



The Difference Engine: Charles Babbage and the Quest to Build the First Computer

Doron Swade

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In 1821, Charles Babbage was reviewing a set of mathematical tables with a colleague in preparation for a scientific presentation when, after finding a wealth of errors, he exclaimed in frustration, "I wish to God these calculations had been executed by steam!" With this outburst, Babbage began to envision an end to human errors in the numerical tables upon which finance, trade, science, and navigation relied. *The Difference Engine* is the fascinating story of his heroic quest, against all odds, to build the first computing machine more than one hundred years before the modern computer we use today was invented.

Set against the politics and science of the explosive early Victorian era, *The Difference Engine* is a thrilling tale of Babbage's exuberant determination. Like *Longitude*, *The Difference Engine* is a fascinating portrait of the human story behind a pivotal moment in history and one of the most influential inventions of our time.

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