

**MATTHEW  
REILLY**

**CONTEST**



Pan Macmillan Australia

Matthew Reilly is the international bestselling author of *Contest*, *Ice Station*, *Temple*, *Area 7*, *Scarecrow* and *Hover Car Racer*. His books have been translated into 18 languages and are sold in over 20 countries. To date he has sold over 2 million books around the world. Matthew has also written several short stories, all of which are available for free at his website:

[www.matthewreilly.com](http://www.matthewreilly.com)

He lives in Sydney.

*Also by Matthew Reilly*

ICE STATION  
TEMPLE  
CONTEST  
AREA 7  
SCARECROW  
HOVER CAR RACER  
HELL ISLAND (FOR BOOKS ALIVE, 2005)  
SEVEN ANCIENT WONDERS

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*For Mum and Dad*

# Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Stephen Reilly my brother—marketing genius, tortured writer (aren't we all?) and loyal friend. To Natalie Freer—the first person to read my work, and the most patient and giving person on this earth. To my parents for letting me watch too much television as a kid and for their unwavering support. And to Peter Kozlina for his monumental show of faith in this book before he had even read a word.

And of course, thanks once again to everyone at Pan Macmillan—Cate Paterson, for being a brilliant publisher; Jane Novak, for being a fantastic publicist (and for being the only person I know who could read *Voss* and then pick up *Ice Station* and enjoy them both!); Julie Nekich, for being an understanding editor (you have to be to work with me); and lastly, once again, all the sales reps at Pan for the countless hours they spend on the road between bookshops. Thank you.

To anyone out there who knows a writer, never underestimate the power of your encouragement.

## A note from the author about *Contest*

Hello there. Matthew Reilly here.

Now before we get on with the show, I'd like, if I may, to share with you a few secrets about *Contest*.

First of all, as some of you may already know, *Contest* was my first novel. The story of how I self-published it after every major publisher in Sydney rejected it has been pretty well documented elsewhere, so I won't go into that here. Suffice it to say that only 1000 copies of *Contest* were ever released, all paid for by yours truly.

And then came *Ice Station*.

Now, many people have taken the time to tell me what a ride they found *Ice Station* to be. Such comments please me immensely because that is what it was *supposed* to be—a non-stop rollercoaster ride on paper.

What few people know, however, is that when I wrote *Ice Station*, I had one all-consuming goal: to top *Contest*.

*Contest* is the book that made *Ice Station* (and later *Temple*) what it was. If it doesn't seem as large in scale as its two successors, it is because it was the first. It was the prototype upon which they were built; a prototype for a different *style* of book—a superfast-paced, absolutely *nonstop* thriller. Everybody has to start somewhere. I started with *Contest*.

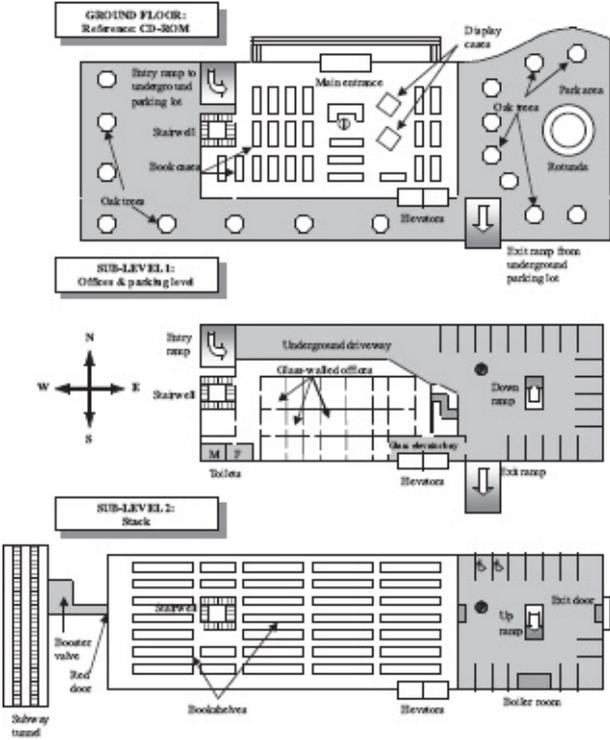
That said, I think the story in *Contest* is easily the fastest of all my books. It is like a sports car stripped down to its raw components—wheels, frame, engine. No fancy paintwork. No fancy upholstery. Just raw non-stop *energy*.

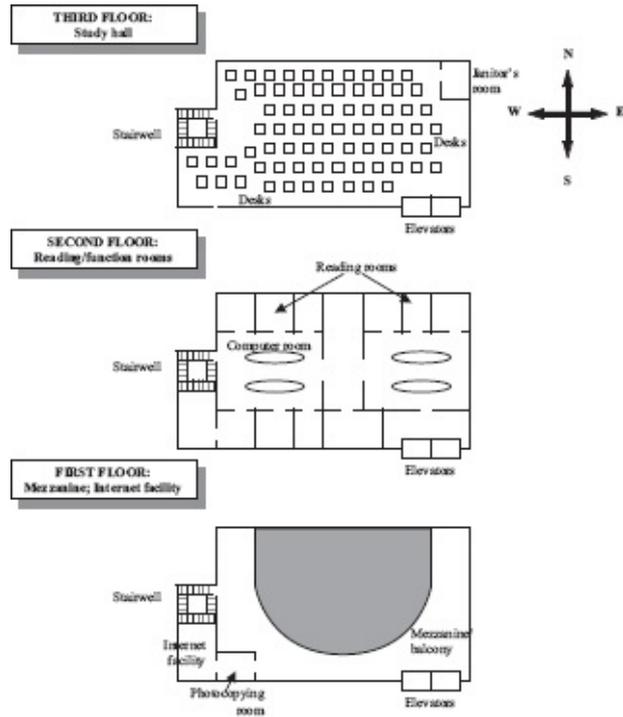
As any author will tell you, you only get one first book. And that first one always occupies a special place in your heart. *Contest* is like that for me. It was the first one, and now as I look back on it, I can see without a doubt that it set the tone for everything to come.

I truly hope you have as much fun reading it as I did writing it.

Matthew Reilly  
November 2000

# THE NEW YORK STATE LIBRARY





Do I dare  
Disturb the universe?  
– T. S. Eliot

# **INTRODUCTION**

**From: Hoare, Shane**  
***Suetonius: The Picture of Rome***  
**(New York, Advantage Press, 1979)**

‘CHAPTER VII: THE FIRST CENTURY A.D.

. . . ultimately, however, it is Suetonius’ classic work, *Lives of the Emperors*, that provides us with the best picture of court life in Imperial Rome. Here Suetonius might well be writing a modern day soap opera, as he outlines the lust, the cruelty, the intrigues and the numerous *insidiae*—or plots—that dominated life in the Emperor’s presence . . .’ [p. 98]

‘. . . not least of whom was Domitian, who, although well-known for his *ex-tempore* executions of scheming courtesans, provides perhaps the most brutal of all examples of Roman intrigue—that of Quintus Aurelius.

A distinguished former captain in the Roman army who rose to prominence in the Senate under Domitian, Aurelius apparently fell out of favour with the Emperor in 87 A.D. Initially recruited by Domitian to aid him in military matters, Aurelius was also a prolific writer, who not only instructed Domitian on military strategy, but who also committed those instructions to his own personal record. Much of this writing has survived to the present day, dated and intact.

However, Quintus Aurelius’ writing ceased abruptly in the year 87 A.D.

All correspondence between senator and Emperor was severed. Aurelius’ personal record cited no further entries. There was no mention of Aurelius in Senate documents from that year onward.

Quintus Aurelius had disappeared.

Some historians have speculated that Aurelius—who, it was said, would appear in the Senate in full military attire—simply fell out of favour with Domitian, while others have proposed that Aurelius was discovered plotting . . .’ [p. 103]

**From: Freer, Donaldx**  
***From Medieval to Modern: Europe 1010–1810***  
**(London, W. M. Lawry & Co., 1963)**

‘. . . by comparison, the wheat riots in Cornwall were but a trifle when compared with the confusion that overwhelmed a small farming community in West Hampshire in the spring of 1092.

Historians have long pondered over the fate of Sir Alfred Hayes, the Lord of Palmerston Estate, whose disappearance in 1092 upset the entire feudal balance of his small agrarian community in West Hampshire . . .’ [p. 45]

‘ . . . However, the most startling aspect of the whole affair is that if Hayes did, in fact, die suddenly (of cholera or anything else for that matter), why was his death not listed in the local church register as had always been the custom? A man so renowned for his past glory on the battlefield, and of such stature in the community, would not be overlooked by the death registrar. The sad fact is that since no body was ever found, no death was ever recorded.

Writing after his lord’s disappearance, the local abbot of West Hampshire observed that, apart from necessary military excursions, Sir Alfred had never left West Hampshire before, and that during the days immediately prior to his disappearance, he had been seen about *the* village carrying out his business as usual. It was odd, the abbot wrote, that here was a man who could be ‘certified as born’, but who had, officially, never died.

Putting aside all medieval myths of witchery and demonic intervention, the facts are quite straightforward: in the spring of 1092, Sir Alfred Hayes, Lord of Palmerston Estate, West Hampshire, simply vanished from the face of the earth.’ [p. 46]

# **CONTEST**

# PROLOGUE

**New York City**

**30 November, 2:01 a.m.**

Mike Fraser pressed himself flat against the black wall of the tunnel. He squeezed his eyes shut as he tried to block out the roar of the subway train flashing by in front of him. The dirt and dust kicked up by the speeding train hit his face like a thousand pin-pricks. It hurt, but he didn't care. He was almost there.

And then, just as soon as it had come, the train was gone, its thunderous rumble slowly fading into the blackness of the tunnel. Fraser opened his eyes. Against the black backdrop of the wall, the whites of his eyes were all that could be seen. He peeled himself away from the wall and brushed off the dirt that had clung to his clothes. Black clothes.

It was two o'clock in the morning, and while the rest of New York slept, Mike Fraser was going about his work. Silently and swiftly, he made his way up the subway tunnel until he found what he was looking for.

An old wooden door, set into the tunnel wall, held shut by a solitary padlock. Pasted across the door was a sign.

**NO ENTRY—BOOSTER VALVE  
HIGH VOLTAGE AREA  
CONSOLIDATED EDISON PERSONNEL ONLY**

Fraser examined the padlock. Stainless steel, combination lock, pretty new. He checked the hinges of the old wooden door. Yes, much easier.

His crowbar fitted snugly behind the hinges.

*Crack!*

*Status Check: Initialise program systems.*

*Officials in charge of third element*

*please confirm delivery.*

The door fell from its frame, and dangling from the padlock, swung silently into Fraser's waiting hand.

He peered inside the doorway, slipped the crowbar back into his belt and stepped inside.

Large box-shaped electricity meters lined the walls of the booster valve room. Thick black cables snaked their way across the ceiling. There was a door on the far side. Fraser headed straight for it.

Once through the booster valve room, he made his way down a narrow, dimly lit

passageway until he came to a small red door. It opened easily and as Fraser looked out from the doorway, he smiled at the view.

Endless rows of bookshelves—each one rising from floor to ceiling—stretched away from him as far as the eye could see. Old and faded fluorescent lights lined each aisle, but at night only every third one was on. The lights themselves were so old that the whiteness of their fluorescent tubes had gone a mouldy ivory colour and a powder of oxidised fluorine had settled inside them. Their sickly state gave the lowest floor of the New York State Library a haunting yellowish glow.

The New York State Library. One hundred years old, a silent sanctuary of history and knowledge—and also the owner of twelve brand-new Pentium III computers whose hard drives would soon be in the back room of Mike Fraser's apartment.

Fraser checked the lock on the door.

Safety lock.

From the booster room you didn't need a key, but from the library side you did. One of those automatically closing doors designed to keep the curious out, but not to accidentally lock the electricity workers in.

Fraser thought for a moment. If he had to make a hasty escape, he wouldn't have time to pick the lock. He searched around for an answer.

*That'll work*, he thought, spying the nearest bookshelf. He grabbed the first book he could reach and wedged it on the floor between the red door and its frame.

The door now safely ajar, Fraser hustled down the nearest aisle. Soon the small red door marked **BOOSTER VALVE—NO STAFF ACCESS PERMITTED** was but a tiny square in the distance behind him. Mike Fraser didn't even notice, he knew exactly where he was going now.

Terry Ryan looked at his watch—again.

It was 2:15 a.m. Four minutes after he'd last looked. Ryan sighed. Jesus, the time crawled on this job.

*Status Check: Officials in charge of third element confirm delivery complete.*

Idly, Ryan peered out through the massive floor-to-ceiling windows of the atrium of the New York State Library. Nothing stirred on the streets outside.

He touched the gun by his side and grunted a laugh. Security guards in a library—a *library*, for God's sake. The pay was the same, he guessed, and so long as that kept coming, Terry Ryan didn't care what they asked him to guard.

He continued to stroll around the atrium, whistling quietly to himself—

*Clink-clink.*

He froze.

A noise.

There it was again: *clink-clink.*

Ryan held his breath. It had come from the left. He drew his gun. Behind the Information Desk, Mike Fraser swore as he picked his screwdriver up from the floor. He peered out over the counter.

No one to the left. Nor to the right. He let out a deep breath. No one had—  
*'Freeze!'*

Fraser snapped around. He took in the scene quickly. Security guard. Gun. Maybe fifteen metres, twenty at the most. As if there was a choice.

'I said, freeze!' Terry Ryan yelled. But the thief had already made a break for it. Ryan broke into a run.

Books on shelves became streaking blurs of colour as Fraser bolted down a narrow aisle. His heart pounded loudly inside his head. And then suddenly he saw the door. And the sign: STAIRS.

Fraser hit the stairs running, grabbing the banister, sliding down the first flight. The security guard, Ryan, flew in two seconds later, taking the stairs three at a time.

Down and down, round and round, Fraser went, clinging to the banister, hauling himself around at every turn. He saw the door at the bottom. He flew down the last flight of stairs and hit the door at full speed. It burst open easily—too easily—and Fraser went sprawling face-first onto the hard wood floor.

He could hear heavy footsteps bounding down the stairs behind him.

Fraser reached for the nearest bookshelf to hoist himself up and immediately felt a searing pain rip through his right arm. It was then that he saw his wrist. It had taken the full weight of the fall, and now, bent grotesquely backwards, it was undoubtedly broken.

Teeth clenched, Fraser hauled himself up with his good arm and had just made it to his feet when—

'You stay right where you are.'

The voice was soft and sure.

Fraser turned around slowly.

In the doorway behind him stood the security guard, with his gun levelled at Mike Fraser's head.

Ryan pulled out his handcuffs and threw them to the injured thief.

'Put 'em on.'

Fraser closed his eyes in disgust. 'Why don't you,' he began, 'kiss . . . my . . . *ass!*' Then suddenly, like a wounded animal, he lunged at the guard.

Without a blink, Ryan raised his gun and fired it into the air above the fallen thief's head.

The booming shot rang out in the silence of the library.

Fraser dropped back to the floor as small white flakes of plaster began to flutter down around his head.

Ryan stepped forward into the aisle, tightened his grip on his pistol, reasserted his aim at Fraser's head.

'I said, *put 'em on*. So put—' Ryan's eyes darted left. 'What was that?'

Fraser heard it, too.

And then—ominously—it came again.

A long, slow growl. Like the snort of a pig. Only louder. Much louder.

'What the hell was that?' Fraser said quickly.

*Boom.* A loud, dull thud.

The floor shook.

'There's something down here . . .' Fraser whispered.

*Boom.* Again.

The two men stood there frozen.

Ryan looked down the aisle beyond Fraser. It stretched endlessly away from them, disappearing into darkness.

Silence.

Dead silence.

The wooden floor was still again.

'Let's get the fuck outta here,' Fraser hissed.

'Shh!'

'There's somethin' down here, man!' Fraser raised his voice.

*Boom.*

A tremor shook the floor again.

A book teetering on the edge of a shelf fell to the floor.

'Let's go!' Fraser cried.

*Boom. Boom. Boom.*

Books began to fall off the shelves in bundles.

Ryan leaned forward, grabbed Fraser by the collar. He pulled the thief's face up to his own.

'For God's sake, shut up,' he whispered. 'Whatever it is, it's hearing your voice. And if you keep talking—'

Ryan stopped abruptly, and frowned at Fraser. The young thief's eyes were wide with fear, his lower lip quivering madly, his whole expression one of total and utter disbelief.

Ryan felt his blood run cold.

*Fraser was looking over his shoulder.*

Whatever 'it' was, it snorted again, and as it did so Ryan felt a wave of hot air rush across the back of his neck.

It was behind him.

*It was right behind him!*

The gun went off as Ryan was yanked bodily off the floor. Fraser dropped to the ground, staring at the hulking mass of blackness before him.

Ryan screamed as he struggled uselessly in the powerful arms of the dark shape. And then suddenly, the creature bellowed loudly and hurled him through the nearest bookshelf. Books cascaded everywhere as Ryan's body doubled over and crashed *right through* the old wooden casing.

The massive black shape lumbered around the bookshelf, looking for the body on the other side. In the dull yellow light, Fraser could see long black bristles flowing over a high, arched back, saw demonic pointed ears and powerful muscular limbs, caught glimpses of matted black hair and gigantic scythe-like claws.

Whatever it was, it picked up Ryan's body like a rag doll and dragged it back around to the aisle where Fraser sat.

The flight through the bookshelf must have broken Ryan's back, Fraser guessed, but the security guard wasn't dead yet. Fraser could hear him moaning softly as the creature lifted him to the ceiling.

It was then that Ryan screamed.

A shrill, ear-piercing, inhuman scream.

To his absolute horror, Fraser saw what was going to happen next and he put his hand up over his face just as he heard the sickening *crack* and an instant later, he felt a torrent of warmth wash all over the front of his body.

Ryan's scream cut off abruptly and Fraser heard the beast roar a final time, followed by the thunderous crunching of wooden shelves.

And then there was nothing.

Silence.

Total and utter silence.

Slowly, Fraser removed his hand from his face.

The beast was gone. The guard's body lay there in front of him, twisted and mangled, motionless. One of the bookshelves to his right lay horribly askew, wrenched free from its ceiling mountings. Blood was everywhere.

Fraser didn't move, couldn't move.

And so he just sat there, alone, in the cold emptiness of the New York State Library, and waited for the dawn.