



© 1997–2009, Millennium Mathematics Project, University of Cambridge.

Permission is granted to print and copy this page on paper for non-commercial use. For other uses, including electronic redistribution, please contact us.

September 2003

Reviews

'The Code Book on CD-ROM'

reviewed by Cristina Escoda



The Code Book on CD-ROM

The Code Book on CD-ROM, by author Simon Singh and designer Nick Mee, is the interactive version of the best-selling book of the same title. Singh has already shown in *The Code Book* and *Fermat's Last Theorem* that he is an excellent communicator, able to explain complex ideas without using obscure jargon. But while the main achievement of *The Code Book* is to make codes and ciphers intelligible to everybody, the CD goes further and allows you to become a code builder and code breaker yourself. You will find yourself first turning into a code builder, fearful of being cracked, and then into a dedicated code breaker, following tips on how to crack the ciphers.

The material progresses from the simplest and oldest ciphers in history, such as codes built by transposition and substitution techniques, through encoding tools used in the Middle Ages, right up to the encryption methods used on the internet and the current issues of public secrecy and quantum cryptography. In each of the five sections, Singh tells a fascinating story about the history of codes. He explains how the Rosetta Stone helped historians to decode the Egyptian hieroglyphs, and how the course of history was altered by the cracking of a telegram in the First World War. Each section is accompanied by video clips providing visual explanations and interviews with experts, and there are also several animations and programs. You see how the codes were built and then later cracked – for example, there is a virtual Enigma cipher machine and an explanation of how it was cracked.

The CD can be regarded either as an instructive extension to the book or as a self-contained interactive introduction to codes and ciphers. Some sections refer to chapters and pages in the book. There are also links to various websites and to previous chapters, allowing the user to refresh ideas learnt in earlier sections. In the main section there are several extra tools, with puzzles to be solved and encryption tools to print out and use to encode your own messages. There is also a section for teachers, with worksheets and notes, and a section for junior codebreakers with code emulators. Anyone interested in the history, development and construction of ciphers will find it very useful and inspiring, and it is bound to stimulate the interest of young people in mathematics and logic games.

The CD is easy to run and install, but can only be used on PCs. It only costs £5, with big discounts on multiple orders and for schools, and can be ordered online at [the author's website](#), where you can also find

'The Code Book on CD-ROM'

up-to-date information on current and future projects related to *The Code Book*.

CDROM details:

Simon Singh and Nick Mee

CD-ROM

available from www.simonsingh.net/The_CDROM.html



Plus is part of the family of activities in the Millennium Mathematics Project, which also includes the NRICH and MOTIVATE sites.