In 1566, Croatian Count Miklós Zrínyi defended the Fortress of Szigetvár against an overwhelming Ottoman siege for 33 days. In the end, with troops and supplies exhausted, he led the remainder of his men in a last charge into the enemy lines, killing thousands before being killed themselves. Almost a hundred years later in 1651, Zrínyi's great-grandson, also Miklós Zrínyi and himself a famed general, composed an epic poem of some 1,500 stanzas recalling in vivid and often fantastic detail the events of the siege, the heroes on both sides, and the climactic final sortie that led to defeat for the Hungarians and painfully empty victory for the Turks.

Part chronicle of war, part theological treatise, the poem also has episodes of romance and adventure, as each side is at once humanized and made larger than life. The work is today considered to be one of the cornerstones of Hungarian literature, and one of most important works of the seventeenth century of any language, but has been virtually unknown and entirely inaccessible outside of Hungary – until now.