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# The Difference Engine



## Synopsis

1855: The Industrial Revolution is in full swing, powered by steam-driven cybernetic Engines. Charles Babbage perfects his Analytical Engine, and the computer age arrives a century ahead of its time. Three extraordinary characters race toward a rendezvous with the future: Sybil Gerard – a fallen woman, politician’s tart, daughter of a Luddite agitator; Edward “Leviathan” Mallory – explorer and paleontologist; Laurence Oliphant – diplomat, mystic, and spy. Their adventure begins with the discovery of a box of punched Engine cards of unknown origin and purpose. Cards someone wants badly enough to kill for. Part detective story, part historical thriller, *The Difference Engine* took the science fiction community by storm when it was first published more than twenty years ago. Provocative, compelling, and intensely imagined, this novel is poised to impress a whole new generation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A collaborative novel from the premier cyberpunk authors, William Gibson and Bruce Sterling. Part detective story, part historical thriller, *The Difference Engine* takes us not forward but back, to an imagined 1885: the Industrial Revolution is in full and inexorable swing, powered by steam-driven, cybernetic engines. Charles Babbage perfects his Analytical Engine, and the computer age arrives a century ahead of its time. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In a surprising departure from the traditional view of cyberpunk’s bleak future, Gibson ( *Mona Lisa*

Overdrive ) and Sterling ( Islands in the Net ) render with elan and colorful detail a scientifically advanced London, circa 1855, where computers ("Engines") have been developed. Fierce summer heat and pollution have driven out the ruling class, and ensuing anarchy allows the subversive, technology-hating Luddites to surface and battle the intellectual elite. Much of the problem centers on a set of perforated cards, once in the possession of an executed Luddite leader's daughter, later in the hands of "Queen of Engines" Ada Byron (daughter of prime minister Lord Byron), finally given to Edward Mallory, a scientist. Mallory, who knows the cards are a gambling device that can be read with a specialized Engine, is soon threatened and libeled by the Luddites, and he and his associates confront the scoundrels in a violent showdown. A sometimes listless pace and limp conclusions that defy the plot's complexity flaw an otherwise visionary, handsomely written, unsentimental tale that convincingly revises the 19th-century Western world. 75,000 first printing; \$75,000 ad/promo. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I just got done reading this book after it has been sitting on my shelf since I got it. I thought it was a great story. It was nice to see real historical figures of importance woven in to this complex story. I would have never thought of the magnitude a computing device described in the book could become not based on what we perceive today as the modern computing device. I don't think this book is for everyone as they need to know a bit of history before diving in to it or perhaps be inclined to investigate the historical points and persons. Gibson is great at writing and is one of my favorite authors. I wish Sterling and Gibson would write together again like this.

Book was recommended in the Steampunk Bible and it did NOT live up to expectations! NOT happy!

I was eager to read this due to my interest in steampunk and Babbage's computer. Its premise is interesting enough, but it was not engaging enough. I ended up losing interest, and never finished it.

I love Steampunk books but this one seemed a little slow for my tasteThe ending wasn't what I expected either (not in the COOL! way)

Very boring. I've just read till the end to try to find out where the authors were getting at. Nowhere was my answer. I've bought because I've read that it was a scientific fiction classic but I was very

disappointed.

The authors have done a great job in creating a fanciful 1855 Britain which has gone through a technological and social revolution as a result of the success of Babbage's differential engine, a mechanical computer which in reality was never perfected but had enormous potential. Whether that potential, as portayed in the book, would have resulted in digital photography and a national credit card system I'm not certain. The authors are great at creating characters and plausible scenes but the reasoning behind much of the plot is a bit dodgy. Still, a good read.

William Gibson always gets most of the credit for this, but Bruce Sterling seems to have a huge influence on this. This may be the definitive piece of Steampunk fiction. I recommend it for anyone interested about the genre.

Each time I read this, I find something that I didn't notice on a prior reading. Little shadings that make the book so much deeper and richer. It's interesting, not having a paper book, because I can take it places I normally wouldn't take a book and read it.

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