

Dr **S**ylver
and the
Tapestry
of **T**ime

Paul Kercal



About the author

Paul Kercal = youth worker, college teacher, husband, dad, ex-computer games artist, doodler, writer and part time gardener on a social action weekend (15, 5, 14, 13/9, 10, 27, 8 and 7 years respectively).

He can be found behind an iMac teaching computer arts and animation, behind a Mac mini writing or frowning at emails, a Macbook on a number 34 bus writing and being bounced around and behind a metal bladed bush whacker during Ready 4 Action. It's good to mix things up occasionally.

Dr Sylver and the Tapestry of Time is his seventh work and third book in the Dr Sylver series. For more information check out the blog at: kercal.wibsite.com. Or his website at www.kercal.co.uk

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Dr **S**ylver and the
CA**P**E**S**T**R****E**
of **T**ime

The Sylver Chronicles Book 3

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Tapestry. n. A piece of fabric or canvas bearing pictures formed by the skilful weaving of coloured threads, fabrics or silks.

Time. n. An indefinite progression of existence, events or matter. A unit contained within the past, present or future.

Dr Sylver. pers. Librarian and keeper of the books of the recent past, present and near future.

The diaries of days yet to come

Jamie Meek was a runner, though rarely by choice.

He had run from many things during the latter half of his fifteen years on a planet he barely understood: from one bully to the next, from an explosive family which had disintegrated noisily around him and then, most recently, from one world to another. Somehow Jamie had become the invited guest of a dimension which was bigger, and often scarier, than anything he could ever imagine; a realm of light, shadow, grace and despair.

On the first day back at school following the Easter holidays, Jamie found himself running all over again and this time it was from as unexpected a place as any he had been in during the past few years: this time he was running away from his closest friend and his form tutor. One of them had asked

Jamie a question which made him desperate to get to the other side of the building as quickly as he could without any thought of hesitation or consequence. Jamie Meek didn't think of the people he left behind or the troubles he might encounter as he ran down school corridors that had a strict and easily exceeded speed limit. All he thought about was the destination.

In fact his mind was so focused elsewhere that he failed to notice that, matching every step he made, there were two shadows and only one was his...

“Jamie, can you take this book back to the library for me?” the form tutor asked as his year 10 class began to leave for the first lesson of the morning.

In contrast to the speed he would soon reach Jamie moved slowly towards Mr Laurence's desk to collect the book to be returned. It wasn't that he wanted to appear rude or unhelpful but the past few months had changed him. Fear would have made Jamie walk faster; fear of what his friends would think of him for moving too quickly or what others would think if he said no. But a few short weeks before the Easter holidays Jamie had beaten the thing which had once controlled him and that was affecting in good and bad ways. It was liberating to not have to worry about what others thought, that was for sure. But sometimes he could be a little too relaxed about what others thought. He barely looked up from the floor as he walked, deep in thought at what had once been. Any mention of the library seemed to have that effect on him nowadays and none of his friends could point to anything even closely resembling a reason why. Once it had been the place he found the most comfort and security in, now it seemed to be the exact opposite.

Charlotte walked beside her friend, as confused by this new-found mood as their teacher was. Mr Laurence signed a 'sorry' to her for the delay this conversation would cause them in getting to their next class and she returned the comment with a hand movement of her own, more graceful and assured yet similarly clear to read: 'np'. No problems.

Despite the gentle worry he felt about whether this short chat with Jamie would have as little effect as all other attempts seemed to have had the short signed conversation was a welcome relief and almost made the teacher laugh out loud. It was a strange feeling to know that he could communicate more easily with the only deaf and non-speaking member of his class than with Jamie himself and a simple truth struck Mr Laurence: being able to hear obviously didn't mean that you could listen. As much as Jamie seemed currently disconnected from the world Charlotte seemed more instinctively aware of what was happening around her than ever. Whether people had spoken aloud, used sign language or communicated solely on body language she seemed to be the most intuitive of anyone in his class, especially when it came to Jamie's current mood. Already Charlotte had guessed that the teacher's suggestion was the latest in a series of attempts to find some way to get her friend to discuss his feelings and, for the moment, she was happy to play along.

“Anytime today, I don't think she'll be expecting the book back this soon anyway,” the teacher added, hoping that the reverse psychology might move Jamie a little quicker as he moved at his own, slow, pace. To that extent it had the effect Mr Laurence was looking for: all three of them were surprised at how quickly Jamie's head jerked upwards from the floor at long last.

She...

A female librarian? Take the book back to the school's female librarian. On the face of it it seemed such an innocent suggestion.

For his first three years at St Philip's secondary school Jamie Meek had spent a large percentage of the breaks between lessons hiding in the library from people who wanted to bully him. Over time he had been increasingly befriended by the librarian, Dr Sylver, and while most saw her as someone who looked after the school's reference books in the main library Jamie had come to discover that she was something less expected. When things had seemed most confusing, the librarian had been a calming source of advice and strength but, much more than that, they had come to

meet and talk in the most unusual place he could ever have imagined: the Library of Everything.

The *other* library in St Philip's school was a room which housed a huge collection of books that told anyone, well, anyone who was able to read them, what was going to happen over the next year, not just things that had happened in the past. It was a storehouse of knowledge and forewarning and the person who looked after it was not just your average librarian, she was an angel in disguise and held the keys to a wealth of strange possibility.

The strangest thing was how similar and how different both Dr Sylver and the library looked when they were doing God's side of things. The school library was much like any other. It had books on shelves and posters on walls. It contained reading charts to be followed and notices to be ignored. That was the room that he and most of the people at his school expected to see when they stepped through the doorway.

The Library of Everything was different in almost every respect: the windows were full of colourful pictures and the shelves glowed gently despite being made from a rough and richly coloured wood. All around the room candles stood: tall or broad, on the floor or on polished metal frames which seemed too graceful to hold up such a weight of wax and wick, each as big as Jamie or larger still and they pulsed with a bright and pure living light. Into everything in the room intricate and detailed images had been carved giving the Library of Everything the feel of an inverted Cathedral. The room itself might have been made up of straight angles, the shape of the school room itself, but the architectural decoration it contained gave the space life and energy; if anyone said the Devil was in the detail they obviously hadn't seen some of the more intricate pieces of art God had on display.

Every book housed in God's library was similarly unusual. Each one was covered in red or white leather with a date printed on the spine and decorated in gold leaf, yet it was on the inside of each book that the most important change could be seen. On the thick parchment pages were printed incredibly ornate words; curling, colourful and

enthusiastically restrained. In some of the books, the ones covered in white leather sheets, the words captured and described everything that had happened in a specific geographic area. They were a diary of the thoughts, actions and non-actions of Jamie Meek and his family, his friends and their families, their relatives, their teachers, their neighbours, their enemies and many more people besides. The books detailed everything that had been said, done and thought by a wide cast of players.

Odd though it was to have books that seemed to know so much about the past few months they were not the strangest held in the Library of Everything. The books covered in red leather had dates printed on them that had *not* yet passed... they were the diaries of the days yet to come and printed on their pages were words that still moved. The red books contained sentences and paragraphs which wrote and re-wrote themselves, hurrying from page to page and changing with every human decision yet to be made. Each word was at the mercy of the possibility it described and one changed option could see entire pages re-written almost instantly as the new action affected everyone around it. They were the documentation of flux; everything happening to a plan which had been written so long ago yet still seemed happy to be open and adaptable.

And then, even as Jamie was struggling to try to understand even a fraction of the Library and his place in it, Dr Sylver had disappeared and seemingly taken not only all of the books but also the room itself away with her. One day she was there and then, the next, she was not: written out of a story to be replaced by a new librarian who students would have said had been at their school for as long as they had. Mr Wellingham was, to everyone except Jamie, the person who you went to if you were looking for a book to help you with your work. To Jamie he was one more layer of confusion in a year that had seen him question everything that surrounded him, seen and unseen... Mr Wellingham was a reminder of the mystery of the disappearing librarian and the blurring of the visible into the invisible.

But his teacher had asked Jamie to take the book back to HER.

Could she be back? Even as Jamie asked the question in his mind the answer seemed to come to him as positively as if someone standing in front of him had said it aloud.

‘Yes.’

Not an answer really, not a word for word reply, just a feeling beyond description and a knowledge that it was true. Without hesitation, Jamie had taken the book the teacher held towards him and sped away from the classroom. He didn't wait to let Mr Laurence and Charlotte know where he was going, or even why he was running, because he knew that he wouldn't have been able to find the words or signed movements to explain his impulsive reaction. If Jamie had stopped, even for a second, he might have looked back and laughed to see the stunned expression on their faces but, before they had a chance to react, he was already gone.

Less than four minutes after he took the book and ran, breathless as he arrived at the entrance to the library, Jamie found himself stopping for the first time since he left the form room.

Now, finally, he found himself questioning what had just happened as he held the door handle to the room that had proven so confusing over the past few years. The faith and hope that had exploded in his mind seemed to disappear and suddenly the conviction he had felt began to melt away.

What if he was wrong?

What if he had misheard what his teacher said?

What if it wasn't Dr Sylver but a different librarian?

Jamie's hand shook slightly as his head spun from one possibility to another, barely waiting for an answer to the questions he asked himself before the next worry was vocalised. The metal of the handle felt no different... had he expected it to? It felt cold and smooth just as it should, being a smooth, metal, door handle.

And then a thought without words popped into his mind and Jamie Meek finally opened the door before he even realised he was moving. He pushed himself into the room with an effort, praying and hoping and only partially expecting...

As soon as the door swung open and he looked into the room he saw that it was true... For a long, silent, second Jamie stood motionless having only taken a hesitant half step into the room. He stared at Dr Sylver and she looked back at him, both waiting for the other to speak. Each had so many questions to ask yet neither knew how to begin or what to say first. And then the librarian smiled and Jamie grinned back at her and, for the moment, everything was all right.

“Come in, Jamie,” she said at last. “Welcome back to the library.”

As Jamie shut the door behind him he didn't notice the shadow creep forwards to look through the window set into the door to stop and watch the two friends who had been reunited. The darkness looked from one smile to the other and hissed, then, having seen enough for the moment, it retraced the route followed now that the end had begun. It was happy to know that some things were progressing just as had been anticipated. Soon enough the librarian would know what she, and all who stood with her, were up against... Soon she and Jamie would both know how hopeless their futures had become. Before they knew it the war would begin. The fight seemed unfair in a way. A group of schoolchildren against the blackest, ugliest nastiest forces that the dark realm could throw against them.

From a place within the shadow an ugly, rasping laugh could be heard as it faded from one part of the school to another and then away from the building, just for a while. It had other tasks to move on to and a great game to play. The librarian was a part of it, as were Jamie and his friends, but the promise was still to be completed and they were only one part of a far grander scheme to bring about a great deal of suffering...

And then the end of everything.



War is coming

Loving the past

“ou OK babe?”

Mushy was talking to Natasha as she trudged from one lesson to another.

“Hmm?” she replied, too drained to do anything but concentrate on her slow journey.

“I said ‘You OK?’” Mushy replied before pulling her close. He had seriously underestimated how tired she was and the effort of maintaining her balance nearly made them both fall over...

“Oi! Careful,” she said but stayed wrapped protectively in his arm, once she had shifted his hand a little.

“'soz...” Mushy said. “What's up?”

“You try doing two feeds a night then sitting through history,” his girlfriend replied, fighting a yawn and thinking how wretched she felt. Then, once she thought of it, she found it impossible *not* to yawn. She walked, mouth open and eyes closed, trusting her boyfriend to steer her through the crowded corridor.

Since having a baby part way through year 10, with the help of an unidentified partner, Natasha Chansi had returned to her school on a phased timetable. She attended lessons where focus was needed for her mock exams and worked at home on subjects she could afford to miss at school. When first suggested, it had sounded like an easy option.

The reality was more painful. Weeks of sleep loss followed by hours of attempted concentration tore through her skull, she was left feeling as if everyone else was far more awake and alive than she was. Her son, Sean, was able to nap through the day, safe in the care of his grandmother. Tasha, on the other hand had to cope with all that school threw at her with fuel cells constantly on empty. She had been offered the option to repeat the year from the following September but the thought of spending the intervening weeks trapped in the house with her son crying and mother nagging made her go back to school as soon as possible. The most important thing on her mind was that she didn't want to be in a different year from her best friends; Mushy, Jamie and Charlotte. When other people spoke to her, people Tasha realised she barely knew, they smiled at Sean without heeding her replies or comments... If it wasn't for her friends she would have wondered if she even existed at all. Once you were a teenage mother that was it, there were no easy options and nobody saw you as 'you' again.

“You here at lunch?” Mushy asked as he and Natasha split up to walk to their separate classes.

“No... Mum's picking me up straight after fourth period,” she said glumly. Natasha's mother had been keen to see her daughter back in school but only for lessons, not for any sort of socialising. Alina Chansi may have come to terms with the fact that her daughter had become pregnant at the tender

age of thirteen but she was still angry about where Natasha's choices had taken them as a family.

“Fun...” Mushy said, knowing what Tasha would be thinking. He had usually managed to escape when Alina had started to go off on one but, every so often, he had been at the mercy of her tirades, mainly because Alina was mistakenly convinced that he was Sean's father... For the sake of his girlfriend's sanity he had agreed to maintain the deception but still, sometimes it was hard to keep quiet and not argue back. “I'll catch up with Jamie then.”

“Thanks.”

Mushy just smiled... He couldn't think of anything more he could say to help so he pulled Tasha close and then kissed her for as long as possible before the next lesson started and then for a little while longer. When they finished he walked off to his class, feeling less shattered and trapped than his girlfriend did as she shuffled to hers.

In a glowing building made of stone, jewel and whisper an elderly angel walked from one desk to another, lost in thought as he watched others work. For more years than could be imagined the angel Ezel had maintained the same routine – it was his job after all – yet today, for the first time ever, he stopped, thought and worried.

Within the Repository of the Past there were thousands of desks, terraced and tiered, some standing up to fifteen levels high and each housing angelic calligraphers who worked to the best of their ability. For thousands of years Ezel had ceaselessly walked from one station to the next to ensure that their writings would be suitable for inclusion into a greater work and when he had reviewed the words transferred from nib to parchment at the last desk in the building he would start all over again from the beginning, constantly watching, constantly encouraging... in his own way.

And then, for a reason that no-one understood, Ezel's routine changed slightly. Unexpected and unannounced he waited behind one particular desk and spent more time than ever he had looking at what was being written onto a thick piece of parchment. He said nothing yet looked unusually thoughtful.

Unbeknown to everyone who worked around him Ezel found himself considering the names which seemed to crop up more and more on the path that stretched in front of them all. Jamie Meek: the loner who had been beaten but not broken. Already he had faced down enemies more powerful than he could ever have imagined yet there seemed to be more he would be called to in the future. Charlotte Worrel: unable to hear yet able to do so much more. She was limited not by her abilities anywhere near as much as by the perception others had about her. Already she had rescued one of her friends from the worst, without knowing how important her actions had been. Dennis Mushrell junior and Natasha Chansi: the angry one and the flirty one... Ezel remembered the scrolls he had seen where Jamie had run from Mushy's relentless bullying. A vicious spiral that seemed unbreakable until somehow, in the most unlikely of situations, they found themselves as friends. Natasha had made poor choices in the past which seemed to constrain every choice she could now make and yet he had an unshakeable feeling that one decision she would make in the future would have drastic consequences for all around her.

There were other names written on the scroll because the stories that the angels put to page wove in a large cast of characters whether any of the participants realised it or not... Michael Walsh had helped in the past year by setting up a radio station which had exposed an ugly secret. Richard Mitcham, who everyone knew as Richmich, had shown Jamie some of the path he had to follow even as his brother Daniel had tried to kick Jamie off it... Jamie's sister was there, as was their mother... Mushy's father had become more a part of the story written on the scroll as had Dr Sylver.

The last name drew a 'hurumph' from Ezel even before he realised it. For an angel to be so prominently named on a scroll was, at best, unusual and all told it was a good job the keeper of the Repository of the Past didn't know how much time the librarian spent rubbing her name out of as many stories as she could get her hands on. The times when he saw her name written down were enough to cause him to frown as if she were there, standing in front of him, ready to be glared at.

And then, even as he was thinking this, Ezel saw his own name added to the scroll in front of him as the meeting between himself and Jamie fell onto the page and he 'hurumph-ed' again, this time at himself.

Ezel was an angel from the old, old school. His role, and joy, was the thoughtful dissection of actions that had been and that led him to care very little for possibilities which might come to be. Everything about him was serious, considered and studious... If he had a sense of humour few had seen any evidence of it which was, in his line of work, something of an advantage.

Yet the past year had altered him in ways that he did not recognise. He was aware of people's hope and dreams, lives and deaths, actions and deceptions but he rarely, if ever, found himself affected by these things. It was not his role to become personally involved, nor was it for him to care for anything other than the work which progressed around him...

And then something had happened; the story that Ezel took an academic interest in began to involve him in a way it never seemed to have before. He stood for so long, deep in thought, that the angelic calligraphers and scribes around him hushed. Their breathing slowed and every one strained to hear any whispered question or comment their line manager might utter. An eerie hush descended on the Repository of the Past.

Roused from his unfocused state, Ezel realised that nobody was working anywhere near as hard as he expected them to, he clapped his hands sharply. Instantly everyone resumed penning and life in God's storehouse of the scrolls of all history, hidden within St Paul's Cathedral, went back to normal.

All except for one person, lost in thought, wondering what was to come...

"Is it done?"

There was a hesitation on the other end of the phone line. Not that it was a line anymore of course, more a series of cold, hard numbers invisibly moving from one place to another; a

fact that was quite fitting, given the nature of the conversation.

“Yes... well... I've done my bit anyway,” a nervous voice finally replied.

“Will it happen?”

“I've done my bit,” the man repeated. “I don't like it though, let's put it that way.”

The two men speaking to each other could not have been more different. One was hard and ruthless, the other weak and easily pushed around. Between them and a few other similarly minded individuals, they had carried out a plan of revenge that only one member of the group truly believed was necessary. The weaker of the two had been needed to draw up a legal document. One small piece of paper which would deal out a world of hurt.

“Spare me your emotion, please. This is a positive step for the community,” Mr Bester replied instantly. The man he spoke to had served his purpose and any patience in dealing with him was no longer required.

“If you say so...”

“I do.”

“Well, I don't like it, and I want you to keep my name out of this.”

This drew a laugh from the uglier side of the conversation. The two voices were separated geographically by only a few miles but by an immeasurable length of hostility. One of them wanted his revenge at any cost, the other was fearful enough to stand and watch it happen, having participated in the deed only as little as he felt he could get away with.

“Still... Feels like we're sticking the knife in the old man,” the weaker voice continued.

“An unfortunate choice of words,” Mr Bester replied. “We're not hurting anyone, how he reacts is entirely up to him. This is for the good of a great many people. Sentiment should not stand in the way of progress.”

“You reckon?”

“A few ruffled feathers, that's all... Some people will sulk a little and then it will all die down. These things always do.”

Mr Bester smiled, but the humour did not reach his voice and the man he spoke to failed to see any significance in the words used. Mr Bester did, indeed, hope that things would 'die down' and drew no discomfort from his choice of phrase. He was an elected county councillor, he knew how some people would complain about anything from the strength of a light bulb to the placement of a drop kerb. Such mundane trivialities were for those with no imagination or capacity for seeing the bigger picture; it was for the brightest to steer the community towards a more successful future, not the chattering, complaining masses.

"Right... well... I'm not involved OK? This is your plan. Make of it what you will."

"I will," the crueler voice replied. He waited for a second before adding his final flourish: "Thank you for your help." Mr Bester pressed the disconnect button on his phone and smiled, knowing that these last words – ones he rarely used – would have stung the fool he now had no reason to listen to or cajole.

He loved this part of the plan: laying the foundation and seeing someone walk blindly into a trap... Mr Gulheart, the patriarch of St Philip's school, a Headmaster who was loved and cherished by fools who did not see him as a relic of times past. For him Mr Bester had an irrational anger at past slights and defeats. For him Mr Bester had gone out of his way to cause harm, emotionally if not physically. He had decided that it was time to spring-clean and, in order to make progress sometimes you had to start by throwing away the rubbish.

Mr Bester smiled to himself, unaware of a shadow fading into the distance, readying itself to move on to its next task. So much was falling into place, broken hearts locking together to form a new picture of despair.

And all to the soundtrack of ugly, black laughter.