



## The Baroque Cycle: Quicksilver, The Confusion, and The System of the World

Neal Stephenson

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Get all three novels in Neal Stephenson's *New York Times* bestselling "Baroque Cycle" in one e-book, including: *Quicksilver*, *The Confusion*, and *The System of the World*. This three-volume historical epic delivers intrigue, adventure, and excitement set against the political upheaval of the early 18th century.

## **The Baroque Cycle: Quicksilver, The Confusion, and The System of the World Details**

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## **From Reader Review The Baroque Cycle: Quicksilver, The Confusion, and The System of the World for online ebook**

### **Alan Marchant says**

The reader should recognize from the start that this is a "three thousand page novel." The volume and books into which it is subdivided represent different points of view on a single revolutionary process - the industrial revolution and the rise of classical liberalism. The story relegates rulers, soldiers, and inventors to background positions, focusing instead on proto-scientists, financiers, women, and crooks.

The Baroque Cycle is a true epic, including round-the-world travel and the intertwined life stories of several characters. Its listing as fantasy is due solely to occasional visits by Enoch Root (apparently the immortal wandering Jew) who affects the story "hardly at all" and embodies disappointment in the ideals of alchemy.

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### **Reid Wayman says**

One of my two favorite Sci-Fi authors. This series is worth reading a bunch of times. Not only an excellent story, but really good at the historical details.

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### **Nat says**

I am not going to finish it...I don't have the stamina.

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### **Paul Garfinkel says**

I managed, with great difficulty, to trudge through the first of the three books in this work. I found it to be very difficult to get through certainly compared to Stevenson's other work. In general I was disappointed, and gave it up.

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### **Nikki says**

An online acquaintance had recommended this to me and as the whole collection was only 5€ on Amazon (Kindle) I went for it. I had no idea just HOW long the whole thing is or what I was letting myself in for. I got off to the slow start as the first book drops you right in without much of an introduction and to be honest, I found the first part set in Massachusetts fairly boring. Things started to click together for me when Jack and Eliza first meet in Vienna and travel Germany together. I haven't laughed so much at fabulous dialogue in years and both are incredible characters.

On occasion the books do get bloated, but Stephenson takes you on an amazingly informative journey through the baroque era and early science that left me with huge respect for those early scientists like

Newton and Leibnitz and how they shaped our modern world. In Eliza he created a fantastic female heroine that should be a role model for any young girls in the world and Jack is certainly the most dashing swashbuckling crazy hero ever. How Stephenson came up with his elaborate schemes is beyond me. As a dabbling writer myself, I can't express in words how much I admire his fantasy in coming up with all of these plots.

The Baroque Cycle has given me so much inspiration for research and finding more about people and their time. Strangely I live only 2.5 hrs from Hanover but have never been there or even thought about the place. Now visiting the castles is on my top list of things to do. Next month I'll be visiting a new exhibition on the "German princesses" in Kensington Palace as Caroline of Ansbach, of whose existence I had not been aware, was one of my favorite characters in the books.

I will definitely need to re-read the whole thing at least once, too. I moved on to reading Cryptonomicon but while it was similar in its elaborate plotting and had more Waterhouses and Shaftoes to befriend, it just wasn't the same as Daniel, Eliza and Jack. I wish HBO would tackle this and turn it into another huge TV show like Game of Thrones. Anyway, if someone wants to talk about the Baroque Cycle, please do get in touch with me, I'd love to talk more to like-minded people.

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### **Luci says**

This is a huge story with lots of big ideas in it. However the characters are engaging and the ending is a real payoff. I enjoyed the story and the science. It is a tad overwritten in some spots but this cycle has been on my bucket list for a while and I am glad I read it.

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### **Catherine says**

I rarely give up on books, and I enjoy long books (and this is LONG). In theory the plot sounds most interesting - a romp through the western 18th century political, social, and scientific landscapes through a wide range of different characters eyes. I can't quite decide why I don't like this book, on paper it checks all of the boxes for me - but life is too short to continue to slog through a 2,000+ page trilogy that-I-just-do-not-like. I may try it again at some point in the future, thankfully I had checked out the electronic version from my local library so there is no buyers remorse.

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### **Sabrina says**

Phenomenal scale and scope, the Age of Enlightenment comes to life in these pages.

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### **Nancy Brisson says**

I chose the **Baroque Cycle** by Neal Stephenson because I wanted a long read and because this author has written other books that I enjoyed. Perhaps if I knew this trilogy of books ran to 2700+ pages I might have had second thoughts but my Kindle doesn't deal with page numbers. I like to think that I would have read

these novels anyway. It certainly was not a sprint: it was a journey – a journey in time, a mental journey, and involving lots of journeying by the books' characters. Stephenson takes us to the 17th and early 18th century. This time period represents a transitional age in that the way men lived upon the earth was changing, in much the same ways that we are in a transitional age now.

**Quicksilver** introduces us to the Alchemists, who wished to find a way to turn base metal into gold. Quicksilver is mercury, which fascinated Alchemists with its unusual behaviors as a metal that is liquid at room temperature and a metal that beads and rolls around as if it were solid. It was felt that quicksilver, so often found near gold deposits, was somehow transformed into gold by some kind of mysterious natural process. The Alchemists were almost done with their investigations, having failed so often in their endeavors. But the experimentations they had conducted gave them a great scientific curiosity about everything in the world around them, both nonliving and living. Out of the Alchemists came a group known as Natural Philosophers and we had the very beginning of Physics.

These were the days of Isaac Newton in England and Hooke in England and Huygens, a Dutchman, and Gottfried Leibnitz, a German. These men explored the insides of living things, they looked at everything under lenses that improved in quality as the trilogy progressed. They created “the algebra” and they began to see that all things were made of smaller things (atoms to Newton, monads to Leibnitz). Newton and Leibnitz both claimed to have come up with “the algebra” which made these two great men opponents and caused educated folks to divide into two camps depending on which great man they backed.

Stephenson gives us a fictional character to serve as a go-between for these great gentlemen who did not always agree with each other. Daniel Waterhouse is the character who speaks to all of the principals. He also avoids much of the Catholic – Protestant divide of the times by coming from a family that is neither. His father is persecuted for his beliefs, but Daniel is not. Daniel serves as our man in London and in Massachusetts where he is trying to set up the Massachusetts’ Institute of Technological Arts. (He is not the founder of MIT.)

The other two books in this trilogy - which jumps around in time and place - although not quite as neatly and tidily organized as I am making them sound, are called **The Confusion** and **The System of the World**. They take us out of London with a vagabond. On the “Continent”, we follow two very unusual fictional characters. We follow Eliza, the stunning and extremely intelligent ex-Turkish slave, captured by a French aristocrat with her mom and sold into slavery in Turkey. And we have Jack Shaftoe, a poor Englishman, also extremely intelligent, who becomes the King of the Vagabonds. Eliza and Jack fall in love when he rescues her from the Turks but their paths diverge. Eliza becomes wealthy by learning to invest in the Dutch “stock market” of the day. Dutch economics are superior to other nations earlier due to the trade of the Dutch East India Company. Eliza becomes a member of the court of Louis XIV and becomes a familiar figure at Versailles. Jack gets captured and becomes a slave rorer on a ship bound for Africa. But he is too brilliant to stay down for long. Jack makes a plan, makes some friends and ends up taking us to visit all the world that was known at that time.

Jack’s plan involves stealing gold as part of a plan of retribution against the Frenchman who enslaved Eliza. He does not realize that this is known as the Solomonic Gold because it is bound to mercury. The nature of this particular gold had everyone chasing Jack and his men all over Christendom and beyond and puts his life in mortal jeopardy more times than you will want to count. The Alchemists and the Natural Philosophers are thrown into a total tizzy over this gold and several of our favorite characters barely escape with their lives and only manage it through the rather extreme machinations of Daniel Waterhouse and those he ropes into assisting him. Thus ends the age of Alchemy.

What follows are the beginnings of the Industrial Age. Here as magical science wraps up and practical science begins, just here when someone invents the “Engine that Uses Fire to Pump Water” and a contest offers a prize to anyone who can come up with a way to determine “the longitude” when on a sea voyage, things are as chaotic as they are here at the end of the Industrial Age in our real world.

The **Baroque Cycle** is a tale that will either entertain you over many a rainy and sunny day or will cause you to completely lose your patience and perhaps throw it at a wall. (Don’t throw your Kindle). Although I sometimes felt a bit crazed when I read for half a day and only progressed through 2% of the book, I never really wanted to stop reading it and I enjoyed it thoroughly, but it’s not an experience I can recommend to anyone. You know if you are a reader who will love this or yawn over this. As for me I will eventually download another Stephenson tome and while away some more idle hours by allowing my mind to be taken somewhere/time else. (It is also a love story of sorts.)

“At some point, says Neal Stephenson by way of Daniel Waterhouse, the whole System will fail, because of the flaws that have been wrought into it...Perhaps new sorts of Wizards will be required then. But – and perhaps this is only because of his age, and that there’s a longboat waiting to take him away – he has to admit that having some kind of System, even a flawed and doomed one, is better than to live forever in the poisonous storm-tide of quicksilver that gave birth to all of this.

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### **LOL\_BOOKS says**

I'M ALWAYS HARPING ON ABOUT IT BUT MOAR MEMERS SHOULD SLOG THEIR WAY THROUGH THE BAROQUE CYCLE SO THEY CAN GO BACK AND READ MY FAVOURITE BITS ABOUT THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE.

YOU DON'T MAKE IT SOUND TERRIBLY APPEALING.

IT'S ACTUALLY REALLY, REALLY GOOD, BUT IT'S NEAL STEPHENSON AND YOU HAVE TO TRUST HIM TO TIE THREE MASSIVE BOOKS WITH MULTIPLE NARRATIVES TOGETHER.

IN DECEMBER I WANT TO READ BOOKS THAT I HAVEN'T PICKED MYSELF. SO I THOUGHT MEMERS COULD LIST SOME OF THEIR FAVORITE BOOKS OR THE BEST BOOKS THEY'VE READ THIS YEAR OR WHATEVER, AND THEN I WILL USE RANDOM.ORG TO PICK EIGHT OF THOSE TITLES MENTIONED BY MEMERS AND READ THEM! I PROMISE TO SHARE IMPRESSIONS.

JOAN DIDION'S BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER; THE HANDMAID'S TALE; NEAL STEPHENSON'S BAROQUE CYCLE, I FOUND THE FIRST HARD-GOING BUT THE SECOND TWO ARE MUCH QUICKER PACED; DAVID PEACE'S NINETEEN SEVENTY-SEVEN, WHICH IS GRIM AS FUCK BUT HIS PROSE IS RLY INTERESTING AND UNUSUAL, IF YOU DON'T WANT TO READ ABOUT SERIAL MURDERS YOU MIGHT PREFER GB84; THE YELLOW BIRDS; AND ONCE YOU BREAK A KNUCKLE, WHICH IS A BUNCH OF INTERLINKED SHORT-STORIES.

I WISH I HAD ANOTHER BIG DOORSTOPPER OF A SATISFYING BOOK LIKE THE LUMINARIES OR JONATHAN STRANGE OR WOLF HALL.

TRY THE BAROQUE CYCLE. OR ANY OF NEAL STEPHENSON'S BOOKS, RLY.

I'VE NEVER HEARD OF THE BAROQUE CYCLE. /o\

READ THAT! I FOUND THE FIRST ONE A BIT OF A SLOG BECAUSE IT'S BASICALLY AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF DANIEL WATERHOUSE, ISAAC NEWTON AND THE ROYAL SOCIETY, BUT THE REST OF THE PLOT IS ALL SPIES AND HEISTS AND MUCH MOAR ACTION-Y. IT'S RLY GOOD.

DON'T READ IT.

LOL NEAL STEPHENSON BUT I RLY LOVED TREE BAROQUE CYCLE AND IT IS ONE OF THE ONLY THINGS I HAVE READ ABOUT A LOT OF THAT PERIOD OF HISTORY SO I SOMETIMES FIND MYSELF ASSUMING SOMETHING WAS ACTUAL HISTORY WHEN IT WAS JUST BAROQUEFAX.

LOL NEAL STEPHENSON

I READ THE FIRST ONE AND THOUGHT IT WAS PRETTY GOOD BUT HAVEN'T READ THE OTHER TWO. AND LOL WHENEVER I THINK ABOUT DOING THAT I FEEL LIKE I'D HAVE TO READ THE FIRST ONE AGAIN, AND LOL IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I READ ANY STEPHENSON THAT I'M NOT SURE I COULD HANDLE IT.

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### **Henry Gee says**

I am at a loss to sum these books up simply. Baldly, the Baroque Cycle is an extended romp on the Enlightenment, and, with Cryptonomicon, on the value of money once it becomes abstract, divorced from real-world commodities such as silver or gold. Now, this summary says as much about this vast work as a description of a skeleton of a swallow does about flocks of live birds twittering in an autumn sky. Although the author classifies them all as SF - there are one or two fantastical elements in all of them - the four books represent a towering literary achievement in any genre.

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### **Andrew Bennett says**

First off, even though this is a trilogy packed into a single volume this story is LONG. I usually read fast, and these 3 books took me as much time to read as all of ASOIAF Each book within itself is a very long book, and you will have points when you are plodding through wondering why Stephenson isn't getting on with it. However, as with all Stephenson books, there is a reason for this that just may not be resolved until much later. Regardless of the length, the ride that this story takes you on is so worth all of the time you'll spend reading this.

I don't want to give anything away, but I have more love for Eliza, Jack Shaftoe and Daniel Waterhouse than I have for any other characters in years.

And there is a connection with Cryptonomicon besides the family names, so if you enjoyed that do yourself a

favor and set aside a couple months to read the Baroque Cycle.

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