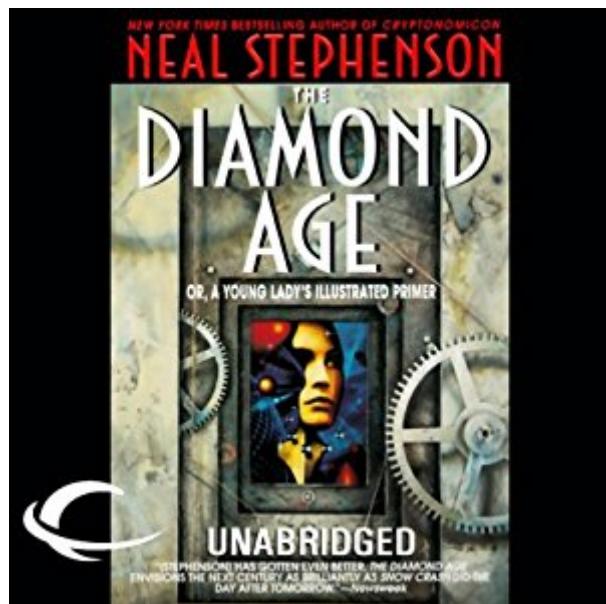


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The Diamond Age



Synopsis

In Snow Crash, Neal Stephenson took science fiction to dazzling new levels. Now, in The Diamond Age, he delivers another stunning tale. Set in twenty-first century Shanghai, it is the story of what happens when a state-of-the-art interactive device falls in the hands of a street urchin named Nell. Her lifeâ "and the entire future of humanityâ "is about to be decoded and reprogrammedâ | --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Diamond Age by Neal Stephenson was one of the most insightful and original books I've read in a long time. After a brief absence from the world of science fiction, I picked this book up, almost entirely because of my love for his earlier novel, Snow Crash. In Snow Crash, Stephenson gave us a view of a future not all that far away. The technology of the Diamond Age takes us into the very distant future. On the Earth of the Diamond Age, mankind has developed and perfected the concept of nanotechnology. Nanotechnology is based around the concept of using microscopic computers to allow people to literally make anything possible. Often times, the tricky part of designing an object is making it heavier than air so it won't float away. Matter compilers can create any object with the proper program, and a pair of wooden chopsticks has flashing advertisements running up and down their sides. As backlash to this technological heaven, the elite members of society borrow their culture from the British during the Victorian era. These Victorians -or Vicky's, as some derogatorily refer to them- place value in items that are hand made, and pay exorbitant amounts of money for

such items. This novel varies from many typical science fiction novels, in that its focus is not on the technology or the rich, but rather on a single girl from a dysfunctional family in one of the poorest parts of the world. Nell, comes across one of three copies of the Young Lady's Illustrated Primer, a book of sorts intended to educate a young girl. This book, while itself not a technological marvel, displays a true ingenuity in its content, as any good book.

I've just finished reading the previous 178 reviews, and have to agree with the main themes: 1) The ending is abrupt and leaves major storylines unresolved. 2) The book is not light reading. It reminds me of the old Far Side cartoons which were hilarious to some but incomprehensible to others. 3) The peek at a possible future is excellent, especially the use of nanotechnology. Most of the reviews speak of the "Young Lady's Illustrated Primer" as a book that teaches a girl how to survive on the streets and to be an independent thinker. What they don't mention, and what I think is vital, is that one of the main themes in the design of the book was "subversion". The book was meant to guide a young girl on her path to becoming a free-thinking and subversive woman. Such a person would inevitably become a force, either positive or negative, in the book's rigid society. Having read 3 of Mr. Stephenson's books (Cryptonomicon, Snow Crash, and Diamond Age), I must agree that each one has a somewhat abrupt ending -- although Diamond Age seems to be the worst. In general, Mr. Stephenson tends to leave storylines open and let the reader's imagination take over. While this is a valid literary style, it quickly gets annoying. While Diamond Age may not have been a straight cyberpunk novel, the environment is certainly similar to what you see in William Gibson's Neuromancer. In essence, future society has broken down into "tribes" with a significant barrier dividing the upper and lower classes. The story contains quite a bit of the Oriental class (caste?) system that you see in cyberpunk, and it also adds a Victorian class system that isn't much different.

I picked up "The Diamond Age" with a glee so intense that it borders on embarrassing. Like most of the other reviewers, I loved "Snow Crash." I assumed... no, I HOPED that I'd love "The Diamond Age" as much, but unfortunately that didn't happen. It started off promising, with an interesting concept, likable characters, and that unparalleled Stephenson sense of style. But those qualities didn't gel into a cohesive story for me, and I have to admit that it was disappointing. The story itself is intriguing. The main focus is on Nell, a little girl in possession of an interactive Primer that not only teaches her but also nurtures her in the absence of parents or loved ones. But really, it's an ensemble tale (it's no accident that a reviewer compares Stephenson to Quentin Tarantino, who creates incredibly complex ensemble films). It's also about Miranda, who provides the nurturing

quality in the Primer. It's about Elizabeth, who has a Primer of her own. It's about Harv, Nell's brother. It's about the society they live in. Ultimately, this is where the book falls short of the high standards set in "Snow Crash." After all, "Snow Crash" has a similar format, a number of subplots all converging in the end to reach a final, stunning (perhaps too stunning) conclusion. What's the difference between them? I cared about all of the subplots in "Snow Crash" and all of the characters in them. I was as wrapped up in them as I was in Hiro Protagonist, the focal point of the book. I didn't feel the same way with "Diamond Age." I cared about Nell, yes, but the other characters were secondary to her. I really didn't care about what happened to them. Unfortunately, we spend a lot of time learning about them; they're central to the plot.

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