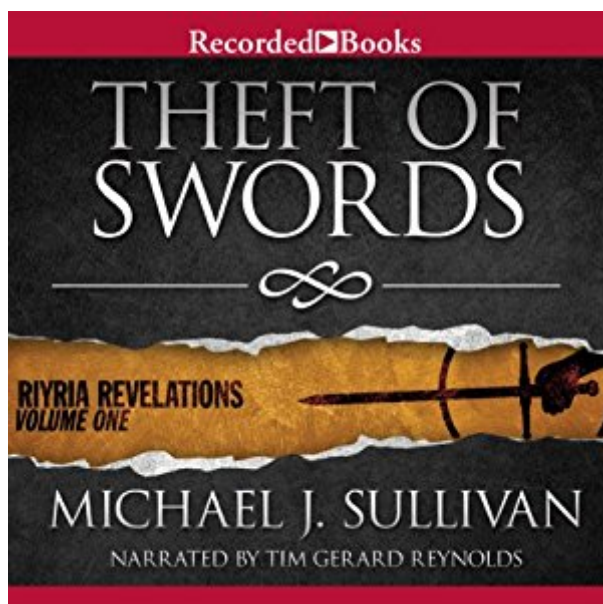


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Theft Of Swords: Riyria Revelations, Volume 1



Synopsis

Audie Award Nominee, Fantasy, 2013 Acclaimed author Michael J. Sullivan created instant best sellers with his spellbinding Riyria Revelations series. This first volume introduces Royce Melborn and Hadrian Blackwater, two enterprising thieves who end up running for their lives when they're framed for the death of the king. Trapped in a conspiracy bigger than they can imagine, their only hope is unraveling an ancient mystery - before it's too late. Theft of Swords contains The Crown Conspiracy and Avempartha, books 1 and 2 of Riyria Revelations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I absolutely loved this book. Hadrian and Royce battle for the greater good in the midst of intrigue, false promises, action, adventure, and love. They know what it means to walk a careful line between competing interests, and before the end of the book I knew that they were two of my most favorite fantasy characters ever. The world of the Riyria Revelations is well imagined and the backdrop for the sudden plot twists is sweeping and inspiring. I couldn't put this book down, and didn't want it to end. A great story, start to finish. When I could part with the book, I loaned it to my 75-year-old mother, who loved it. She decided that Hadrian was her favorite name. Shortly thereafter, I loaned it to my 13-year-old grandson, and he LOVED IT! He liked different characters and different parts of the story, but the very idea that we could read a book through the generations and all delight in the story was absolutely something to celebrate. If you love fantasy, you will not be disappointed with this excellent offering by Michael Sullivan. Do yourself a favor. Read it.

Hadrian and Royce are partners in crime, a mercenary and thief who make a living working for the various nobles who rule over the lands of Avryn but spend most of their time feuding with one another. One particular job ends with Hadrian and Royce being arrested and charged with regicide. Determined to prove their innocence and take revenge on those who framed them, they set out on a quest that could change the fate of Avryn and the whole world.

Michael J. Sullivan's Riyria Revelations series is already a proven success, with both small press and self-published editions of the books selling well. Orbit have picked up the series and recast the original six books as three omnibuses, bringing them to a wider audience. Whilst this laudably rewards the author's success, it also raises the stakes: standing out from the crowd in self-publishing is one thing, but how does Sullivan's work stack up compared to the current fantasy heavyweights? The answer is...okay, actually. Sullivan's ambition with this series was to create a series that in a way beat against the current trend for adult, edgy, violent and explicit fantasy novels in favour of something more straightforward or 'classic'. Something that evoked the spirit of say Eddings or Brooks without being as dire. Sullivan lists Harry Potter as an inspiration, particularly the way it welded together accessibility and a classic structure with darker elements (such as major character deaths), and that's certainly a reasonable ambition.

Theft of Swords (which combines the first two novels in the series, The Crown Conspiracy and Avempartha) is a fast-paced, straightforward read with a fast-moving plot and easy-to-read writing. Sullivan's risk in aping the simpler form of fantasy fiction is that he might skirt towards blandness, and this is certainly a problem in the book. He has a fairly blank prose style which is effortless to read, but also somewhat forgettable. His skills with characterisation are somewhat stronger, but still not as great as might be wished. Particularly odd is that his central characters of Hadrian and Royce are not very well-developed at all, and many of the secondary characters are more interesting and better-drawn. The central duo do get a bit more fleshed out towards the end of the second half of the book and we also get a possible reason for why Sullivan had to hold back on certain revelations about them, but it is a bit of a challenge to read a book where the two heroes are so (apparently) shallow.

Other issues can be found in the worldbuilding, particularly the existence of apparently substantial kingdoms with walled cities in them that are only about 20 miles wide. Sullivan aims for some consistency here - a couple of hundred soldiers forms a large army in this world, presumably because populations are correspondingly tiny - but it's still a bit odd. On the racial front, things are fairly traditional: dwarves are geniuses for stonecarving whilst elves are long-lived, pointy-eared types. The only dwarf we meet is a grubby villain, whilst the elves are (in this first book anyway) kept firmly off-screen and are

the enemies of humanity, but these are minor (and not particularly unprecedented) twists to the established formula. Naturally, the main storyline also revolves around prophecies, chosen ones whose arrival will signify the end of the world and so on, and it won't take a genius to guess who the chosen one is going to be. The principle problem with the book is its very predictability. At first, reading an epic fantasy without blood spraying over people's faces every five seconds or two mandatory graphic (and usually badly-written) sex scenes per book is a refreshing change of pace, and feels like a valid direction to take at this time. However, the book's embracing of classic tropes without doing much (or, at times, anything) to subvert or challenge them eventually gets dull. Brandon Sanderson, for example, is also writing classic epic fantasy but remembers to put in plenty of interesting twists: a post-magic-apocalypse setting, a Wild West angle and, of course, lots of original magic systems. These flourishes are absent from Sullivan's debut work. *Theft of Swords* (***) is an easy, relaxing read but also one that lacks depth or originality. It's fun enough to warrant reading on (and the series rep has it improving massively as it continues), but I do wonder if publishing these stories as 650-page omnibuses rather than their original 320-page, bite-sized chunks was a mistake. A fun popcorn read, but ultimately not much more.

It should be noted that some of the first fantasy stories I ever read fell quite solidly into the sword and sorcery sub-genre. I remember liking them and then starting to move towards other things. Anyway, it's been a while since I found a sword and sorcery story I truly delighted in reading and *Theft of Swords* reminded me of everything I love about the sub-genre. The book is about two partners in crime, Hadrian and Royce, as they get hired to pull a couple of heists involving swords (hence the title). Both start off simply enough but as such things are wont to do in fantasy novels, events go all Murphy's Law on them. It's really more like two novellas set one after the other with an ongoing plot linking them loosely together. Usually the biggest pitfall I have with sword and sorcery is the main characters. This was not the case for this book. There was no brooding over Royce's and Hadrian's pasts (which was refreshing). Little tidbits and hints about their pasts were noted without dragging the pace of the story down or distracting me with some tale of woe. There were one line acknowledgements where I could look back at that character's actions up until that point and go "yup I suspected that, but thank you for confirming it" without interrupting the story one whit. I loved the social dynamic between the two of them and how opposite Hadrian and Royce were by nature and by trait, but how little true antagonism there was between them. I found myself very happy with the ribbing of who's got a soft spot for what, the "if we listened to me, we wouldn't be in this mess" reiterations and of course the ever entertaining "Well we could just kill the twit" spiel. Call me a

shallow dunce, but I was actually happy with how both of these guys accepted each other and how they broke problems down into things they could deal with. Since they were so stable with each other, one could appreciate the degree of instability that every other character seemed to go through during the course of each of the novellas. This is not to say that the main characters are static as much as the changes in them are not dramatized as much as everyone else's (with one teeny tiny exception related to the overarching plot between the stories). I thought that appropriate since everyone else seemed to be dealing with much more dire personal and political problems through the stories. While this could have been problematic, instead Royce and Hadrian served as a stabilizing force in the stories. The other characters with more going on within the stories consist namely of Alric the new king of Melengar, his sister Arista and Thrace, a peasant girl in the second novella. Both Alric and Arista seemed fairly typical as far as they went. Much of their individual antics seemed more to set up situations to see Royce and Hadrian react to them than to garner characterization for them individually. Among the more minor characters, I felt that Thrace was better detailed and will probably end up being more interesting than either of the hereditary royalty as this series progresses. So far the villains are obvious with a few exceptions. However, I am happy to report that the conspiracy seems to require the Evil Overlord's Handbook as required reading for all of its ranking members. That is to say, that those in charge of making plans and carrying them out were generally smart and wily enough to not get caught at it and make it appear as if they had been wrong/mistaken/forced into whatever action they had gotten caught at. It made for a better villain and put it a little more on the reader to define exactly who are the bigger jerks between the two sides of the big Imperial conspiracy. If there's one place where this book stumbled, it was in the world building. It wasn't that there were elves and dwarves and dragons so typical of the sword and sorcery sub-genre. It was more that I had time trying to figure out why there was a rift between the Imperialists and the Royalists when it seemed more reasonable to guess that any of the kings would quite happily support an imperial agenda... provided they were the ones wearing an imperial coronet after all was said and done. I also thought that the boundaries and differences between kingdoms (at least the ones that were actually visited by the characters) were minute overall, more like city-states or really big fiefdoms rather than anything so expansive as a kingdom. I did appreciate how "other" the elves ended up being. I kind of wish that the dwarves had a different other-ness illustrated to the same degree, particularly since the story has a dwarf character pop up a few times, but no true elves have any face time whatsoever. Fortunately I didn't pay all that much attention to a lot of that because I had Royce and Hadrian escapades to laugh over instead, except as the politics intersected with their lives. Faults aside, I really enjoyed Theft of Swords and will be eagerly awaiting

the next installment.

This is definitely at the top of my list of favorite books. I loved this story, and very much look forward to the next in the series. It seems as if lately everyone is trying to write darker, brooding books, and there is nothing wrong with that, but I was happy find something a little more like the stories that got me into reading when I was younger. A great story with characters you want to get to know and a well executed plot that keeps you engaged. It was definitely well thought out and well written. It is a rich world with great characters (good and bad) and stories without being too complex to follow. Great for all ages.

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