

Library of the Soul

a Peter White mystery

An Excerpt

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An Alnpete Book

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Prologue

Think of a library. If you're from a small town you're probably thinking of a couple of rooms – one to read the newspapers and encyclopaedia and the other to look for the latest Catherine Cookson novel. If you're from a big city you're imagining something a bit grander – separate rooms for fiction, non-fiction and children's books. If you're a graduate you're probably remembering long days spent in your campus library trying to track down that obscure reference the professor included in your assignment. Bureaucrats will think of the British Library and Americans will think of the Library of Congress. Anyone under 18 is still struggling with that first sentence – “...isn't a library what they had in the old days before the Internet?” Classical scholars are dreamily imagining the Library of Alexandria, before the fire. Some of us are even lucky enough to be thinking of a particular room in our own house where we keep our favourite books. But all of these visions of libraries, past and present, real or imagined have one thing in common. They are limited in size and coverage, specialised (one way or another) and relatively recent collections (with the obvious exception of the defunct library of Alexandria).

Imagine a library that doesn't have those limitations. That has been in place for some two thousand years and has vast resources behind it. A library that was started when many of our revered classical writers were contemporary upstarts. That began with papyri and scrolls and has lived through the introduction of new technologies many times over – vellum, paper, quill pens, hot lead, binding, impact printing, continuous feed, lasers, CD-Rom, memory sticks, PDF, eBooks. The medium changes; the language changes (once anything worth

reading was written in Greek, then Latin, and now any and every language under the sun – natural or electronic); but the library remains intact. Now new technology is helping to keep the library safe – environmental control protects ancient parchments and fading inks, while digital imaging is preserving the contents in electronic form. Such a library, were it to exist, would need vast and secure storage space. The imaging technology would require sophisticated equipment, powerful processing and data storage and a reliable power supply and environment. Protecting such an invaluable collection would require an army. The dedication of the generations of staff needed to maintain such a library would require some higher motivation than money, politics or even academic pursuit.

Such a library does indeed exist. Although you're probably not imagining even one percent of the extent of it. It has a public face, which is itself huge and impressive. It even has publicly available 'secret archives' which attract researchers like bees to a flower. But what's really behind the façade is breathtaking in its breadth and depth. Everything ever published is contained here. Many items that were never 'published' are here also; original manuscripts, theses, treatises and revelations from the greatest philosophers and scientists throughout history – Pascal, Leonardo, Galileo, Augustine, Feynman, Einstein; public and private letters from writers and artists – Michelangelo, Raphael, Voltaire, Dante, Chaucer; documents written to or by the powerful men and women of the Western world – Constantine, Charlemagne, Napoleon, Catherine the Great. Many documents that have been lost to the rest of the world still reside quietly here, carefully protected and maintained, untouched by curious scholars, greedy dealers or unscrupulous collectors.

Along with this almost unimaginable history of

literature is an unrivalled installation of information technology that would leave most governments in awe. The use of this technology has enabled a step-change in the core activity of the staff at the heart of this library. While many governments have recently come to understand the need for cryptography to protect their secrets and crypto-analysis to steal other's secrets, here they have been employing the best cryptographers and steganographers for nearly two thousand years. Many of the 'traditional' cryptographic techniques used since Roman times have been developed here. The American National Security Agency claims to employ the best cryptographers in the world, but even they are unaware of the people or work that goes on in this library. The NSA, like other secret government agencies around the world, are only interested in the use of cryptography to further their masters' political and economic ends and employ those who are equally politically and financially motivated. This library has never been interested in such trivial concerns. It is interested in only one thing – the fight between good and evil. A staff motivated by the ultimate struggle with an infinite timeframe have a very different perspective on their life as well as their work.

However, sometimes the dirty world of politics and economics impinges and they use their resources for more prosaic purposes. On these occasions the cryptographic department becomes the single most effective (and oldest) secret service in the world.

On one such occasion I was drawn into their world...



Alnpete is an exciting, innovative new independent publisher.
Check out the first Peter White mystery from Simon Buck:

Library of the Soul

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For years the CIA have been using a poison designed to cause a heart attack and then disperse without a trace. Now a batch has gone missing.

On a visit to Rome, Peter White is recruited by his old friend Costanza into the oldest secret society in the world, in order to help her solve an urgent problem. Cardinals and other clerics around the world are dying of unexpected heart attacks. Police authorities are not interested as there is no evidence of foul play. But Costanza believes someone is using electronic cash and a betting website to fund and coordinate a campaign of murders that will ultimately lead to the assassination of the Pope. She and Peter must track down the killer before any more people die. Using the world's largest supercomputer, deep in the Secret Archives beneath the Vatican Library, they lay an electronic trap and wait. But when the Library itself becomes the target of an audacious plot to steal a 2000 year old manuscript, the problem suddenly becomes much more personal.

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About the author

Simon Buck has been a consultant for many years to blue chip companies including banks, retailers and telecom service providers. He has been widely published in the fields of Internet security, electronic commerce and data communications. This, his first published novel, is one of a series of Peter White mysteries. He was born and brought up in Kent by an Italian mother and English father. He still lives in a village in the Garden of England and has a wife, two teenagers and an Apple Macintosh habit to support.