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# The Thrilling Adventures Of Lovelace And Babbage: The (Mostly) True Story Of The First Computer (Pantheon Graphic Novels)



## Synopsis

THE THRILLING ADVENTURES OF LOVELACE AND BABBAGE . . . in which Sydney Padua transforms one of the most compelling scientific collaborations into a hilarious series of adventures. Meet Victorian London's most dynamic duo: Charles Babbage, the unrealized inventor of the computer, and his accomplice, Ada, Countess of Lovelace, the peculiar protoprogrammer and daughter of Lord Byron. When Lovelace translated a description of Babbage's plans for an enormous mechanical calculating machine in 1842, she added annotations three times longer than the original work. Her footnotes contained the first appearance of the general computing theory, a hundred years before an actual computer was built. Sadly, Lovelace died of cancer a decade after publishing the paper, and Babbage never built any of his machines. But do not despair! The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage presents a rollicking alternate reality in which Lovelace and Babbage do build the Difference Engine and then use it to build runaway economic models, battle the scourge of spelling errors, explore the wilder realms of mathematics, and, of course, fight crime—for the sake of both London and science. Complete with extensive footnotes that rival those penned by Lovelace herself, historical curiosities, and never-before-seen diagrams of Babbage's mechanical, steam-powered computer, *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage* is wonderfully whimsical, utterly unusual, and, above all, entirely irresistible. (With black-and-white illustrations throughout.)

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

James Gleick, author of *The Information* "Don't be fooled by the word comic. Sydney Padua tells a story that is tender, passionate, and true." Charles Petzold, author of *Code and The Annotated Turing* "So there. *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage* is learned, clever, funny, and above all very silly in the best sense of the word." Publishers Weekly (starred review) "The immensity of Padua's research and the wit and allusions of her prose are striking, saying as much about what drove her to explore the possibilities of her protagonists' relationship as about the protagonists themselves. Permeated by delightful illustrations, obsessive foot- and endnotes, and a spirit of genuine inventiveness, it's an early candidate for the year's best." Martha Cornog, *Library Journal* "Padua's extravaganza is very much for the whimsical intelligentsia and will speak to those interested in computers or math who will delight in the abundant background materials." Bookpage "Sydney Padua's impeccably researched, yet playfully imagined graphic biography is a treat for history buffs and graphic novel lovers alike. With fantastically detailed art, footnotes and diagrams, this is a whimsical graphic account like no other." Margaret Quamme, *The Columbus Dispatch* "Reading *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage* is like auditing a dozen high-level, inventively taught college classes simultaneously: more than a little overwhelming yet fascinating." Etelka Lehoczky, *NPR.org* "Sydney Padua's new book is definitely a material." Discover Magazine "An outlandish, enlightening tale." Nancy Szokan, *Washington Post* "Informative and entertaining . . . It's a book that makes you a lot smarter as it makes you laugh." The Takeaway "Novelist Sydney Padua has found quite a pair: the girl with the unstoppable brain; the male inventor 24 years her senior, part-poet, part-genius; this Victorian odd couple, dedicated to crime foiling and cleverness, is easily worthy of Holmes and Watson with a title to match." Maria Popova, *BrainPickings.org* "Immensely delightful and illuminating | a masterwork of combinatorial genius and a poetic analog to its subject matter."

SYDNEY PADUA is an animator and visual effects artist, usually employed in making giant monsters appear to be attacking people for the movies. She started drawing comics by accident and is still trying to figure out how to stop. Originally from the Canadian prairie, she now lives in London with her husband and far too many books. *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage* is her

first book.

Five stars BUT do not get the Kindle edition. Although you can enlarge each comic panel, the foot notes on each page (which are fun and interesting and worth the read) get only a tiny bit bigger. Very frustrating. Go for the hard cover. Amusing story, partly true, partly fiction and well written and drawn.

More cogs and footnotes than I imagined possible. Truth and fiction dancing together to the progressive chunk-a-chunk of steam powered machinery and the chattering rise and fall of Victorian gossip.

Sometimes there are books that you want to just go out on the street, grab someone by the collar and say "Look! At this!" I have never quite seen a book like Sydney Padua's *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage*. It's a wonderful thing, the true story up front and a 'pocket universe' to extend it. It's full of the most amusing historical footnotes. Padua is amazing, witty, a keen observer, a fine science writer; she should do more of this kind of work. I don't think the real countess of Lovelace and Charles Babbage could have been created as a work of fiction only the real world produces characters as strange and delightful as them. Read it, or just buy it for the footnotes!

This book is a real joy. It both brings Babbage and Lovelace to life and illuminates the more adventurous aspects of the Victorian age. While based upon fact (and is spectacularly researched with all of the supporting material included in the appendices), it is, partly, a work of fiction a fact which the author makes very clear. It is so wittily written and drawn that it's easy to forget that this is so.

This is a humorous look at the relationship of Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelace, and the beginnings of computing. While Babbage was never able to complete his Analytical Engine, this book suggests what might have been, while given quite a bit of insight into how it would have worked. If you are interesting in the history of computing, the genre known as "Steampunk," or just want an entertaining read, this is a fascinating book. I've had the privilege to actually see the completed version of Babbage's Difference Engine, which was built from his plans. It is a beautiful

piece, and is fascinating to watch. This book gave me a greater insight in these pioneers of computing, which I first discovered in a book called "The Difference Engine" by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, which was one, if not the, first Steampunk novels. A

I had been seeing this book around, but I was really hesitant to pick it up. Why? Well, as a woman in software engineering, I'm painfully aware of what a controversial figure Ada Lovelace is. She's been hailed as the inventor of computer programming -- which has led to some incredibly virulent backlash, accusing her of having been some sort of hack who merely copied down other people's ideas without even really understanding them herself. Now, let's not kid ourselves. If a man had written the article Lovelace wrote, there's no way we'd see the same sorts of ferocious efforts to prove him incompetent. OTOH, if it had been a man, we hardly would have heard about him at all. He'd probably be accepted by some as the "father of computer programming"... in kind of a footnotey, nobody-cares kinda way. But in my line of work, it's dangerous to talk about sexism unless you want a ton of it to rain down on your head, so I wasn't terribly interested in mirroring myself in this controversy. Thus a book that looked like it was probably a sunny-and-dry retelling of team Lovelace's side of the story didn't jump out at me as something that would be appealing. Boy was I wrong!! Surprisingly, the author used the oldest trick in the book for dealing with an acrimonious controversy: present the evidence. The primary sources. And then even-handedly discuss the controversy in light of the evidence. Now, if that sounds more boring to you than "a sunny-and-dry retelling of team Lovelace's side of the story," here's the genius of it -- it's not boring at all -- it's wildly fun and entertaining!! Quite sincerely, I think the author of this book has invented a new genre, and a brilliant one at that. Here's how it works: Padua took various primary sources (contemporaneous writings by or about Babbage and/or Lovelace and/or other famous people they met) and wrote fictional scenes around them (including some set in the author's invented alternate universe for them). Then Padua wrote footnotes that interact with the story by giving the rest of the (real) story. This is an absolutely brilliant way of synergising the best parts of history and historical fiction. Plain history has a difficult relationship with objectivity, and is at its driest when striving to be objective. Historical fiction is fun and can leave objectivity aside -- but constantly leaves me curious about which bits are historical and which bits are fiction. The author of this work found the magic formula to combine them! This work is at once great and truly pioneering. If there's a canon of graphic novels, this one deserves a top slot.

I thoroughly enjoyed this graphic novel. Two of the most feted geniuses, who didn't meet one

another, have a pretty good time (if they'd ever met). The first part is worth the candle as it briefly describes their careers which were both very interesting. You're reading this in the way you are because of the careers of the title characters: Babbage designed, but was never able to build, not the first computer\*, but the first general-purpose computer. Ada Lovelace wrote the first computer programs, even though there were no computers upon which they could run. She was a genius, too and her story is pretty sad. The drawing is quite nice, rather whimsical. If you like good cartooning and a nice fantasy with some history of the devices we all know and (mostly) love, you'll like this book.\* Arguably the first working modern computer was the Jacquard loom.

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