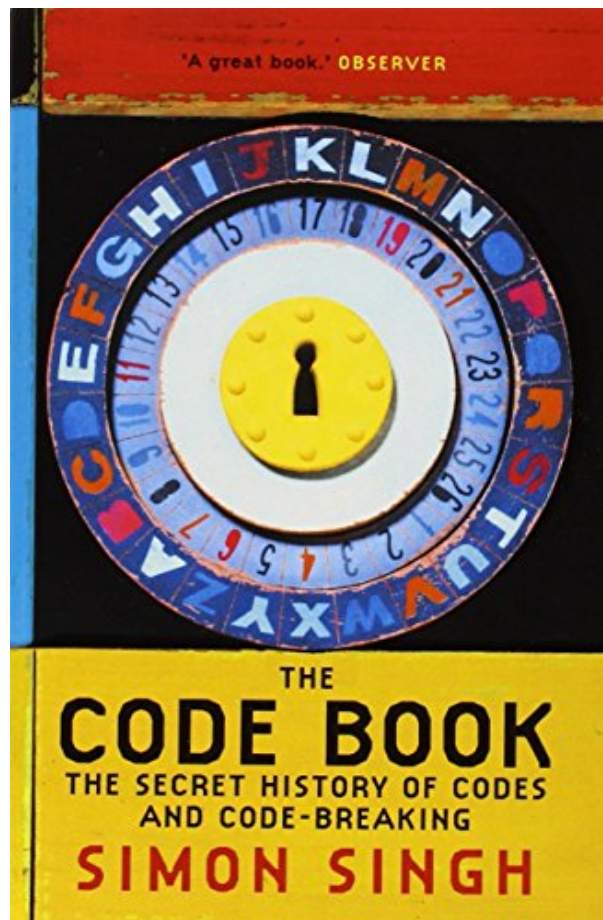
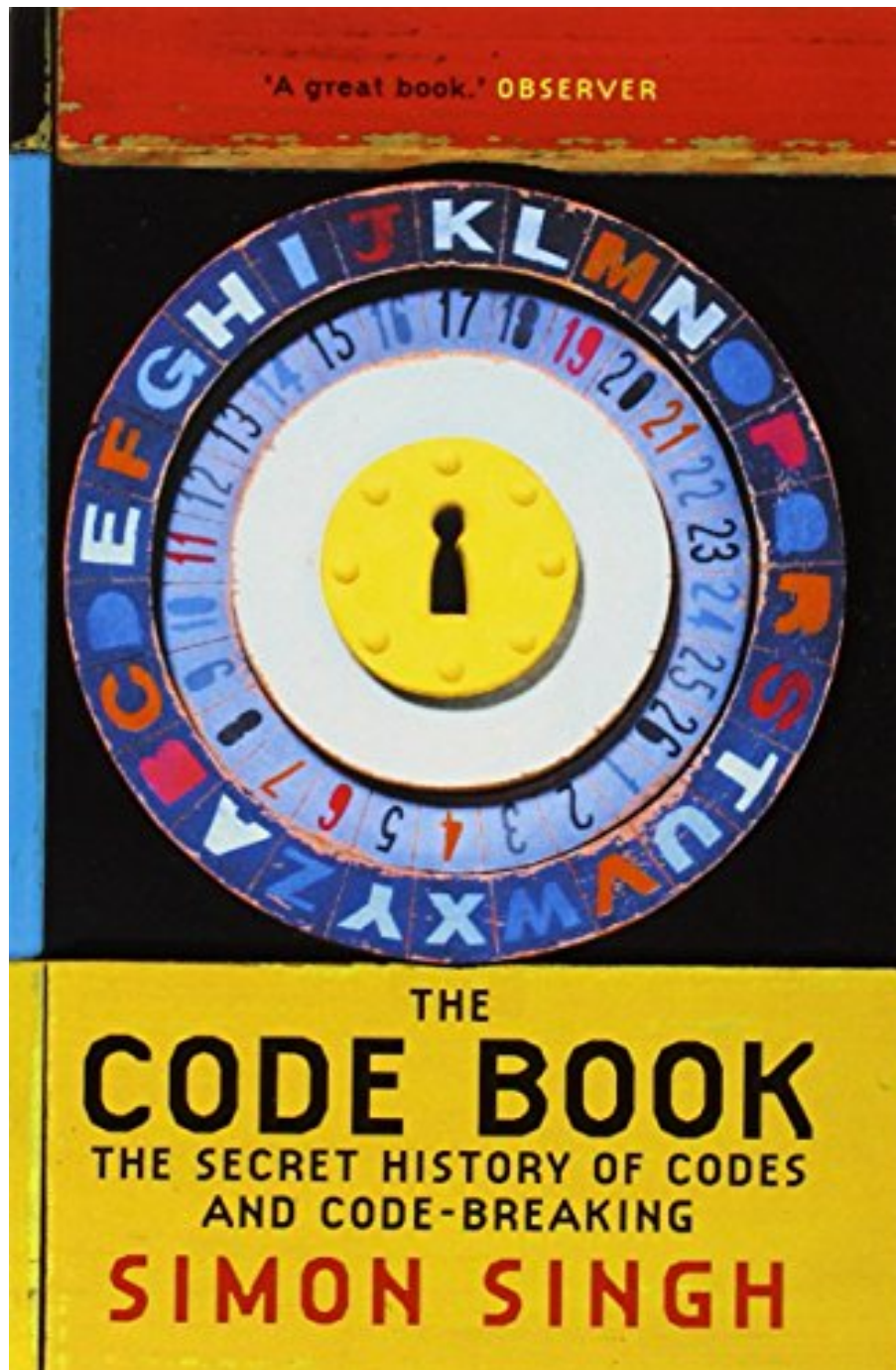


# **THE CODE BOOK: THE SECRET HISTORY OF CODES AND CODE-BREAKING BY DR. SIMON SINGH**



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## **Review**

`A fascinating meander through the centuries; replete with tales of intrigue, political chicanery, military secrecy and academic rivalry.'The Times

## **About the Author**

Simon Singh is a science journalist and TV producer. Having completed his PhD at Cambridge he worked from 1991 to 1997 at the BBC producing *Tomorrow's World* and co-directing the BAFTA award-winning documentary *Fermat's Last Theorem* for the Horizon series. In 1997, he published *Fermat's Last Theorem*, which was a best-seller in Britain and translated into 22 languages.

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The Science of Secrecy from Ancient Egypt to Quantum Cryptography From the best-selling author of Fermat's Last Theorem, The Code Book is a history of man's urge to uncover the secrets of codes, from Egyptian puzzles to modern day computer encryptions. As in Fermat's Last Theorem, Simon Singh brings life to an astonishing story of puzzles, codes, languages and riddles that reveals man's continual pursuit to disguise and uncover, and to work out the secret languages of others. Codes have influenced events throughout history, both in the stories of those who make them and those who break them. The betrayal of Mary Queen of Scots and the cracking of the enigma code that helped the Allies in World War II are major episodes in a continuing history of cryptography. In addition to stories of intrigue and warfare, Simon Singh also investigates other codes, the unravelling of genes and the rediscovery of ancient languages and most tantalisingly, the Beale ciphers, an unbroken code that could hold the key to a \$20 million treasure.

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- Fourth Estate

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4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Shhhhhh!

By Daniel Myers

Like all narrative non-fictional works that, eventually in this case, deal with technical subjects whose details are beyond the scope of the non-specialist reader, this book attempts to strike a balance between two

extremes, between a book so chock-full of technical detail that it reads like a textbook and a book that skimps so completely on the heart of the matter at hand that it can only be described as fluff. Singh has done a remarkable job in balancing the two here, it seems to me, and the book is worth any reader's time whose interest is piqued by cryptography.

Singh is singularly aided by his subject matter here. This book was recommended to me by a fellow poster on a crossword puzzle blog which I frequent, as a daily solver of the New York Times crossword. The discussions on the blog vary from the whimsical to the technical with all manner of things mooted. So goes Singh's book as well. But what makes this possible is that cryptography and cryptanalysis, for most of human history, has been no more complex, au fond, than a very difficult crossword puzzle. And one is not surprised to see a crossword used during WWII by the British to test potential candidates for work at top secret Bletchley Park, which was responsible for cracking Germany's "Enigma" code. The crossword is provided in the book and was jolly fun to solve.

It seems to me that up to the Vigenère polyalphabetic coding, known for centuries as "le chiffre indéchiffrable", anyone with an interest in this book could understand and create such a cipher and write an encrypted message in it. Indeed, it's in deciphering such messages without the "keyword" that the technical going gets somewhat involved and perhaps beyond the ken of some readers not familiar with basic statistical analysis, and, not coincidentally, this decipherment of such encryptions is where maths starts to predominate. But it's certainly not difficult to understand the concept of how these encryptions are deciphered, it's merely very tedious and painstaking to do it as Charles Babbage finally did in the 19th Century.

Up to this point, for this reader in any event, no trade-off was necessary and Singh is free to fill his tale of codes and ciphers with histories which hinge upon them, starting with the life and death of Mary, Queen of Scots. Also, he makes an elegant segue in the tale of how the Linear B tablets were finally translated, and the toing and froing of certain egotistical archaeologists etc. - It should be noted here the final decipherment and translation of Linear B was the cumulative work of men (and one woman) of genius who were linguistic prodigies. - Again, pass the 19th century and the non-specialist becomes more than a tad lost in the, literally and figuratively, nuts and bolts of Enigma machines and multi-lingual scholarship and fluency.

Thus, it's no surprise that the ending of the book was the weakest part for me. Though it must be said that Singh goes out of his way to use "Alice, Bob, Eve" analogies to make the concepts clearer most effectively, being able to do what the main players in the tale are doing is far beyond the amateur's grasp. Also, the book is thirteen years old and the final sections dealing with computer encryption seem a bit dated already.

In sum though, a very pleasing, well-written book about the perennial human need to keep matters secret.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

A little outdated for modern topics

By Joe Beda

I really enjoyed the historical perspective of encryption and codes. Simon Singh does a great job of showing how both cryptography techniques were created and broken through history. As someone involved in the computer industry, however, the more "modern" sections are showing their age. This is a fast moving area. It would be great to see the book updated with more context of state actors and the revelations that have surfaced over the last ~10 years.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

I read the condensed version a decade ago and loved it, so decided to get the full book ...

By Joseph H.

I read the condensed version a decade ago and loved it, so decided to get the full book now. To be honest, I

think the condensed version is better and more appealing to non-geeks, but I have enough geek in me to not be bored by the TL;DR version.

What's great is that encryption still hasn't moved on much since the book was written so it is still very relevant. The discussion about quantum computers and quantum encryption is great introduction to stuff that is becoming a reality today.

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