**Resources**

Cooper, Brian. ‘Baba-Yaga, the Bony-Legged: A Short Note on the Witch and Her Name.’ New Zealand Slavonic Journal (1997), pp. 82-88

Dixon-Kennedy, Mike, *Encyclopedia of Russian Myth & Legend*, ABC-CLIO Inc, 1998

Kononenko, Natalie, *Slavic Folklore Handbook*, Greenwood Folklore Handbooks, 2007

Wixman, Ronald, *The Peoples of the USSR: An Ethnographic Handbook*, 1998

Zaroff, Roman, ‘Measurement of Time by the Ancient Slavs,’ Studio Mythologica Slavica XIX (2016), pp. 9-39.

**Introduction**:

Variously a mythical wise woman, a witch, a forest spirit or a leader of others in the spirit realm, Baba Yaga’s legacy of lore comes from mixed cultural groups within Eastern Europe and as such a fantastic and horrifying collection of motifs have assembled around the character. Flying through the air in a magical mortar and pestle, she leaves her forest hut which sits astride chicken legs, its keyhole filled with sharp teeth and its land surrounded by a fence of human bones topped with skulls. These tropes have evidently gathered together from different sources and, in fact, even the etymology of the name Baba Yaga cannot be fixed for certain. Baba is certainly derived from Babushka, and is probable a babble-term, meaning grandmother or more distinctly an older married woman of a lowly social class. Yaga is more difficult to fix down but has mixed meanings of relevance in various Slavic languages; translating for example as horror, anger, witch or dryad.

**Approaches & Inspirations**

The first story follows the original tale in structure but has been fleshed out using a variety of themes. The first being the Taiga, the second largest biodome in the world, that great forest that stretches across northern climes - Alaska, Russia etc. The immensity of this forest has always captured my attention and it seemed only fitting that a forest dwelling Russian crone of immense power would make this her abode. I’ve also slowly woven in the more well-known features of the more well-known incarnation of Baba Yaga: the mortar and pestle and the chicken-legged hut. There’s also debatable speculation about Baba Yaga being a sort of guardian of the underworld, a being who positions herself between the land of the living and the dead. First and foremost, I’m a storyteller and this interpretation of her legend was too delicious to resist.

The second story is different from the rest as it features an old woman who meddles in magic. Since the story of the ‘Vermin Witch’ was so interesting, I thought I’d take the risk of thematic dissonance and include the tale. After all, she is a baba and a witch so she doesn’t stray too far from the thematic boundaries. Particularly, her act of stealing the stars was an interesting narrative element and I was inspired to portray this in terms of Slavic cosmological beliefs, which have this very *relational* theme - the Milky Way being the ‘Way of the Ancestors’ and the morning star as the sister of the sun, for example. I thought it would be satisfying to flesh out her narrative by portraying our vermin witch as a very lonely old woman who stole stars out of bitterness. This motivation isn’t in the original tale but I feel that it fits on a narrative level.

‘Jenzibaba’s Grove’ is largely inspired by an interesting creative connection that may or may not have been a connection made by the original tellers of the tales. Jenzibaba’s grove induces panic and disorientation in much the same way that the ‘Great God Pan’ was said to have done in Greek/Roman mythology. To flesh out this idea of panic, I thought I would conflate two separate stories: one in which a hunter wrestles a dead hare from the cave dwelling Jenzibaba and the common belief that whoever entered her grove would become so lost they could never find their way out again. In this conflation, I thought it would be an interesting narrative device to make the hunter’s disorientation a form of vengeance enacted by a witch very angry to have lost a source of food.

Lastly, ‘The Blood Sucking Baba’ has been written based on a fascinating tale that seems to have arisen from the mingling of Russian slavic tradition and native Serbian culture, particularly the Chuvan and Yukagir people groups. In addition to the story, I researched what little I could garner on the shamanistic-animistic beliefs of these peoples, which has guided much of the story telling. Moreover, I’ve drawn upon descriptions of Baba Yaga from across the slavic world to make Princess Marfita’s encounter with the hag much more vivid.

**Further Reading & Viewing**

*Hellboy* and *Fables* comics both feature Baba Yaga

‘Pathfinder’ Role Play Game has a module that features Baba Yaga

‘Lawn Dogs’ is a film that references the tale and uses it as a plot device

‘Baba Yaga’ - a film by Corrado Farino

*The Necromancer’s House* - a novel by Christopher Buehlman

<http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/babayaga/themes.html> - a very comprehensive source on modern interpretations of Baba Yaga