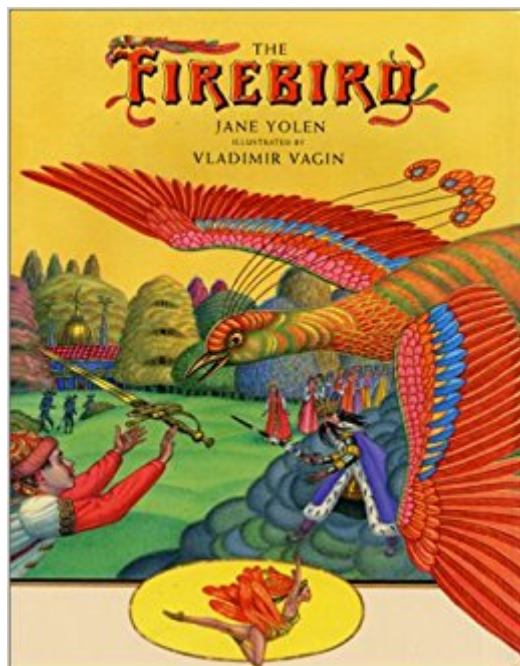


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The Firebird



Synopsis

In a certain land, in a certain kingdom -- as they say in old Russia -- on the far side of a certain tangled wood, a garden shimmered like a green jewel....Inside that jewellike garden, an evil wizard named Kostchei the Deathless holds a princess and her nine maidens captive, turning all those who attempt to save them to stone. But help is nearby -- Prince Ivan searching the nearby tangled wood for food, finds the young women and vows to save them. And with some help from the powerful and mischievous Firebird, as well as with much true courage from within, Prince Ivan will slay a horde of demons and Kostchei himself in order to free the damsels. Jane Yolen's rich, mystical narrative is based on both the well-known Russian folktale and the famous Balanchine/Stravinsky ballet. Enhancing that theme, Vladimir Vagin has created exquisite paintings with a double focus: The folktale takes center stage, while intricate vignettes of the ballet serve as a border. The result is a seamlessly woven multilayered tapestry of story and art that will make this book a treasure for ballet lovers new and old.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This gracefully structured picture book introduces readers to the famous Firebird ballet (choreographed by George Balanchine to Igor Stravinsky's music) and the Russian folklore that inspired it. Accomplished hunter Prince Ivan becomes lost in a strange, tangled wood where the only living creature is the magnificent Firebird, which he snares. In exchange for her life, the magical bird offers Prince Ivan one of her glorious feathers and a pledge of help if ever he should call upon

her. The feather and Firebird serve Prince Ivan well when he battles evil wizard Kostchei the Deathless and frees the maidens imprisoned in Kostchei's garden. Yolen (*How Do Dinosaurs Say Goodnight?*) crafts her well-paced tale from a variety of sources (listed in an author's note), including her own childhood memory of seeing Firebird danced by Maria Tallchief in 1949. Employing a design that is both stylish and informative, Vagin (*The King's Equal*) depicts a ballet performance in a panel that runs across the lower portion of each page, while the larger, top portion of the pages contain his dramatic interpretation of the story. From the brilliant, red-plumed Firebird to the sumptuously decorated house of the wizard, Vagin's crisply rendered paintings evoke czarist Russia. The elegant costumes and poses in his ballet scenes may well leave many readers eager to view a live performance. Ages 3-6. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Kindergarten-Grade 3-A well-known character in Russian folklore, the fierce and beautiful Firebird, is also featured in the ballet, set to the music of Igor Stravinsky. It is the ballet version of the story that Yolen and Vagin present in this richly hued picture book. Young Prince Ivan is hunting near the castle of the terrible demon Kostchei when he captures Firebird. In exchange for its freedom, the bird gives Ivan one of its feathers, which eventually helps him to defeat the demon and marry the beautiful princess imprisoned in the castle. The text makes the story clear and exciting, faltering slightly at the rhymed incantations: "Wave the feather in the air- Firebird will be right there." Yolen has based her telling on George Balanchine's choreography, which varies slightly from other versions. The Fokine version, found in Louis Untermeyer's *Tales from the Ballet* (Golden Press, 1968; o.p.), adds a magical egg holding the powers of Kostchei. The illustrations are especially useful in explicating the ballet. In the large painting at the top of each spread, the action is played out in the forest by the hero, villain, and bird. In the long, narrow artwork below the text, the scene on stage is shown, with costumed dancers portraying the Firebird and demons. Even the pit orchestra is given a scene in the beginning. Not to be confused with two stunningly illustrated titles of different folktales, Demi's *The Firebird* (Holt, 1994; o.p.) and Ruth Sanderson's *The Golden Mare, the Firebird, and the Magic Ring* (Little, Brown, 2001), Yolen's *Firebird* will be most appreciated as an introduction to the ballet. Ellen Heath, Orchard School, Ridgewood, NJ Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"In a certain land, in a certain kingdom--as they say in old Russia--on the far side of a certain tangled wood" was a garden ruled by an evil wizard, Kostchei the Deathless. Kostchei holds the princess and her nine maidens captive in his garden, anyone who attempts to rescue them is turned

to stone. Prince Ivan is out hunting and follows the magical firebird to this garden. The red firebird bestows one of his magical feathers to Prince Ivan, but will that be enough to help him conquer Kostchei and free the princess and her maidens. Vagin's exceptional illustrations display the folktale as well as depict scenes from the famous ballet. I loved this book! The language flows naturally making this book ideal for a read aloud; this is an essential element of traditional literature. The Firebird also exhibits other features of quality traditional literature, for instance, the simple story structure, the struggle between good and evil, references the oral tradition, has an indistinct setting, and succinct language. The illustrations are so entrancing that I had to go through and look at all the illustrations on every page before I read the story. Yolen includes an author's note at the end that provides the reader with some insight into Russian folktales. The Firebird is a reoccurring character in many Russian tales and sometimes dwells in a golden cage. My four-year-old son actually introduced me to this folktale via Disney's "Little Einsteins - Rocket's Firebird Rescue" (a movie made for preschoolers), and we were both ecstatic to learn that the hero in the traditional version is Prince Ivan because Ivan is my son's middle name :). I am very excited to start reading other variants and versions of this magical tale!

With one reading this book became my four year old's favorite. After fifty readings it still is. The story is short enough for a bedtime story, yet detailed enough to be interesting, and the drawings are colorful and captivating. Each double page has a panoramic of the story on the top 1/2, text below, and a panoramic of the stage ballet on the bottom. My girls (4 and 6) love comparing the dancers to the story characters, noting how the costumes make the people look like the characters. It's a perfect opportunity to discuss real vs. pretend. For example, they are quick to point out that although the villain is killed the dancer is only pretending to be. The story is obviously meant to be told aloud, although in a few places I find the rhythm awkward. Overall, it is excellent. My daughters' favorite line is, "And Kostchei the Deathless met Death at last." As expected, the story ends happily. And my daughters are happy to hear it - again, and again, and again....

I am teaching Stravinsky's The Firebird at my daughter's preschool and I wanted a picture book that mirrored the ballet storyline. This book seemed to fit the bill precisely, touting that it was based on Stravinsky's ballet and even had illustrations of an orchestra and ballet dancers under those of the actual story. The illustrations are beautiful and the author starts off well, but the story makes a wayward turn during what should be The Infernal Dance. Unfortunately, in my opinion, it follows Ballanchine's version of the storyline. There is no mention of the Firebird's spell that forces Katshei

and his minions to dance until they fall exhausted. Nor is there a mention of the Firebird casting a sleeping spell (Berceuse). Instead, the Firebird drops a sword into Prince Ivan's hands and he plunges it into Katshei's chest. Perfectly suited for three and four year olds, no? All that could have been avoided if the author just stuck with the original ballet plot--it's a children's book after all. Katshei's soul and magic powers reside in his magic egg, which the Firebird shows Ivan so that he can destroy it. When he does, Katshei and his minions vanish and all that were under his spell are liberated. No blood, no dead bodies and far more symbolic and interesting from a teaching standpoint. If you don't care about the original ballet plot or the unnecessary violence, you will love the pictures.

Gorgeous book. Exciting. My 6 yo grandson loved it and read it twice the first hour it arrived. I gave him this book with the CD of Stravinsky.

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