



FORTUNE
FAVORS THE
THIEF

VOLUME TWO OF THE
RIYRIA REVELATIONS

RISE OF EMPIRE



MICHAEL J. SULLIVAN

**A PUPPET IS CROWNED. THE TRUE HEIR REMAINS HIDDEN.
A ROGUE'S SECRET COULD CHANGE EVERYTHING.**

War has come to Melengar and once more Royce and Hadrian are hired to make a desperate gamble and form an alliance with the Nationalists whom are fighting the Imperialists in the south. As the power of the Nyphron Empire grows, so does Royce's suspicion that the wizard Esrahaddon is using the thieves as pawns in his own grab for power. To find the truth, he must unravel the secret of Hadrian's past--what he discovers may end their friendship and break Riyria in two.

“Mr. Sullivan brings back a type of story that's had very little presence in this genre in the last twenty years or more. I, for one, wish him much success and hope his career is a long one. Making swashbuckling tales popular again creates more excellent choices for fantasy readers.”
– Greg Hersom, Fantasy Literature

“Michael J. Sullivan is not a surprise for me anymore, but an author that already established his place within the fantasy genre. "Nyphron Rising [Book 1 of Rise of Empire]", like Sullivan's previous novels, offers an adventurous tale and a captivating story, returning to the roots and values of the classical fantasy.” – Dark Wolf's Fantasy Reviews

“The second half of the book, is amazing and probably constitutes Mr. Sullivan's strongest work yet...Nyphron Rising [Book 1 of Rise of Empire], is another capable installment in a fantastic series. Fans of the Riyria Revelations will not be disappointed.” – Speculative Fiction Junkie

“Nyphron Rising[Book 1 of Rise of Empire] is a great story – a fun plot with new characters and plenty of action! Sullivan's writing style is easy to follow and the story is complex enough to be exciting, but not so complex that you have to keep backtracking to remember who's who and what happened when.” – John Hulet, Fantasy Literature

"Sullivan ramps up all his long-arc plot threads, gives us more small wavering glimpses at the future, and tells us another rip-roaring yarn worthy of even the best fireside storyteller. A Triumph! I've said it before and I'll say it again. If you haven't been reading Michael J. Sullivan's Riyria Revelations series, you are missing out. Go grab them today here and set out on a voyage of adventure and intrigue.” – Iceberg Ink Fantasy Review

RISE OF EMPIRE

*Volume Two of the
Riyria Revelations*

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WORKS BY MICHAEL SULLIVAN

Original Riyria Revelations
The Crown Conspiracy (2008)
Avempartha (2009)
Nyphron Rising (2009)
The Emerald Storm (2010)
Wintertide (2010)
Percepliquis (2012)

Orbit Riyria Revelations (Omnibus Versions)

Theft of Swords (2011)
Rise of Empire (2011)
Heir of Novron (2011)

Works in Progress

Antithesis (2012)
A Burden to the Earth (2012)
Short Story: *Riyria Chronicles #1* (2011)

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AWARDS & RECOGNITION

- 2011 Library Journal's September Debut in Scifi/Fantasy for *Theft of Swords*
- 2010 Fantasy Book Critic Top 25 Novels for *The Emerald Storm* and *Wintertide*
- 2010 GoodReads Choice Award Nominee for *The Emerald Storm*
- 2010 Fantasy Book Critic Top Independent Novels for *The Emerald Storm* and *Wintertide*
- 2010 Bookworm Blues Best Overall Read for *Avempartha*
- 2010 Fantasy Book Critic Top Independent Novels for *The Emerald Storm* and *Wintertide*
- 2010 Iceberg Ink Best Read Award for *The Crown Conspiracy*
- 2010 Fantasy Book Critic Anticipated Releases for *The Emerald Storm* and *Wintertide*
- 2009 ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year Finalist for Fantasy for *Avempartha*
- 2009 ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year Finalist for Fantasy for *Nyphron Rising*
- 2009 Dark Wolf Award for *The Riyria Revelations*
- 2009 National Indie Excellence Award Finalist for Fantasy for *The Crown Conspiracy*
- 2009 Dark Wolf Top 5 books of First Half of 2009 for *The Crown Conspiracy*
- 2009 Fantasy Book Critic Notable Fantasy Book for *Avempartha*
- 2008 Fantasy Book Critic Notable Indie for *The Crown Conspiracy*
- 2008 ReaderViews Literary Award Finalist for Fantasy for *The Crown Conspiracy*
- 2007 ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year Finalist for Fantasy for *The Crown Conspiracy*

CHAPTER 1: THE EMPRESS

Amilia made the mistake of looking back into Edith Mon's eyes. She never meant to, she never planned on raising her stare from the floor, but Edith startled her and she looked up without thinking. The head maid would consider her action as defiance, a sign of rebellion in the ranks of the scullery. Amilia had never looked into Edith's eyes before, and doing so now, she wondered if a soul lurked behind them. If so, it must be cowering or dead, rotting like a late autumn apple—that would explain her smell. Edith had a sour scent, vaguely rancid as if something had gone bad.

“This will be another tenent withheld from yer pay,” the rotund woman said. “Yer digging quite a hole, ain't you?”

Edith was big, broad, and missing any sign of a neck. Her huge anvil of a head sat squarely on her shoulders. By contrast, Amilia barely existed. Small and pear-shaped with a plain face and long, lifeless hair—she was part of the crowd; one of the faces no one paused to consider—neither pretty nor grotesque enough to warrant a second glance. Unfortunately, her invisibility failed when it came to the palace's head maid, Edith Mon.

“I didn't break it.” *Mistake number two*, Amilia thought to herself.

A meaty hand slapped her across the face, ringing her ears and watering her eyes. “Go on,” Edith enticed with a sweet tone, and then whispered in her ear, “lie to me again.”

Gripping the washbasin to steady herself, Amilia felt the heat blossom on her cheek. Her gaze now followed Edith's hand and when it rose again, Amilia flinched. With a snicker, Edith ran her plump fingers through Amilia's hair.

“No tangles,” Edith observed. “I can see how ya spend yer time, instead of doing yer work. Ya hoping to catch the eye of the butcher? Maybe that saucy little man who delivers the wood? I saw ya talking to him. Know what they sees when they looks at ya? They sees an ugly scullery maid is what. A wretched filthy guttersnipe who smells of lye and grease. They would rather pay for a whore than get ya for nothing. You'd be better off spending more time on yer tasks. If ya did, I wouldn't have to beat ya so often.”

Amilia felt Edith winding her hair, twisting and tightening it around her fist. “It's not like I enjoy hurting ya.” She pulled until Amilia winced. “But ya have to learn.” Edith continued pulling Amilia's hair, forcing her head back until only the ceiling was visible. “Yer slow, stupid, and ugly.

That's why yer still in the scullery. I can't make ya a laundry maid, much less a parlor or chambermaid. You'd embarrass me, understand?"

Amilia remained quiet.

"I said, do ya understand?"

"Yes."

"Say yer sorry for chipping the plate."

"I'm sorry for chipping the plate."

"And yer sorry for lying about it?"

"Yes."

Edith roughly patted Amilia's burning cheek. "That's a good girl. I'll add the cost to yer tally. Now as for punishment..." she let go of Amilia's hair and tore the scrub brush from her hand, measuring its weight. She usually used a belt—the brush would hurt more. Edith would drag her to the laundry, where the big cook could not see. The head cook took a liking to Amilia, and while Edith had every right to discipline her girls, Ibis would not stand for it in his kitchen. Amilia waited for a fat hand to grab her wrist, but instead Edith stroked her head. "Such long hair," she said at length. "It's yer hair that's getting in the way, isn't it? It's making ya think too much of yerself. Well, I know just how to fix both problems. Yer gonna look real pretty when I—"

The kitchen fell silent. Cora, who was incessantly plunging her butter churn, paused in mid-stroke. The cooks stopped chopping and even Nipper, who was stacking wood near the stoves, froze. Amilia followed their gaze to the stairs.

A noblewoman adorned in white velvet and satin glided down the steps and entered the steamy stench of the scullery. Piercing eyes and razor-thin lips stood out against a powdered face. The woman was tall and, unlike Amilia's hunched posture, stood as straight as a shaft of light. She moved immediately to the small table along the wall where the baker was preparing bread.

"Clear this," she ordered with the wave of her hand, speaking to no one in particular. The baker immediately scooped up his utensils and dough into his apron and hurried away. "Scrub it clean," the lady insisted.

Amilia felt the brush thrust back into her hand, and a push sent her stumbling forward. She did not look up and went right to work making large swirls of flour-soaked film. Nipper was beside her in an instant with a bucket, and Vella arrived with a towel. Together they cleared the mess while the woman watched with disdain.

"Two chairs," the lady barked, and Nipper ran off to fetch them.

Uncertain what to do next, Amilia stood in place watching the lady, holding the dripping brush at her side. When the noblewoman caught her staring, Amilia quickly looked down and movement caught her eye. A small gray mouse froze beneath the baker's table, trying to conceal itself in the shadows. Taking a chance, it snatched a morsel of bread and disappeared through a small crack.

"What a miserable creature," she heard the lady say. Amilia thought she was referring to the mouse until she added, "You're making a filthy puddle on the floor. Go away."

Before retreating to her washbasin, Amilia attempted a pathetic curtsey. A flurry of orders erupted from the woman, each announced with perfect diction. Vella, Cora, and even Edith went about setting a table as if for a royal banquet. Vella draped a white tablecloth, and Edith started setting out silverware only to be shooed away as the woman carefully placed each piece herself. Soon the table was elegantly set for two, complete with multiple goblets and linen napkins.

Amilia could not imagine who could be dining there. No one would set a table for the servants and why would a noble come to the kitchen to eat?

"Here now, what's all this about?" Amilia heard the deep familiar voice of Ibis Thinly. The old sea cook was a large barrel-chested man with bright blue eyes and a thin beard that wreathed the line of his chin. He had spent the morning meeting with farmers, yet he still wore his ever-present apron. The grease-stained wrap was his uniform, his mark of office. He barged into the kitchen like a bear returning to his cave to find mischief afoot. When he spotted the lady, he stopped.

"I am Lady Constance," the noblewoman informed him. "In a moment I will be bringing the Empress Modina here. If you are the cook, then prepare food." The lady paused a moment to study the table critically. She adjusted the position of a few items then turned and left.

"Leif, get a knife on that roasted lamb," Ibis shouted. "Cora, fetch cheese. Vella, get bread. Nipper, straighten that woodpile!"

"The empress!" Cora exclaimed as she raced for the pantry.

"What's she doing coming here?" Leif asked. There was anger in his voice as if an unwelcome, no-account relative was dropping by and he was the inconvenienced lord of the manor.

Like everyone, Amilia had heard of the empress but never saw her—not even from a distance. Few had. She had been coronated in a private ceremony over half a year ago on Wintertide, and her arrival had changed everything.

King Ethelred no longer wore his crown and was addressed as regent instead of Your Majesty. He still ruled over the castle, only now it was referred to as *the imperial palace*. It was the

other one, Regent Saldur, who had made all the changes. Originally from Melengar, the old cleric took up residence, and set builders working day and night on the great hall and throne room. It was also Saldur who declared new rules that all of the servants had to follow.

The palace staff could no longer leave the grounds unless escorted by one of the new guards, and all outgoing letters were read and needed to be approved. This latter edict was hardly an issue, as few servants could write. The restriction on going outside the palace, however, was a hardship to almost everyone. Many with families in the city or surrounding farms chose to resign because they could no longer return home each night. Those remaining at the castle never heard from them again. Regent Saldur had successfully isolated the palace from the outside world, but inside, rumors and gossip ran wild. Speculations flourished in out-of-the-way corridors that giving notice was as unhealthy as attempting to sneak away.

The fact that no one ever saw the empress ignited its own set of speculations. Everyone knew she was the heir of the original legendary Emperor Novron and therefore a child of the god Maribor. This was proven when only she had been able to slay the beast that had slaughtered dozens of Elan's greatest knights. The fact that she had previously been a farm girl from a small village confirmed that in the eyes of Maribor all were equal. Rumors concluded that she had ascended to the state of a spiritual being. It was believed that only the regents and her personal secretary ever stood in her divine presence.

That must be who the noblewoman is. The lady with the sour face and perfect speech was the Imperial Secretary to the Empress.

They soon had an array of the best food they could muster in a short time laid out on the table. Knob, the baker, and Leif, the butcher, disputed the placement of dishes, each wanting their wares in the center. "Cora," Ibis said, "put your pretty cake of cheese in the middle." This brought a smile and blush to the dairymaid's face and scowls from Leif and Knob.

Being a scullion, Amilia had no more part to play and returned to her dishes. Edith was chatting excitedly in the corner near the stack of oak kegs with the tapster and the cupbearer, and everyone was straightening their outfits and running fingers through their hair. Nipper was still sweeping when the lady returned. Once more everyone stopped and watched as the lady led a thin young girl by the wrist.

"Sit down," Lady Constance ordered in her brisk tone.

Everyone peered past the two women, trying to catch the first glimpse of their god-queen. Two well-armored guards emerged and took up positions on either side of the table. But no one else appeared.

Where is the empress?

“Modina, I said sit down,” Lady Constance repeated.

Shock rippled through Amilia.

Modina? This waif of a child is the empress?

The girl did not appear to hear Lady Constance and stood limp with a blank expression. She looked to be a teenager, delicate and deathly thin. Once she might have been pretty, but what remained was an appalling sight. The girl’s face was white as bone, her skin thin and stretched, revealing the detailed outline of her skull beneath. Her ragged blonde hair fell across her face. She wore only a thin white smock which added to the girl’s ghostly appearance.

Lady Constance sighed and forced the girl into one of the chairs at the baker’s table. Like a doll, the girl allowed herself to be moved. She said nothing and her eyes stared blankly.

“Place the napkin in your lap this way.” Lady Constance carefully opened and laid the linen with deliberate movements. She waited, glaring at the empress who sat oblivious. “As empress, you will never serve yourself,” Lady Constance went on. “You will wait as your servants fill your plate.” Lady Constance looked around with irritation when her eyes found Amilia. “You—come here,” she ordered. “Serve Her Eminence.”

Amilia dropped the brush in the basin and, wiping her hands on her smock, rushed forward. She lacked experience with serving but said nothing. Instead, she focused on recalling the times she watched Leif cutting meat. Taking up the tongs and a knife, she tried her best to imitate him. Leif always made it look effortless, but Amilia’s fingers betrayed her and she fumbled miserably, managing only to place a few shredded bits of lamb on the girl’s plate.

“Bread.” Lady Constance snapped the word like a whip and Amilia sliced into the long twisted loaf, nearly cutting herself in the process.

“Now eat.”

For a brief moment, Amilia thought this was another order for her and reached out in response. She caught herself and stood motionless, uncertain if she was free to return to her dishes.

“Eat, I said.” The Imperial Secretary glared at the girl who continued to stare blankly at the far wall.

“EAT, DAMN YOU!” Lady Constance bellowed and everyone in the kitchen, including Edith Mon and Ibis Thinly, jumped. She pounded the baker’s table with her fist, knocking over the stemware and bouncing the knives against the plates. “EAT!” Lady Constance repeated and slapped the girl across the face. Her skin-wrapped skull rocked with the blow and came to rest on its own. The girl did not wince. She merely continued her stare, this time at a new wall.

In a fit of rage, the Imperial Secretary rose, knocking over her chair. She took one of the pieces of meat and tried to force it into the girl’s mouth.

“What’s going on?”

Lady Constance froze at the sound of the voice. An old white-haired man descended the steps into the scullery. His elegant purple robe and black cape looked out of place in the hot, messy kitchen. Amilia recognized Regent Saldur immediately.

“What in the world...” Saldur began as he approached the table. He looked at the girl, then at the kitchen staff, and finally at Lady Constance, who at some point had dropped the meat. “What were you thinking...bringing her down here?”

“I—I thought if—”

Saldur held up his hand, silencing her, then slowly squeezed it into a fist. He clenched his jaw and drew a deep breath through his sharp nose. Once more he focused on the girl. “Look at her. You were supposed to educate and train her. She’s worse than ever!”

“I—I tried, but—”

“Shut up!” the regent snapped, still holding up his fist. No one in the kitchen moved. The only sound was the faint crackle of the fire in the ovens and the bubbling of broth in a pot. “If this is the result of a professional, we may as well try an amateur. They couldn’t possibly do worse.” The regent pointed at Amilia. “You! Congratulations, you are now the Imperial Secretary to the Empress.” Turning his attention back to Lady Constance, he said, “And as for you—your services are no longer required. Guards, remove her.”

Amilia saw Lady Constance falter. Her perfect posture evaporated as she cowered and stepped backward, nearly falling over the upended chair. “No! Please, no,” she cried as a palace guard gripped her arm and pulled her toward the back door. Another guard took her remaining arm. She grew frantic, pleading and struggling as they dragged her out.

Amilia stood frozen in place holding the meat tongs and carving knife, trying to remember how to breathe. Once the pleas of Lady Constance faded, Regent Saldur turned to her, his face

flushed red, his teeth revealed behind taunt lips. “Don’t fail me,” he told her and returned up the stairs, his cape whirling behind him.

Amilia looked back at the girl who continued to stare at the wall.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After finding a manual typewriter in the basement of a friend's house, Michael inserted a blank piece of paper and typed: It was a dark and stormy night and a shot rang out. Well, he was just eight years old at the time, so we'll forgive him that trespass. But the desire to fill the blank page and see what doors the typewriter keys would unlock wouldn't let him go. For ten years Michael developed his craft by studying authors such as Stephen King, Ayn Rand, and John Steinbeck...just to name a few. During that time he wrote ten novels, and after finding no traction in publishing, he gave up and vowed never to write creatively again.

Michael discovered that never is a very long time, and he ended his hiatus from writing after a decade. The itch returned when he decided to create a series of books for his then thirteen-year-old daughter, who was struggling in school due to dyslexia. Intrigued by the idea of writing a series with an overarching story line, he created the Riyria Revelations. Each of the six-books were written as individual episodes but also included intertwining elements and mysteries that develop over time. Michael describes this endeavor as something he did "just for fun with no intention of publishing." After presenting the first manuscript to his daughter, he was chagrined that she declared, "I can't read it like this, can't you get it published?"

So began his second adventure on the road to publication, which included: drafting his wife to be his business manager; signing with an independent press; and later creating a small press. After two and a half years, the first five books sold more than 60,000 copies and ranked in the top twenty of multiple Amazon fantasy lists. In November 2010, he leveraged his success and received his first commercial publishing contract for three novels from Orbit Books (the fantasy imprint of Hachette Book Group, USA). In addition, Michael reached international status with foreign right translations including: France, Spain, Russia, Germany, and the Czech Republic.

Michael's work has been well received by critics and readers alike, earning him hundreds of positive reviews, interviews, and articles. He has attributed much of his success to the fantasy book blogging community. Dubbed "the little indie that could" he found his books pitted as the only independent in major competitions such as the 2010 Goodreads Choice Award Nominee for Fantasy 2010 Goodreads Choice Award Nominee for Fantasy and the 2009 Book Spot Central's Fantasy Tournament of Books, which he won.

Today, Michael continues to fill blank pages and has three projects under development: A modern fantasy, a literary fiction piece, and a prequel to his bestselling Riyria Revelations.