



Forgemasters of the Realm: Arkaain Savior

Snæbjörn

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Well-written sword fights and an intriguing good-elf-versus-bad-human premise make this Tolkienesque adventure colorful and engaging.

Prolific fantasy author Snæbjörn extends his colorful, if somewhat chaotic, *Forgemasters of the Realm* trilogy with this fourth title, *Arkaain Savior*. Here, he returns to HearthGlen, where elves, gnomes, dwarfs, and humans once banded together to fight off evil forces of the Northern Realm.

Arkaain Savior retains the dramatic fantasy setting and unusual characters of the earlier volumes, but now the residents of HearthGlen, once so successful in defending their lands from outsiders, face serious threats from within the realm. Now it's humans versus the "little people" in an all-encompassing battle for territory.

As in the previous volumes, *Arkaain Savior* features elves, dwarfs, and gnomes in a crisis situation. In this round, they're up against an ominous threat from the domineering human population that is determined to take over the ancestral lands occupied for generations by the "little people." As brothers Stefan and Rober, their human mother, Björglin, and elven father, Runar, learn of the impending loss of their homestead, Blesugrof, little people throughout the realm face the same problem. They must all band together in a quest for secret documents and a magical amulet that may hold the key to their survival.

Snæbjörn sets Stefan and Rober on their journey without a clear explanation of how the documents and amulet might aid in fending off the evil humans. The action is near-constant, however, as elves, dwarfs, gnomes, and goblins battle orcs, wyverns, yeti, and scryers. Readers may be sufficiently engaged by the sword fights that they won't worry too much about the underlying plot. Other distractions include a whole new group of mythological beasts—tjörns and airwharts, for instance—though the book introduces fantastical creatures at such frequent intervals that the story often reads more like a cast list than an adventure tale.

Apparently with some aspirations toward Tolkien, Snæbjörn includes characters like Helgi the Grey, an ancient, Gandalfesque wizard who helps the band of adventurers along the way. Also reminiscent of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are maps of the realm, although none of the illustrations approach the imaginative detail of Tolkein's classics. Many of the illustrations are generic and bear oblique references to untitled clip art available online.

Well-choreographed battle scenes provide some shining moments in a quest that takes a number of quick turns in a short amount of time. Readers may experience some confusion along the way, as Snæbjörn makes detours for family and village dramas that are intriguing, but seldom fully developed. Deeper development of the characters and their relationships could provide the thread that's needed to connect action scenes more cohesively.

Though not quite faithful enough to be an homage to *The Lord of the Rings*, or original enough to stake out new territory for fantasy stories, *Forgemasters of the Realm: Arkaain Savior* offers mild entertainment for readers who don't take the genre too seriously.

SHEILA M. TRASK (September 23, 2013)

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