

FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE RYRIA REVELATIONS

# HOLLOW WORLD



MICHAEL J. SULLIVAN

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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Cover & interior illustration © 2013 by Marc Simonetti

Cover design © 2013 by Michael J. Sullivan

Format design by Robin Sullivan

Kickstarter edition: July 2013

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# MICHAEL SULLIVAN'S WORKS

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*Theft of Swords* (contains *The Crown Conspiracy* and *Avempartha*)

*Rise of Empire* (contains *Nyphron Rising* and *The Emerald Storm*)

*Heir of Novron* (contains *Wintertide* and *Percepliquis*)

### THE RIYRIA CHRONICLES

*The Crown Tower*

*The Rose and the Thorn*

### STANDALONE NOVELS

*Hollow World*

*Antithesis* (coming soon)

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## **THE FUTURE IS COMING...FOR SOME, SOONER THAN OTHERS.**

Ellis Rogers is an ordinary man, who is about to embark on an extraordinary journey. All his life he has played it safe and done the right thing, but faced with a terminal illness he's willing to take an insane gamble. He's built a time machine in his garage, and if it works, he'll face a world that challenges his understanding of what it means to be human, what it takes to love, and the cost of paradise. He could find more than a cure for his illness; he might find what everyone has been searching for since time began...but only if he can survive Hollow World.

Welcome to the future and a new science fiction thriller from the bestselling author of *The Riyria Revelations*.

*This book is dedicated to the people who created Kickstarter  
and all the amazing people who create or contribute to projects there.*

*You are enabling the democratization of art and providing opportunities  
never before possible. I thank you for helping to make dreams realities—my own included.*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Time travel as described in this novel isn't possible. It's important to mention this up front. I'm not saying, "Don't try this at home." I'm simply clarifying that this is as much a work of fantasy as it is science fiction—but, then again, most science fiction has a dash of fantasy thrown in, that artificial *what if* spark that ignites the chain reaction that propels everything forward.

In the classic *The Time Machine*, H. G. Wells's high-tech explanation for how his device was able to skip through years was: "Now I want you to clearly understand that this lever, being pressed over, sends the machine gliding into the future, and this other reverses the motion." That's pretty much the extent of his hard science. Of course his story, while named *The Time Machine*, really wasn't so much about the machine or the science behind it, but rather speculations on the future of mankind.

So is *Hollow World*.

*The Time Machine* was first published in Britain in 1895. Apparently, back then, you could get away with stating that pressing a lever resulted in doing something otherwise known as impossible. Of course back then, they didn't have the Internet. The average reader today knows that you can't travel faster than the speed of light, or through a black hole. This education may be due more to the success of science fiction entertainment such as *Star Trek* than to high school teachers, but here we are. The modern-day reader is better educated and demands plausibility.

To this end I did research into time-travel theory, and I drew inspiration from a handful of sources, most notably *Time Travel in Einstein's Universe: The Physical Possibilities of Travel Through Time* by renowned astrophysicist J. Richard Gott. Mr. Gott provided a plausible explanation for how a stationary object could move significantly forward in time by overcoming the g-force restriction of linear travel by moving interdimensionally. This is theoretically possible if you could put yourself in the near-center of a black hole while maintaining a defensive shell using electrostatic repulsions of like charges. That's the theory, but as I said, time travel of the sort required for this story isn't possible—at least not in an urban garage. I fudged the math—a lot. I aimed for a dramatic blend of façade, plausibility, and smoke-and-mirrors illusion so that if you don't look too closely, you can *almost* imagine it working.

Like H. G. Wells's tale, *Hollow World* really isn't about time travel any more than reality television shows are documentaries. I hope you won't allow a little creative license to get in the way of enjoying the ride. I felt providing a good reading experience superseded an adherence to strict probability. *Hollow World* isn't a story about the science of time travel.

So, what *is* this story about?

Read on—a world awaits.

—*Michael J. Sullivan*  
*July 2013*

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# CHAPTER ONE

## RUNNING OUT OF TIME

When she said he was dying, and explained how little time he had left, Ellis Rogers laughed. Not a normal response—the doctor knew it, Ellis did too. He wasn't crazy; at least he didn't think so, but how does anyone really know? He should have seen visions, flashes from his life: kissing Peggy at the altar, graduating college, or the death of their son, Isley. He should have fixated on all of the things that he'd never done, the words he had spoken, or the ones he hadn't. Instead, Ellis focused on the four letter word the doctor had said. Funny that she used *that* word—he never told her what was in his garage.

The pulmonary specialist was a small Indian woman with bright alert eyes and a clipboard that she frequently looked to for reference. She wore the familiar white lab coat—stethoscope stuffed deep in one pocket. She sat, or more accurately leaned, against the front of her desk as she spoke. At the start of her speech, the doctor had begun with a determined, sympathetic resolve, but that train had been derailed by his inappropriate outburst, and neither of them seemed to know what to do next.

“Are you...all right?” she asked.

“First test I ever failed,” he said, trying to explain himself, hoping she'd swallow it and move on. Given the news she had just delivered, he deserved a little slack.

The doctor stared at him concerned for a moment, then settled back into her professional tone. “You should probably get another opinion, Ellis.” She used his first name as if they were old friends, though he’d only seen her the few times it had taken to get the tests performed.

“Is someone working on a cure for this?” Ellis asked.

The doctor sighed, keeping her lips firm. She folded her arms, then unfolded them and leaned forward. “Yes, but I honestly don’t think anyone is close to a breakthrough.” She looked at him with sad eyes. “You just don’t have that much time.”

There was that word again.

He didn’t laugh, but he might have smiled. He needed a better poker face. Ellis shifted his sight away from her and instead focused on three jars sitting on a counter near the door. They looked like they belonged in a kitchen—except that these contained tongue depressors and cotton swabs instead of sugar and flour. He couldn’t tell what was in the last one. Something individually packaged, syringes, maybe, which reminded him to double-check the first aid kit to make sure it had a good supply of aspirin. Not all of them did.

The doctor probably expected him to cry or maybe fly into a rage cursing God, bad luck, the industrial food complex, or his own refusal to exercise. Laughter and smiles weren’t on that menu. But he couldn’t help being amused, not when the doctor was unwittingly making jokes.

*No, he thought, not jokes—suggestions. And she’s right, there’s nothing stopping me anymore.*

He was dying from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis and she had given him six months to a year. The *to a year* portion of that sentence felt tacked on in an overly optimistic manner. Anyone else might have focused on that part of the equation—the dying part—and thought about trips to Europe, safaris in Africa, or visiting neglected friends and family. Ellis, was planning a

trip of a different sort and began running a mental checklist. He already had most everything. Flashlight batteries, he should get more of them—can't ever have too many batteries—and some more M&M's, why the hell not? It wasn't like he had to worry about his weight, diabetes, or tooth decay. *I'll buy a whole box! The peanut ones, the yellow bags are always the best.*

"I'm going to set up an appointment for you to come back. Two weeks should give you enough time to see someone else and have the tests repeated." She stopped writing and stared at him with her big brown eyes. "Are you sure you're all right?"

"I'm fine."

"Is there someone I can call?" She flipped through the pages on the clipboard again. "Your wife?"

"Trust me, I'm good."

He was surprised to realize he was telling the truth. The last time he felt that way was thirty-six years ago when he had sat across from the loan officer's desk and learned he'd qualified for the mortgage that allowed him to move out of his parent's home. Fear mingled with the excitement of facing the unknown. Freedom—real freedom—had all the rush of an illegal drug.

*I can finally press the button.*

She waited a beat or two longer, then nodded. "Assuming your second opinion concurs with mine, I will add your name to the registry for a transplant, and I'll explain the process in detail at your appointment. Aside from that, I'm afraid there's nothing else we can do. I'm really very sorry." Reaching out she took his hand. "I really am."

He nodded and gave a slight squeeze. Her smile appeared less forced then. Maybe she was thinking she'd made him feel better, made some emotional connection. That was good, he needed all the karma he could get.



“What’d the doctor say?” was the first thing out of Peggy’s mouth when Ellis walked through the door. He couldn’t see her. He guessed she was somewhere in the kitchen, shouting over the television she’d left on in the living room. Peggy did that a lot. She said it made her feel less alone, but she kept it on even when Ellis was home.

“She said it was nothing to be concerned about.” He dropped his keys on the coffee table in the candy dish their son had made years ago.

“She? Wasn’t your appointment with Dr. Hall?”

*Damnit!* Ellis cringed. “Ah—Dr. Hall retired. I met with a woman doctor.”

“Retired? That sounds sudden. Is he okay?”

“Yeah—yeah he’s fine.”

“Well good for him. I’m surprised, though. He really isn’t much older than we are, and I always thought doctors retired later than other people. So this other doctor, she wasn’t concerned about your cough?”

Ellis found the remote and turned down the volume until the gaggle of women arguing on the television were nothing more than a low hum. He wondered if it was the same show he always walked in on or if all the shows she didn’t watch were the same.

“Not really. She said it was just a virus,” he called back.

The living room was a milestone showing how far they had come. Two Williams Sonoma silk couches faced a big screen television as wide as the bathroom in their first apartment. On shelves near the fireplace sat his M.I.T. textbooks alongside dissertations he had bound in genuine leather. Above those were a pile of thrillers and murder mysteries by the likes of Michael Connelly, Tom Clancy, and Jeffery Deaver—his mind candy.

Photos were everywhere: hanging on the walls, propped on end tables, balanced atop the television. From each frame a sandy-haired cherub with freckles and a varying number of teeth smiled back. The one taken at Cedar Point commanded the centerpiece of the granite coffee table. All three of them had been in that amusement-park photo, but a strategic fold had left only Ellis's left hand visible where it rested on his son's shoulder.

“Did she even give you anything for it?” Peggy asked. She entered the living room still wearing her work clothes, what she called her “three Ps”: power pantsuit and pearls. She glanced at the television, perhaps checking to see if she was missing anything important, then turned back to him.

For a moment he considered telling the truth, at least about his prognosis. He wanted to see what she'd say. What she'd do.

He couldn't say yes. She might ask to see the bottle. “She gave me a prescription. I just haven't filled it yet.”

“Well, you better do that soon. The drugstore will be closing—at least the pharmacy counter will.” She pulled a fresh pack of menthols from the pocket of her jacket and began to tap out a cigarette, then paused, looking at him. “Oh,” she said with a disappointed tone and a little frown. “Aren't you going to the garage?”

“Actually, I'm meeting Warren. Just came home to get my coat. It's getting cold.”

“Well, if you take any pills, look at the bottle before you start drinking.”

Ellis grabbed Peggy’s keys off the hall table as quietly as he could, but instead of heading out the kitchen door he climbed the stairs to their bedroom, and once inside, locked the door. His heart was pounding so loud he hoped Peggy couldn’t hear it. Taking this first step made it real for him.

*Jesus, I’m actually going to do it.*

He crept to the closet, put on his coat, then began excavating. The left side of the walk-in had always been Peggy’s territory. Stacked on the floor were old shoes, the wedding photos, and God knew what else she had stuffed back there in an assortment of cardboard and plastic containers. Ellis knew what he was looking for, and after carefully disassembling a tower of shoe boxes, he uncovered the treasure-chest-shaped jewelry case. She kept it locked. The key was on her ring along with a bottle opener, flip-out nail file, coin purse, rape whistle, penlight, laminated photo of Isley, silver medallion of a camel or llama, another of a soccer ball, and a big plastic plaque that read: PEGGY. The ridiculous thing was that the Nissan had a keyless entry system and a push button start.

The jewelry box opened like a cash register with the top popping up and the drawers pushing out in tiers. The thing was packed with memorabilia. He spotted a Mother’s Day card Isley had made when he was around six. Just a bit of folded poster board with the word MOM scrawled in crayon. There were a bunch of letters, a few photos of Isley, ticket stubs to a play called *No Parking* that he didn’t remember, and a bunch of poems Peggy had written before they got married, back when she was learning to play the guitar and planned on being the next Carole King.

And, of course, there was jewelry.

Old clip-on earrings, and the newer pierced ones, some dangled like Christmas tree tinsel, others were just studs. She had two strings of pearls, a choker with what looked like an ivory medallion, and a host of rings. Most of it was costume. Four pieces were not.

Peggy's engagement ring and wedding band were there, but he wouldn't touch those. Ellis was only interested in a pair of diamond earrings he had inherited from his grandmother. The jewelry was at the bottom, buried under the memorabilia.

Downstairs he heard Peggy move. Her footsteps crossed the living room, heading toward the stairs. He froze.

Ellis imagined her coming up and reaching for the door.

*Why is the door locked? What are you doing in there, Ellis?*

What would he say?

*What are you doing with my keys?*

He paused, listening. She had stopped.

*What the hell is she doing? Just standing in the middle of the hall? Screw it.*

Ellis reached in and grabbed everything in the way. He stuffed the pile in his coat pocket, then felt for the earrings.

He heard Peggy starting up the steps, and scooped up the jewelry on the bottom. He closed the closet and raced his wife to the bedroom door, opening it just before she touched the knob.

"Still here?" she asked.

He smiled. "Just heading out."

His heart was pounding as he went down the steps. He gingerly set her key ring back on the little table near the coat rack and walked out. On the porch he put his hand in his pants pocket

and felt for the jewelry. Ellis sighed. He'd accidentally grabbed Peggy's rings along with his grandmother's diamonds. He'd leave them on the kitchen counter when he got back from the bar, although they obviously didn't mean anything to her anymore. She'd worn them for eighteen years but stopped about the time she started taking the real-estate seminars. Peggy mentioned that an article had said women Realtors without wedding bands consistently outperformed those who wore them regardless of whether or not they were actually married. Ellis never argued, never put up a fuss because he knew the real reason. She had put away her rings and started her career the same summer that Isley had hung himself in the garage with one of his father's belts.



Brady's was a nearly invisible bar on Eight Mile Road. Sandwiched between a video-rental store and a Chinese restaurant in a neighborhood of liquor stores and bump shops, it was the only building without bars on the windows. Brady's didn't have windows. The place was just a brick front with a white-painted steel door that clanged on a tight spring.

Ellis stood outside the bar, coughing. He always had trouble going out in the cold, not that it was all that cold yet. November in Detroit, with the moisture coming off the Great Lakes, was just the prelude to six months of bone-chilling misery. Still, his lungs didn't like the change in the air. These days his lungs didn't like much of anything, and the coughing came in fits of chest-ripping waves that left him feeling battered. He waited until the wheezing stopped before heading inside.

The interior of Brady's was about what the exterior suggested: a no-frills bar that smelled like fried food and still reeked of cigarette smoke years after the state ban went into effect. The floor was sticky, the tables wobbled, and the corner-mounted television showed muted football



highlights while hidden speakers played vintage Johnny Cash. Without windows, the only light came from the television and a few old-fashioned ceiling lamps, leaving the place a flickering cave of silhouettes.

Warren Eckard sat at the bar, looking up at the television screen and swirling what was left of a Budweiser. Supported by his elbows, he was hunched over the bottle, one foot bouncing to the rhythm of Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues." Warren was wearing a T-shirt that read: I LOVE MY COUNTRY. IT'S THE GOVERNMENT I HATE. The 2XL shirt was still too small, leaving an exposed band of pale skin muffining out of his jeans. Ellis was just thankful Warren wasn't letting his waistband droop any more than it already was.

"Warren," Ellis said, clapping him on the back and taking a seat alongside him.

"Hey! Hey!" Warren turned, grinning at him with an overacted look of surprise. "Well, if it ain't Mr. Rogers. Wonderful day in the neighborhood to ya, old man. How ya been?"

Warren held out his hand, and Ellis took it, his own disappearing inside that big mitt. It had been decades since the accident, but he couldn't help noticing Warren's missing fourth and fifth fingers.

"Who's the kid behind the bar?" Ellis asked, trying to catch the eye of the bartender—some young fella in a black T-shirt with a toothpick in his mouth.

"Freddy," Warren said. "He's Italian. So don't make any dago jokes, or we'll both be swimming *wit da fishes*."

"Where's Marty?"

Warren shrugged. "Day off, maybe. Laid-off likely. Who knows?"

"Freddy?" Ellis called to the kid, who was leaning back on his elbows, fiddling with the toothpick between his teeth. "Can I get a Bud?"

The kid nodded and popped the top off a tall, brown bottle frosted from the cooler. He slapped a square napkin on the bar in front of Ellis, set the bottle on it, and then went back to his elbows and his toothpick.

“Lions playing tonight?” Ellis asked, nodding at the television as he peeled off his coat.

“Against the Redskins,” Warren replied. “Gonna get creamed.”

“Way to support the home team.”

“Well, it’d help if they had any decent players.” He drained his bottle and clapped it on the bar loud enough for Freddy to take notice and pull him a new one.

“Maybe you can try out after the baby comes. What are you eight, nine months, now?”

“Very funny, you’re quite the comedian. You know damn well that”—he switched into his best impersonation of Marlon Brando, which sounded more like a sickly Vito Corleone than Terry Malloy—“*I could have been a contender.*”

“Yeah, well, shoulda, woulda, coulda. Speaking of which…” Ellis withdrew a stapled stack of paper from the inside pocket of his coat. The pages were creased, stained with coffee, and had notes jotted in the margins. The bulk of which was a lot of small text in two columns—much of it equations.

“What’s this?” Warren asked. “More of your geek leaking out? You bringing your work to the bar now?”

“No, this one’s all mine. Been working on it for years—sort of a hobby. You know anything about the theory of relativity? Black holes?”

“Do I look like Stephen Hawking?”

Ellis smiled. “Sometimes. When you’re sitting up straighter and speaking more clearly.”

Warren fake-laughed. “Oh you’re hot tonight.” Turning his attention to Freddy he added, “You hear this guy?—a regular Moe Howard.”

Freddy was pulling a pair of Miller Lites and a Michelob for three women, who had taken seats at the far end of the bar. He looked over, confused. “Who?”

“You know, the Three Stooges.”

Freddy shook his head.

“Jesus, are you shitting me? Moe, Larry, and Curly. Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk. The greatest comedians of our time.”

“What time would that be exactly?” Freddy asked with a smile that both insulted and charmed.

“Never mind.” Warren had his disgusted-with-the-younger-generation expression on, which never ceased to amaze Ellis, because he had known Warren Eckard when they *were* the younger generation.

Warren flipped through the pages, shaking his head the way a cop might at a particularly gruesome crime scene. “I can’t believe you do this shit for fun.”

“You watch football,” Ellis countered. “I play with quantum—”

“Football’s exciting.”

“So is this.”

Warren pointed at the television where a blimp’s-eye view revealed the mammoth FedExField in Landover, Maryland. “There’s more than eighty-five thousand people in those stands, and a hundred million watch the Super Bowl every year. That’s how fun it is.”

“Five hundred million watched Neil Armstrong step on the surface of the moon. How fun is that?”

Warren scowled and sucked on his beer. “So what’s with the egghead papers? Got a point or just showing off?”

“Showing off?”

“You’re Mr. M.I.T and I’m Mr. G.E.D, right?”

Ellis frowned. “Don’t be an ass.”

“Fifty-eight years of practice, my friend. Hard to turn off.” Warren took another swig.

Ellis waited.

Warren looked at him and rolled his eyes. “Okay, okay—skip it. What’s this all about?”

Ellis laid the papers on the bar. “So, there was this guy in Germany back in the thirties, Gustaf Hoffmann, who published a theory reviewed in *Annalen der Physik*. That’s one of the oldest peer-reviewed scientific journals in the world. It’s where Einstein published his theories, okay? I’m talking important science here.”

Warren’s expression was one of labored patience.

“Anyway, it didn’t get much attention. Mostly because the math didn’t hold up, but basically he tried to show that time travel is not only possible but practical. I did one of my theses on Hoffmann, applying modern quantum theory on top of his concepts. Even after I turned in my dissertation, I continued to play with the idea and tweak the math. About two years ago I figured out what Hoffmann did wrong.”

“That’s...that’s great, Ellis.” Warren nodded robotically. “Twisted and sad, but if you’re happy, I’m happy.”

“You don’t understand. This theory—it’s really simple. Not the math—that was a bitch—but the final equation was like all good physics—simple and perfect. The best part is that it’s applicable. I’m talking about applied science, not just theory and conjecture. You know, like how

Einstein came up with a theory and the guys on the Manhattan Project built the A-bomb. Well, that took years of research and development and tons of infrastructure and resources to make it a reality. This”—Ellis tapped the stack of pages—“is much easier, much simpler.”

“Uh-huh, and so…” Warren was quickly losing interest, although Ellis doubted he had much to begin with.

“Don’t you get it? This right here is a blueprint for a time machine. Wouldn’t you like to see the future?”

“Hell no. I’ve seen enough of the present to know what’ll happen. The last good thing society did together was kill Hitler.” Warren took another swallow and wiped his mouth.

“C’mon, are you telling me you don’t want to see how everything turns out?”

“That’s like wanting to stick around to see how jumping off a cliff turns out.” Warren smirked, shaking his head. “World’s going to shit. America’s like that old Buick of mine. The old gal is rusting out. China is gonna kick our ass. Everyone’s gonna be eating rice and carrying little red books.”

Now it was Ellis’s turn to smirk.

“You don’t think so, huh?” Warren said. “The problem is, we’ve gotten weak. The baby boomers and their kids have had it too easy. Spoiled brats, really. And they’re making the next generation even worse. Everyone wants their big houses and fancy cars, but no one wants to work for it. Hell, the only ones willing to work these days are the damn wetbacks.”

Ellis grimaced and looked across the bar at a table of Hispanics near the door. They either didn’t hear or didn’t care.

“You wanna use your indoor voice, Mr. Bunker? And you might consider joining the rest of us in the new millennium and use the revolutionary new terms of *Hispanic* or *Latino*.”

“What?” He looked toward the table near the door, and in a louder voice added, “I’m complimenting them. They’re good workers. That’s what I said.”

“Never mind.” Ellis rubbed his face with his hands. “We were talking about the future, remember?”

“Screw that shit. It’s gonna be some sort of apocalyptic hellscape or, worse, some kind of oppressive prison-world run by Big Brother from that Orson Welles story.”

“*Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written by George Orwell. H. G. Wells wrote *The Time Machine*, and Orson was a director and actor.”

“Whatever. I’m just saying the future don’t look bright, my friend.”

Ellis wondered if Warren realized he was part of that same baby-boom generation he was pinning the downfall of civilization on. He didn’t think Warren would throw his own name in the spoiled-rotten hat, and maybe he was right not to. They both came from blue-collar families whose fathers had worked themselves into early heart attacks. Ellis had been lucky, Warren hadn’t.

Warren’s dream of playing professional football had died for good when he lost his fingers. He’d cut them off in the die-stamp press at work after removing the safety cover because it *was in the way*. Warren won a lawsuit on the grounds that the cover shouldn’t have been removable. Apparently Warren felt as entitled as the next guy—felt he deserved something after losing his fingers. His friend’s personal responsibility had evaporated with the lure of a big check.

“Now, if you can send me to the past, okay then,” Warren said. “Shit, the 1950s were a fucking paradise. America ruled the world and was a beacon of hope and freedom for everyone.

Anyone who wanted to could achieve their dreams. People knew what they were supposed to do. Men worked; women stayed home and raised the kids.”

“Can’t go back. It doesn’t work that way. This Hoffmann fellow says you can only go forward. Well, you don’t actually *go* anywhere. You pretty much stay put and let time pass you by. It’s like when you go to sleep. You lie down, close your eyes, and *poof* it’s the next day. You just skipped over those seven or eight hours. But even if it were possible to go either way I’d still like to see the future.”

“And you will. Part of it, at least. We aren’t dead yet, right?”

Ellis took another swallow of his beer, thinking how strange it was that Warren had chosen those words—almost like a sign from God. He considered mentioning his pink slip from the almighty, but when playing out the scenario in his head, he decided to keep quiet. Life in the Motor City didn’t invite men to be lippy with their feelings. One recession piled on another created strata of cold steel in the spines of its people. Like those who came before, rust-belt folks gritted their teeth, smoked, drank, and got by. They didn’t hug; they shook hands. And Ellis didn’t see the point in telling his best friend that he was dying. Bad enough that he had to walk around with that depressing bit of trivia.

“Anyway.” Ellis picked up the stack of papers and handed them to Warren. “I want you to keep this.”

“Why?”

“Just in case.”

“In case of what?”

“In case it works.”

“Works? In case what works?” Warren’s eyes narrowed, then widened. “Oh, wait—so what are you saying? You’re thinking of doing this? Making a time machine?”

“More than thinking. I started building it right after I figured out Hoffmann’s mistake. I have it in my garage.”

It would be more accurate to say it *was* his garage, but he thought it best to keep this simple. Warren already had that knot in his brow like he was looking at a Magic Eye image and trying to see the three dimensional object in the pattern.

“Is it—it’s not dangerous, is it?”

When he didn’t answer right away, Warren’s eyebrows went up. “Ellis, you’re a bright guy, the smartest I’ve ever known. You’re not thinking of doing something stupid, are you?”

Ellis shook his head. “Don’t worry. Probably won’t work. It’s just that...you know how you feel about not playing on the big fields?” He motioned to the game still on the television. “Well I never got my chance to be an astronaut, to reach space, walk on Mars. This could be like that, but I’m getting old and don’t have a lot of time left to do anything *important*—anything adventurous.”

“What about Peggy?”

Ellis drank from the fresh beer that had been making a puddle because Freddy had failed to put down a new napkin. He was tempted to ask, *Peggy who?*

“It might be for the best. I honestly think she’ll be relieved. A few years ago I mentioned we might consider moving to Texas. There was a great position opening up down there, and it would have meant more money and a big promotion for me. She said she couldn’t leave what little she still had left of Isley, but I could go if I wanted. She seemed disappointed when I stayed.”



“She still blames you?”

“With good reason, don’t you think?”

“Don’t beat yourself up. I would have done the same thing, you know.” Warren shook his head, his lips pursed like he just bit into a lemon. “Any man would.”

“Drop it, okay.”

“Sure. Sorry. I didn’t mean—”

“Forget it.” Raising his voice Ellis called to Freddy. “Hey set me and my friend here up with a couple of shots of Jack. I feel like celebrating.”

Freddy poured, and when he was done, Warren raised his glass. “To a long life.”

Ellis picked up his. “To the future.”

They kissed rims and drank.

## **A NOTE ABOUT AVAILABILITY**

*Hollow World* is a “book of the heart” meaning that it has very little chance of publication success, but is also a story that I just HAD to write. It didn’t matter to me if it turned out that only myself and my wife would ever read it. As expected, it was originally rejected by my main publisher. Not because of its quality, but because of the state of the science fiction market, and the narrowly defined types of books that they think will do well.

Undeterred, I ran a Kickstarter campaign because I wanted to use very talented (and very expensive) professionals to ensure a book that rivals the quality of those coming from New York. I estimated that I would need to spend \$6,000 so I set a goal of \$3,000 figuring I would fund half and have the readers fund the other half it sounded like a project they would be interested in. To say the Kickstarter was successful, is an understatement. It ended up earning more than \$31,000.

Because of a non-compete clause in my current contract with Orbit, I’m not allowed to publish any other book until January 17, 2014. So I set the publication date of *Hollow World* for January 20. People who contributed to the Kickstarter received their ebooks in July 2013 and their print books in August, but that was only because those were “sold” in April when the Kickstarter was held. So you may hear people talking about the book, but you’ll not be able to get a copy just yet, but pre-order pages should be live soon.

To complicate matters further, I’ve subsequently sold the print-only rights of *Hollow World* to a respected fantasy publisher and the soonest they are able to get it onto the market is

April 2014. I've also sold the audio rights to *Hollow World* and they plan on synchronizing their release with the print/ebook.

Because I retained my ebook rights, I can do things that my publishers either can't or won't. So when considering whether you will be purchasing *Hollow World* please keep the following in mind.

- All ebooks released by me will be DRM free. I'll even provide multiple formats so you can read on your ipad and kindle without buying two copies. Just email me a copy of your receipt and what additional formats you would like to receive.
- Any person who buys the print or audio book can receive free ebook copies. The way I see it you already bought the book once in one format, you shouldn't have to pay for the same content twice. I'd rather you use the money you save to buy other books by myself or other authors.

I hope you'll enjoy this sample chapter, and if you do, look for *Hollow World* in April 2014.

## 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. During that time, he wrote twelve 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 writing hiatus 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 70,000 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 more than a dozen foreign right translations including: France, Spain, Russia, Germany, just to name a few.

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 & 2012 Goodreads Choice Award Nominee for Fantasy, the 2013 Audie Award for Fantasy, and the 2009 Book Spot Central's Fantasy Tournament of Books, which he won.

Today, Michael continues to fill blank pages and is working on his third series tentatively titled, the First Empire.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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