Nicole Kimball, "Entry on: Hover Car Racer by Matthew Reilly", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/353. Entry version as of October 10, 2026.

Matthew Reilly

Hover Car Racer

Australia

TAGS: Aeneid Apollodorus Apollonius of Rhodes Argonauts Arion / Areion (Horse) Clashing Rocks / Symplegades / Cyanean Rocks Dido Golden Fleece Jason Labyrinth Virgil

We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Hover Car Racer
Country of the First Edition	Australia
Country/countries of popularity	Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Details	Mathew Reilly, *Hover Car Racer*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia Pty Ltd, 2004, 428 pp.
ISBN	9781405036214
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Novels, Science fiction
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Nicole Kimball, University of Newcastle, nicole.kimball@uon.edu.au
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Creators

Matthew Reilly , b. 1974
(Author)

Matthew John Reilly was born in 1974 in Sydney, Australia, the second son of Ray and Denise Reilly. His father was an employee of the Department of Corrective Services and his mother a maths teacher. He grew up in Willoughby, on the lower North Shore of Sydney. After graduating from St Aloysius' College, Australia's highest performing Catholic High School, in 1992, Reilly undertook an undergraduate Law degree at the University of New South Wales. He graduated in 1997, 31st out of 250 students.

At the age of 19, Reilly wrote his first book, *Contest*. Having been rejected by every major publisher in Australia, he self-published 1000 copies and sold them to several bookshops around Sydney stating, "I knew that publishers checked out bookshops so that's where I needed my book to be." In early 1997, Pan Macmillan offered Reilly a two-book deal, the first of which, *Ice Station*, was released in 1998. An instant hit in Australia, *Ice Station*, gained Reilly a foothold with major publishers in the UK, US and Germany. He has since produced over a dozen novels and novellas of which 7.5 million copies have been sold, in over 20 different languages. Four of these have been the biggest-selling fiction titles in Australia for the year of their release including: *The Tournament* (2013); *Scarecrow and the Army of Thieves* (2011); *The Five Greatest Warriors* (2009); and *Seven Ancient Wonders* (2005).

A self-confessed nerd, Reilly is infamous for his collection of movie paraphernalia. He owns and drives a DeLorean DMC-12, the car made famous by the *Back to the Future* movie franchise, and has a life-sized Han Solo in carbonite hanging from his office wall.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: June 25, 2018).

Facebook profile (accessed: June 25, 2018).

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Additional information

Adaptations

Hover Car Racer was initially released as an online eight-part serial available for free though Matthew Reilly's website as an attempt to draw more young adults into reading. He eventually sold the publishing rights to Pan Macmillan for AU$1.

The hard-copy text was published as one single book for the Australian release and as three mini-books in the US: *Crash Course* (2005), *Full Throttle* (2006), and *Photo Finish* (2007).

Walt Disney Pictures bought the movie rights to *Hover Car Racer* and several screenplays were written, but the film was not made.

Summary

Hover Car Racer is set in a futuristic Earth where hover technology has revolutionised the transport industry. It follows the story of Jason Chaser, a fourteen-year-old hover car racer, along with his autistic younger brother The Bug, and documents their year at the International Race School over eight parts.

During a regional competition, Jason impresses a recruiter for the International Race School, despite driving with a damaged car. He is offered a place and accepts, forming a team with his brother as navigator and Sally McDuff, a young Scottish Mech Chief. During the first races of the year Jason and his team are outshone and bullied by the other racers – particularly Barnaby Becker, a bully from Jason's home town, and Prince Xavier Xonora, the best racer at the school. Jason's team also suffers constant equipment failures – faulty mag drives, substandard coolant, and mechanical failures. Despite this, his team, though a combination of hard work and natural talent, quickly rise in the rankings.

At the midpoint of the year an open event occurs at the school, allowing the students to race in front of professional teams. Jason is introduced to Umberto Lombardi, the owner of one of the few privately owned teams. Although Jason comes second to Xavier in the event his hard work and impressive showing causes Lombardi to offer him a place in a professional level race, the Italian Run. Jason and his team head to Italy, where Jason meets Dido. He begins a relationship with her, although it is limited due to his age and lack of experience. During the race, Jason is nearly killed in a horrific crash and his

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confidence takes a major hit. With the aid of the Bug and Sally Jason regains his confidence, but not before several racers take advantage of his doubts. Jason discovers that Dido has been passing information about his doubts and strategies to Xavier and he breaks of the relationship, after which Sally discovers that Dido is Xavier's cousin.

At the end of the year Jason wins himself one of four spots in the New York Masters Challenger Race, an amateur event that allows the winner a spot in the New York Masters, one of four Grand Slam races. Jason wins the race, having recognised Xavier's habit of pre-emptive celebration and using this weakness against him. Xavier approaches him after the race, claiming that he is the superior racer in every respect and thus should have won the race. Jason agrees with Xavier in all but one respect, explaining that while Xavier has more talent Jason works harder to achieve his goals.

Having gained entry into the New York Masters, Jason competes in a series of four races. At one point, feeling he is going to be eliminated from the competition Jason accepts defeat, knowing that he has achieved his goal of competing at the professional level and is all but guaranteed a place on a professional team. A crash eliminates several other competitors and Jason qualifies for the final race – a Quest Race in which competitors race to a marked point to retrieve a trophy before racing back to the finish line. Jason uses a soft pile of wool spray painted gold – a Golden Fleece – as his trophy. At the last moment, while he is in first place, Jason's tail fin explodes and Jason crash metres from the finish line. Not willing to give up, Jason use his safety ejector seat to fire himself, his transponder equipped steering wheel and his Fleece across the finish line, winning the race. In doing so Jason secures himself a full-time racing position with Team Lombardi.

Analysis

Matthew Reilly maintains that the inspiration for *Hover Car Racer* is based in love of sports. Having wondered what it would be like to have a sport that was "totally wild", Reilly came up with the idea of hover cars, essentially rocket cars capable of going up to 800 km/h. He then built a world of competitive hover car racing using key characteristics of existing sports, particularly those that have major international competitions. In the interview printed in the back of his book, Reilly admits that there is significant reference to Classical Literature. He classes the presence of references to Apollonius of Rhodes' *Voyage of*

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the Argo and Virgil's *Aeneid* as part of a series of overt "in-jokes" included in the story. Reilly attaches no significance to his choice to include references to the ancient world in his book, although he does say that he believes the *Voyage of the Argo* to be one of the *best action-adventure stories you'll ever read*.

The principal aspects of Apollonius' *Voyage of the Argo* that are replicated within *Hover Car Racer* are the appropriation of the hero Jason and his quest for the Golden Fleece. In Apollonius' work, Jason is charged with obtaining the Golden Fleece to regain his throne. Having left Iolcus with his crew the Argonauts, Jason is subject to a number of obstacles that he must overcome before he can obtain the Fleece and reach his goal. Much like the original Jason, Jason Chaser's quest for the Fleece comes at the end of a series of obstacles, both races to be won and people to overcome, and is merely a means to end. For Jason Chaser, the quest ends not with a throne, but a contract to a professional racing team.

While Reilly does prefer to use his own style of obstacle for Jason to overcome, he does include one from the original story. The *Symplegades*, or Clashing Rocks, appear twice within *Hover Car Racer*. The first occasion is very literal, ice bergs that are mechanically moved to crash against each other when approached during a race. These Crashing Bergs, much like to Clashing Rocks, must be approached at incredibly high speed in order to be passed safely. The same principle is applied to an obstacle that appears in a much later race. The Meat Grinder operates in a very similar way the Crashing Bergs in that speed must be used to pass through safely, but the interpretation is much less literal.

Further reference to the ancient world is made through the character of Dido, a young girl who attempts to seduce Jason to spy on him for her cousin, and Jason's chief rival, Prince Xavier of Monesi. The Dido of the *Aeneid* is placed in Aeneas' path by Hera in an attempt to stop the founding of Rome. Reilly's Dido fulfils a very similar purpose. She is placed in Jason Chaser's path by her cousin, who feels that Jason is a threat. Dido seduces Jason, distracting him from his goal and keeping him from properly preparing for races. Dido's purpose in *Hover Car Racer* is similar to that of the Dido written about by Virgil. Aeneas was lead to the Dido of Carthage by Hera in an attempt to stop him founding Rome and is fairly obvious in her purpose. The Dido of Hover Car Racer is much more subtle, and is heavily influenced by the trope of the *femme fatale*, particularly as it appears in popular spy

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	film and literature (e.g. the James Bond franchise), yet still her purpose is distraction. Reilly states that he wanted his version of Dido to be similar in purpose to that of Virgil's, a love interest who represents a beautiful trap and attempts to prevent the realization of the hero's goal.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aeneid Apollodorus Apollonius of Rhodes Argonauts Arion / Areion (Horse) Clashing Rocks / Symplegades / Cyanean Rocks Dido Golden Fleece Jason Labyrinth Virgil
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Disability Family Future Identity Race Social class Step-parents Violence

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