary, everyday assassination. Mab wants her newest minion to pull off the impossible: kill an immortal. No problem there, right? And to make matters worse, there exists a growing threat to an unfathomable source of magic that could land Harry in the sort of trouble that will make death look like a holiday. Beset by enemies new and old, Harry must gather his friends and allies, prevent the annihilation of countless innocents, and find a way out of his eternal subservience before his newfound powers claim the only thing he has left to call his own... his soul.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a wonderful novel that rewards longtime Dresden followers with callback after callback to previous events in the series (it especially demands a re-reading of *Summer Knight* in particular in order to fully understand who's who in its large cast of background characters, both present and

deceased), and although it would be a poor idea for new readers to jump in at book 14 of a series as long as this one, the cast of characters are so well fleshed-out, the adventure so intriguing, the story so flat out entertaining, they wouldn't necessarily have to know absolutely everything about what occurred in previous stories to feel let in on the fun. Jim Butcher's Dresden Files have always contained a wonderfully manic combination of screwball comedy, High Urban fantasy, and the detective genre. As is traditional in a good noir story, our lead is a capable protagonist who finds himself in a dangerous situation that is rapidly spinning out beyond his ability to control, thanks mostly in part to a cadre of dangerous women who run the gamut from murderous matron to femme fatale to a literal Ice Queen. Expounding upon his troubles are Harry's increasing list of character flaws. Although Harry possesses magic, he isn't particularly wise; Although he's intelligent, he's not a very good deductive reasoner; and even though he's become powerful due to deals brokered in previous books in the series, he's hardly an invincible combatant. What he is, is a man as prone to making things worse for himself through accident as well as intent. But, like any good protagonist worth rooting for, Harry remains a motivated scrapper determined to do the right thing and he isn't alone; like the Harry from those OTHER books, his previous deeds have earned him a collection of friends and comrades as determined to keep him alive as he is to get himself killed through his endearingly self-destructive bouts of suicidal stupidity. Mister Butcher as always chooses to balance moments of fist-pumping triumph for our hero with face-palming groans of disbelief at what he's lumbered into THIS time. As a fan of Mister Dresden, I'm inclined to imagine instances where instead of taking humiliating beatings, and demoralizing lectures, he instead coasts through his enemies with consummate ease, soul-crushing putdowns, and invincible skills; luckily for Harry, Butcher is a much more capable writer than I am and understands that the essences of a truly entertaining story are conflict and risk. If Harry was an undefeated juggernaut who could snark his way through every encounter and argument with lazy ease, these stories would lose a rich element of growth and suspense that helps make them such fun escapist fare; (To make an old comparison: we like Superman, but we ADMIRE Batman. After all, if Superman fell off a building, he'd dust himself off none the worse for the wear; Batman would be a cowled smear on the asphalt and yet, it doesn't keep Batman from challenging things comfortably outside of his weight class). Putting it all together, I give Cold Days my highest recommendation as a humble Reader. The events in this book are as momentous as they were in Changes (book 12), and without giving away any unneeded spoilers, things will change quite dramatically for characters that we've followed for years. The revelation of the purpose of the Summer Knight was genuinely surprising as was the maturation of Fix, a relatively minor background player for years who in this tale steps his game up

considerably, samurai style. Sad fates await some (depressingly sad in fact), but the scope of the conflict becomes far clearer. For me, the thirteen hours I spent reading this book evaporated in no time and left me hungering for more. And just like all the times before, I'll have to wait a good long while to see what happens next. (There's a fresh mystery that'll make your head "split" when you realize it won't get resolved this go-around, hur-hur-hur). In closing, read this book. Terry Goodkind went mad with power, Robert Jordan died before he could finish things on his own terms, Piers Anthony became a bit lecherous and unpalatable, and we're slowly losing the great Terry Pratchett. If you were to ask me who gets my vote for which popular entertainment writer to sacrifice a few dozen unrecoverable hours of your precious and finite life to, it's not a hard decision to make; In Jim Butcher, I trust.

Cold Days still has a lot of the things that make The Dresden Files great. It has awesome action, great quips and touching moments between Harry and his friends. The plot provides several interesting revelations, and gives us a lot of insight into characters who have been around for most of the series. But despite all of the good points, I think about 14 books in cracks are beginning to show, and some of the problems have only continued from previous entries. I'm worried that the series is becoming too dark. It's true, the series has been putting Harry through the wringer since the start, and it's a major part of the series' identity. But it seems that the bright spots in Harry's life are getting increasingly dimmer. It wasn't until Ghost Story that I started to feel that it was becoming too much, and as the story ends with a note that the real problems are only starting, it doesn't look like it's going to get any better. It seems like a lot of supernatural series just keep piling despair on the protagonists until it becomes ridiculous. Buffy did it, Supernatural did it, and it looks like the Dresden Files is doing it too. I'm all for characters overcoming difficulty, but does the misery have to be so darn relentless? I'm not fond of the fate of a certain character at the end of the book. Harry has had losses before, but I'm not sure I can weather this one. I'm not angry, I'm not like "How dare the author do that!?", I'm just sad. I've never felt as empty finishing a Dresden File as I did this one. You might ask, "But is it a bad thing for a story to make you sad?" No, but when a series alters or removes the characters you're most invested in, it can suck some of the enjoyability out of the story. "But isn't it better for a series to be unpredictable?" I say no. "Unconventional" isn't automatically the same as "good". With the Winter Knight being such a big deal, I was frustrated that Harry still gets his butt kicked just as badly as he always had. I want Harry to be challenged, I know the series would be boring otherwise. But despite every book emphasising that Harry has gotten better at magic, and despite getting new powers every few books, battles never get any easier for Harry no

matter what opponents he faces. Every victory Harry has, big and small, is always by the skin of his teeth and it's starting to get exhausting. Murphy's character feels a bit flat in this book. "Stoic" seems to be her only personality trait for most of the book. Perhaps the book was already balancing so many characters and subplots that the deeper parts to Murphy's character ended up being put aside. I have to echo other reviewers in that her and Harry avoiding a relationship is getting tiresome. I think the reasons for why they don't make perfect sense, but this is something that becomes a problem because of the length of the series. Just because it's logical doesn't mean it's not boring. I've heard that Jim Butcher once said that even he isn't sure who Harry's going to end up with, but that feels a little hollow because at this point, Murphy's the only person who can even be considered a candidate. Like many other series, each successful novel just seems to get longer and longer, and it doesn't always equal a more in depth book. In particular, Harry's feud with the Redcap feels like it could've been cut entirely without affecting anything else. It's disappointing that even with the number of pages, certain characters and plot points still seem like they were glossed over. I fear that while the series may remain well written, the increasing darkness and somewhat repetitive writing mean that the series won't be as enjoyable as it once was. I hope I'm proven wrong, but the books seem set in their ways by now.

What can I possibly say about a Dresden Files novel that I haven't said in one of my other 13 reviews? Not much. Butcher brings the same great characters and world-building to the table as he always does in this installment. He (somehow) manages to up to the ante yet again, creating a tense and fast-paced plot that follows Harry on another dangerous and wacky adventure compressed into an absurdly short time period (one day this time!). He pulls together and adds to plot threads that were woven into installments ten plus books ago and manages to keep them fairly coherent, consistent, and interesting. He builds even more complexity into his overarching story-verse and sets off major events that will reverberate for books to come. There was nothing surprising about this novel, really – and that was a good thing. I was a little let down by *Ghost Story*, if you remember, because it very much felt like the boring interim between two important arcs in the Dresden-verse: everything that happened before *Changes* and everything that will happen after. This book was the first installment of that "after," and it was quite a doozy. Butcher completely makes up for the somewhat slow pacing of *Ghost Story* in this book, and the plot jumps right back into all the action and super-high stakes that the series is so good at. I'm looking forward to watching the rest of the series progress from this book on, as *Cold Days* was definitely a fairly high point in the books, and, much like *Grave*

Peril way back when, promises of even greater things to come. Another excellent Dresden Files novel all around!

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