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Sydney Padua's *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage* violates the rules of *Passages* in a technical sense; the book was published in 2015, so cannot be a classic, right? I could excuse cheating on the grounds that covering this delightful book is so important that I can't wait until 2025. After all, I might be hit by a bus; ACM SIGSOFT might dissolve; rogue AI might go all Skynet and murder us all; less catastrophically, I might tire of doing these columns or you might tire of reading them. A much better excuse,however, is that Padua's book really dates from a throwaway cartoon she posted on the web in 2009. In any case, this month's column is a review of Sydney Padua's 2015 book, *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage - with Interesting Curious Anecdotes of Celebrated and Distinguished Characters, Fully Illustrating a Variety of Instructive and Amusing Scenes; As Performed Within and Without the Remarkable Difference Engine (Embellished with Portraits and Scientifick Diagrams).*

The full title of this "graphic novel" (or perhaps comic collection – for it's not clear it's really a "novel" though the nature of "the novel itself" comes into play in this fantasy) indicates how deliciously Victorian this book is, as is appropriate for a celebration of those most Victorian characters, Lovelace and Babbage. Padua, in a short introduction, describes Babbage as a "blend of Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Toad, Don Quixote, and Leonardo da Vinci" and indeed reading his autobiography one does wonder if he was invented by Dickens or Grahame (granted, *The Wind in the Willows* was published after the reign of Queen Victoria, but what's ten years?)

The basic conceit of the book is not unlike that of Bruce Sterling's great short story, "Dori Bangs," in that Padua, disheartened on learning the story of Babbage and Lovelace, offered to "write it different" and launch a series of comics in which Ada did not die young, and Babbage did not fail to realize his computing dreams. The initial proposal made in that 2009 comic, was not meant to be taken seriously, but reaction was so positive that Padua ended up producing a series of stories, collected in this 300 page book.

The topical interest here for software engineers is obvious, and the exuberant episodic exploration of "what might have been" is great fun. However, what makes the book essential is the obsessive, exhaustive attention to detail and elaboration. This book has more text than almost any graphic novel I've ever seen. It has footnotes (even Alan Moore, to my knowledge, doesn't do footnotes), and it has primary source documents, annotated and illustrated, in Appendix I. Everything is presented in a whimsical style (that might remind some readers of the old Beagle Bros. catalogs), but this book makes it easy to *learn a great deal more about the "pre-history" of computing than you already knew, while having a very good time.* Incidentally, you will also probably become moderately expert on quaternions, George Eliot, and Thomas Carlyle. Perhaps the height of this intensity of focus is Appendix II, a full graphic presentation (over 20 pages, including a mini-comic on Babbage's design for an "anticipating carriage") of the Analytical Engine, function and design, as it would have been had Babbage's plans of the early 1840s come to fruition. That's something worth seeing. Take this book into your mind's Crystal Palace, and give it a particularly good exhibition location.