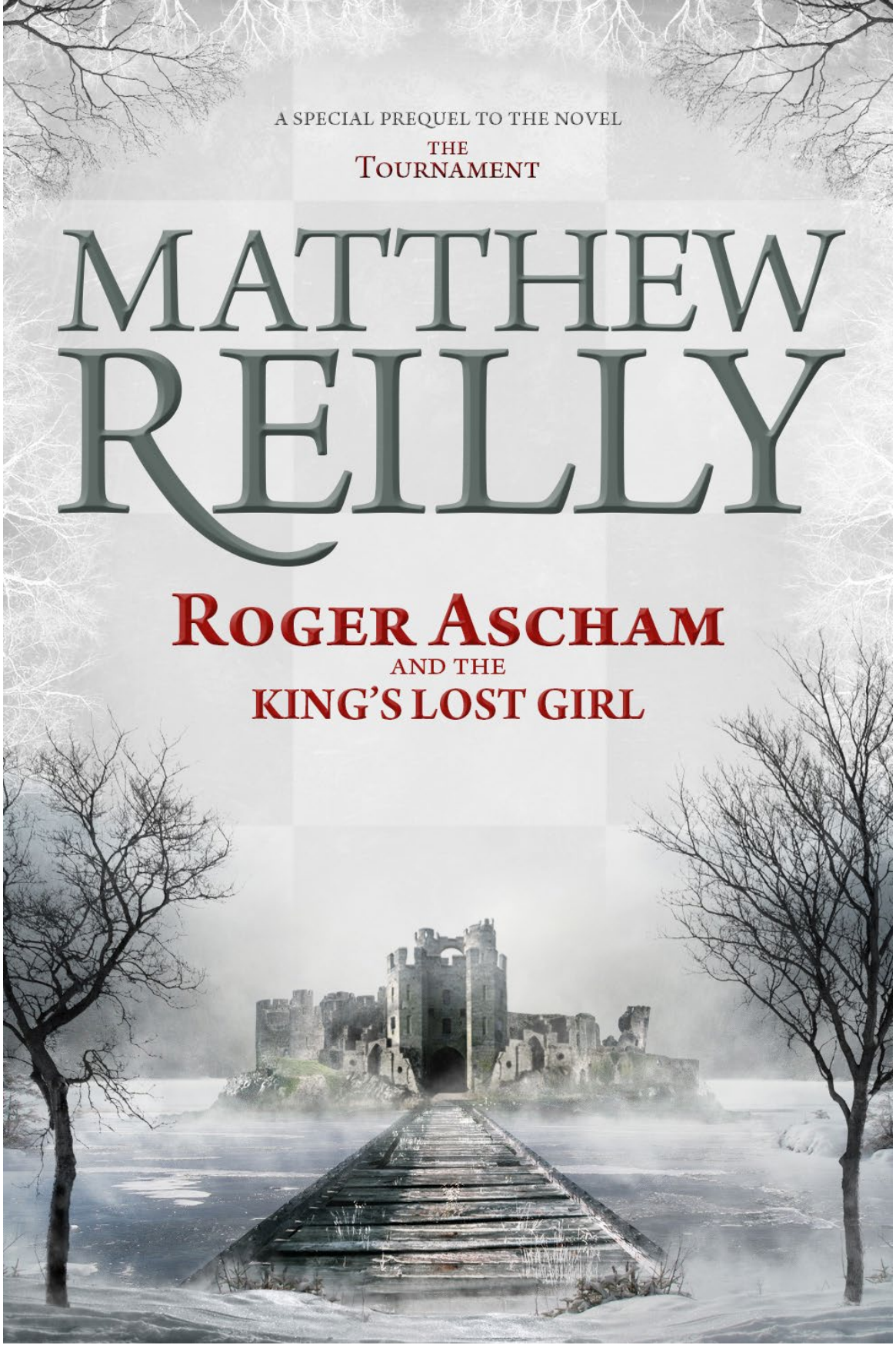


A SPECIAL PREQUEL TO THE NOVEL

THE  
TOURNAMENT

# MATTHEW REILLY

**ROGER ASCHAM**  
AND THE  
**KING'S LOST GIRL**



*About Roger Ascham and the King's Lost Girl*

In this special prequel to Matthew Reilly's  
*The Tournament*, Roger Ascham,  
the unorthodox tutor of Princess Elizabeth,  
is tasked by King Henry VIII with a  
most unusual and dangerous mission.

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# MATTHEW REILLY

**ROGER ASCHAM**  
AND THE  
KING'S LOST GIRL



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*It is costly wisdom that is bought by experience.*

– ROGER ASCHAM

**CAMBRIDGE, FEBRUARY 1546**

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Seven months before the events  
depicted in *The Tournament*

## ONE

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*King's College, Cambridge*  
*February 1546*

IT WAS ALWAYS a celebrated occasion when the king came to visit Cambridge . . . for everyone except Roger Ascham.

The chapel at King's College, stupendous and imposing at the best of times, had been converted into a colossal audience chamber for King Henry and it was filled to bursting point with academics, students, puffed-up local nobles and the awestruck townsfolk of Cambridge.

The king sat on a high throne that had been placed on a stage at the front of the chapel's three-hundred-foot-long nave, which was only right, as just two years previously he had paid for the completion of the chapel, in doing so finishing a building project that had been begun almost one hundred years earlier at the command of Henry VI.

Outside, a steady snow fell. It had been a cold and bitter winter. The trees, roads and lawns of Cambridge were covered in white and the river had frozen over.

From his throne, Henry attended to the business of being king—honouring the local noblemen, gifting money, hearing petitions; he even thanked the Earl of Cumberland’s bastard son, a student at the College, for the repair and reconstruction work the young man had carried out on the ruins of Cambridge Castle.

Corpulent yet still commanding, with his heavy bearded jowls and deep voice, the king was by turns charming and frightening. He may have needed wheeled machines to move up and down stairways but he knew how to hold court and he had this one in the palm of his hand.

As the business of the king’s visit was taking place at the front of the great space, sitting quietly at the back, unnoticed by all, were two figures: Roger Ascham and his young royal student.

Ascham sighed inwardly. He knew what was coming. He had endured it before. Still, it was always unnerving to be commanded to report to a king who had renounced the Catholic Church, dissolved its monasteries and ordered the execution of two of his six wives.

Ascham wondered who had complained to the king this time. He guessed it had been Primrose Ponsonby—who had complained to the king about Ascham’s teaching methods on six previous occasions—but it could have been any of a dozen people.

Roger Ascham was thirty years old and a highly regarded professor of Latin and Greek at Cambridge. He was of modest



build and he had a thick mop of brown hair that covered his oversized ears. But his eyes were sharp, they took in everything. In addition to his duties at Cambridge he had recently taken on the role of overseeing the education of the third in line to the English throne.

That individual happened to be the twelve-year-old girl sitting quietly by his side—her head bent reading a book, her feet swinging happily, unable to reach the floor—a delightful young lady known to Ascham as Bess but to everyone at court as Elizabeth. Her usually wild curly red hair had been tightly braided for this unexpected visit from her father. Right now, despite the murmuring, movement and general excitement in the great room around her, she was totally absorbed in her book: a history of Cleopatra that Ascham himself had recently translated.

While he waited to be raked over the coals by the famously intemperate king—and he and Bess had been waiting all morning; it looked like Henry had chosen to see them last of all—Ascham examined a most unusual object in his hands: a brass mariner's quadrant that he had been tinkering with. The quadrant had long been used for celestial navigation at sea, but Ascham was frustrated with its limitations on a rolling ship's deck, so he had attached a couple of mirrors to the device, plus a sighting tube, which he hoped would make it work better—

‘Excuse me, good sir, but is that a quadrant you have there?’ The voice was cultured, firm, confident.

Ascham looked up.

A young man in his twenties stood before him, a student. A student, Ascham realised, who he knew.

The lad's name was Timothy Higginbotham but the plainness of his name had not stopped the rumour-mongers at Cambridge—they could smell anyone with blood ties to a title from ten miles away—from figuring out very quickly who he really was: Timothy Higginbotham was the bastard son of the Earl of Cumberland. And he was clearly a beloved son: despite his illegitimacy, the Earl had sent him to Cambridge with a sizeable pension.

Ascham handed the young man the quadrant. 'Yes, it is but with some modifications of my own design.'

Higginbotham took the device and turned it sideways to look at it more closely.

'I love to know the inner workings of things,' he said absently. 'I like your modifications. They would compensate for the rocking of a ship, allowing you to sight your star and the horizon with greater ease.'

Ascham was both surprised and impressed at the speed with which the young man had assessed the purpose of his adjustments.

'Why, thank you. You are Cumberland's boy, are you not? The one who has been repairing the old castle?'

'I am.'

'I confess I do not venture to that part of town very often so I have not seen your work at the ruins. You are a student here? What are you studying?'

‘Medicine,’ the lad answered without looking up, still gazing at the quadrant. ‘I want to be a surgeon.’

Ascham nodded. ‘Good for you. That is a fine calling—’

‘MR ROGER ASCHAM AND HER HIGHNESS, THE PRINCESS ELIZABETH!’ the King’s herald’s voice boomed above the din.

Ascham retrieved his quadrant from the lad and, taking Bess’s hand in his, strode down the length of the hall.

The crowd parted like the Red Sea before Moses as Ascham and Bess made their way toward the throne. Ascham caught many a curious glance and even a few pitying ones from members of the throng as he passed them by.

And there, looming at the end of the pathway made by the crowd, sat King Henry VIII, legs spread wide, fists resting on his armrests, staring down at them. Ascham wondered if anyone else saw the irony of a king who had dispossessed the Catholic Church of its riches sitting on a throne in a grand chapel that had been built for that very Church. He doubted it.

Ascham and Bess stopped before the king, holding hands, and for a horrifying moment the hall went silent. The king’s frown was even more severe than usual.

And then his face broke into a broad grin. ‘Come here, my gorgeous little princess!’

Bess walked toward her father, shoulders hunched and head bent, blushing.

In so many ways, Ascham thought, she was beyond her years—but in the presence of her father she became a little girl

again. So confident and assured in private, now she moved with the stilted awkwardness of every twelve-year-old girl. Ascham's heart went out to her.

The king took her hand gently in his and suddenly became the doting parent. 'Are you doing your sums, little one?'

'Yes, Father.'

'And your Greek? I am told it is improving.'

'Oh, it is, Father. Mr Ascham is frightfully good at the ancient languages.'

At the mention of Ascham's name, Henry cast a glance at him. 'And how is your chess, Elizabeth? Have you beaten your teacher yet?'

'No,' Bess said sadly. 'He continues to get the better of me. But I am improving, Father, and I shall beat him one day. I am determined to.'

Ascham offered the king an apologetic half-smile. His crushing victories over Bess at chess had been the subject of their last meeting.

Henry kept his eyes on Ascham as he spoke. 'If your teacher is equipping you with determination, then I approve of those lessons. It is a worthy virtue to possess. Now, run along, my sweetling, I have matters to discuss with your schoolmaster. Master Rusting, please take my delightful daughter to the kitchen and find her something sweet and tasty.'

Bess was whisked away by the king's usher.

No sooner was she out of the room than the king rounded on Ascham.

‘Ascham, what in fucking hell were you fucking thinking when you took my fucking daughter to a fucking slaughterhouse last month?’

Ascham stood his ground. So that was it.

‘Your Majesty, I merely wished for Bess to learn where her food comes from,’ he replied evenly. ‘Every common farmer’s child knows how a leg of beef arrives at their table, but Bess did not. I felt that a potential future Queen of England—’

The crowd tittered. Elizabeth was third in line to the throne and if her half-brother ascended to that throne, married and had children, she would be shunted further down the line of succession. Her chances of becoming queen were wildly remote and the whole room knew it.

Ascham went on, heedless of their mocking. ‘—I felt that a potential future Queen of England should know this.’

Henry stared at Ascham for a long moment, not speaking. The hall fell silent again.

Then the king spat, ‘Hell and fucking damnation, Ascham. Just don’t do it again. I’m sick of getting complaints about your fucking teaching methods. That is all. Now, clear this hall!’

The king’s guards began herding the crowd out of the vast chapel. His humiliation over, Ascham was making to leave as well when the king called, ‘Not you, Ascham! You will stay!’

And that was something Roger Ascham had not expected.

Moments later, the great hall was empty, save for Ascham, the king and the king’s chief aide, Sir Harold Rigby.

‘Ascham,’ the king said in a very different tone. ‘A most . . . unusual . . . matter has arisen and I require your assistance.’

‘My assistance, Your Majesty?’ Ascham did not know where this was going.

‘When I come to Cambridge, I enjoy the, ah, ministrations of a young lady at Napier’s establishment, an Italian girl by the name of Isabella. She is a most beautiful thing and she has talents that I have found in no other lady in England.’

Ascham said nothing. The king’s visits to Napier’s brothel while in Cambridge were well known.

The king went on: ‘You will, therefore, understand the frustration I felt when I arrived here this week to discover that the girl is not at Napier’s.’

‘She no longer works as a prostitute?’ Ascham asked.

‘No,’ Sir Harold Rigby interjected. ‘The girl is missing and your king would like her found.’

## TWO

---

ASCHAM BLINKED.

‘Your Majesty, I am flattered to be asked to find this girl for you, but I am at a loss. Surely you have a half-dozen men better suited to this task than I. Men more at home visiting dens of, ahem, pleasure, or trackers or hunters, like Sir Roderick of York. He is an unmatched hunter, surely he would be a fine tracker of a missing girl.’

Henry stared directly at Ascham. ‘I dispatched Sir Roderick three days ago on exactly this mission. Come with me.’

Henry and Rigby led Ascham to a small stable behind the great chapel. Snowflakes drifted down all around them. Mounds of snow lay heaped against the stable’s outer wall. Henry pushed open its doors and Ascham beheld a man’s body lying inside a stall.

Henry said, ‘As I said, I dispatched Sir Roderick on this mission three days ago. His body was found lying face-down

in the snow in the woods near Vicar's Brook on the south side of town this morning.'

Ascham stared at the corpse, swallowing hard. Sir Roderick had been a big man, powerful, a warrior's warrior. Now his body lay in the freezing horse stall like a pale slab of meat.

Henry stepped up beside Ascham, also gazing at the body of the hunter.

'Roderick was a fine knight and an exceptional huntsman. It is hard to imagine any man getting the better of him,' the king said. 'Whoever killed him is formidable, Mr Ascham. My favourite girl is missing and my best man, sent in pursuit of her, is dead. *I want to know what is going on.* You're a most peculiar fellow, Ascham, I won't deny it, but there is always a logic to your madness, a shrewd logic that I do not see often, which is why I tolerate your occasionally bizarre lessons with my sweet Elizabeth. You think outside the usual. You see beyond the normal. This situation is beyond the normal. I want my girl found and I want to know who took her so that I may torture him myself before I cut off his fucking head and mount it on a fucking stake.'

Henry turned to Ascham. 'Can you do this for me?'

'I will do my very best, Your Majesty.'

'Rigby will give you whatever assistance you need. *Find her,* Mr Ascham.'

The king left. Ascham did not.

He turned to Rigby. 'Let's take this body to the school of medicine. I wish to examine it.'



\*

An hour later, the body of Sir Roderick lay on a wooden bench surrounded by the gruesome tools of the surgical trade. The skin on his face was completely white from the cold, Ascham noted, white as a ghost.

Alongside Ascham was his friend and head of the school of medicine, John Blyth.

'All right, Roger,' Blyth said after Ascham had briefed him on the identity of the dead man and the manner of the discovery of his body. 'What do you want to know?'

'I want to know how he died.'

Blyth snorted. 'If he is one of the king's men, he probably drank too much wine, collapsed in the snow and froze to death.'

'Indulge me,' Ascham said.

As Blyth began sorting his instruments, Ascham set about removing the dead man's boots.

He paused.

There were curious clumps of yellow-flecked dirt wedged in the soles of Sir Roderick's boots.

'John, do you know what this yellow dirt is?' he asked. 'It looks like a variety of sulphur deposit.'

Blyth glanced over at it. 'There are several sulphurous springs in these parts. Make an ungodly smell, they do.'

'While I do enjoy the odd walk,' Ascham said, 'I do not wander as far in my ambulations as you do, John. Where are

these springs? Are they on the south side of town near Vicar's Brook, perhaps?'

'No, there are none there,' Blyth said. 'There are perhaps a dozen of them but they are mainly to the north and west of Cambridge.'

Blyth commenced his examination of the corpse and after about an hour he reported to Ascham: 'Perhaps I should show more pause before I disparage the king's associates. Your man here didn't freeze to death at all. He drowned. His lungs are filled with water. He was dead well before his body froze.'

'He drowned *then* froze?' asked Ascham.

Blyth said, 'Yes. But then . . . no, that's just ridiculous.'

'Tell me anyway,' Ascham said.

'Well, you said his body was discovered lying face-down in the snow near Vicar's Brook. If he drowned, wouldn't he be found *in* the very lake or river in which he drowned, or at least on the shore of it? Drowned men do not stagger out onto land. This man drowned and was then *taken* from whatever body of water in which he drowned and placed on land, in snow, to make us think he froze to death.'

Ascham stared at the body, thinking.

'How very peculiar. Thank you for your help, John. I shall ensure that the king hears of it. I, however, have more inquiries to make, the first of which is to visit our missing girl's place of employment.'

## THREE

---

THIRTY MINUTES LATER, Roger Ascham strode down the main street of Cambridge, coat wrapped tightly around his body, braced against the driving snow. It was getting late in the afternoon and few people were out in the ghastly weather.

He had left Bess in the care of his good friend Gilbert Giles, with instructions that Giles give her a lesson in secular philosophy. Ascham knew full well that neither Giles nor Bess would follow his instructions. Instead, while he ventured out into the terrible weather, they would almost certainly sit by the fire and play chess—Giles was the best player at Cambridge and Elizabeth, frustrated at losing constantly to Ascham, would no doubt ask Giles for some winning strategies.

Ascham arrived at his destination and scowled: Napier's brothel. With a sigh, he entered the house of ill repute.

It was warm inside the brothel, thanks to a blazing fire in a corner of the ante-room. The entry area was large, with lush

rugs and expensive velvet curtains. Six young women with painted faces and wearing only their undergarments sauntered around the room. Business was clearly good at Napier's.

Ascham was greeted by a young woman with curly orange hair and wearing just a petticoat. Her name was Georgiana.

When Ascham asked to speak with the owner, Mr Napier, Georgiana fetched him and Ascham was surprised to be met by a short, fresh-faced and beardless man barely twenty years of age.

'Mr Napier? I am Roger Ascham, here at the command of His Majesty, King Henry. I have been commissioned by the king to inquire into the whereabouts of an Italian girl named Isabella who is said to work at this establishment. You are the owner of this house, are you not?'

The young man nodded. 'I am.'

'Forgive me, but you strike me as rather young to be the owner of such a large establishment.'

'It was my father's. I have only just inherited it. My father . . . died . . . recently.'

There was something in the way he said it that caught Ascham short.

'How recently?' he asked.

'Ten days ago.'

'Forgive me for asking,' Ascham pressed, 'but may I inquire *how* he died?'

Young Napier pursed his lips and threw a glance at Georgiana nearby. 'Let us not discuss it in here.' He grabbed a thick fur-lined coat. 'Come outside.'

\*

Moments later, Ascham found himself standing out in the cold with Napier.

‘My father was murdered,’ Napier said flatly. ‘He was found with his head removed from his body over on the eastern side of town.’

‘His head had been *cut off*?’ Ascham asked.

‘Cleanly,’ Napier said. ‘Without a nick or a shred to the surrounding skin. A shepherd found his body near the sheep track over by the Mill Cemetery. He found the corpse lying in the snow with the head just sitting there beside it. My father had gone in search of the very girl you seek: Isabella.’

Ascham felt his throat tighten.

He did not mention to Napier the fate of Sir Roderick. Isabella, it seemed, was a dangerous girl. Those who went in search of her met untimely and unpleasant ends and now he himself bore that task.

Napier went on: ‘Isabella was a particularly lovely girl, spritely and vivacious, with flowing dark hair, enormous brown eyes and a beautiful smile. She was also, I must say, very skilled at the erotic arts. As you are clearly aware, she was a special favourite of the king’s when he came to Cambridge to visit.’

‘Do you know anything of the girl’s final movements?’ Ascham asked. ‘For instance, who her last customer was?’

‘For the sake of discretion, we do not keep written records of our customers and our girls,’ Napier said. ‘But our memories are good, my father’s in particular.’

‘You think he went in search of her final customer?’ Ascham asked.

‘Yes. Occasionally, for our richer customers or those gentlemen who do not wish to be seen on our premises, we send our girls to their residences. Isabella’s last job, I am told, was at a customer’s residence and my father, it seems, went to that residence to find her.’

‘And he did not return.’

‘And he did not return,’ Napier agreed.

Ascham frowned. ‘Tell me again, where was your father’s body found?’

Napier turned and pointed. ‘At the edge of the Mill Cemetery, about a mile that way.’

As the young man raised his arm to point eastward, Ascham saw something trickle off his back and fall to the snowy ground: some grains of yellow soil, sulphur-like dirt of the kind he had seen on the boots of Sir Roderick. The sandy substance had dropped out of the thick fur lining that covered Napier’s neck and shoulders

A chill ran through Ascham. Could this diminutive man have been the one who had killed Sir Roderick? It didn’t seem likely but then—

‘Mr Napier,’ he said, trying to keep his voice even, ‘your coat, may I ask how you acquired it?’

‘This?’ Napier looked down at it. ‘Why, it was my father’s. It was a gift from the king himself, as thanks for bringing the girl Isabella to his attention a few years ago. As you can see, it is of exceptional quality.’

Ascham’s eyes narrowed. ‘It was your father’s . . .’ His mind was turning now. ‘Wait, was your father *wearing* this coat when his body was found near the cemetery?’

‘Yes, he was.’

‘When his head was severed, his body fell into the yellow-flecked dirt . . .’ Ascham said, thinking aloud. ‘*Napier and Roderick were killed in the same place.* And yet they were found far apart, at the southern and eastern extremities of Cambridge.’

‘Roderick?’ Napier said, perplexed. ‘The southern and eastern extremities? I’m sorry, but what the Devil are you talking about?’

Ascham snapped back to attention. ‘My apologies, young sir. My mind was running away with things. There is more to this than just the death of your father. Thank you, you have been very helpful indeed.’

## FOUR

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THEIR MEETING OVER, Napier went back inside his establishment. Ascham turned and began walking up the snow-covered street.

He thought about the yellow soil. According to Blyth, it could be found around springs in any of a dozen places to the north and west of the wider Cambridge area, but which place specifically?

Lost in thought, Ascham had not gone a hundred paces when a woman's voice stopped him. 'Good sir?'

He turned to find the young red-haired woman from Napier's standing before him in a hooded cloak, the girl named Georgiana.

'Forgive me, sir,' she said, 'but I could not help overhearing earlier when you told Mr Napier that you were inquiring into the whereabouts of Isabella. She was my good friend and I am desperately aggrieved by her disappearance. The other girls



are also fearful for word has spread among the ladies of our profession in these parts.'

'What do you mean?' Ascham asked.

Georgiana looked about herself anxiously. 'Lewd women are disappearing. Three from Peterborough, all from different houses, two from Bedford, again both from different establishments, and three also from Colchester, again all from separate brothels. No-one has made this connection except for us lewd women and the sheriffs and noblemen do not care for our opinions or fears.'

Ascham frowned in thought. The towns of Peterborough, Bedford and Colchester formed a wide circle around Cambridge.

'I care for what you say,' he said. 'So our abductor is not only dangerous, he is also shrewd. He targets prostitutes, probably because they are often itinerant or foreign-born and so have few relatives or friends in a town. They are not missed. And he is careful to take only *one* woman from each house of ill repute—and then from different towns—so few notice . . . few, that is, except women in your trade.'

'Yes, sir. That's absolutely right,' Georgiana said. 'Many of us girls are very afraid, sir. Some of us are planning to leave this town, leave the whole area, to get as far away as we can from the monster stealing women in our trade.'

At her words, Ascham's head snapped up.

'To get as far away as you can . . . ' he repeated. He looked about himself, thinking. He needed a—

He turned to face the girl. ‘Young lady, thank you for the information you have given me. It may be more important than you can imagine. I fear I must away now. I need to find a map.’

Ascham found a map of Cambridge in King’s College and took it to John Blyth’s rooms.

He unrolled the map, spread it out over a desk and examined it. ‘Sir Roderick’s body was found here, by Vicar’s Brook, on the south side of town,’ he said to Blyth as he placed a stone on a spot on the southern quarter of the map.

‘And Napier’s body, headless, was found by the Mill Cemetery, to the east of the town centre, here.’ He placed another stone on the map.

‘What are you thinking, Roger?’ Blyth asked.

‘I am thinking,’ Ascham said, ‘that our killer is trying to throw any would-be investigator off the scent by depositing the bodies *as far away as he can* from the site of their deaths. So I must find a location in Cambridge which possesses this peculiar yellow soil but which is also as far from these two places as possible.’

‘*Here,*’ Blyth said, planting his index finger on a point in the north-western corner of the map. ‘There is a sizeable deposit of sulphurous dirt here, by a spring that was converted into a moat.’

Ascham peered at the map. The spot Blyth was indicating was almost exactly equidistant from the two locations marked with stones, as far from them as possible.

There was one other thing about the location Blyth had indicated.

His finger had fallen on an icon on the map marked: 'CAMBRIDGE CASTLE'.

## FIVE

---

IT WAS GETTING DARK when Roger Ascham stepped off the main northern road onto the yellow-flecked dirt of a trail that led through dense forest to the ruins of Cambridge Castle.

Built many centuries before, the castle had long ago fallen into disrepair, its stonework cannibalised to build the university's colleges.

There was precious little left of the main building anymore. However, its ancient dungeon still stood, a three-storey structure nestled in the middle of a pond with only a low bridge giving access to it. Up until the last century, this dungeon, with ghastly machines of torture still lining its walls, had been used as something of a local gaol till it, too, fell into disuse.

The forest around the castle had encroached across the trail and in the dimming light of the afternoon and the ever-falling snow, Ascham wondered if he should wait until morning to investigate the ruins: if he took too long or lost his way, finding

his way back in darkness could prove difficult, even deadly, given the cold.

But he calculated that he had enough time to make it there and back and so he pressed on, pushing aside branches and vines as he trod down the dirt path.

Many of the branches framing the path had been cut back and Ascham recalled that the Earl of Cumberland's bastard son had been undertaking some reconstruction work on the old castle's dungeon. Due to his duties overseeing the education of Princess Elizabeth, Ascham had been spending less time in Cambridge of late, so he was only dimly aware of these repairs.

He ventured deeper into the forest, turned a corner and suddenly found himself facing the dungeon. Rising out of the middle of a moat, veiled in the slow-falling snow, with its hardy stonework and tiny barred windows, it looked like something from another, harsher time.

The pond around it was completely frozen over, the only access to the dungeon a low wooden bridge with no handrails, just thick beams on either side.

The view of the dungeon had seized Ascham's attention and it was precisely then that he felt an ever-so-gentle tug on his ankle and out of the corner of his eye, he saw something move. On instinct he ducked and—*whoosh!*—something swung down out of the branches above his head and swept by at the exact height where his neck had been.

The whooshing noise was quickly followed by a thud and Ascham looked up from his crouched position to see a

scythe-blade—hanging from an ingenious metal swing—lodged in a branch above and behind him.

He had, of course, tripped a length of twine—artfully disguised as a stray vine—causing the swingblade to be released from a perch above him and rush at his neck.

A booby trap.

Ascham swallowed.

It was the same fiendish mechanism, no doubt, that had severed Napier senior's head. Ascham looked at the ground and saw that the path here contained large swathes of the yellow-flecked soil he had already seen twice that day.

Ascham's heart began to pound. He was actually a little surprised at himself.

*He had found the lair of the killer.*

But he was no huntsman or sword-wielding knight. He wasn't even carrying his beloved bow today, having not thought he would need it when he had appeared before the king that morning. Goodness, he was just a teacher!

Napier had come here, because he knew where he had sent the Italian girl . . . and he had come to a grisly end.

And so had Sir Roderick—how he had found the place, Ascham didn't know, but he guessed it had to do with his hunter's mind. Whatever had led him here, Ascham was keenly aware of what had happened to Sir Roderick once he'd got here. A far more physically powerful man than Ascham, he had come to this place and not emerged alive.

Ascham resolved to race back to King's College to inform the king and return with armed escorts.

But first he had to do one thing: since he didn't want the killer who lurked here to know anyone had come this way, he reset the swingblade that had almost decapitated him, replacing its trip-rope as well.

Ascham had only just set it back in place and was turning to leave when he heard a terrifying sound.

A woman's scream.

It had come from the dungeon.

A desperate shriek of terror.

'Someone's alive in there . . .' Ascham said aloud as he broke into a run and dashed toward the grim dungeon.

He came to the low wooden bridge spanning the frozen pond and hurried across it, his feet pounding on its slats.

Then he entered the dungeon and his breath caught in his throat.

## SIX

---

WHAT ASCHAM BEHELD IN that dungeon was the stuff of nightmares. He recoiled in revulsion.

From an elevated platform he saw an old stone-walled chamber lit by flaming torches and filled with awful machines of torture: body-sized sarcophagi fitted with spikes, hanging cages suspended above hot coals or icy baths, iron helmets with no eyeholes, a pillory, two racks and . . .

. . . *Good God*, Ascham thought . . .

. . . and every single one of the hideous contraptions had a young woman imprisoned inside it or manacled to it.

The two women on the racks were dead. Their innards lay exposed, cut open, not in a butcher-like manner but in a more exact, precise way.

Ascham did a quick tally: there were eight women in total, all for the most part undressed. Some groaned, one sobbed, another whimpered while yet another screamed from her cage



above the icy bath—a scream that none would hear, save for Ascham, for they were several miles from any kind of habitation.

‘For heaven’s sake, do something, man,’ Ascham said to himself, snapping out of the horrified trance into which he had fallen.

The depraved villain responsible for this hellish scene was apparently not in residence, so Ascham leapt into action, dashed down some stone stairs leading into the chamber and hurriedly began unshackling and releasing the girls.

His hands fumbled with fear as he freed them from the terrible machines, and he turned constantly, checking to see that the villain had not returned to his lair while Ascham was in it.

As he released each girl, he shouted, ‘Run! Get out of here!’ The terrified girls needed no further urging and they scurried up the steps and out the door, despite their lack of clothing.

Ascham came to the two racks. He shook his head sadly and moved to the last girl, the one wearing the eyeless iron helmet.

His fingers quivering, Ascham unlatched the dreadful mask and removed it, revealing a beautiful young woman with dark eyes, olive skin and long brown hair.

The king’s lost girl.

‘Isabella?’ he asked.

‘*Si* . . . yes,’ she said through teary eyes.

‘Come on.’

He pulled her to her feet and, leading her by the hand, clambered up the stone steps and raced outside.

He emerged to find snow still falling and the sky darkening. He stepped onto the bridge. They had to get out of the forest before nightfall—

‘I love to know the inner workings of things,’ a voice said through the gloom, stopping him dead.

Ascham looked up and saw a lone figure standing at the far end of the bridge spanning the frozen pond. The women he had freed had not yet crossed the bridge for the figure was blocking it, their only avenue of escape.

Ascham froze, for he had heard those very same words earlier that day from those very same lips.

It was the Earl of Cumberland’s bastard son, the student named Timothy Higginbotham.

‘I see that you have found my private surgery, Mr Ascham,’ Higginbotham said evenly.

‘It is the lair of one with a warped mind,’ Ascham said.

‘I like to think of it as an inquiring mind,’ the lad said. ‘I wish to become the finest surgeon in England. Think of this as extra study on my part.’

Ascham sized up the lad as he spoke. He was tall and strong but certainly no match for a warrior like Sir Roderick. Ascham wondered how he had got the better of Roderick.

‘What sort of monster uses other human beings for his experiments?’ Ascham said, his eyes roving as he spoke. He saw that the lad had no discernible weapon on him.

‘My father introduced me to women like this when I was

young,' Higginbotham said. 'He said they would make a man out of me, but they laughed at me. They do not laugh anymore. They beg. And I quite like that. Well, I suppose you have got me, Mr Ascham. You have outwitted me. Come and escort me to the authorities.'

Ascham walked past the horrified and freezing young ladies, stepping further out onto the low wooden bridge, only twenty feet from Higginbotham.

Higginbotham watched as Ascham strode out into the centre of the bridge, and then suddenly the boy lunged to his left and threw a hidden lever.

The middle section of the bridge dropped away, as if on a hinge, plunging into the ice-covered pond.

The lad looked up, grinning, no doubt keen to see Ascham drop into the freezing waters—

—only there was Ascham, standing on the left-side beam of the bridge, having leapt onto it at the last instant, safe from the open trap-door beside him.

Higginbotham's grin faded.

'Sir Roderick drowned before he froze, boy,' Ascham said. 'There had to be some way you got the better of him, some way you managed to drop him into a body of water from which he could not escape—like a trap-door into an ice-covered pond.'

Higginbotham turned and ran.

Ascham gave chase, edging across the rest of the bridge via the side beam before dashing down the trail as the snow fell harder and the day grew darker.

He was approaching a bend at speed when suddenly the lad's fist came rushing at him from behind a tree. The blow hit home and Ascham's feet flew out from under him and he hit the ground with a great ungainly thump.

Dazed and in pain, he looked up to see the Earl's son standing over him. The lad had picked up a sizeable rock and held it in his hand like a weapon.

'I cannot allow you to leave this place alive,' Higginbotham said. 'Rest assured, though, that you will be found . . . a long way from here.'

Ascham scrambled on his rear-end along the dirt trail, away at the lad's boots as they advanced. He rolled away, desperate, before suddenly he stopped and looked back up at his assailant and said, 'Only one of us will be leaving this place, lad. And it will be me.'

With those words, Ascham lashed out with his right hand and broke the trip-rope crossing the path just behind him.

The swingblade came rushing down and just as the lad comprehended what Ascham had done—that he had got the better of him—the scythe-blade cut cleanly through his neck and the villain fell to the ground, headless, a bucket's worth of blood splashing onto the yellow-flecked dirt all around him.

Still lying on the path, Ascham could only stare in wonder, breathless wonder, at what he had just done.

'Goodness me . . .' he gasped. 'Goodness gracious me.'

## SEVEN

---

ONCE HE HAD RECOVERED from the shock of his encounter with the deranged Higginbotham, Ascham escorted the young women he had rescued to the safety of a local convent.

There, with the aid of the resident nuns, he attended to the poor women, ensuring they were clothed and fed. He only left when the last one was asleep, in safety, warmth and comfort.

While he did this, he sent word to the king that the Italian girl, Isabella, had been found, along with a summary of the acts of the Earl of Cumberland's bastard son, who had taken to kidnapping, torturing and performing surgery on prostitutes from Cambridge and its surrounding towns.

He also mentioned the manners of Sir Roderick's and Napier senior's deaths, and confirmed that Higginbotham had unfortunately been killed in the course of the investigation.

After Ascham was satisfied that the girls were in safe hands, he made his way to King's College to face King Henry, certain

that His Majesty, while pleased to know his favourite girl was safe, would want a comprehensive report of the day's events—the death of an Earl's son, even a bastard, was not a matter that was taken lightly.

It was thus late in the evening when Ascham arrived at King's College, exhausted and cold, to be informed that King Henry had only an hour previously hurried back to London to deal with some pressing matter of state.

And so Ascham found himself standing at the doors to King's College on a snowy winter's night, having confronted a monster on behalf of a king who was no longer there to hear his report. He wondered if the king even remembered the commission he had given Ascham that morning.

Ascham sighed and trudged back to his rooms.

The next morning, Princess Elizabeth, fresh from her lesson with Giles, challenged Ascham to a game of chess.

As Bess set up the pieces, she asked, 'Whatever did you get up to yesterday? You were gone all afternoon and evening.'

'I shall tell you about it some day,' Ascham said with a sad smile, 'but now is not the time. Come, let us play. It's your move.'

# MATTHEW REILLY

## THE TOURNAMENT

(Extract)



MACMILLAN  
Pan Macmillan Australia

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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The following is a work of fiction. While it contains characters and organisations that existed, their actions are the product of the author's imagination.

This novel also contains subject matter of an adult nature. The author recommends that it be read by mature readers.





It has long been accepted that the first international chess tournament was the event staged in London in 1851 and won by Adolf Anderssen of Germany. Sixteen men from all over Europe competed to determine the best player in the world. (Prior to that occasion, individual players would play in celebrated one-off matches.)

But a rumour persists in the chess world of a tournament that was held long before the London one, an event that took place in the 16th century in the ancient city of Constantinople, now Istanbul.

Sadly, no records of this event remain and until some kind of documentary proof of its staging arises, it is destined to remain the stuff of legend.

From: *A History of Chess*,  
Boris Ivanov (Advantage Press, London, 1972)

1603

## PROLOGUE

1603

MY QUEEN IS DEAD. MY FRIEND IS DEAD. The world is not the same. It is darker now.

How she carried herself so well in this chaotic world, I shall never know. In a life lived in a maelstrom of courtiers, bishops and commanders, she always got her way. This she achieved oftentimes through charm, many times through shrewdness, and on rare occasions through the more direct method of executing those who opposed her.

She always knew when people were watching. I have no doubt that when she sent some poor wretch to the Tower, it was as much for the spectacle of it as it was for the crime. Sometimes rulers must set grim examples.

It has been said by many that her extraordinary nimbleness of mind was the result of her education at the hands of the great schoolmaster Roger Ascham. Having

personally witnessed some of that education, I can attest that her schooling was of the highest order.

As the child of one of her household's staff and being of a similar age, I was the young princess's principal playmate. Later in life, I would assume the role of chief attendant to her bedchamber, but as a girl, by sheer virtue of proximity, I was allowed to partake in her lessons and thus received a level of instruction that I otherwise would never have known.

By the time Elizabeth was seven, she was fluent in French, capable at Spanish and could speak and read Latin and Greek. When William Grindal—supervised by the great Ascham—took over her education in 1544, she had added Italian and German to that list. While Grindal managed her day-to-day lessons, it was Ascham who always loomed in the background, the grand architect of her overall schooling. He stepped in when major subjects were taught: languages, mathematics, and history, both ancient and recent. A vocal advocate of the benefits of regular outdoor activity, he even taught her archery in the grounds of Hatfield.

He also, it must be said, taught the young princess Elizabeth chess.

I can still see her as a thirteen-year-old, bent over the board, the wild curls of her carrot-coloured hair framing an elfin freckled face, her eyes fixed in a deadly stare at the pieces, trying to deduce the best available move, while across from her, Ascham, utterly careless of the state of the game, watched her think.

As a child Bess lost more games than she won and some in the royal house at Hatfield thought it scandalous that Ascham should continually beat the daughter of the king, often crushingly.

On more than one occasion Bess would fall into my arms in tears after a game. ‘Oh, Gwinny, Gwinny! He beat me again!’

‘He is a cruel monster,’ I would say soothingly.

‘He is, isn’t he?’ But then she would regather herself. ‘I shall beat him one day. I most certainly will.’ And, of course, eventually she did.

For his part, the great teacher made no apologies for his brutal manner of play, not even when Bess’s governess wrote a letter to the king complaining about it.

When pressed by an emissary of the king about the matter, Ascham argued that unless one loses, one does not learn. His job, he said, was to ensure that the little princess learned. The king accepted this argument and the beatings at chess were allowed to continue. As an adult, Elizabeth would rarely lose at the game and on the far more dangerous chessboard of her life—at court in London and on the high seas against the House of Castile—she never lost.

Chess, Ascham claimed, taught many important lessons: to flatter one’s opponent, to lay traps and to see them laid, to be bold and to restrain one’s tendency to boldness, to appear naïve when in truth one is alert, to see the future many moves ahead and to discover that decisions *always* have consequences.

Ascham taught my young mistress well.

But now, to my great shock, I have just learned that Ascham's best lesson might have occurred not in our little schoolroom in Hertfordshire but far from England.

For last week, as her health faded and she lay confined to her bed, my mistress called me to her side and then ordered all the other attendants to leave the chamber.

'Gwinny,' she said. 'My dearest, dearest Gwinny. As the light dims and the end draws near, there is something I wish to tell you. It is a tale that I have kept to myself for nigh on sixty years.'

'Yes, Your Majesty.'

'Call me Bess, like you used to, when we were children.'

'But, of course. Please go on . . . Bess . . .' I had not called her that for half a century.

Her eyes opened but they stared at nothing. 'Many have wondered at the life I have led, Gwinny: a queen who never married or bore heirs; a woman with no military training who fended off Philip's armadas; a Protestant ruler who continually executed Ignatius of Loyola's Catholic missionaries and who on more than one occasion rebuffed proposals of marriage from the Russian tsar, Ivan.

'How I came to be such a woman—sexless and aloof with men, wary of courtiers and ambassadors, ruthless when dealing with enemies—was the result of many things, but above all of them rises one experience, one singular experience from my youth, a journey that I took in absolute secrecy. It was an event that I have not dared tell anyone about for fear that they would

think me a fabulist. It is this experience that I wish to impart to you now.'

For the next two days, my queen spoke and I listened.

She recounted to me an event early in her life when, during the autumn of 1546 at a time when Hertfordshire was gripped by a sudden bout of plague, Roger Ascham took her away from Hatfield House for a period of three months.

I remembered the time vividly and for several reasons.

First, the plague of 1546 was a particularly vicious one. Escaping outbursts of the dreaded disease was common for royal children—removing a young heir from the locale of an illness was the best way to avoid a severing of the royal line—and that year many of the residents of Hertfordshire fled the district very promptly.

Second, it was a particularly dangerous time for Elizabeth. Although the passage of the *Succession to the Crown Act of 1543* had seen her returned to the line of succession, in 1546, at the age of thirteen, she was still third in line behind her younger half-brother, Edward, then nine, and her older half-sister, Mary, then thirty. Yet Elizabeth's mere existence still posed a threat to both of their claims and she faced the very real possibility of being taken away in the dead of night and meeting a bloody end in the Tower—an end that could be conveniently blamed on the plague.

The third and last reason perhaps reflects more on me than on my mistress. I remember that particular time well because

when she went away to the east, Elizabeth chose not to take me with her.

Instead she took another young member of our household, a spritely older girl named Elsie Fitzgerald who was, I admit, far prettier and more worldly than I was.

I wept for days after they left. And I spent that autumn miserably alone at the home of relatives in Sussex, safe from the plague but missing the company of my friend.

When my mistress finished her tale, I was speechless with horror and shock.

In the years following that missing autumn of 1546, she had always maintained that her trip away had been an uneventful one, just another excursion to the Continent with Ascham. Although they had ostensibly gone east to see some chess tournament, upon her return Elizabeth had never talked about chess or any such championship, and her friendship with Elsie was never the same again.

After hearing her account of that time, I now know why.

Her trip had not been uneventful at all.

Ascham had not just taken her far to the east—beyond the borders of Christendom, into the very heart of the lands of the Moslems, the great city of Constantinople—he had also exposed the future queen to many dreadful perils as they became privileged witnesses to the most remarkable event never recorded in history.

When she finished telling me her tale, my queen lay back on her pillow and closed her eyes. ‘Long have I wondered if



I should tell anyone of those days, but now all of the other participants are dead and soon I will be, too. If it pleases you, Gwinny, write down my words, so that others might know how a queen like me is formed.’

And so I make this my task, my final task on her behalf, to commit to writing her exact words and recount to you, dear reader, the marvellous things—the terrible things, the terrifying things—she beheld over the course of that secret journey in 1546.

1546



## ROOK

IN MODERN CHESS, the rooks are presented as castles anchoring the four corners of the board, but it was not always this way.

In fact, the name 'rook' derives from *ruhk*, the Persian word for chariot. Pawns were footsoldiers, bishops were elephants, knights were mounted cavalry, and speeding along at the edges of the board were the swift and deadly chariots.

But as times changed and the game spread from Persia to Europe, chess pieces began to reflect the social hierarchy of medieval Western Europe. Thus the chariot became a castle. It was still a powerful piece, able to race down the board in a single move and control entire ranks, but the original reason for its fleetness of foot was lost.

Still, in its own way, the rook-as-castle remains an excellent example of chess pieces reflecting medieval society, for many a king of those times was judged by the strength and grandeur of the castles he kept.

From: *Chess in the Middle Ages*,  
Tel Jackson (W.M. Lawry & Co., London, 1992)



*I thank God that I am indeed endowed with such qualities  
that if I were turned out of the realm in my petticoat,  
I were able to live in any place in Christendom.*

**– QUEEN ELIZABETH I**



## ENGLAND, SEPTEMBER 1546

---

I WAS LIVING AT Hatfield House in Hertfordshire when the invitation arrived at court in London. It was delivered to Hatfield a day later, accompanied by a typically curt message from my father to Mr Ascham.

Truly, it was a wondrous thing.

It was printed on the most exquisite paper, crisp card with gold on its edges. Written on it in shining gold ink (and in English) was the following:

---

HIS EXALTED MAJESTY  
SULEIMAN THE MAGNIFICENT,  
CALIPH OF THE SONS  
AND DAUGHTERS OF ALLAH,  
SULTAN OF THE LANDS OF THE OTTOMANS,  
LORD OF THE REALMS OF THE ROMANS,  
THE PERSIANS AND THE ARABS,

HERO OF ALL THAT IS,  
PRIDE OF THE GLORIFIED KAABA  
AND ILLUMINED MEDINA, THE NOBLE  
JERUSALEM AND THE THRONE OF EGYPT,  
LORD AND RULER OF ALL THAT HE SURVEYS,  
BIDS YOU MOST WARM GREETING.

AS ESTEEMED KING OF ENGLAND,  
YOU ARE INVITED TO SEND  
YOUR FINEST PLAYER  
OF THE GAME KNOWN AS SHATRANJ,  
LUDOS SCACORUM, ESCHECS, SCHACHSPIEL,  
SCACCHI, SZACHY OR CHESS,  
TO COMPETE IN A TOURNAMENT  
TO DETERMINE THE CHAMPION  
OF THE KNOWN WORLD.

---

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I snorted. ‘For a great sultan who is lord and ruler of all that he surveys, his English is lamentably poor. He can’t even spell *England* properly.’

Still holding the note, Mr Ascham looked up at me. ‘Is that so? Tell me, Bess, do you speak his language? Any Arabic or Turkish-Arabic?’

‘You know that I do not.’

‘Then however lamentable his English may be, he still speaks your language while you cannot speak his. To me, this gives him a considerable advantage over you. Always pause before you criticise, and never unduly criticise one who

has made an effort at something you yourself have not even attempted.'

I frowned at my teacher, but it was impossible to hate him even when he chastised me so. He had a way about him. In the way he carried himself, in the way he spoke, in the way he chastised me: gentle but firm.

Mr Roger Ascham was thirty-one then, and in those days—long before he wrote *The Schoolmaster*, the work for which he became rightly famous after his death—he was already one of Cambridge's most celebrated instructors in classical Greek and Latin.

And yet, if I could have wished anything more for him, it would have been that he were more handsome. He was of average build and average height and in a world of rich young colts with broad shoulders, hard features and the imperiousness of inherited wealth, this made him seem small, soft, harmless. He had a big round nose, hangdog brown eyes and oversized ears that he kept covered with a mop of thick brown hair. I once overheard someone say that at a society ball, not a single one of the young ladies accepted his polite invitations to dance. I cried for him when I heard that. If those silly ladies only knew what they were missing.

But while I shed tears for him over it, he didn't seem to mind. He was more interested in the art of learning and he pursued that passion with a ferocious intensity. In fact, he displayed a deep intensity of concentration in almost *everything* he did, whether it was practising his beloved archery, debating

matters of state, reading a book or teaching me. To learn, as far as Roger Ascham was concerned, was the noblest of all endeavours and it was an *active* one.

He was, quite simply, the most curious man I had ever met.

Mr Ascham knew all manner of strange arcana, from theories about the ancient stone circles on the Salisbury Plain to the latest scientific methods in medicine and mathematics. And what he didn't know, he sought to find out. Whether it was the visiting Astronomer Royal, the king's surgeon or a travelling tinker selling a miracle cure, Mr Ascham would always probe them with pointed questions: asking the Astronomer Royal if Amerigo Vespucci's claims about using the moon and Mars to determine longitude were valid, asking my father's surgeon why certain plants caused certain kinds of rashes, or asking the tinker if he was aware that he was a quack.

Such was Mr Ascham's knowledge of so broad a range of subjects, it was not unknown during his time at Cambridge for professors in *other* disciplines to come to his rooms to confer with him on areas of their own supposed expertise.

For in a world where people claimed to find higher wisdom from God or the Bible, my dear tutor prayed at the twin altars of knowledge and logic. 'Everything,' he once told me, 'happens for a logical reason, from the downward flow of streams to illnesses to the actions of men. We just have to find that reason. The acquisition of knowledge, the sheer pleasure of finding things out, is the greatest gift in life.'



On one well-known occasion, after a local boy prone to foamy-mouthed fits died suddenly and the local abbot attributed the event to the boy's possession by Satan, Mr Ascham asked to see the lad's brain. Yes, his brain! The dead boy's skull was cracked open and, sure enough, Mr Ascham found a white foreign body the size of an apple lodged in his brain. Mr Ascham later told me in reference to that event, 'Before we blame the supernatural, Bess, we should exhaust all the natural explanations first.' The abbot didn't speak to him for a year after that. Not everyone shared Mr Ascham's pleasure for finding things out.

And then, in the prime of his university career, he had come to teach me, a mere child, the third in line to the throne. Even at that tender age, it had struck me that the remarkable Mr Roger Ascham was wildly overqualified to be tutoring a girl of thirteen, even if she was a princess. I wondered why. What did he see in me that no-one else did?

In any case, this exchange between us about the Moslem sultan's use of English was not unusual. I was wrong and he was right—again.

We turned our attention back to the invitation. It added that the chess tournament would take place in one month's time in the Sultan's capital, the ancient city of Constantinople.

Accompanying the invitation was a note from my father, addressed to Mr Ascham.

*Ascham,*

*I understand that your associate, Mr Gilbert Giles, was the finest player at Cambridge. Would you please inquire as to whether this is still the case and if it be so, dispatch him to me at once. No less than the reputation of the corpus christianum requires our best man at this tournament.*

*Henry, R*

*By the way, I appreciated your efforts in the matter of Cumberland's son. They did not go unnoticed.*

# **THE TOURNAMENT**

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Matthew Reilly is the internationally bestselling author of the *Scarecrow* novels, *Ice Station*, *Area 7*, *Scarecrow*, *Scarecrow and the Army of Thieves* and the novella *Hell Island*; the *Jack West* novels, *Seven Ancient Wonders*, *The Six Sacred Stones* and *The Five Greatest Warriors*; and standalone novels *Contest*, *Temple* and *Hover Car Racer*. His books are published in over 20 languages, with worldwide sales of over 4 million copies.

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*THE TOURNAMENT*

**MORE BESTSELLING TITLES FROM  
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# Contest

The New York State Library. A brooding labyrinth of towering bookcases, narrow aisles and spiralling staircases. For Doctor Stephen Swain and his daughter, Holly, it is the site of a nightmare. For one night, this historic building is to be the venue for a contest. A contest in which Swain is to compete – whether he likes it or not.

The rules are simple. Seven contestants will enter. Only one will leave. With his daughter in his arms, Swain is plunged into a terrifying fight for survival. He can choose to run, to hide or to fight – but if he wants to live, he has to win. For in this contest, unless you leave as the victor, you do not leave at all.

# Temple

Deep in the jungle of Peru, the hunt for a legendary Incan idol is under way – an idol that in the present day could be used as the basis for a terrifying new weapon.

Guiding a US Army team is Professor William Race, a young linguist who must translate an ancient manuscript which contains the location of the idol.

What they find is an ominous stone temple, sealed tight. They open it – and soon discover that some doors are meant to remain unopened . . .



# Hover Car Racer

Meet Jason Chaser, hover car racer. He's won himself a place at the International Race School, where racers either make it on to the Pro Circuit – or they crash and burn.

But he's an outsider. He's younger than the other racers. His car, the *Argonaut*, is older. And on top of that, someone doesn't want him to succeed at the School and will do anything to stop him.

Now Jason Chaser isn't just fighting for his place on the starting line, he's racing for his life.

# Ice Station

## A Scarecrow Novel

### THE DISCOVERY OF A LIFETIME

At a remote ice station in Antarctica, a team of US scientists has found something buried deep within a 100-million-year-old layer of ice. Something made of *metal*.

### THE LAW OF SURVIVAL

In a land without boundaries, there are no rules. Every country would kill for this prize.

### A LEADER OF MEN

A team of crack United States marines is sent to the station to secure the discovery. Their leader – Lieutenant Shane Schofield, call-sign: SCARECROW. They are a tight unit, tough and fearless. They would follow their leader into hell. They just did . . .

# Area 7

## A Scarecrow Novel

### A HIDDEN LOCATION

It is America's most secret base, a remote installation known only as Area 7.

### THE VISITOR

And today it has a guest: the President of the United States. But he's going to get more than he bargained for on this trip. Because hostile forces are waiting inside . . .

### HIS SAVIOUR

Among the President's helicopter crew, however, is a young marine. His name is Schofield. Call-sign: SCARECROW. Rumour has it, he's a good man in a storm. Judging by what the President has just walked into, he'd better be . . .

# Scarecrow

## A Scarecrow Novel

### IT IS THE GREATEST BOUNTY HUNT IN HISTORY

There are 15 targets. And they must all be dead by 12 noon, today. The price on their heads: \$20 million each.

### ONE HERO

Among the names on the target list, one stands out. An enigmatic marine named Shane Schofield, call-sign: SCARECROW.

### NO LIMITS

And so Schofield is hunted by gangs of international bounty hunters, including the ‘Black Knight’, a ruthless hunter who seems intent on eliminating only him.

He led his men into hell in *Ice Station*. He protected the President against all odds in *Area 7*. This time it’s different. Because this time SCARECROW is the target.

# Hell Island

## A Scarecrow Novella

It is an island that doesn't appear on any maps. A secret place, where classified experiments have been carried out. Experiments that have gone terribly wrong . . .

Four crack special forces units are dropped in. One of them is a team of marines, led by Captain Shane Schofield, call-sign: SCARECROW.

Nothing can prepare Schofield's team for what they find there. You could say they've just entered hell. But that would be wrong. This is much, much worse.

# Scarecrow and the Army of Thieves

A Scarecrow Novel

## THE SECRET BASE

It is a former Soviet base known only as Dragon Island. It houses a weapon of terrible destructive force . . . that has just been re-activated.

## A RENEGADE ARMY

The island has been seized by a brutal terrorist force calling itself the Army of Thieves, and the fate of the world hangs in the balance.

## ONE SMALL TEAM

There is an equipment-testing team up in the Arctic. It does not have the weaponry or strength to attack a fortified island held by a vicious army. But it is led by a marine captain named Schofield, call-sign: SCARECROW. And Scarecrow will lead the team in anyway, because someone has to.

# **Seven Ancient Wonders**

**A Jack West Jr Novel**

## **AN ANCIENT SECRET**

Two thousand years ago, it was hidden within the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Now, in the present day, it must be found again . . .

## **ONE HERO TO FIND IT**

Captain Jack West Jr – part soldier, part scholar, all hero. The odds are stacked against him and his loyal team: nine brave companions taking on the most powerful countries on earth.

## **AN ADVENTURE LIKE NO OTHER**

From the pyramids of Egypt to the swamps of Sudan, to the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and the boulevards of Paris: the desperate race begins.

## **FOR A PRIZE WITHOUT EQUAL**

The greatest prize of all: the power to end the world or rule it.

**AND SO THE GREAT ADVENTURE BEGINS**

# **The Six Sacred Stones**

**A Jack West Jr Novel**

## **THE END OF THE WORLD IS COMING**

A mysterious ceremony at a hidden location has unlocked a catastrophic countdown to world annihilation.

## **ONE HERO**

Now, to save the world, supersoldier Jack West Jr and his loyal team of adventurers must find and rebuild a legendary device known as ‘the Machine’.

## **SIX FABLED STONES**

The only clues to locating this Machine are held within the fabled Six Sacred Stones, which are scattered around the globe. But Jack and his team are not the only ones seeking the Stones, there are other players involved who don’t want to see the world saved at all . . .



# **The Five Greatest Warriors**

**A Jack West Jr Novel**

## **THE END OF THE WORLD HAS ARRIVED**

Jack West Jr and his loyal team have been separated, their mission is in ruins, and Jack was last seen plummeting down a fathomless abyss.

## **OCEANS WILL RISE, CITIES WILL FALL**

After surviving his deadly fall, Jack must now race against his enemies to locate and set in place the remaining pieces of ‘the Machine’ before the coming Armageddon.

## **WHO ARE THE FIVE WARRIORS?**

Jack will learn of the individuals who throughout history have been most intimately connected to his quest, but not before he and his friends find out exactly what the end of the world looks like . . .

This is a work of fiction. Characters, institutions and organisations mentioned in this novel are either the product of the author's imagination or, if real, used fictitiously without any intent to describe actual conduct.

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