



Currency

Neal Stephenson

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This is the middle third of the volume originally published as The System of the World.

Currency Details

Date : Published October 31st 2006 by Hartorch (first published 2003)

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Author : Neal Stephenson

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From Reader Review Currency for online ebook

Rrrrron says

This book slowed down abit. The dialogue is still good. But it did not have the drama of the 1st book in volume 3.

Clif Hostetler says

This is book 7 of 8 in the Baroque Cycle (or the 2nd book in the third volume as first published). It takes place during during the year 1714 in London.

At the beginning of this book we learn what Jack the Coiner (a.k.a Jack Shaftoe) was up to in raiding the Tower in the previous book. He managed to cast doubt on the integrity of British money by tampering with an item of the mint's quality control system. (You'll need to read the book yourself to have it explained.) This is a serous challenge to Isaac Newton because he's in charge of the mint.

This all happens in the midst of the political unrest caused by the anticipated death of Queen Anne and the resulting battle between the Whigs and Tories over succession plans. Near the end of the book there are about a half dozen scenes happening simultaneously on an evening in London. A princess is in danger, there's sword fight, there's a riot, there's a fire, Newton has a meeting with his nemesis, young men with mohawk haircuts, and so on...

The book ends with the announcement that Queen Anne is dead. "Long live the King!" But which king?

In previous books of the Baroque Cycle the reader is informed (and reminded) that the purpose of Daniel Waterhouse's return to London from Massachusetts was to patch up the differences between Newton and Leibniz. They're both in London in 1714, but not much attention is paid to that particular problem in this book. There are more pressing issues to deal with.

One example of Neal Stephenson making this book match his historical research is the story of Sophia of Hanover dying in her garden after running for shelter from a rainstorm. In this book it is described how she dies in the arms of Caroline of Brandenburg-Ansbach, her granddaughter-in-law. I at first assumed this to be fictional flourish. But as best I can determine, it's a true story.

An example of the author's going off the deep end of fiction is in his description of a "logic mill" designed and constructed by Daniel Waterhouse. It is essentially an 18th Century digital computer programmed using punch cards made of small gold sheets. This I am sure to be pure fiction. I figure Stephenson included this in the story in order to tie it to Daniel's 20th century descendant in the book, Cryptonomicon, who participated in the development of the modern digital computer.

LINK TO Wikipedia article about the Baroque Cycle by Neal Stephenson.

LINK TO my review of Quick Silver (Bk. 1) by Neal Stephenson.

LINK TO my review of King of the Vagabonds (Bk. 2) by Neal Stephenson.

LINK TO my review of Odalisque (Bk. 3) by Neal Stephenson.

LINK TO my review of The Confusion (Bks. 4 & 5) by Neal Stephenson.

LINK TO my review of Solomon's Gold (Bk. 6) by Neal Stephenson.

LINK TO my review of System of the World (Bk. 8) by Neal Stephenson.

Karen Chamis says

First and foremost, I love this series. That said, this is the weakest link in that wondrous chain. I'm hoping it is because this book sets up a grand finale!

Kevin says

The seventh book in the series. This was was a fun adventure focusing at how the use of currency really started (beyond just the cash part) and tying in an active adventure with all our heros. Jack still plays an active part as does Eliza, Daniel, and Newton. Interesting read.

Catherine Weaver says

I loved this whole series. Each book in it was awesome.

Tim Jin says

After finishing "Solomon's Gold", I was excited to get through the "Currency." I was suspecting that the story would pick up in the second book in the last volume. For anyone that has been invested in the Baroque Cycle thus far, there is an instinct trait of Neal Stephenson's writing. Depending on the tempo of the setting, his style can be slow and fast. Unlike other authors, Stephenson let the reader decide on what pace to read these books.

For example, the Baroque Cycle could be considered as a soap opera with Eliza, or a history lesson of the 18th century with Newton and the Towers of London, or an action pack adventure with Jack the Coiner. However you interpret the Baroque's society, you are never disappointed on the outcome. His writing style is not like a bull, charging the gate. His style is more of a turtle morphing into a rabbit.

As for "Currency", I thought that the series reached its climax by going into more in depth in the gold plates and the Bank of England. I've been looking forward to this ever since the definition of Quicksilver. Although I really enjoyed the constant cat and mouse game between Newton and Jack, I was ecstatic to learn more about the financial system and the building of the towers.

There are so many elements in this series, but if you decide to focus on one of it and see it through the end, all of the notes will come together in the Baroque Cycle.

Ed says

Notwithstanding its title, *Currency* is as much to do with the politics of succession as does with money. As entertaining as it is informative.

One cannot but be impressed with Stephenson's polymathic abilities.

Unfortunately, only one more title left in this series.

Jeff says

Interesting progress in the story following the Isaac Newton and coining in the Tower of London. In the background, the workings of Jack Shaftoe are ever-present.

Halle Lieu says

"I'm keen to know whether the next English King is going to be German or French."

Lars Dradrach says

What can I say that I haven't already said in the previous volumes, the whole series stands out as something special among everything else I have read.

A lot of the side stories are easier to follow this second time I listen to it, but it's still a story where you have to concentrate and keep your wigs and Tory's straight.

Now on to the final volume

Turkish says

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Julie Capell says

I loved, loved, loved this installment in the Baroque cycle. Action, intrigue, science, royal succession, Jesuits, slavery, the creation of money, alchemy . . . this book has it all. It is nearly impossible to categorize this series of novels except to say that they are unlike any other books I have ever read. I can't wait to listen to the final installment. The writing is phenomenal. One of the things I absolutely love is the way Stephenson describes people. Here are three quotes from "Currency" displaying this talent.

These women stared out from the canvases with arched brows, enormous eyes and tiny mouths, seeing much, and saying little.

He is flitting and hopping about in the lobby like a sparrow whose nest had just been blown down in a windstorm.

[The thief-taker] was conspicuous by his age, I should estimate he is in his middle fifties, and by a bearing, I am tempted to call it dignity, wanting in the others. He has a good head of hair, only a bit thin on top, blond going grey, and sea green eyes. He has an excellently carved set of teeth, but displays them rarely. He has a trim figure, unusual in a profession that consists largely of loitering around taverns, but any illusion that he is especially fit is dispelled when he begins to move, for he is a little bit halt, and a little bit lame, stiff in the joints and given to frequent sighs and grimaces that hint at pains internal.

Nicholas Anderson says

Probably the best of the series so far. This one had some hilarious bits and plenty of plot twists to keep me interested.

Mykola says

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Michael Nash says

[where Jack duels him to save Eliza (hide spoiler)]
