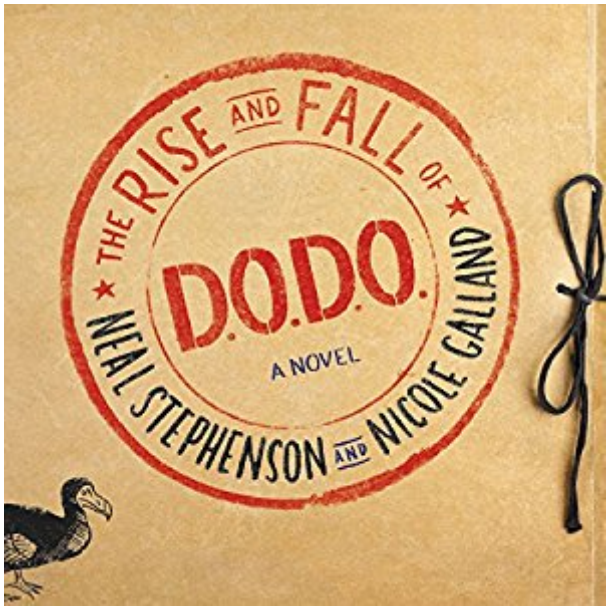
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The Rise And Fall Of D.O.D.O.: A Novel



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Synopsis

From best-selling author Neal Stephenson and critically acclaimed historical and contemporary commercial novelist Nicole Galland comes a captivating and complex near-future thriller combining history, science, magic, mystery, intrigue, and adventure that questions the very foundations of the modern world. When Melisande Stokes, an expert in linguistics and languages, accidently meets military intelligence operator Tristan Lyons in a hallway at Harvard University, it is the beginning of a chain of events that will alter their lives and human history itself. The young man from a shadowy government entity approaches Mel, a low-level faculty member, with an incredible offer. The only condition: She must sign a nondisclosure agreement in return for the rather large sum of money. Tristan needs Mel to translate some very old documents, which, if authentic, are earth-shattering. They prove that magic actually existed and was practiced for centuries. But the arrival of the scientific revolution and the Age of Enlightenment weakened its power and endangered its practitioners. Magic stopped working altogether in 1851, at the time of the Great Exhibition at London’s Crystal Palace - the world’s fair celebrating the rise of industrial technology and commerce. Something about the modern world "jams" the "frequencies" used by magic, and it’s up to Tristan to find out why. And so the Department of Diachronic Operations - D.O.D.O. - gets cracking on its real mission: to develop a device that can bring magic back and send Diachronic Operatives back in time to keep it alive...and meddle with a little history at the same time. But while Tristan and his expanding operation master the science and build the technology, they overlook the mercurial - and treacherous - nature of the human heart. Written with the genius, complexity, and innovation that characterize all of Neal Stephenson’s work and steeped with the down-to-earth warmth and humor of Nicole Galland’s storytelling style, this exciting and vividly realized work of science fiction will make you believe in the impossible and take you to places - and times - beyond imagining. Full cast of narrators includes Robert Fass, James Foster, Tavia Gilbert, Arthur Morey, David Stifel, Charlie Thurston, and Kate Udall.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Neal Stephenson, you promised me time travel, magic, and Ancient Greek - all in the first few pages. You quoted Peter Gabriel! I was so there! Oh goody, I thought, gentle reader, Mr S is back to pre-Reamde/Anathem/Seveneves form. Nearly 750 pages later >sigh< I can tell you that I was wrong. Mr S misled me. Read our review of Seveneves for a more detailed exegesis of what ails Mr Stephenson’s writing now. Sadly, D.O.D.O lacks even the beauty and science that leavened Seveneves. There’s no magic or Ancient Greek to be seen, either.Dr Melisande Stokes, Harvard lecturer in ancient language, is writing a record for the future (dear reader) in London in 1851, where she is stuck, having been sent there from the twentieth-first-century. Stephenson/Galland’s quantum theory explanation for what magic was and why it ceased to exist in 1850 is ingenious and quite charming. Intriguingly, it has a connection to an incident of importance in Brian Catling’s The Vorrh. Melisande has been recruited by US Army officer, Tristan Lyons, to start-up the ancient languages department of an organisation that ultimately becomes "D.O.D.O", a ’shadowy government entity’, whose purpose is to revitalise magic, to be practised by witches.The full name for which "D.O.D.O’ is an acronym is not explained for some time, and is just one of many such names which are thought-up to provide amusing or appropriate nicknames. The ridiculousness of bureaucracy is well-captured in the increasingly hysterical emails from D.O.D.O.’s HR department: "As you choose your costumes, please try to keep in mind everything our Diversity Policy has to say about stereotypes surrounding witches. Most of you who work here don’t need to be told this, but every year it seems we have some children who show up in costumes that are offensive to certain members of our staff. Remember, the following costume elements are expressly forbidden:Pointy hatsGreen skinWarts on noseBrooms."(Shades of a Yale ’witch hunt’).The D.O.D.O. boffins (your standard Japanese genius and a bunch of nerds) build a machine (an "ODEC") in which witches can practise magic, otherwise impossible in this time. How Melisande has ended-up in Victorian London, and how D.O.D.O. recruits a witch, will all be revealed, although there is no real suspense in either. Melisande’s supposed linguistic ability is never properly illustrated - all conversations are

given in English. There is the occasional mention of ’declensions’, ’conversational Sumerian’ or the plastering on of a foreign phrase, but that’s it.There is a theory that everything was different once, but we can’t remember that, because our memories changed too. It’s the idea behind Crowley’s Aegypt cycle and Ursula le Guin’s The Lathe of Heaven. [Redolent of lymphocytes also? - Ed.] A sign that there has been such a change is foreshadowed in the book, but disappointingly, that theme is never taken anywhere. The magic which is revitalised by D.O.D.O. is used for time travel which is utilised only to change the world in ways which the US financial-industrial complex would find helpful. The other, surely vast, uses of magic are virtually ignored. The spells are all conducted off-stage (in the sealed ODEC). Were Stephenson and Galland again not interested enough to fully develop this idea, or did they agree that they simply couldn’t make magic spells sound convincing? Anyone who goes into an ODEC with a witch comes out the other side with convenient confusion and amnesia. Just how it is done is glossed-over by the witches themselves, who simply can’t explain it to muggles when they ask. "’What an idiot question,’" I said. ’How does writing work? Can you tell me now it is I scratch thrice-ten marks on a piece of vellum and you can look at it and learn every piece of knowledge in the world?’"For a book which needs a tight and complex plot, The Rise and Fall of D.O.D.O. is sloppy, as is D.O.D.O., the top-secret organisation itself. One would expect a ’shadowy government entity’ dealing with metaphysical matters of the greatest profundity and importance to mankind, to think a bit about security; D.O.D.O.’s security is the type that a truck can be driven through (like the time travel plot). The officials of D.O.D.O are all astoundingly unobservant and stupid, whereas the visitors from other times and places, who could rightly be expected to be out of their depth, are wily and resourceful to a degree that over-stretches credulity. A family of financiers, the Fuggers, are suspiciously ubiquitous across time, but their involvement is ultimately wishy-washy and underdeveloped. The concept of an implosion of all things physics, occurring when time travellers change history too quickly, is here called ’diachronic shear’, ’lomadh’ or ’diakrÃƒÂ nikus nyÃƒÂ- rÃƒÂ- as’. In John Wyndham’s time it was called a "chronoclasm". Whatever it is called, it remains a get-out-of-gaol-free card for an embattled author and is used to this end by the authors of D.O.D.O. Sub-plots concerning the involvement of the Irish witch, GraÃƒÂ- nne, with a 17th century historical figure and her role as a spy for a never-seen correspondent, seem tacked on. The style of diary entries, letters and emails is lazy. Stephenson’s readers are entitled to expect a more synthesised and complicated narrative along the lines of The Baroque Cycle.)The novel is clearly written with screen rights in mind - the plot requires several characters to be nude frequently, although for once, sometimes it is men. While our feisty (but dull) heroine is not a beauty, her cheerful, arm-punching male co-worker is (although also dull), and the

main witch, Erszebet (a very annoying character) is as well.There are amusing moments. Melisande, writing with dip pen and ink, crossing out slang and profanities: [censored by] The Viking raid is worth its weight in plundered axes. There's a funny, developing google search list and a very funny Norse epic. If you haven't yet given up on Mr S, suspend disbelief, stop asking yourself "why?", "but wouldn't...?" and "that can't be so because....", and D.O.D.O. will entertain well enough.The book ends on much the same note as does Seveneves - after a lot of confusing wrapping-up action and rushing about, a motley band of questing types from Central Casting sit around a table planning their next move - to be described in the sequel which we at TVC are unlikely to read. We want to go back to the time when Neal Stephenson wrote wittily and with depth and intricacy, for grownups. This'll make a ho-hum Netflix series.

I have read 5 books by NS and enjoy his writing immensely. This book is out of character, even a far step from REAMDE. As a quantum physicist, I found the misuse of even simple quantum concepts appalling and the sophistication of thought/writing is consistently low. It is best read as a light-hearted farce in which silliness prevails, perhaps along the lines of the humorous plots of the old sitcom Bewitched. Overall, I believe this will be very disappointing to fans of NS.

As good a read as I expected from the author, engaging to the end. As a long time fan of the Chronicles of St. Mary's, I got a little uncomfortable for the condition of Jodi Taylor's toes, but I suppose time travel has a limited number of issues to be explored and the magical factor is, of course, not in her books at all.

What an odd book. An amalgamation of science fiction (quantum physics) and fantasy (witches everywhere) plus some comic touches. It's nothing like the best Stephenson (i.e., Snow Crash), but it's entertaining enough for light reading.

Not up to the author's tremendous previous works. The time travel & magic make for more sci-fi instead of his more interesting science & technology based works.

Good stuff from one of the best mainline SF authors. It left everything unresolved, however. Will there be a sequel?

This is the best book IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve read in the past few years! So complete, and yet different

from everything. Loved it.

Very intriguing book that crosses genres but in the end--a fun read! Hoping for a sequel!! I'm eager for more!

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