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Cryptonomicon

THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER

NEAL STEPHENSON
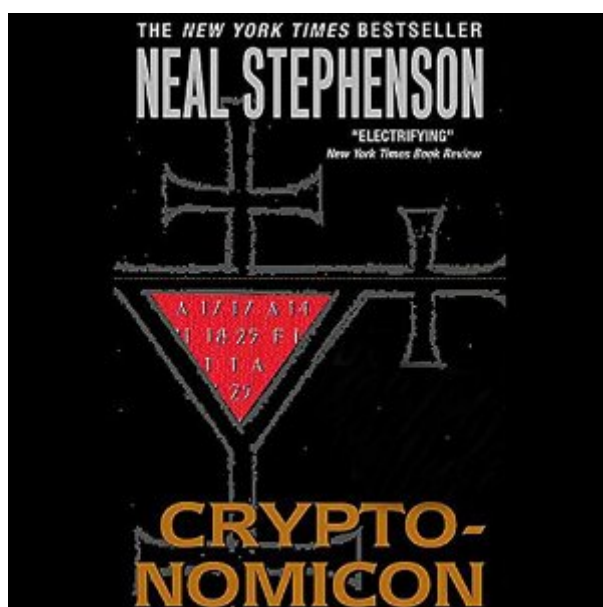
"ELECTRIFYING"
New York Times Book Review

CRYPTO-NOMICON

Synopsis

Neal Stephenson hacks into the secret histories of nations and the private obsessions of men, decrypting with dazzling virtuosity the forces that shaped this century.In 1942, Lawrence Pritchard Waterhouse - mathematical genius and young Captain in the U.S. Navy - is assigned to detachment 2702. It is an outfit so secret that only a handful of people know it exists, and some of those people have names like Churchill and Roosevelt. The mission of Watrehouse and Detatchment 2702 - commanded by Marine Raider Bobby Shaftoe - is to keep the Nazis ignorant of the fact that Allied Intelligence has cracked the enemy's fabled Enigma code. It is a game, a cryptographic chess match between Waterhouse and his German counterpart, translated into action by the gung-ho Shaftoe and his forces.Fast-forward to the present, where Waterhouse's crypto-hacker grandson, Randy, is attempting to create a "data haven" in Southeast Asia - a place where encrypted data can be stored and exchanged free of repression and scrutiny. As governments and multinationals attack the endeavor, Randy joins forces with Shaftoe's tough-as-nails grandaughter, Amy, to secretly salvage a sunken Nazi submarine that holds the key to keeping the dream of a data haven afloat.But soon their scheme brings to light a massive conspiracy, with its roots in Detachment 2702, linked to an unbreakable Nazi code called Arethusa. And it will represent the path to unimaginable riches and a future of personal and digital liberty...or to universal totalitarianism reborn.A breathtaking tour de force, and Neal Stephenson's most accomplished and affecting work to date, Cryptonomicon is profound and prophetic, hypnotic and hyper-driven, as it leaps forward and back between World War II and the World Wide Web, hinting all the while at a dark day-after-tomorrow. It is a work of great art, thought, and creative daring.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Going in to CRYPTONOMICON, I had absolutely no idea what to expect. I'd never read anything by Neal Stephenson, nor had I read any blurbs or reviews of the book. However, it had appeared on enough "Best Book" lists that I decided to give it a try. And boy am I glad I did.This novel is fun, huge, funny, rambling, witty, and sprawling. It is clever, engaging, and well-paced. It is full of quirky, eccentric, immensely likeable characters, crazy, interesting ideas, and amusing, often hilarious, looks at various situations including, but not limited to, mathematics, life, how to eat Cap'n Crunch properly, the purpose of beards, and well, just about anything else you can think of. Obviously, then, this book is not for everyone. Those who like tight, meticulously pared-down straightforward stories may not be able to get into this one.For me, though, as you may have guessed from the title of the review, this book was an absolute joy to read. The books chapters cycled between four main characters, and every time I finished a chapter I found myself in an awkward position: I didn't want to go on, because I wanted to keep reading about the character I'd been following. However, by the end of the first paragraph of the next chapter, I'd be feeling the same way about the next character in the cycle. It was an odd feeling, and a tribute to the skill with which Stephenson created these characters that each of them was so completely engaging.In addition to the main characters, the settings and situations were vivid and well-drawn. Despite this books immensity and its tendency to ramble at length about inanity, it never got boring, and always retained its charm. Stephenson provides us with a very amusing outlook on life.

Just finished the book - and while reading it, I recommended it to many others because I was enjoying it so much. I kept telling people "I'm reading the coolest book - you have to read it, too!" Very well written. Moves at an incredible pace, the dialogue is believable, and of course the excursions into math, cryptology, engineering, computers, eating Captain Crunch so it doesn't lacerate the roof of your mouth, and all those incredible observations about society/culture/whatever-is-in-front-of-them that only engineers and sceintists can make are the icing on what would be an incredibly well-written tale even without all that stuff.What makes the book so excellent, though, is the believable story and the believable characters. I found that I liked all of them because they were so real - I even cared about the bad guys. Still want them to lose, of course, but as a *reader*, I cared about them, and that's what keeps driving a reader on through a

story.It's certainly a book that requires some commitment - it is very long, but I tell you, after hitting page 800, I was depressed, knowing that I had only another 110 pages of this joyful reading ahead of me. How many books have done that to you lately? In the last ten years? I read hundreds of books each year, most of them I can bring myself to enjoy even if they aren't great literature, but it is rare that I am so much enjoying a book that I begin to question if I should slow down, just so I can savor the enjoyment longer - and I did that a lot with this book.Stephenson has a way with words that will leave you breathless and in awe at his skill at writing. His metaphors are brilliant, sometimes hilarious.

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