

Salvation Taverns: A Rooke's Tale

E. M. Goldsmith

KPM

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In a world plagued by fairies and dragons, a determined storyteller may be people's last hope in the epic fantasy novel Salvation Taverns.

E. M. Goldsmith's *Salvation Taverns* is a vast fantasy novel about a storyteller who is working to save his land.

The story's action is immediate. The Rooke, with friends and his sons, travels out from his sanctum to revive the oral history of Aerda, where once

Teachers taught. Tailors sewed. Musicians played their lively tunes. Bakers created heavenly treats and bread that could not be matched ... Gardeners grew wondrous flowers, fruits, and vegetables.

But that was long ago. Now, people have lost hope. Art is dying in the land. At the same time, two dragons have stirred toward waking; they could burn Aerda to the ground. Thus, the Rooke and his party make quick work of their travels, all while solving puzzles and reconciling themselves to their pasts. As they travel, they are also plagued by new and devious individuals. Still, they persist in trying to outrun their pursuers.

The worldbuilding is extensive and immersive—conveyed from the Rooke's point of view, through the stories he tells, through people's conversations, and via occasional secondary perspectives. These narrative shifts help to maintain intrigue throughout—and to make sense of the complicated fantasy setting. And while the book's action scenes move at a steady, clipped pace, the Rooke's tales also temper the book's forward movement, making its epic progression easier to follow. Further, even as the story spans centuries, it troubles the nuances of moral gray areas in an intriguing way. Still, the Rooke's party is quite large, and not all of its participants are equally well developed—in particular in comparison to the Rooke, whose first identity is concealed, though it is suggested that those details about him are significant: "He remembered himself only in dreams and shadows."

This first series title concludes with abruptness, though it does maintain enough hope to carry interest through to future volumes: in the end, Aerda may yet be saved, despite the fact that a fire dragon has already razed a city. Indeed, a sorceress who's tethered to storytellers of the past gives the Rooke's party room to succeed.

In the expansive fantasy novel *Salvation Taverns*, the last storyteller works with his friends and allies to bring back the beauty of his homeland and stave off the wrath of dragons.

RACHEL TELLJOHN (March 25, 2024)

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