

Into the Forest: Tales of the Baba Yaga

Lindy Ryan, Editor

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The chilling entries of the literary collection *Into the Forest* revolve around the Slavic, folkloric witch Baba Yaga, depicting her in a variety of modes, from benevolent to all-devouring.

Each of the twenty-two stories provides a new angle on Baba Yaga: sometimes she is the hero, sometimes the villain. She both helps and preys on the weak, her characteristic fondness for children shining through as she alternates between eating them and adopting them. One Baba Yaga takes a lover, a knight who defends her from angry hordes, but who keeps his own magical secrets. Another Baba Yaga poses as a peddler to lure the boys of a village to her oven. Multiple young women visit Baba Yaga for assistance with reproductive care, from aborting to birthing.

While some of these stories are set in modern times, and others in historical or fantastical settings, their major themes cross over, and the ambivalence and wildness of Baba Yaga prevails. Spurned women receive special aid from her, with Baba Yaga often reveling in crunching on the flesh and bones of treacherous men. Cross-cultural influences also appear, with one tale featuring a rusalka, or the Russian spirit of a drowned girl, and another giving a nod to the candy-housed witch in the Grimms's tale of Hansel and Gretel.

Lindy Ryan's preface sets the tone for the anthology, situating it as a contribution to the recent flowering of collections featuring women writing horror, while Christina Henry's foreword provides historical and scholastic context for Baba Yaga folktales. The book's tone shifts past these introductions. Throughout, the prose is lyrical and brutal; each story unfolds hidden truths and twists about the all-devouring witch.

The stories in *Into the Forest* collect the guts and bones of some of the world's oldest witch tales and refashion them into something new, beautiful, and gruesome.

JEANA JORGENSEN (November / December 2022)

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