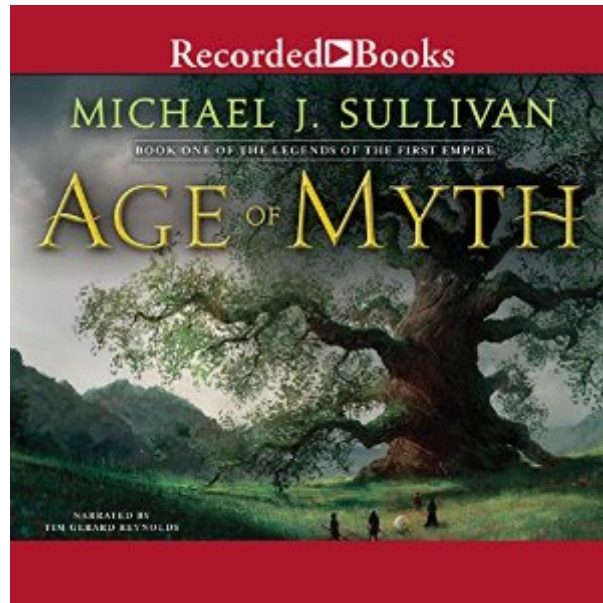


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Age Of Myth: Book One Of The Legends Of The First Empire



Synopsis

Since time immemorial, humans have worshipped the gods they call Fhrey, truly a race apart: invincible in battle, masters of magic, and seemingly immortal. But when a god falls to a human blade, the balance of power between humans and those they thought were gods changes forever. Now only a few stand between humankind and annihilation: Raithe, reluctant to embrace his destiny as the God Killer. Suri, a young seer burdened by signs of impending doom. And Persephone, who must overcome personal tragedy to lead her people. The Age of Myth is over; the time of rebellion has begun.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Michael J. Sullivan has returned to the world of his Riyria series, this time taking his readers to an era three millennia before the six-volumes of the Riyria Revelations series. Age of Myth, the first in a five-volume "Legends of the First Empire" series, explores a time when humans (the Rhune) are barely subsisting in hovels, dwarves (the Dhergs) have been driven deep below ground, and elves (the Fhrey) "having recently discovered magic" are treated as gods. If all of this sounds like the traditional formula for old-fashioned, heroic, epic fantasy, that's because it is. Age of Myth is unashamedly an homage to the roots of the genre, with obvious, venal villains and unapologetically good and noble heroes. Consequently, Age of Myth is a welcome, refreshing antidote to the senseless brutality and cynicism of recent, dark fantasy. Tolkien and his literary descendants endure because they tap into

a fundamental human desire to see sympathetic, compelling characters triumph over evil. At its best, epic fantasy celebrates the values that make ordinary people into heroes, and contrary to current trends it also keeps the heroes around to fight another day. Of course, if that were all that epic fantasy novels accomplished, they would quickly become repetitive and trite. Coherent, engaging worldbuilding is essential to good fantasy, and Sullivan certainly delivers in that regard. In his preface, Sullivan notes that he wrote all five of the Legends novels at once, and the scope of that project is reflected in the complexity and detail of the Fhrey and Rhune societies he has created. Sullivan begins with the homogenous and monolithic stereotypes with which each group views the other. He then quickly immerses us in details, conflict, intrigue, and politics that show the complexity and nuance of both societies. As fascinating as the cultures are, it is the characters that make *Age of Myth* a compelling read. Sullivan has a talent for fast, clever dialogue. Like an impressionist working with quick, brief strokes he uses those conversations to deftly paint nuanced characters who are authentic, recognizable, and worth following over the course of a five-volume epic. The prose in which the characters' words and lives are couched is solid work, but it does sometimes edge toward the trite or conventional. Fortunately, Sullivan's knack for dialogue more than compensates for any shortcomings in that regard. At the midpoint of *Age of Myth*, two of the central protagonists discuss the nature of stories in their respective villages. One notes that in the stories she learned, "The heroes are usually lost in the forest and either eaten or sucked away into the spirit world." The other says that in the stories his sister told, "Almost every tale had a ghost or a dragon in and a hero who rescued a beautiful girl [stories that] take you someplace else, someplace warm, someplace wonderful." In recent years, fantasy has experienced a glut of stories in the former category. Michael J. Sullivan's *Age of Myth* invites us to gather around the fire and instead retell the stories that take the chill from the night air and shine a light into the shadows. Readers eager to lose themselves in a well-crafted world, a world filled with likeable people who become unintentional heroes, should jump to answer that invitation.

A new Michael Sullivan book is always a treat. He's a great storyteller, and I've enjoyed his Royce and Hadrian books (the Riyria Chronicles and Revelations). Although this new book ('*Age of Myth*,' the first of a five part series) is set in the same world as Riyria, it takes place thousands of years before. So it's essentially a new world, and I entered with some trepidation. The book took a few chapters to get going, but once it did I was held through to the end. Part of the slow start for me was that the settings seemed a little thin. The early part of the book didn't have the richness of detail I

was used to in Riyria. But it got much better after 50 pages or so, at which point the world starts to feel well realized. But the characters are strong from page 1. Characters have always been Sullivan's strength, and this shows in his dialogue. His characters have wonderful depth, and they are (like Royce and Hadrian) what carry 'Age of Myth.' (Alert: minor spoilers, but nothing that gives away the plot): For starters, Sullivan is great at writing boastful men. In a scene reminiscent of Riyria, one character exaggerates another's deeds: "Raithe is a master of combat the likes of which the world has yet to see. The metal of his blade had broken, but the mettle of the man rang true. Using only the broken hilt of his sword, Rathe slashed at the villain's exposed wrist (etc. etc.)..." Every mouth in the hall hung agape, and each man leaned forward to hear better." And I suspect most Sullivan fans know that his characters can also be downright hilarious. In another scene, a mystic attempts to explain the vicissitudes of the gods: "Anyway, so out you go, walking into a horrible badger-ripping death, because you didn't know any better. That's the way the gods play their games and why I think we need to talk to the trees. So we aren't all ripped apart by badgers." Good stuff, and it gets even better. (Don't worry, I'm not giving much away. Those two quotes are well within the first 100 pages. And of course, I should mention they are from a pre-production copy, so are subject to change.) Finally, 'Age of Myth' has a number of strong female characters, which is excellent to see. This is the first of a five part series. And although it's a big book, it's a small part of a larger story, the beginning of an epic. It takes place over about a month, and the setting are fairly constrained--no one is taking the One Ring all the way to Mordor here. Instead, in 'Age of Myth,' the characters are just trying to hold their lives together the face of a growing threat, the scope of which no one yet understands. And although the ending ties up most loose ends (there is no cliff hanger as such) clearly there is more--much more--to come. Looking forward to it.

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