

THE NO.1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# MATTHEW REILLY

THE FOUR LEGENDARY KINGDOMS

Available  
18.10.16



CHAPTER SAMPLER



I CANNOT SEE IT.  
THE OPTICKS OF MY TIME ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH.  
BUT THE MATHEMATICS ARE INESCAPABLE.  
IT IS COMING.  
IT WILL BE UP TO THE WISE AND NOBLE MEN OF FUTURE  
GENERATIONS WITH OPTICKS OF A MORE ADVANCED NATURE  
THAN MINE TO FIND IT IN THE NIGHT SKY AND INITIATE THE  
RETURN CALL.  
OR ELSE ALL IS LOST.

SIR ISAAC NEWTON  
*THE CHRONOLOGY OF ANCIENT KINGDOMS*

IT'S NOT THE SIZE OF THE DOG IN THE FIGHT, IT'S THE SIZE OF  
THE FIGHT IN THE DOG.

MARK TWAIN



# FIRST CHALLENGE

## THE ENTRY INTO HELL



And there along the shattered chasm's edge  
We found the infamy of Crete stretched out –  
The beast conceived inside the wooden cow.  
And seeing us, the creature bit himself  
As though tormented by an inward rage . . .

That is the way the Minotaur behaved.  
My wary guide called out: 'Run down towards  
The crossing: best descend while he is mad.'

DANTE'S *INFERNO*,  
TRANSLATED BY SEAN O'BRIEN  
(PICADOR, LONDON, 2006)

## CHAMPION PROFILE

NAME: WEST, JONATHAN JAMES  
AGE: 46  
RANK TO WIN: ABOVE 10TH  
REPRESENTING: LAND

### PROFILE:

Captive participant.

A late inclusion to these Games, Jonathan (Jack) West Jr is a wildcard not to be dismissed lightly. He is, after all, the fifth greatest warrior of ancient prophecy. That said, that prophecy has no relevance here.

Ranked above 10th out of 16 to win the Games.

### FROM HIS PATRON:

No supporting comment was issued by this champion's patron.

Jack West woke with a lurch, startled and gasping for air.

He was alone and in darkness.

He didn't know where he was, how he'd got here or how long he'd been here.

The air was cool and moist, like in a deep cave. The floor was dusty. The wall against his back was solid stone.

He was wearing jeans and a long-sleeved t-shirt, but no shoes.

His head was sore. He touched it . . . only to pull his hand away in shock.

His hair had been shaved off—

With a piercing shriek, the rusty iron door of his cell swung open and light flooded in.

A horrifying silhouette filled the doorway.

The outline of a bull-headed man.

A minotaur.

Or at least a man wearing a bull-shaped helmet.

He was well muscled, with knotty biceps and a stocky chest. While his upper body—save for the bull mask—was bare, on his lower half he wore modern black army-issue cargo pants and black combat boots.

*I must be dreaming*, Jack thought.

He didn't have time for a second thought because right then, with a roar, the 'minotaur' charged at him.

A serrated hunting knife appeared in the masked man's right hand and it came slashing down at Jack.

Instinct kicked in.



Half rising, Jack grabbed the minotaur's knife-hand, twisted it and threw the man to the side, springing to his own feet as he did so.

The minotaur tackled him, and they rolled, struggling, wrestling, ending up on the ground with the masked man on top, straddling Jack and pressing down with the knife.

Clenching his teeth and using all his strength, Jack gripped the hilt of the knife, keeping its blade at bay, two inches from his own throat.

The blade edged closer to his Adam's apple, and in a faraway corner of his brain, Jack recalled that if you died in a dream, you woke up. He wondered if that would happen here.

*Only what if it's not a dream, Jack . . . ?*

His opponent pushed harder and from behind the black bull mask, Jack heard the man inside grunting with exertion.

*It's just a man! his mind screamed. It's just a man!*

*And every man can be beaten.*

Energised, Jack shifted his weight and reverse-rolled, sending the minotaur smashing head-first into the stone wall.

It was a sickening blow. A dull crack echoed out—the sound of the minotaur's neck breaking—and the masked man slumped to the dusty floor and lay still.

Jack heaved for breath.

What a way to wake up.

Regaining his composure a little, he took in his cell for the first time.

The door was still open a little, letting in light. The cell looked exceedingly old: the walls were made of sandstone; the heavy rusted door sat on ancient iron hinges. As for what lay beyond the open doorway, God only knew.

On one wall of Jack's cell were two images carved deep into the stone:



The first one Jack knew: it was the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph *ankh*, meaning ‘life’.

As for the second symbol, it looked like a swirling four-armed octopus. It was a variant of a rare and ancient symbol found in Hindu, Buddhist and Neolithic cultures called a tetragammadion.

As he looked at it, Jack had the distinct feeling he had seen this symbol only recently, but he couldn’t recall where.

He blinked, trying to remember. But it was no use. His mind was still too groggy.

Instead he tried to recall the last place he had been before he had lost consciousness and woken up here.

*Pine Gap*, he thought.

*The top-secret base deep in the Australian desert.*

He’d gone there to attend a meeting, a high-level meeting.

Something about the SKA Array . . .

He remembered arriving at the base outside the remote town of Alice Springs with Lily, Alby and the dogs, and being allowed inside by the armed gate-guards.

And he recalled being met outside the observatory lab at Pine Gap by the tall, bespectacled figure of General Eric Abrahamson, the genial yet whip-smart man who had replaced Jack’s long-time boss and friend, General Peter Cosgrove, after Cosgrove had been promoted to higher office.

They’d shaken hands and Abrahamson had introduced Jack to *his* soon-to-be replacement, a stern-faced general named Conor Beard. With his angular features and neatly trimmed red beard, Beard’s operational call sign had been a slam dunk: since his early days in the military, he’d been known as *Redbeard*.

‘Glad you dressed up for the occasion, Jack,’ Abrahamson had said wryly.

Jack had been dressed casually, wearing jeans, sneakers, and a blue shirt over an old white t-shirt. He wore a brown suede glove



over his titanium left hand and a simple Casio G-Shock watch on his right wrist.

He'd smiled back at Abrahamson in the desert sun. 'I don't work for you anymore, so I get to dress any way I like.'

After exchanging greetings with Lily and Alby, Abrahamson bent down to pat the dogs. 'Haven't seen these two since they were pups.'

Jack said, 'They own me now. Everyone owns me now. Zoe. Lily. The dogs. I was once the fifth greatest warrior, you know.'

Abrahamson laughed. 'What about Horus? What does she think of the dogs?'

Jack whistled sharply and a moment later, his loyal peregrine falcon, Horus, previously soaring overhead, had landed lightly on his shoulder. Looped around her neck was a leather collar from which hung a GoPro camera. She glared at Abrahamson and Beard, as if peering into their souls.

'She tolerates them,' Jack said as Horus took to the air again.

'Come inside.' Abrahamson guided them through the doors of the lab. 'I have something important to show you.'

And then nothing . . .

. . . nothing till he woke up here with a man dressed as a bull trying to kill him.



Still sitting on the dusty floor of his cell, Jack looked down at himself.

Somewhere in transit, his blue shirt and sneakers had gone missing. His long-sleeved t-shirt, a gift from Lily from a few years ago—back when she'd been a cute thirteen-year-old and not a worldly twenty-year-old—depicted Homer Simpson lying in an inflatable kiddie pool, passed out from drinking and surrounded by empty Duff beer cans, under the words:

### WORLD'S GREATEST DAD

*This is surreal*, Jack thought.

He peered at the lifeless man in the bull mask on the floor beside him.

The mask, he now saw, was very modern, and was actually more of a helmet than a mask. It was made of high-tech lightweight resin and was painted matte-black.

The visor of the bull helmet was a black mesh like that found on a fencing mask—it hid the identity of the wearer but allowed him full vision. Over the wearer's mouth was a gas-mask filter that looked like an animal's snout, thus making the whole thing look even more like a bull's head.

Jack yanked the mask off the fallen man . . .

. . . to reveal that it wasn't quite a man.

But it was something similar.

The 'man' under the mask had a broad low-browed forehead,



wide-set eyes, a flat nose, big mouth, crooked teeth and thick matted black hair everywhere: on his jowls, in his ears and forming a monobrow above his eyes.

*The eyes*, Jack thought, looking closer.

His eyes—frozen open in the moment of his death—were deep brown. They looked basically human yet somehow duller. If he didn't know better, Jack would have thought he was looking at some kind of half-evolved hominid, like a Neanderthal or Cro-Magnon man.

A tattoo on the half-man's hairy shoulder read: N-016.

Jack gazed down at his dead attacker.

'What the hell are you and where the hell am I?' he asked aloud.

With a roar the hairy half-man sprang from the floor, snatching up the knife and lunging at Jack.

*Jesus Christ!*

But his attacker was weaker now, slower, fighting out of sheer fervour and frenzy. Jack parried the knife away and slipped round behind the half-man, wrapped his forearm around his throat and fully broke his neck.

The thing dropped dead for good this time.

'Fuck me,' Jack gasped, sucking in air again.

Out of habit, he made to stroke back his hair and again he felt the rough stubble there. His head had indeed been shaved while he had been unconscious.

Lacking any other weapons, Jack patted down the dead minotaur. The only weapon the half-man had was the knife so Jack pocketed that. He removed the minotaur's combat boots and put them on. They were way too big for him but they were better than nothing.

With a shrug, he also took the armoured bull helmet.

Then he walked out of the cell, stepping into the light.

*\*Under no circumstances should this chapter sampler be resold, published or copied.*

## A RUTHLESS KIDNAPPING

Jack West Jr and his family are living happily on their remote farm...  
...when Jack is brutally kidnapped and he awakes in an underground cell to find a masked attacker with a knife charging at him.

## THE GREAT GAMES

Jack, it seems, has been chosen - along with a dozen other elite soldiers - to compete in a series of deadly challenges designed to fulfil an ancient ritual.

With the fate of the Earth at stake, he will have to traverse diabolical mazes, fight cruel assassins and face unimaginable horrors that will test him like he has never been tested before.


## TO HELL AND BACK


In the process, he will discover the mysterious and powerful group of individuals behind it all: the four legendary kingdoms.


He might also discover that he is not the only hero in this place...

**#fourlegendarykingdoms**

matthewreilly.com

 /officialmatthewreilly

 @matthew\_reilly

 @matthewreillyofficial

Love talking about books?  
Find us online at Pan Macmillan Australia



  
MACMILLAN  
Pan Macmillan Australia