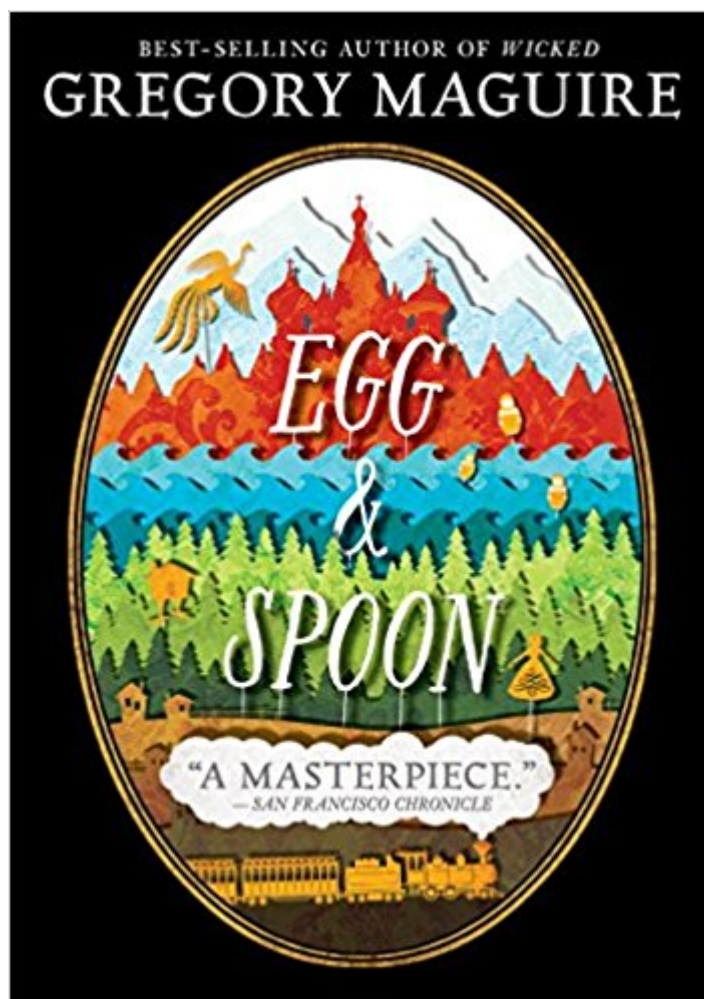


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# Egg And Spoon



## Synopsis

"A beautiful reminder that fairy tales are at their best when they illuminate the precarious balance between lighthearted childhood and the darkness and danger of adulthood." — School Library Journal (starred review)

Elena Rudina lives in the impoverished Russian countryside, and there is no food. But then a train arrives in the village, a train carrying a cornucopia of food, untold wealth, and a noble family destined to visit the Tsar in Saint Petersburg—a family that includes Ekaterina, a girl of Elena's age. When the two girls' lives collide, an adventure is set in motion, an escapade that includes mistaken identity, a monk locked in a tower, a prince traveling incognito, and—in a starring role only Gregory Maguire could have conjured—Baba Yaga, witch of Russian folklore, in her ambulatory house perched on chicken legs.

## Book Information

Paperback: 496 pages

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Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 153 customer reviews

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in Books > Children's Books > Fairy Tales, Folk Tales & Myths > Multicultural #205

in Books > Teens > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy > Wizards & Witches

Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Gr 7 Up—Peasant girl Elena Rudina is slowly starving to death along with her dying mother in the Russian countryside. Her eldest brother has just been drafted into the Tsar's army. When a train carrying Ekaterina, a girl of the nobility, unexpectedly breaks down in their village, an opportunity presents itself. Through a series of unplanned events, the girls switch places, and Elena is off to Saint Petersburg to visit the Tsar, whom she will ask to free her brother. Add in a young prince,

Baba Yaga, a fire dragon, and dancing matryoshka brides, and you have a rollicking adventure full of Russian folklore and vigor. Michael Page gives an amazing reading, making Baba Yaga a cross between a witch and a comedian. He easily conveys Elena's fears, sorrows, and pessimism. Page's deep, craggy voice adapts to each character, making them distinct and appealing. This fractured fairy tale is one of the year's best recordings and a must-have at any library. —B. Allison Gray, Goleta Public Library, Santa Barbara, CA --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Though the story bears some marks of a heroic quest, it is really a series of dreamy, expertly painted vignettes, set pieces both absurd and spectacular. Maguire's wit is shown to best advantage when in sync with his lush whimsy. In this surfeit of myth and mayhem, there are also moments of poignant quiet, when the grand quest of saving the magic of Russia recedes. In these moments, the human comes to the fore, and our focus narrows once more to a child longing for a parent, a mother longing for a child, the aching burden of living through suffering that life demands again and again. It is impossible not to root for girls and watches and aunts alike, and to cheer their little victories as acts of grace. The New York Times Book Review: Maguire marries the traditional "Prince and the Pauper" narrative to the Russian folktale of Baba Yaga with his trademark wit and aplomb. His lyrical descriptions of the drab countryside are equally detailed and moving as the charmed, floating courts of the Romanov dynasty. Each character is well-drawn and fascinating... The author weaves a lyrical tale full of magic and promise, yet checkered with the desperation of poverty and the treacherous prospect of a world gone completely awry. Egg and Spoon is a beautiful reminder that fairy tales are at their best when they illuminate the precarious balance between lighthearted childhood and the darkness and danger of adulthood. —School Library Journal (starred review) An epic rich with references, aphorisms and advice. An ambitious, Scheherazade-ian novel, rather like a nesting-doll set of stories, that succeeds in capturing some of the complexities of both Russia and life itself. —Kirkus Reviews (starred review) Like the matryoshka doll Elena carries, there are a lot of layers to Maguire's story. Rich, descriptive language will reward readers who like to sink their teeth into a meaty story. —Publishers Weekly (starred review) Maguire savors every inch of his elaborate narrative, introducing tropes from Russian folktales and giving his characters plenty of play, especially the hardboiled Baba Yaga, who seems to exist outside of time (and is akin to Maguire's other witches). The plot meanders, developing everywhere at once yet always intriguing. ... [T]here is so much in his rich and consistently surprising prose that young readers will ... enjoy the gift of his magical story. —The Horn Book (starred review) Set in Tsarist Russia,

Gregory Maguire's suspenseful story conjures the folkloric figure Baba Yaga--a hilariously acerbic old witch--and incorporates fantastic creatures such as the Firebird, an ice-dragon and a talking cat, to create a fairytale saga that will delight and challenge its readers. ... Egg & Spoon's phrasing and vocabulary give it a classic feel that reflects its folktale roots, as does its storyteller-style narration. ... An excellent choice for younger readers who are reading at more advanced levels. Alternating and ultimately interweaving story lines add complexity to the plot, which is driven by an enticing mix of mystery, danger and magic.

•Shelf Awareness (starred review)Although Cat and Elena's burgeoning friendship and determination make for a heartening story, it's Maguire's Baba Yaga, full of irreverent anachronisms and a salty attitude, who steals the show... Maguire's fantastical world is filled with Russian folklore and history, particularly the growing unrest that eventually led to the October Revolution, and ... the whimsical tone and lush setting are ... plenty appealing.

•BooklistThe story flows easily although it includes uncommon vocabulary and an uncommon setting. However, the characters of Russian folklore are what captivates and holds the reader; especially Baba Yaga, who is ancient, modern, and futuristic, at the same time.

•Library Media ConnectionGregory Maguire's novels have never lacked for audacity. ... Now, taking on the rich tradition of Russian folk tales, he has allowed himself even greater extravagance in "Egg & Spoon." ... Somehow, Maguire transforms the wildness of his story into a commentary on the chaos and injustice of our own world -- a sort of folkloric news of the day.

•NewsdayEven minor characters have flesh and blood, and brilliant cameo moments. ... The writing, frankly, is brilliant. ... It is common enough for a novelist to be able to plot intricately. It is common, even, for novelists to write as lyrically as poets. It is rare to find both qualities in the same novelist. ... "Egg & Spoon" is thoughtful, engaging, and theatrical in the deepest sense. This is one of those young reader's books that may be gifted to any ardent reader of almost any age, as long as they're open to the possibilities of wonder.

•The Boston GlobeThe author of 'Wicked' wows with a magical tale set in the Russian countryside, complete with wisecracking witch Baba Yaga, she of Slavic folklore fame.

•Scholastic Instructor[Maguire] plays with Russian folk tales, with a delightful nod to the ever-wicked, ever-beguiling Baba Yaga. ... A somewhat imaginary Russified landscape, complete with magic matroishkas, and a healthy helping of playful language ... make the story here a delight.

•Globe + MailMaguire weaves themes of class struggle and environmental upheaval into an engaging and relatable tale. This isn't a story about desolation, but one of hope. Elena and Ekaterina prove that with a little tenacity and bravery, people can change their lives for the better.

•BookPageThe author writes nimbly.

•The Wall Street JournalThis

historical fantasy is as big as Mother Russia. ... A grandly sardonic masterpiece. — San Francisco Chronicle A true literary gem. — San Antonio Express News Maguire conjures up one sumptuous image after another... A novel as intricately and colorfully detailed as Cat's Faberge egg. — The Columbus Dispatch So much swirls through this blizzard of a novel that it's easy to get (delightfully) lost in it. ... The adventure dashes along so compelling on its chicken legs (like Baba Yaga's enchanted house) that it's more than worth a read. — Virginian-Pilot The story ... [is] richly told [and] contains important lessons about wealth and inequality. ... Part fantasy, part fairy tale, part adventure, this is a children's tale also directed at grown ups -- or one perhaps best enjoyed together. — Plain Dealer An exciting nesting doll of a novel, entertaining and rich, steeped in Russian folklore. ... Fantastic, detailed and lush, like an exquisite lacquer box. — Star Tribune A rich and layered story, full of gorgeous images and sentences, a matryoshka doll sort of tale. ... This fabulous witch of Russian folklore is a fabulously written character, funny, scary, wry, and just about everything possible in Maguire's capable hands. ... The plot is unique and complex, swirling around in highly unusual directions. It is staying with me and the more I mull it over the more I love it. ... A unique and wonderful read. — Monica Edinger, Educating Alice blog A lush and literary tale. — Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books A great, long, lose-yourself-in-it story sparkling with the magic of Russian folklore. ... Witty and thorough in its imagining. — Toronto Star

I don't have much patience for regular speed on audio books, so as usual, I listened at 1.25x, which was perfect. A monk, the narrator of the story, is amusing with his asides and humor in telling the story. Couple this with the outstanding voice narration of Michael Page, and the story is taken to a higher level of enjoyment. Page seamlessly voices the numerous characters where males sound male, females sound female, and witches sound witchy! Speaking of witches, Baba Yaga steals the show. What a hoot she is! She is a perfect counter to the prim and proper-ness expected in civilized society, and her character made the book for me. There are so many different levels to this story -- there is the fantastical and the the practical, smoothly woven together by Maguire to create something for everyone to enjoy. Folk tales and fairy tales are good for all ages, and though this is categorized young adult, there is definitely adult appeal in Egg and Spoon. While the reading could be challenging for some younger readers, the richly drawn characters and setting, along with a basic plot that's highly unusual and interesting, are going to keep readers engaged. Advanced readers are likely to get a different experience from others because it's really quite a complex story with statements on social injustice and inequality, the environment, the life, death, and more. The

book goes longer than it needs to with some extraneous and seemingly random parts which could have been left on the cutting room floor. I feel like had I read this instead of listened, there definitely would have been some skimming. Even so, it's a wonderfully creative story and listening was time well spent. I have several of Gregory Maguire's books on my TBR shelf, and *Egg and Spoon* is incentive for me to move them to the top of the pile. Thank you to Audiofile / SYNC Audiobooks for Teens free summer audio book program for providing this download with absolutely no strings attached. As always, my honest opinion is the only kind I give. If you like this review, visit my blog *Hall Ways* for book views, reviews, and news you can use - or not. [...]

Every sentence is a pleasure to read. His prose are superiorly entertaining. MaGuire has the gift of using irony, humor, sarcasm and wit in everything he writes. His characters are smart and speak volumes for all social classes and their challenges. MaGuire makes you think. His characters are strong. His characters shine with common sense and the wisdom that is found by living and making due with what fate hands them. "*Egg & Spoon*" is a shining light on the goodness of humanity while facing difficult circumstances. Like all of Maguire's books, "*Egg & Spoon*" is a thinking persons book. It's more than just fantasy. It's real life sufferings being met by the best of the human spirit. "*Egg & Spoon*" is a must read for all ages. If your a young adult there are many life lessons to be learned. If your an adult with all the trappings and stresses thereof, then it's a soothing tonic of escapism with brilliant writing. MaGuire does not patronize nor talk down to his audience, he elevates them by engaging the reader to think and "read between the lines" with a wink and nudge to both the young and old. "*Egg & Spoon*" is quite simply, a brilliant piece of literature on a higher plain than the recent norm in the young adult genre. Teen werewolves and dystopian societies are entertaining. We all enjoy junk food from time to time, however it's nice to finally be fed from the hands of a gourmet chef. "*Egg & Spoon*" is pure gourmet literature that should be studied in classrooms everywhere from here after.

Another read from you're author of *Wicked*. This read was a slow build through Russian folklore and fairytales, but once it got moving it was enjoyable. Mr. Maguire tends to spend a lot of read time creating this world and weaving the characters' lives in it; it works and it doesn't. On one hand, you become connected with the characters of Cat and Elena, even Baba Gaga. You grow with them as the characters' become more complex. On the other hand, Mr. Maguire spend so much time creating this wonderful tapestry of a story that he had to end it almost abruptly. It feels like like you are robbed of precious time with these characters that he had just started to lay the ground work for,

the Dragon milk tooth soldier boy, Anton, etc. Story lines are left hanging in the icy freeze. Though the ending does try to pull a little of those loose lines together; it still feels rushed through. All and all, I did enjoy this read

OK, there's some obvious allegorical stuff along the lines of AlGore's "Inconsistent Truth" (or whatever he calls the pseudo-science they force-fed kids a decade ago), but as a Slav and a lover of all things Vasilisa and Baba Yaga, this was a great read. The images of giant Matryoshkas and soldiers of dragon's teeth.....wow.

I love Maguire. Wicked is one of my all time favorite books. If you are looking for that kind of story, this isn't it. The characters are not nearly as complex as his characters in previous books. I also love Russian lit and Russian folk tales which this book nods to both but it lacks some richness. It is not a waste of time but it is ponderous. Overall, it was okay. I think if it had come from a different author, I might have given it a better shake. I just have really high expectations of Maguire.

Loved Loved Loved this story. Sent it to my Great Niece who reads a lot and she enjoyed it. The adventure and the imagination is awesome.

Here's a group on a quest that must be one of the oddest team of adventurers in all of fiction. There's Baba Yaga and her chicken-footed hut, the Firebird, a runaway child prince, a Russian peasant girl, a rich and beautiful teenager who barely escaped becoming betrothed to the prince, and .... Let us not forget the ice dragon and the enchanted white tiger. These are the core group at the heart of Maguire's Russian tale. Readers who choose to join them on their wild romp are sure enjoy the trip.

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