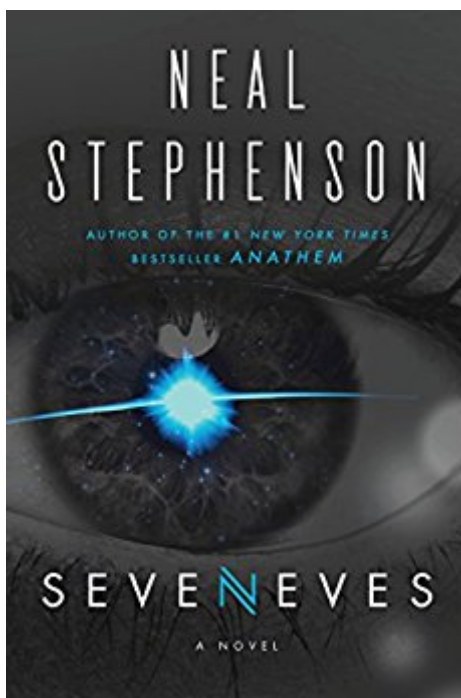


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# Seveneves: A Novel



## Synopsis

From the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Anathem*, *Reamde*, and *Cryptonomicon* comes an exciting and thought-provoking science fiction epic—a grand story of annihilation and survival spanning five thousand years. What would happen if the world were ending? A catastrophic event renders the earth a ticking time bomb. In a feverish race against the inevitable, nations around the globe band together to devise an ambitious plan to ensure the survival of humanity far beyond our atmosphere, in outer space. But the complexities and unpredictability of human nature coupled with unforeseen challenges and dangers threaten the intrepid pioneers, until only a handful of survivors remain . . . Five thousand years later, their progeny—seven distinct races now three billion strong—embark on yet another audacious journey into the unknown . . . to an alien world utterly transformed by cataclysm and time: Earth. A writer of dazzling genius and imaginative vision, Neal Stephenson combines science, philosophy, technology, psychology, and literature in a magnificent work of speculative fiction that offers a portrait of a future that is both extraordinary and eerily recognizable. As he did in *Anathem*, *Cryptonomicon*, the *Baroque Cycle*, and *Reamde*, Stephenson explores some of our biggest ideas and perplexing challenges in a breathtaking saga that is daring, engrossing, and altogether brilliant.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I like Neal Stephenson. I really do. I particularly enjoyed Cryptonomicon, The Baroque Cycle, and even had a grudging respect for Anathem, generally reviled among his hard-core fans. But I hit the wall with Seveneves. Let me explain why, because I think many reviewers either blindly bought into it, or put it down as garbage. There is a reason for both. Seveneves is an 880 page novel, ostensibly about a very near-future catastrophe where the world must work together in a short amount of time to build out an orbiting habitat (using the ISS as a core), to save what tiny fraction they can of the human race. As you can imagine, this rush to save the essence of humanity is a perfect stage to explore every near-future space technology and Stephenson takes every opportunity to do so. And then some. Unlike Cryptonomicon, for example, where the Turing code-break/world net/Axis gold story lines are different enough for the reader to enjoy or slog through, the technology in Seveneves is so dense, so similar in purpose, and so relentless, it's easy for one's eyes to glaze over. A six page description of delta-V and how to achieve it might be interesting in and of itself, if it weren't part of many, many more pages of orbital mechanics and how to use a nuclear reactor to power a space-borne craft. And although the subjects he deeply delves into range from genetics, to asteroid mining, water from comets as propellant, and zero-g sex, these components are all in service to a very specific technology problem the survivors are trying to solve. The first two-thirds of the book relate the challenges of creating the habitat and stabilizing its existence. Unfortunately, the story is but a mere framework on which to hang gobs of technical dissertation, and the characters are poorly formed, used only as chess pieces around which the technology can orbit. No matter how much you may adore hard SF (and Stephenson admits he did play fast and loose with bits of the tech), Seveneves ends up reading, for the most part, like transcribed lectures. The last third of the book, when the survivors can finally return to Earth, exalts similarly in forward-derivative tech, although the story itself picks up a little more steam. The ending is meh and satisfactory only in that it is an ending. The secret to Seveneves, however, is spelled out in the author's five pages of acknowledgements at the end. He tells how he started developing ideas for the book in 2006, and lists the huge cadre of techies, space scientists and enthusiasts, and geeks that helped him vet any number of ideas in his book. The real telling line, comes at the end when he thanks his editor for her patience with him while he spent seven years deciding what to do with all these ideas. To me, that's tech in search of a story and that's exactly what you get in Seveneves. Many reviewers either loved it because it was

NEAL STEPHENSON, while many just stopped reading and tossed it on the floor. When I realized less than half way through that I really fell into the latter camp, I nevertheless struggled through to the end because I adore Stephenson's snarky prose, which is definitely on point. I gave the book three stars, though it really deserves two and a half stars because you have to admire a writer with his cojones to put this out. Should you read Seveneves? If you're a Stephenson nut, you can't not read it. If you're new to Stephenson, stay away and try some of his earlier books from the 1990s. He is no doubt a very fine writer and I would hate to have a newbie be influenced by what I hope is a vanity project that has emptied Stephenson's pent-up rolodex of very near-future space tech, and that his next book is more accessible.

This book was a magnet, pulling the reader closer and closer to the events, crisis, solutions, and new events in this novel that spans milleniums. As always in quality science fiction much of the writing is based in true science and its extrapolation into unknown worlds (in this case space). And as always, the readers anchor in empathetic characters, relationships and human drama. Eloquent phrases illustrate how we interact, deal with problems, resolve conflict and approach challenge. The author spans thousands of years of human evolution and culture in a way that leads the reader along as both passive observer and passionate cheerleader. We can draw parallels to current public figures and space programs, while dropped into centuries of innovation and piecing together resources for survival. I will read this wonderful book again, as I watch the human race, climate change and politics. Delicious.

I had a deal on Seveneves, which was written by the author of Cryptonomicon, a book both my spouse and I really liked, so she bought it for us. Right off I have to warn you that it's a real brick - almost 900 pages as I recall. It's an apocalyptic Sci-Fi novel, but refreshing in that it is not in any way dystopian. The basic premise is that the moon breaks apart and causes the eventual destruction of the earth's surface, so the human race needs to find a way to survive for kind of 5-10,000 years, until the earth can be rebuilt. The author goes in to extensive detail on all the engineering involved in the attempts to save the human race, so early on I really wondered if I really wanted to plow through this brick of a book, but I had a suspicion things were going to get more and more interesting, and I was not disappointed. I do think this book could have appealed to a broader audience if Stephenson had not gone in to such detail on the tech stuff, but as an engineer, I thought it was pretty fun. As a novel, this book is interesting on many levels. It explores the idea of what might happen if human kind had the necessity and opportunity to start over - to both

re-engineer the planet, and to re-engineer not only the human race (and race itself), but every animal on it. Engineering plays a prominent and positive role in the book. As a friend of Stephenson noted, it's not often that the mining industry is portrayed in such a positive light. But what makes this fun is that while it's a science driven novel, there is a huge element of human drama and politics that drives the narrative, making for an exciting and interesting ride.

I imagine if I were a physicist or engineer I would have enjoyed the book much more, as the author put a lot of work into creating the scientific basis for the story. However I am not, so I can only comment on the story itself. It was an interesting plot, and the characters were lively and reasonably motivated. Failure to use human remains for genetic diversity puzzled me. Using delta V as speed differential when I would have assumed it to be acceleration was also strange to me. But these are minor points. It's a good story, it's fairly easy to skip the physics if you are not interested, and I think most readers will enjoy this trip.

This is really two separate novels, which were for some reason published as one. The first part is absolutely amazing. The story is original and exciting, the characters are realistic. It is very emotional and one of the best stories I've ever read. In comparison, the second part seems mediocre. It is still a good science fiction story, but would have worked much better as a sequel. It just cannot compare to the first part, but is still a good read.

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