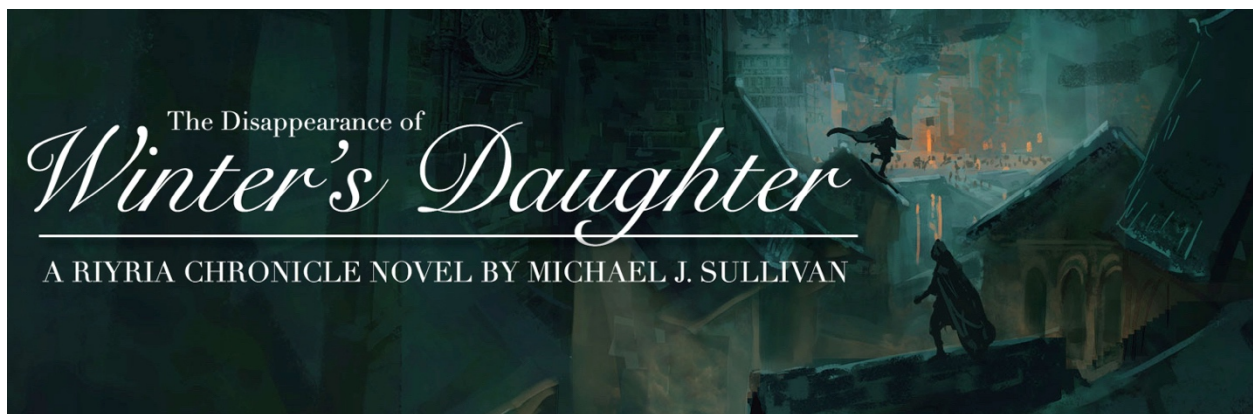


BETA INSTRUCTIONS

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF WINTER'S DAUGHTER



MICHAEL J. SULLIVAN

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WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your interest in being a beta reader for *The Disappearance of Winter's Daughter: Book Four of the Riyria Chronicle Series*. If you are reading this, you've already expressed some interest in beta reading, and you want to learn more about what will be expected of you. So, check out this file, determine if it is for you, and if you still want to participate, fill out this survey. If the past can be used as an indicator for the future, there will be more beta readers vying for spots then we'll be able to accommodate. Please don't take it personally if you are not selected. Past beta programs have had as many as 500 people vying for just 10 – 12 spots.

Oh, and I guess I should introduce myself. My name is Robin, and I'm Michael's wife. I'm not a writer (nor do I don't play one on television), but I am a pretty darn good structural editor and help Michael take a manuscript from the first draft stage to its final release. My roles include:

- **Alpha reader** – being the first person to see the book. In general, most of the “big problems” are found at this stage. Michael then fixes those and the book comes back to me.
- **Fine-tuning structural edits** – a re-read of the book after the alpha changes are incorporated will generally uncover minor plot holes and issues in character motivation that may need minor tweaking. I've been working with Michael for so long that I can channel his writing style and do the necessary changes. While I may not get everything right, the issues raised will generally point Michael to a better fix and so the manuscript will go back to him after this.

- **Line & Copy Editor** – just before beta, I go through the whole manuscript and “clean up the prose.” This means getting rid of overused words, excess words, substituting better word choices, rewriting awkward sentences. At this time, I also do some copy editing: fixing commas, dialog punctuation, fixing typos and various other grammar mistakes. This is NOT a professional copy edit; it’s a first pass. As such, I guarantee you’ll find lots of errors in the manuscript you receive. While it’s your responsibility to point out grammar errors, if you see something, please say something. Typos hang around even after many passes with multiple eyes, so if we can get them out, we want to do so. Anyway, after I’ve done these three steps (structural, line, and copy editing) Michael will read through the book and will revert some of the changes I made that he didn’t like (rare), or revise them (more common), or accept them as is (most common). In some instances, we’ll disagree with a particular approach, and it at these times that we look to the beta readers to break the tie. More on this in a minute.
- **Beta Administrator** – while in the beta, you’ll almost always be interfacing with me. Sometimes you’ll pose a question, and I’ll know the answer and shoot it back, other times I’ll send Michael the question and I’ll copy/paste back his reply. I’ll also take all the feedback from the whole group and distill it down for Michael so he can decide what changes need to be made. While you are doing the beta, the same manuscript you received is going to Michael’s agent and editor. Their feedback will be combined with yours and Michael will adjust the manuscript based on all those sources.

BETA READING OBJECTIVES

While I understand that many people likely signed up to be a beta reader because they want to read the book before everyone else, it should be noted that beta reading is much different than receiving an Advanced Reading Copy (ARC). In general, ARC's are given to reviewers in order to generate pre-release "buzz" about the book on blogger or publishing industry sites.

Beta reading's objective is to improve the book so that when it's released it's the highest possible quality. A beta reader should be a "critical reader" who can articulate what they like and don't like about the book. A beta reader who "loves" everything does provide important validation, but that kind of feedback will result in no changes made to the book. On the other hand, if you are afraid you aren't contributing enough feedback so you start "nit-picking" just so you'll provide "some feedback," that could be harmful. It may mean result in something being changed that was just fine the way it was. So you need to be conscious of that as well.

Lastly, I should note that sometimes we've had beta readers that hate everything about the book. Their feedback is all the characters are terrible, the plot is boring, and they see no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Generally, this is simply a matter of "this book isn't a good fit for me." It's doubtful that after 30 novels, and widespread acclaim that a book will get to the beta stage that is wholly unworthy of release. Michael has written these kinds of books before, but they've been killed by us long before other eyes see it. So, the mere fact that you are even receiving a beta copy means the book has passed our initial "sniff test" and will be released. If it turns out that the book isn't for you, there is no need to torture yourself with completing the beta process and providing feedback that will never be incorporated. In other words the book **will not** be going back to the drawing board and changes that require starting with all new characters just isn't going to happen ;-). So, if

you find yourself in this situation, simply ask to be dropped from the beta, and we'll fill your spot with someone from the waiting list.

I mentioned this early, but it bears repeating. Beta reading is not a substitute for copy editors. In other words, we are not looking to you to find and fix grammatical errors and typos. We have several highly skilled copy editors lined up who will be going over the book and they are both highly paid and professional. In fact, they are the same editors that have worked on multiple books created by Michael in the past, and are the same ones who are employed by Del Rey when he releases a book through traditional publishing. Do we like it if you point out a typo? Absolutely. No matter how many eyes go over a book things are still missed. But it's not your primary goal. So think about any work done on this as a bonus. If you see and report it, great!! If you don't, you're not falling down on the job.

So if you're not here to generate buzz or find typos, what are you supposed to do? Well, think of yourself as a "focus group." You are giving us critical feedback before the book has a wide release so that we can address things that were confusing or parts of the book that seemed to drag. You are also a sounding board. Your feedback lets us know when we were hitting on all cylinders, where we fell down, and sometimes where we had a major screw up. Beta reader feedback has resulted in character's lives being saved, a new introduction written, and even a slightly different ending. It's also resulted in hundreds of little tweaks that end up making the book much better than it would be if it were just Michael and I working on it. So you're here to take a good book and make it better by providing us feedback on what worked and what didn't.

TIMING

Unfortunately, it's difficult to predict the exact timing of when the beta will be ready. I'm giving you the best timeline that I can at this moment, but you'll certainly have the chance to "back out" if it turns out the date changes and you aren't available when the beta officially starts. In general we like to provide beta readers 6 weeks but we have had to run a beta in as little as 4 weeks when schedules needed to be compressed. So let's look at the timeline at the present time.

- May 18, 2017 – Michael should finish the first pass draft
- May 25, 2017 – Book will go to Robin for alpha reading
- May 28, 2017 – Robin provides bullet point adjustments based on first reading
- June 4, 2017 - Michael incorporates alpha reader feedback
- June 25, 2017 – Copy & line edited version completed
- July 2, 2017 – Michael re-reads and makes tweaks as necessary
- **July 11, 2017 – Beta reading begins**
- **August 27, 2017 – Beta reading ends**
- September 4, 2017 – Beta feedback incorporated – copy editing begins
- October 4, 2017 – copy editing ends
- October 15, 2017 – final re-read and minor copy editing
- October 16, 2017 – Audio book recording begins
- October 23, 2017 – ebook and print layout begins
- October 30, 2017 – proofing of pre-press files
- November 30, 2017 – books printed and shipped

- December 5, 2017 – on sale date, pre-orders shipped

So at this moment if you do want to participate in the beta you'll get the file on **July** and need to have the read finished, and the feedback provided by **August 27th**. If you don't think you can finish the beta in that time frame, please don't sign up.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF YOU?

The beta program has been developed over several novels and it's the envy of many in the industry. As I said before, it's not, just reading and reporting "Yeah I liked it" or "No, I didn't. The process is quite extensive and you'll be expected to...

- **Read the full manuscript** (26 chapters consisting of about 110,000 words. I will provide the book for you in any of the following formats: .mobi (Kindle), .epub (Kobo and ibooks), .pdf (computers and printing out), & .doc (for those who want to edit or provide feedback in the document itself). You can request as many formats as you wish.
- **Fill out surveys as you read** (more on that in a minute). It's important to answer the survey as close to the reading session as possible while your opinions are still fresh in your mind.
 - The beta group is divided into two sub-groups:
 - **Chapter readers** will read the book one chapter at a time. They must stop after each one and fill out a survey before reading the next chapter. This provides very granular feedback (and generally better insight), but it can be time consuming for the beta reader.

It also sets up an “unnatural reading” rhythm which can be frustrating for some.

- **Session readers** will read the book in the same way they would read when not in a beta program. In other words, they may read several chapters at a time on one day, and only one (or a portion of one) at other times. We’ve even had people read the entire book in a single session! When you are a session reader, you fill out only one survey per session. So your survey could, for example, cover chapter 4 to chapter 8. When answering a question such as: “What did you like” you might comment on events in chapter 4 and chapter 6 and say nothing about chapter 5, 7, and 8. Session reading generally doesn’t provide as detailed feedback as chapter reading, but it can be faster and easier for the reader as they will fill out fewer surveys.

With regards to which group you’ll be in, the choice is yours. You can even switch between groups if the one you started with doesn’t seem to be working for you.

As for the surveys, both groups gather the same data, the format is just slightly different. For instance, for chapter readers there is a single field to designate the chapter, whereas the session reader will have two fields, one to indicate what chapter they started with and one for what chapter they ended at.

- **Rate each chapter on a scale of 1 – 5 on four key metrics:** overall enjoyment, characters, plot, and pacing. See the chart below for the rating guide to help you determine what number to use. All beta members (regardless of what group you are in) **MUST** provide the rating for every chapter. In the case of a session reader, they ratings may look like this for a session encompassing chapters 4 – 6.

4: 5 4 3 4
5: 3 3 3 3
6: 5 5 5 5

- **Answer questions about your chapter or session.** The survey will ask for your feedback on things like:
 - What did you like?
 - What didn't you like?
 - Were you confused by anything?
 - Were you surprised by anything?
 - Was there something you didn't see that you wished had happened?
 - What do you think will happen in the future?

Not everyone fills out something for each of these questions. For instance if there wasn't anything you didn't like or were confused by, you can leave them blank.

- **Report Typos** – as mentioned you don't have to do this, but the survey does have a field where you can type in things you find. Some beta readers also upload a doc file where they have marked typos found. But as I said this is a *bonus* and not a *requirement* of being a beta reader.

- **Complete a final survey after finishing the book.** In addition to your session surveys (or chapter surveys if you are in the chapter reading group), you'll be required to fill out one last survey which covers the novel as a whole. This one is very important as it steps back from the minutia and lets us know what you thought of the book in general. Bad marks on the final survey may indicate that we have some larger issues that we weren't aware of and it'll be important for us to address them right away.

RATING GUIDELINE

It's important that we try to "standardize" the 1-5 ratings. I know people vary widely in how and when they will rank something a 5 or a 1 so I've developed the following guide which should help. I can't over emphasize how important these ratings are. For instance, during the beta of *Age of Myth* the ratings nose-dived at Chapter 10, but the fix was pretty simple. We split that chapter in half and moved part of it to chapter 5 and kept the rest back at chapter 10. A second beta, proved this new method corrected the problem of waiting too long to introduce a key aspect of the book.

Rating	Overall	Characters	Plot	Pacing
5 - Excellent	I really enjoyed myself.	I found the characters interesting.	I can't wait to see what happens next.	I couldn't turn the pages fast enough.
4 - Good	Better than many books I read.	General well written, but I do have some issues.	There are some areas that may be a concern.	Generally enjoyed, but there were places I skimmed or lost interest.
3 - Average	About the same as other books I've read.	I neither am pleased nor disappointed in the characters.	While not necessarily bad, I think there is room for improvement.	I have neither good or bad things to say about the pace.
2 - Disappointing	Not as good as other books I've read.	Many characters are poorly written, but there are some worth reading about.	I was either confused or have serious issues with where the story is going.	I had to force myself to power through
1 - Terrible	There was little or nothing I enjoyed.	I hope they all die a miserable death.	Without major rewriting, the book would be a major disappointment.	If I weren't in the beta I would have stoped reading.

COMMUNICATING WITH ME

If you have any questions at any time, send an email to riyria.beta@gmail.com. Examples are having problems accessing the feedback surveys, needing to drop from the beta, needing extended time, or if you are confused and want something cleared up before reading on. I **will** be checking the email every day during the beta, but I check it less frequently when the beta isn't running. I may not be able to get back to you right away; it'll depend on how many messages come in.

COMMUNICATING WITH BETA READERS

As mentioned above in the what's expected section, you're required to do the reading and answer the surveys, but there is an **optional** aspect to the beta read that you can participate in if you want. There is a secret and private group on Goodreads and all beta members will be invited to it. From there, you can interact with other beta readers and compare notes or ask and answer each other's questions. I will also be in this forum and, from time to time, I'll be posting questions that will help "break the tie" when Michael and I disagreed on a particular point.

Please note, participation in the group **doesn't replace** filling out the surveys, it is an "in addition to" activity.

If you don't have a Goodreads account, and you want to use this aspect of the beta, just sign up at the site. It's free! I should note that because the group is private (only people who are invited can get in) and because it is secret none of what you post will be seen outside of the members of that group. That way you can speak freely and not worry about your Goodreads friends and followers seeing spoilers or other information about the beta.

COMMUNICATING WITH OTHERS

We love seeing people enthusiastic about being a beta reader. After all, you are in a very select club as we'll have only 20 or so beta readers and hundreds of applicants. So, yes, you can certainly post on social media (Twitter, Facebook, Goodreads, etc.) that you are in the beta reading program. And if you happen to be on Goodreads feel free to add the book to your shelf and comment on it as you would any other book. The only thing we ask is that you **do not post spoilers** or other “inside” information that would ruin the book for future readers. So while you can say something like, “I’m shocked about what happened in Chapter 3 of *The Disappearance of Winter’s Daughter*.” You can’t expand on it and say things, “I’m shocked that Royce died in Chapter 3 of *The Disappearance of Winter’s Daughter*.”

Also, when you’re done with the read, it would be helpful if you could provide a Goodread’s rating or review. Please indicate that you were a beta reader, and your comments are based off a book that might change from release. We welcome all comments in reviews, good, bad, or indifferent all we ever ask is that you provide honest comments.

ELECTRONIC FILES

Some people like to get a word file, so they can use track changes and insert comments or point out typos. Sometimes, people print out the manuscript, write in the margins, and scan the pages. Doing either of those are great, and have been **VERY** helpful in the past, but of course it’s not required—appreciated, yes, but not required. Each survey provides a field where you can upload

such files. If they are too big to upload, then email them to me as an attachment at riyria.beta@gmail.com.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE BETA?

I will compile all the feedback and give it to Michael, he may have some questions for you to better understand particular points, and I'll pass those through the riyria.beta@gmail.com account. Once we have the final manuscript, we'll provide you with the official ebook (in .pdf, .mobi, and .epub formats). We are going to try to broker a deal with Audible Studios (who is producing the audiobook) and if we can get audible download codes a decent rate, we'll provide those as well.

I should also mention that in the final survey there is a spot where you can indicate if you want to be publicly listed in the acknowledgements, and if so what name to use. If you want to see your name in print, and show off to all your reader friends how cool you are, then by all means take advantage of that!

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Now that you know what the beta will entail, you need to decide whether you want to participate. You can opt in or opt out by answering the pre-beta survey. Only people who fill out that survey will get the manuscript. The reason for this is I must have you:

- Attest that you'll not share the file with others.
- Attest that you won't post spoilers.
- Tell me your preferred file formats

- Determine which group you want to be in

Once I have the final version from Michael's re-read (he has three chapters left as I type this), I'll make the ebook formats and email them your way. Then you can start reading, filling out surveys, and hopefully enjoy the book.

QUESTIONS

Well, that's it. I hope you found this beta read primer helpful, and if you have any questions, send an email to riyria.beta@gmail.com. Once again, I want to thank you for considering to be a beta read, and I hope those picked will find it to be a fun and rewarding activity.