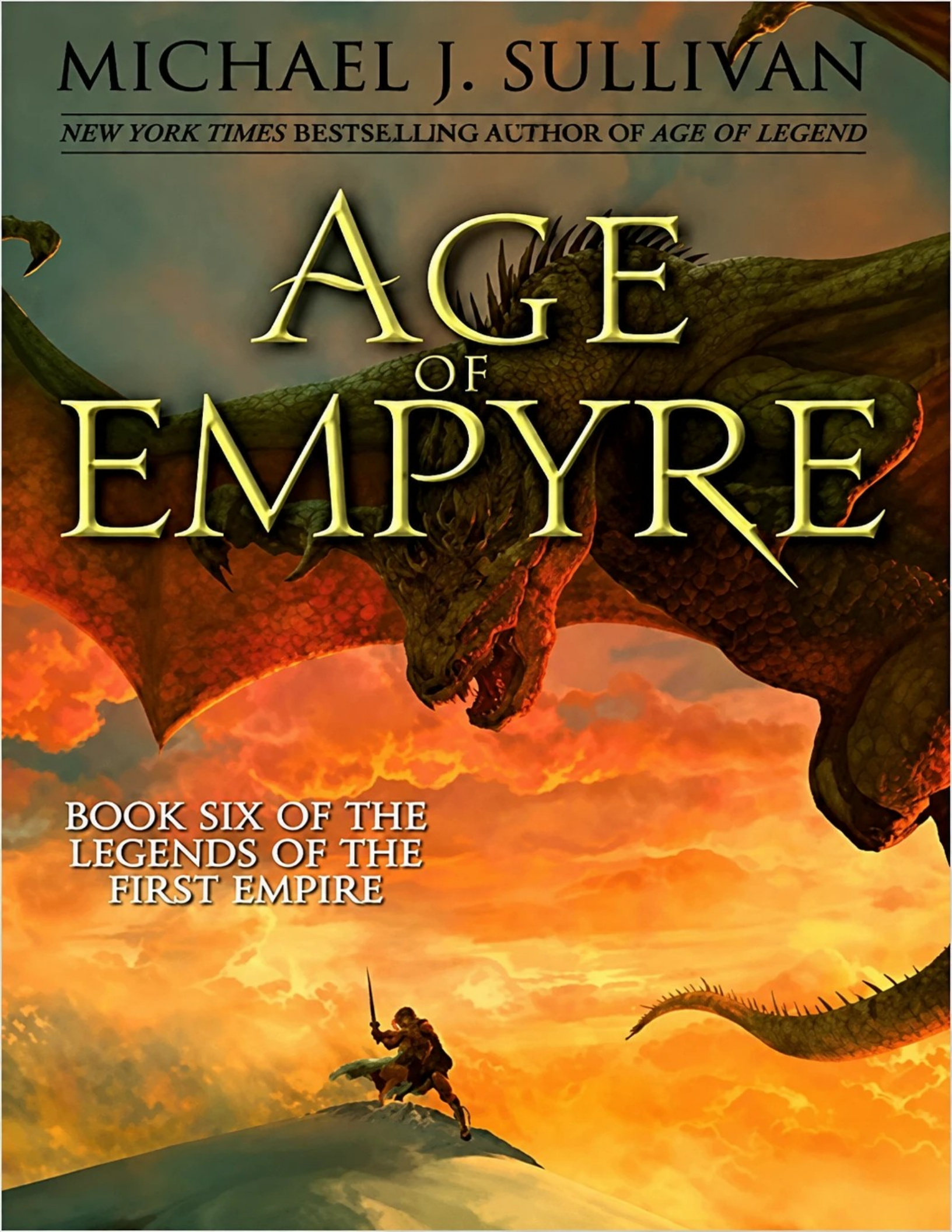




MICHAEL J. SULLIVAN

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *AGE OF LEGEND*

AGE OF EMPYRE

BOOK SIX OF THE
LEGENDS OF THE
FIRST EMPIRE

PRAISE FOR SULLIVAN'S WORK

“*Age of Myth* bears the hallmark storytelling genius that we have all come to love of Michael’s work. It’s fast-paced, intimate, and beautifully cultivated.” — *Fantasy Book Review on Age of Myth*

“Sullivan’s ability to craft an engaging and captivating fantasy world surpasses most any other fantasy author out there, and puts him alongside names like Sanderson and Jordan.” — *Fantasy Book Review on Age of Swords*

“In this powerful third book (after *Age of Swords*) of a projected six-book series, Sullivan continues providing excellent world building and character development . . . Sullivan also gifts readers with complex lives for his characters, filled with tests, triumphs, and tragedies . . . Sullivan’s fans will be delighted.” — *Publishers Weekly on Age of War*

“All I can say, after the wild ride I have been on, is that I NEED to read the next installment in this series, *Age of Death*, as soon as possible!” — *Genre Minx Book Reviews on Age of Legend*

“*Age of Death* took an astounding turn in the direction of the overall story, and it was brilliant!” — *Novel Notions on Age of Death*

“Riyria has everything you could possibly wish for: the characters are some of the best I’ve ever encountered in fantasy literature, the writing is top notch, and the plotting is so tight you’d be hard-pressed to find a mouse hole in it.” — *B&N Sci-fi & Fantasy Blog*

“This epic fantasy showcases the arrival of a master storyteller.” — *Library Journal on Theft of Swords*

“A delightful, entertaining and page-turning read that reminds us just how enjoyable, and how good The Riyria Revelations series is. A must-buy for all fantasy lovers.” — *The Founding Fields* on *Rise of Empire*

“Heir of Novron is the conclusion to the Riyria Revelations, cementing it in a position as a new classic of modern fantasy: traditional in setting, but extremely unconventional in, well, everything else.” — *Drying Ink* on *Heir of Novron*

“Snappy banter, desperate stakes, pulse-pounding sword play, and good old-fashioned heroics are all on full display here.” — *52 Book Reviews* on *The Crown Tower*

“With less gore and a smaller cast of characters than George R.R. Martin’s “Song of Ice & Fire” but equally satisfying, Sullivan’s epic fantasy will be gaining fans at exponential rates.” — *Library Journal* on *The Rose and the Thorn*

“No question about it, this book is another winner, bringing back everything I love about Riyria: great characters, great setting, great story. I really couldn’t have asked for more.” — *The Speculative Herald* on *The Death of Dulgath*

“Another tale full of twists, turns and that brand of humour only Royce and Hadrian can provide. The absolute best literary duo ever—EVER.” — Scott Vout, beta reader on *The Disappearance of Winter’s Daughter*

ABOUT THE BOOK

(From the Back Cover)

A DOOR OPENS. AN ARMY OF DRAGONS ADVANCES. AND THE FATE OF THE LIVING RESTS WITH THE DEAD.

After obtaining the secret to creating dragons, the leader of the Fhrey has turned the tide of war once more—but gaining the advantage has come at a terrible price. While Imaly plots to overthrow the fane for transgressions against his people, a mystic and a Keeper are the only hope for the Rhunes. Time is short, and the future of both races hangs in the balance. In this exciting conclusion to the Legends of the First Empire series, the Great War finally comes to a climactic end, and with it dawns a new era—The Age of Empyre.

From the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author Michael J. Sullivan comes the concluding installment of his six-book epic fantasy. This series chronicles a pivotal point in Elan's history when humans and those they once saw as gods warred until a new world order was born. Set three thousand years before the Riyria tales, Legends is a stand-alone fantasy series that is independent of the Riyria novels. But for those who do follow both series, Legends will unmask lies and reveal the truth about Elan's history and the men and women who shaped what the world became.

WORKS BY MICHAEL J. SULLIVAN

NOVELS

The Legends of the First Empire

*Age of Myth • Age of Swords • Age of War • Age of Legend • Age of Death •
Age of Empyre*

The Rise and the Fall

*Nolyn (Summer 2021) • Farilane (Summer 2022) • Esrahaddon (Summer
2023)*

The Riyria Revelations

*Theft of Swords (contains The Crown Conspiracy & Avempartha)
Rise of Empire (contains Nyphron Rising & The Emerald Storm)
Heir of Novron (contains Wintertide & Percepliquis)*

The Riyria Chronicles

*The Crown Tower • The Rose and the Thorn • The Death of Dulgath • The
Disappearance of Winter's Daughter
Forthcoming: Drumindor
Blood of Thieves (contains The Crown Tower & The Rose and the Thorn)*

Standalone Novels

Hollow World (Sci-fi Thriller)

SHORT STORY ANTHOLOGIES

*Heroes Wanted: "The Ashmoore Affair" (Fantasy: Riyria Chronicles)
Unfettered: "The Jester" (Fantasy: Riyria Chronicles)
Unbound: "The Game" (Fantasy: Contemporary)
Unfettered II: "Little Wren and the Big Forest" (Fantasy: The Legends of the
First Empire)
Blackguards: "Professional Integrity" (Fantasy: Riyria Chronicles)*

The End: Visions of the Apocalypse: “Burning Alexandria” (Dystopian Sci-fi)

Triumph Over Tragedy: “Traditions” (Fantasy: Tales from Elan)

The Fantasy Faction Anthology: “Autumn Mist” (Fantasy: Contemporary)

Help Fund My Robot Army: “Be Careful What You Wish For” (Fantasy:
Contemporary)

INDIVIDUAL SHORT STORIES

“Pile of Bones” (Fantasy: The Legends of the First Empire)

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Michael's Novels Include:

The First Empire Series: Age of Myth • Age of Swords • Age of War • Age of Legend • Age of Death • Age of Empyre

Coming soon: Nolyn • Farilane • Esrahaddon

The Riyria Revelations: Theft of Swords • Rise of Empire • Heir of Novron

The Riyria Chronicles: The Crown Tower • The Rose and the Thorn • The

Death of Dulgath • The Disappearance of Winter's Daughter
Standalone Titles: Hollow World

*This book is dedicated to everyone who has sacrificed their freedom,
employment, businesses, and loved ones during the 2020 COVID-19
pandemic.*

*I have few words to offer when faced with such monumental impacts,
so I'll turn to one of my heroes.*

“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo.
“So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is
not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that
is given us.”

— J.R.R. Tolkien

*Stay home, offer thanks to those on the frontlines, and remember that this,
too, shall pass.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Hello, and welcome to this final installment of the Legends of the First Empire. This book marks the sixteenth novel in my fictional world of Elan and the conclusion to the age of myths and legends that forms the foundation of my previous series.

This book is releasing at an unprecedented time in our history. As I write this, it is April 2020. The Coronavirus Pandemic is rampant throughout the world, and people are sequestered in “lockdowns”—families trapped in involuntary staycations. Early Kickstarter readers, who seem to be hoping to escape their four walls and perhaps the daily news, have been flooding my inbox with emails, clamoring for the book. Robin and I have struggled, but we managed to keep on schedule for the ebook and audiobook versions. We were thrilled the printer could produce the book at all, and it was just three weeks late.

While most people have struggled with stay-at-home orders, life here in the valley hasn't changed much. As most of you already know, we live in a cabin in the mountains of Virginia. Being a fulltime writer with a wife who is my editor, agent, business manager, and publicist means that we have long lived the lives of hermits—by choice. In the past, we have invited people from all over the world to the cabin. We have enjoyed the company of Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists, retired military generals, famous as well as aspiring authors, fans of my work, and even a few who had no idea who I am or what I do. All of that stopped in 2020, of course, and when we come out on the other side of this, I hope we can return to hosting people. So, if you're travel plans ever take you to the Luray, Virginia area, drop us an email (michael@michaelsullivan-author.com), and we'll have you by for a drink.

For those who cannot come here, there is a possibility that we might come to you. Earlier this year, Robin and I bought a Jeep and a teardrop camper with plans of doing some traveling. Once the virus-imposed restrictions are off, we hope to start. Over the years, several people have said, if you are ever in <insert-various-place>, let us know, and because we have

lived like hermits, we, unfortunately, didn't write those down. But we now have a system for recording such things, so if this is of interest, you can go to [this link](#), and let us know where you live. If it turns out that we'll be passing nearby, we'll see if we can meet up.

As it turned out, that teardrop camper came at just the right time. Robin became ill at the end of March, and she has been isolating in it. We are hoping she'll be able to emerge in a few days, but like everyone else, we are erring on the side of caution because we don't want those measures circumvented by moving too quickly.

Finishing this book has been interesting, to say the least. Robin and I work via Discord when she isn't resting to go over typos reported by the gamma and early Kickstarter readers. Usually, we would be in the studio while Tim records (something we always look forward to); however, that wasn't possible this time. We did receive the dailies and were able to communicate changes via emails. Thanks to Tim's in-home studio, he was able to stay mainly on schedule, and that saved the audiobook's release date. As always, our heartfelt thanks go out to Tim and our undying gratitude to the extra work he put in. He had to work alone without an engineer or director, but his efforts meant the audiobook's release wasn't affected by the crisis. Our heartfelt thanks go out to Tim for his added hard work.

So the long journey is finally at an end. I don't think I've fully processed that yet. Getting this book out in May fulfilled a promise Robin made; keeping that pledge was important to her. My hope is that this book has the power—in some small way—to help. I want to think we've created something good and lasting that can be shared—a doorway through which you can go to catch your breath, ease some stress, and perhaps even remember how to smile. Here's hoping that everyone who started reading this series will be able to finish it because that would mean the specter passed by your door. Stay safe. Keep your spirits up. And join with me now for the next, and last, journey into the Legends of the First Empire.

— *Michael J. Sullivan*

April 18, 2020

WORLD MAP

Maps are problematic on e-readers that don't have adequate resolution to display them, and for this reason you can access [a high-resolution map online](#).



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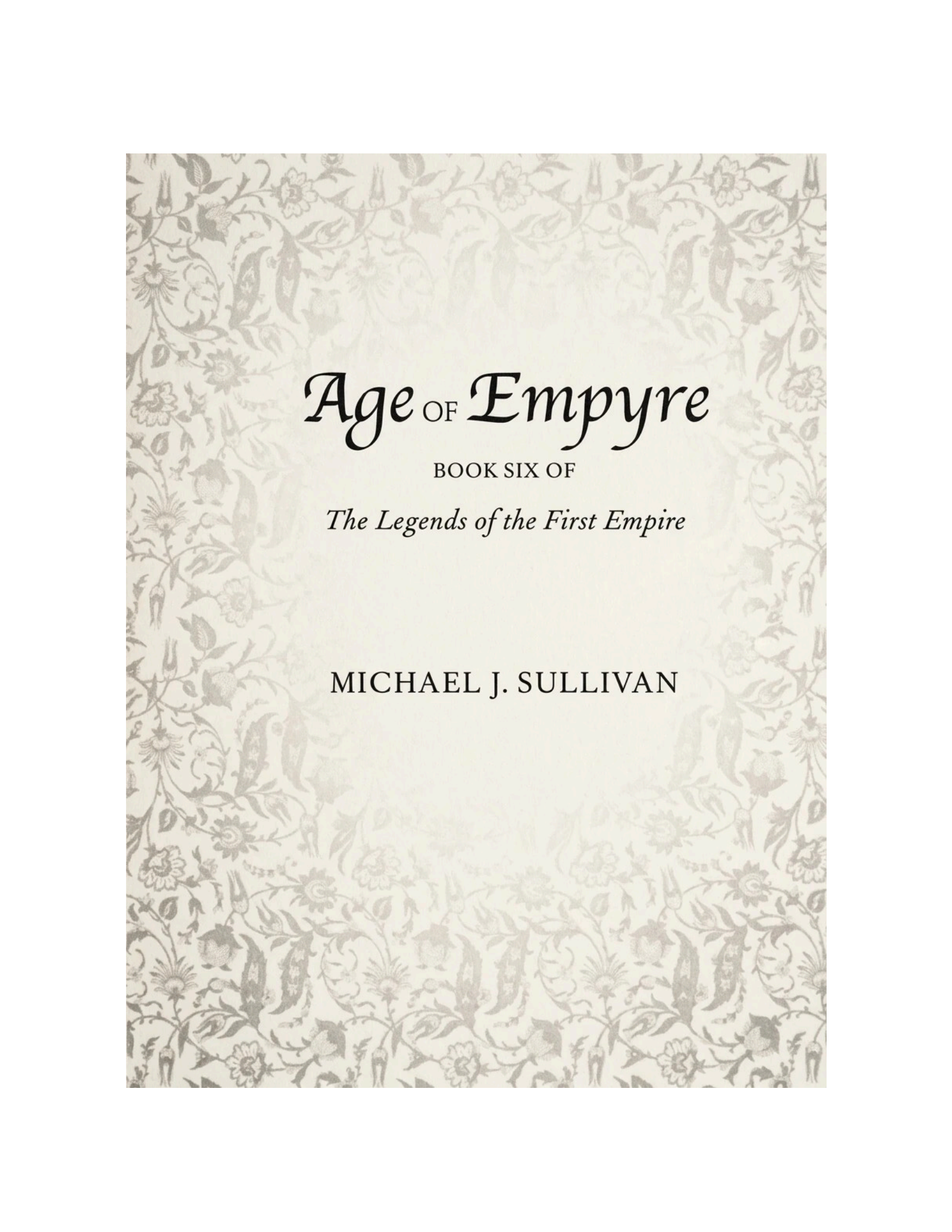
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Age OF *Empyre*

BOOK SIX OF

The Legends of the First Empire

MICHAEL J. SULLIVAN

CHAPTER ONE

HITTING BOTTOM

People often speak about “hitting bottom.” They have no idea what they are talking about. – THE BOOK OF BRIN

In the eternal silence and absolute darkness of the Abyss’s unimaginable depths, Iver heard a scream. Faint at first, it grew to a piercing wail then stopped, cut short by a loud clap. Sounds were rare in his neighborhood, light even more so. And yet he did see a dim illumination seeping into the entrance of his cave. Prior to the howl, there had been a rapid series of booms. Iver hadn’t bothered to investigate those, as he wouldn’t have been able to see anything and the effort of crawling would have been wasted.

But the cry was different. Iver was certain the voice was familiar. Someone had fallen into the Abyss—someone he knew.

With great effort, he willed himself to stand. Few things drove Iver to such ridiculous extremes as walking, but this was a special occasion. He was certain who had fallen; he recognized that voice—that scream.

Iver held out his hands, searching for the wall, then followed it around to the narrow crack that formed the entrance to his *place*. He refused to call it *home*. Home meant something else: warmth and comfort. Even at the most miserable of times, a home served as a locale with merit, possessing an appeal beyond mere shelter. His cave served only as a place to be, a spot to sit, a hole to hide in.

He couldn’t recall the last time he’d left his place. This didn’t surprise Iver, as he was finding it increasingly difficult to remember just about anything. He still knew his name—the first part, at least. There had been more, a qualifier of

some sort, but he couldn't figure out what that might have been. His life was fading, memories dissolving. The last significant event he could summon up was meeting Edvard, a Gula of Clan Erling. Iver had only been dead a short time when the man had beaten and dragged Iver to the cliff. It wasn't until he was falling that Iver realized why the man threw him over the edge. From high above, the Gula shouted, "This is for my wife, Reanna, you fat bastard! May you forever rot."

Iver had expected something horrifying waiting at the bottom. What he had found was nothing, which turned out to be even worse.

But now . . .

Creeping out of the cave, Iver saw a white glow coming off something on the ground not far away. At that distance, it appeared to be a bag of something, clothes perhaps. He remembered those. Drawing nearer, he saw it was a person. He shouldn't have been surprised. The biggest event in what felt like a century had turned out to be nothing more than a casualty of some brutal combat. Some poor wretch had fallen into the depths known to all as the Abyss—the absolute bottom from which no one returned.

He moved closer and found the small frame of a woman with dark, short-cropped hair—or rather what was left of her.

I'm certain I recognized that scream.

Iver felt excitement rise for the first time in . . . well, he hadn't a clue how long it had been. But his high hopes were dashed when Experience chastised him. *Not possible. There's no way it could be her.*

The fall had left the woman crushed on the hard frost: the price of admission to the worst level of existence. Iver surmised that every bone was broken, her skull shattered. Most of her body was lost in crumpled cloth, but Iver based the diagnosis on his own experience. It had taken an eternity to pull himself together. Even now, he had no idea how successful he'd been. In the Abyss, there were no reflections.

Reaching the woman's crumpled form, Iver realized she seemed to have fared better than he. Even so, her body was unnaturally twisted—her eyes

open, alert, and still in her head. When they spotted him, both went wide. She attempted to scream again, but the only thing that came out was a wet gurgle.

“Roan,” Iver said, shocked to discover his voice worked. “It is you!”

Broken as she was, the woman struggled to inch away. Mounted on a broken neck, her head swiveled to one side.

“Roan, you’ve come back to me.”

“Nooo . . .” she managed to moan through broken teeth and pooling blood.

“Oh, yes,” he said. “I’m here. We’ll get you fixed up in no time. Won’t that be nice?”

At the comment, her eyes grew wider still.

They might yet fall out.

Iver bent down and gathered Roan in his arms. Her snapped bones hung limp, feeling eerily like a bag of split firewood.

She moaned and a tear slipped down her cheek and fell to the frozen ground.

“Don’t worry, my dear.” He grinned at her. “Once you’re put back together, it’ll be like old times.”



The moment Brin’s fingers slipped off the edge of the bridge and she felt herself plunge into the Abyss, panic had taken hold. At first, her mind froze, locked by a singular idea: *This can’t be happening*. Then, as she fell deeper into darkness, she wondered what hitting the bottom would feel like. She hoped she would bounce but figured the effect to be more like a dropped icicle.

Will I shatter into a million pieces?

After an inexplicably long time, Brin discovered she *wanted* it to be over. There was no avoiding the collision, no saving herself, and the waiting threatened to drive her insane. Anticipating the impact, knowing it could come at any time was the real terror. She closed her eyes, didn’t want to see.

Get it over with already!

Then it happened. Brin touched down with all the force of having leapt from the front porch of the lodge, a whopping four steps. Landing feetfirst, the

momentum pushed her torso forward. Her palms slapped the ground and prevented any real harm. Only the heel of her left hand suffered a wound—a slight abrasion from scraping the granular frost that covered the ground. It stung for a moment. She straightened and stood, staring at the frozen rock that formed the bottom of the world. Imagining herself breathing, Brin saw her exhalation created a fog, the way it always had in the depths of winter.

That wasn't so bad, she thought, relief pouring in.

The light, however, did catch her by surprise. Pure white and without an apparent source, it illuminated the new world around her. She could see from one side of the canyon to the other. Cliffs rose, their tops disappearing into darkness. She was at the bottom of the Abyss, and nothing was there except a vast, frost-covered plain of uneven ground and miserly ripples of snow that had been blown by a long-extinct wind.

“Roan?” she called out but got no answer. Brin had seen her friend fall, so she should be close by.

Perhaps she wandered off? It would be exactly like her to go exploring, curiosity eclipsing everything else.

Wondering if anyone else had slipped over the edge the way she had, Brin looked up but saw nothing.

I hope everyone else is all right. I'm alone down here—except for Roan. I really need to find her.

Walking in no particular direction, Brin found herself in a maze of fissures, which branched off into narrow canyons that zigzagged into the dark. These gashes were no doubt the reason for the many bridges they had traversed while traveling across the Plain of Kilcorth on their way to King Mideon's castle. The impossibly high walls were as porous as a sponge. Dark holes and caves peppered its surface: some were at ground level, others higher up and extending as far as she could see.

From time to time, Brin paused and called out for Roan. Her voice didn't travel far. The Abyss was a quiet place, its silence broken by the harsh crackle of her feet on the frosty ground. Roan didn't respond, so Brin picked an offshoot at random and ventured down one of the side branches. She guessed