



The Cipher

John C. Ford

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You think your emails are private?

Your credit card number is secure?

That stock trades, government secrets, and nuclear codes are safe?

...th1nk aga1n.

Robert “Smiles” Smylie is *not* a genius. He feels like he’s surrounded by them, though, from his software mogul dad to his brainy girlfriend to his oddball neighbor Ben, a math prodigy. When Ben cracks an ancient, real-life riddle central to modern data encryption systems, he suddenly holds the power to unlock every electronic secret in the world—and Smiles finally has a chance to prove his own worth.

Smiles hatches a plan to protect Ben from the government agents who will stop at nothing to get their hands on his discovery. But as he races from a Connecticut casino to the streets of Boston, enlisting the help of an alluring girl, Smiles comes to realize the most explosive secrets don’t lie between the covers of Ben’s notebook—they’re buried in his own past.

Eerily close to reality and full of shocking twists, this techno-thriller reveals how easily the private can become public, and just how dangerous it can be to encrypt our personal histories.

The Cipher Details

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From Reader Review The Cipher for online ebook

Hannah Vardy says

This was one of the best books I have ever read. I loved the plot twists and the language and style used, and these elements combined to make a stunning read:

Vicky Voronina says

This book starts out slow, so I couldn't really get into it at first, but after a while it became more interesting, and there were some unexpected plot twists. Robert "Smiles" Smylie has always been average or below, unlike seemingly everyone else in his life from his father to his girlfriend to his 16 year old neighbor Ben. His father, in fact, is so intelligent that he created a new way to encrypt data, making him, and Smiles, extremely rich. Despite his luck in the money department, Smiles has had his bad days, from when his stepmother-who he loved a lot-died, to when he found out that his dad had brain cancer. However, his life goes on after all these incidents, until Ben cracks a riddle used to factor the product of 2 prime numbers, which is what his dad's company is based off of. As all that is online is encrypted by his dad's company, Ben has access to everything on the Internet. Smiles, however, sees a solution to this problem. He helps Ben sell the formula to the government, gets some of the money, and saves his dad's company. However, everything goes wrong and Ben is taken away, resulting in Smiles traveling across the country with a girl he meets to try and save him. While he's searching for Ben, Melanie, his former girlfriend who broke up with him very recently, finds out some secrets about Smiles's dad's company, her dad, and more.

Fran says

The Cipher: John Ford

What would you do if you could hack into someone's emails, credit cards, stock trades, government secrets and nuclear codes? What would you do if your father created a business that could do just that and more? Robert "Smiles" Smylie might not be the brightest light bulb on the technological block but he's smart enough to know a good thing when it falls into his lap. A father who is a genius and software mogul and a girlfriend who is extremely smart, genius you might say and an autistic neighbor named Ben, a math nerd, together battle some dangerous situations, attend a conference that will change all of their lives forever. Within this plot there are many subplots as we learn more about Smiles, his past and the fact that on his 18th birthday he came into 7 million dollars. Meeting with his Dad's appointed attorney and overseer of the trust he learns about a letter and package from his ailing dad that the lawyer is to give him at their meeting. But something is not right and when he questions Mr. Hunt about the letter and the package he claims no knowledge of one and destroying the other. But, this won't stop him or his friend Melissa who happens to be the daughter of the lawyer who learns more about her father that leads her to a suicide that starts the book of a man named Andrei who supposedly committed suicide, worked for his father's company and was passing documents to the Russians. Added in he learns that the letter was from his birth mother and Melissa learns that there's a link to this man and Smiles' stepmother Rose. Looking into her files, Melissa finds some interesting emails that were sent from Rose to her father. The plot thickens as she investigates further, checks out Andrei's house and learns that someone is watching the house and an investigation is underway. Why? She was not told.

Smiles is determined to attend the same conference as Ben and when the speaker approaches the podium he is stunned to see that it's his birth mother who rejected him and left him at age 2. But, Ben's reaction to what she says is nothing compared to what happens when he realizes that he cracked an ancient, real-life riddle necessary to modern data encryption systems and now he can hack into anything. Imagine having the power to unlock, unleash and access every electronic secret in the world. Rather than leave it to the NSA and the authorities, Smiles decides to capitalize on the finding in a different way. Did Ben really figure out how to fast-factor the product of two primes? The author and Ben explain what he was able to do in Chapter 46. What would happen if Smiles' father's company could be hacked into. What would happen if anything encrypted by Alyce or any other company that uses public key cryptography could be decoded? Encryption as he learned at the conference does not just protect credit card numbers. Encryption is how "they keep everything on computer networks secure." What would happen if you made a stock transfer, wire transfer, bought airline tickets, and other transactions and learned that what you did was not secure? What about our water systems, nuclear power plants and the stock market? Was Ben right when he told Smiles that the government would consider it an instrument of war?

At the Cyyptcon conference Smiles falls prey to the wiles of a young girl named Erin. Not focusing on the matter at hand he lets his guard down and reveals too much information. Added in his old girlfriend Melanie who does some research and investigating on her own as she learns something about the identity of the man who killed himself, why and the truth behind what appears to be someone who betrayed America and sold documents to the Russians. A sting that you won't see coming and a twist that you will never get as Smiles learns the truth behind why his mother left him, the hard cold facts from a professor named Worth, the confrontation with Melanie's dad and the secrets that no one wanted revealed.

Smiles thinks he has it all figured out when two men claiming to be government agents kidnap Ben and hold him for a 7 million dollar ransom. Not thinking about his trust he finds a way to deliver what might be his biggest mistake ever. A notebook that tells it all. Where is it and what will be revealed as he and Erin, the girl he meets at the conference race the clock to save Ben.

As Melanie learns who the players really are and Smiles' dad passes away decisions have to be made, the company is now his and lives will never be the same. Just how easy is it for your private information to become public? What about the IPO? Will they go ahead with it? What happens when Smiles learns the hidden truths about his father's company? Who was the genius who invented the encryption code used to secure every website in the world?

The descriptions and explanations about public-key cryptography are explained in detail and what really keeps this reviewer glued to the printed page. The pacing of the novel is fast, quick with each character carrying his or her own weight, vividly depicted and each personality unique to that character. Smiles is determined, smart, kind, confidant and definitely someone you want for a friend. What happens when he learns the truth about Alyce Systems from someone you would never expect? What happens when his ex-girlfriend learns a harsh truth about her own father? Trust, loyalties, family values, insecurities, revenge, love and determination are just some of what is brought to light within this novel.

A cipher: A secret or disguised way of writing a code. What is the key to this code? What is the real reason that Andrei Tarasov killed himself? Was he really a traitor to our country? Did he really betray Robert Smiles Sr.? What is the truth behind the discovery? What really happened when Smiles was on the phone with the two NSA agents? What really happened? When the truth is revealed and a note is delivered to Smiles will he follow his heart or will he use his instincts to see the truth? Who will run Alyce? What is next for Smiles? Who wins? Who loses? Only author John C. Ford knows as we all hope he is going to write the next chapter for Smiles. For anyone that wants to learn more about encryption, the latest in technology this book is a great resource and motivator for young adults and teens. Just how safe is your information?

Fran Lewis: Reviewer

Let's give this novel: Five Golden Public Keys

Jake Marchese says

I really liked this book it has a very good story. It had lots of good details building up Nick and the story behind his friends and parents. I like how they progressed the story from Nick finding out who his parents really were and finding out what they had done to Nick having the key to every national secret on the planet. The ending is very good because some government officials kidnapped Nick's friend and he wouldn't leave him behind because he was the one who discovered and created the cipher and that led to them getting 100 million dollars and living a normal life after

Moselle says

After reading the first few chapters, I was already disappointed. The two main female characters in the book were said to be intelligent, but this character trait seemed like something of an afterthought given that both girls were love interests. I wasn't super impressed with the way the author described any of the women in the story, often focusing on how attractive they were rather than anything else. There were several cheap lines throughout the book, including equating a mental disorder to being "medically diagnosed as a nerd" as well as referring to a woman as "fat/slutty" BY A WOMAN in a way that was supposed to be humorous (I don't really understand). I'm not a fan of fatphobic humor/jokes meant to degrade a woman (or anyone) simply because she dresses a certain way or has sex. Do better.

While on the subject of doing better, the main character, Smiles, was not a great person. I genuinely disliked him as the main narrator of the story. He, along with most of the other characters seemed to lack depth.

Although he was a flawed character, I didn't feel like it made him any more interesting a person.

In terms of the plot, it lagged a LOT in the beginning, only beginning to pick up pace toward the end. It took me a long time to get into the story.

Despite all the things I disliked about the book, there were a couple descriptions that were well done:

1. The car engine quieting on a two-lane road (I could hear it in my mind)
2. The "empty smell of vacuumed carpet" (I hadn't ever thought of it this way, but now that I've read it, it makes perfect sense)

Overall, I'm not impressed with the story.

Brian Meadows says

This was a fun-to-read, gripping novel. I enjoyed it. There were continuous twists in turns that kept you going to find out what was next. A bit of a technical background helps with it but is definitely not necessary to enjoy the book. The author wrote in a style that was very readable and interesting, stopping to explain those things that might not be familiar to the reader.

Eye of Sauron says

This was entertaining, I guess, but that's about it.

The plot is predictable, unfortunately, and only by intentionally avoiding speculation (a good practice with mindless novels) is it possible to be surprised by the ending. The characters are incredibly flat, with "Smiles" being such a combination of a terrible name and a terrible person that I was almost rooting for that unfortunate plot twist.

No sympathy shall be given to Smiley Face.

The prose is engaging but bland; it sounds like a script for a typical young adult action/espionage movie. The female characters aren't quite believable, and the whole thing just felt a little like a waste of time. Fortunately (?), the writing is far from dense, so there wasn't much time involved anyway.

The integration of the Riemann hypothesis was interesting, although the explanation was dumbed down to the extreme. Smiles seems like a total idiot. He's eighteen, and **he has no idea what prime numbers are**. SURE. I'm not human, and I'm new to this "mathematics" thing, and that is a ridiculously simple concept.

If this had been written as an adult novel with a much higher level of intellectual intensity (maybe with a little bit of actual math?), it could have been really good. But alas.

Ally says

Unfortunately, I got very bored with the book. I read to the halfway point and skipped to the ending. Reading Smiles' name as a name and not a verb is very disconcerting. Believe me. It is. Plot chugs along slowly in the beginning, and I really hate the exposition. The Riemann Hypothesis remains to be a fascinating point, but for all those who are bored of math (like me, who is right now suffering through Calculus), it's going to be a tough sell.

Grace says

I thought this book was going to be a throwaway attempt at a YA thriller. Then I realized it was about the Riemann hypothesis! How cool! I was obsessed with the Riemann hypothesis as a teenager, and this kid has figured out how to crack universal encryption! Wow!

Unfortunately, it was all fake and this *is* actually more of just a throwaway YA. The plot was certainly interesting the whole time, even though Smiles was kind of annoying. The finale was strange and anticlimactic, and the girlfriend thing? Really? Erin spent like three days with Smiles. What would have been *really* compelling was if Ben and Smiles had some kind of relationship resolution.

Robin says

While this book moved a little slow at times, I never wanted to put it down. It's twists and turns and keeps you guessing. And just when you think you've figured it out, BAM! Another twist takes you in a different direction. I'm definitely going to recommend this to my colleagues and students.

Christine Osborne says

Ok so I enjoyed this book. It wasn't mind bogglingly good but it was a pretty decent read. Very engaging and full of unexpected twists. I was very pleased with how there was little to no predictability to the book, I love it when I don't know what happens simply bc I've read so many books like it. But the twists in this were great, not expected at all, but I guess that's the point of a con. I liked the character interaction and the characters who had the main POVs, Melanie and Smiles, had excellent character development. The family dynamics were well thought out and realistic I think. The integration of math that was intriguing and informative was nice as well. Overall, 3 out of 5 stars.

Shanni says

This book kept me on the edge of my seat every single chapter. By the end, I didn't know how to feel about any of the characters. With plot twists all the way, a basis of encryption, and the coming of age for so many of the characters, this is a must read.

Jonathan Brito says

The book "The Cipher" by John C. Ford is a mystery/ Realistic Fiction. This book starts on Smiles's 18th birthday as he goes to pick up his first trust loan payment with his genius neighbor Ben. Smiles takes Ben to a Encryption Convention in Atlantic City where he ends up cracking the Riemann Hypothesis and has the key to unlocking the internet's darkest secrets. As Smiles is trying to help hide Ben's discovery from the government, they quickly learn about Smiles's dad and mother's message and all the truth comes out. I give this book the rate of Recommended because it has a slow start but once it gets going it keeps the reader on their toes. Two types of people that would want to read this book is readers looking for mystery and readers who love math.

Cody says

I give this book a 4/5 because it was very good until the end. The ending was very confusing and had me a little lost. Also it does not exactly taste like a victory at the end of the book because he still got 7 million dollars stolen from him. Still a very good book and was intense, exciting, and funny. The main characters of this book added a lot to it: Smiles being a dumb, funny, outgoing guy butted heads with the book as it is about math and ciphers. The best and most exciting part was when they all left Smiles and took his money and he

was so confused. But all in all this was a pretty good book and everything was done well in it.

Ms. Yingling says

Smiles is the son of the founder of Alyce Systems, a computer security company that has earned his father wealth and renown. It's been a bad year, though: his step mother was killed in a car accident, Smiles' father has brain cancer and is slowly fading away, Smiles has flunked out of high school and is trying to get his GED, and his father doesn't intend to leave him very much money. His girlfriend Melanie thinks they need "a break". Smiles neighbor, the quirky and perhaps autism spectrum affected Ben, is a brilliant 16-year-old student at MIT. Smiles occasionally drives him places, and when he takes him to a computer conference, several things happen. Smiles sees his estranged mother, Alice; he meets a girl to whom he is attracted but who has a boyfriend in tow; Ben makes an astonishing discovery that will revolutionize the computer security field. Smiles, always willing to get something for nothing, offers to help Ben sell this information to the government, but Melanie (whose father works for Alyce Systems) uncovers some unsettling information about the past dealings of Alyce Systems as well as interesting information about Ben. Will Smiles end up losing more than he gains, in just about every aspect of his life?

Strengths: This was a well crafted mystery with some good math and computer information, an intriguing back story, and lots of twists. It moved along fairly nicely, and the characters were well developed.

Weaknesses: We start with a suicide, go on to Smiles' father in the hospital, and nothing much really happens until 100 pages in. This is the biggest complaint students have when they check books out and bring them back later in the day saying "I just couldn't get into it." Too sad and too slow for most middle school students.

What I really think: A fantastic book for high school students, but too sad, moody, and slow paced for my middle school students, who like a bit more goofiness, as well as explosions, with their mysteries.
