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J. Nelle Patrick (Pseudonym), Jackson Pearce

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Natalya knows a secret.

A magical Faberge egg glows within the walls of Russia's Winter Palace.

It holds a power rooted in the land and stolen from the mystics.

A power that promises a life of love for her and Alexei Romanov.

Power, that, in the right hands, can save her way of life.

But it's in the wrong hands.

Tsarina Details

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From Reader Review *Tsarina* for online ebook

Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

Initial reaction: THAT ENDING, WHYYYYYYYY?

Note: I could totally see it coming, but I still hoped that the plotberg would be avoided. Spoiler: it was hit at full speed ahead.

Review: Russian history ranks highly among my favorite kinds of history. Let's be honest: some crazy shit happened in Russia. There are so many amazing stories to be told. As such, I was thrilled to hear about J. Nelle Patrick's *Tsarina*. The fact that Patrick is actually a pseudonym for Jackson Pearce upped my excitement, since I really enjoyed *Sisters Red*. The Russia stuff is delightful and the writing solid, but *Tsarina* took more of a fantasy angle than I was really expecting.

Read the full review at [A Reader of Fictions](#).

Lauren Stoolfire says

Tsarina by J. Nelle Patrick has a lot of potential. Historical-fantasy is one of my favorite genres and I was hoping I could count this story as one of my new favorite reads. I will say though that my favorite elements of the story are seeing the Romanov family (I could have done with a lot more of them actually as well as Rasputin himself) and the 1917 Russian setting as the Revolution is really beginning to hit home. The author takes some liberties with the timeline of events and changes up some of the cast in order to suit the story that she's telling. I also have to admit that I didn't find our Natalya, our leading lady, all that inspiring as a potential heroine. Although *Tsarina* never quite hit the mark for me, it's still an enjoyable read. If you like the 1997 animated movie *Anastasia*, you may also enjoy this stand alone historical fantasy novel.

Meg says

Tsarina, Tsarina, why wouldn't you let me love you? I wanted to love this book you guys. It's imperial Russia at the time of the Russian Revolution. THERE ARE ROMANOVS (according to the blurb which is a complete LIE because there is only a physical Romanov presence in the first chapter). I can't be the only one who looked at this book and thought

right?

And while there was some of this:

And the teensiest bit of this:

There was mostly this:

Magic. Egg.

Read the full review on Cuddlebuggery.

Brandi says

This was a solid four stars for me up until I figured out my hopes for the direction of the romance were wrong, and then that ending. The story is still good enough to merit a happy three though; allow me to elucidate on my experience.

At its base, Tsarina is a historical fantasy crafted around the Romanov family during the revolution, but it feels more like a YA romance in some ways. Natalya is the young noble that has the heart of Alexei Romanov, and he hers. They have known each other their whole lives and have the love that comes from complete security in one's choice, despite their young age. Alexei takes Natalya into a deeper level of their relationship with the revelation of the Constellation Egg, a gift from Rasputin that has magical powers imbued by the mystic himself. He no longer has to fear his hemophilia as the egg heals him as surely as nothing happened at all, and as he reveals this to Natalya, he divulges that the egg doesn't only work as a healer, but does much more- like protecting those that the Romanov's love. They share a very sweet and tender moment as this conversation goes on, even though they can hear the chanting of rioters just outside the gates. Neither the young Romanov nor his love actually believe anything come of the people protesting, and many times Natalya views them as children throwing fits, as she believes completely in her Tsar, and his capabilities of quelling the growing problem. The love between her and Alexi was well crafted and nicely subtle- very sweet and believable.

”Alexei must have seen the hurt on my face—hiding my thoughts from him was nearly impossible. He saw every blink, every fidget, every half-sigh. I suspect it was because, given his condition, he spent much of his life being watched and worried about; he learned to be equally aware of others’ pain, be it of the body or the heart.”

Along with the fact that I really found myself caring about both Natalya and Alexei, I cared about Emilia as well. She and Natalya were truly great and as their friendship grew so too did my enjoyment of the story.

”Those of us who remained were orphaned, wandering about, waiting for the world we’d always known to spin back around and claim us. It was lonely now, our houses islands amid broken seas of our old lives.”

I loved the way these relationships developed, and have to point out how well written this book is. It was very easy to feel what Natalya and Emilia were going through and it was easy to picture the Russian that we were shown.

Now, my issue with the story, centers on the other love interest- Leo. It’s not even that I dislike Leo, it’s that

I don't like the way the story worked around him. Everything was too rushed, and it felt like it made what I'd read before less authentic. Let me explain as best as I can but it's spoilery, very much so, so do **NOT** read if you don't want to be spoiled. (view spoiler)

I'm sure that the relationship that the story centers around will not be a problem for many readers, so certainly don't put it off just because it turned *me* off. I do expect that many will be annoyed at the ending though, it was really rushed and too tidy, if fantastically magical.

Now a word: (view spoiler)

Maggie Stiefvater says

Possibly I am biased, because the author (Jackson Pearce writing as J. Nelle Patrick) was sitting across from me in my squishy office chair while she wrote this. I'm fond of both Jackson and that chair.

Possibly I am biased because we brainstormed about this book and The Dream Thieves as we loitered in my kitchen with the 4,000 cups of coffee who died to make both of these books possible.

Possibly I am biased because you always like books you saw being born on your living room floor*.

It's possible.

But it's more possible that I really wanted something historical with a hint of magic; something that didn't feel like an assignment; something with a moose in it.

This is that book.**

*This is unpalatable

**Also, if you don't believe me, believe Kirkus, anyway, because they gave it a starred review.

And I just think you'll like it.

Nasty Lady MJ says

Really 1.5 stars. To see full review click [here](#).

I imagine a conversation went like this when pitching this book:

Publisher: Well, Ms. Patrick the Russian Revolution idea is interesting. But we have to have something to compare it with.

Patrick: Why?

Publisher: New trend in YA. Everything has to be compared to something else.

Patrick: Like Hunger Games?

Publisher: Waaaay over done.

Patrick: Okay, what about Dr. Who?

Publisher: Are you serious? Dr. Who meets the Russian Revolution. That is even ridiculous for our company. Here, watch some TV I'll talk to you in a few hours.

Ten days later which equals ten minutes in publishing land.

Publisher: So, have you came up with a mesh up for us.

Patrick: Yes, uh, Material Girls?

Publisher: Material Girls? Is that that bad Hillary Duff knock off of Sense and Sensibility that takes place in LA and has her sister cast in it (God, I love nepotism).

Patrick: Yep, that one.

Publisher: I love it.

Enter MJ

MJ: I don't love it.

To be fair, there's nothing involving Material Girls in the plot synopsis. The comparison is only mine to make. But if you've seen that movie, you're getting a good idea what Tsarina is about. Throw in a little Stockholm Syndrome, a McGuffin, and you got this book.

The only thing it really had in its favor is the concept and the setting.

However, the synopsis mentions the Romanovs. Other than a cameo at the beginning, you don't get any Romanovs. Instead, you get the Duff sisters wearing pretty dresses and in this book essentially causing the Romanovs deaths by being stupid.

But don't worry, there's a new boy in town.

Handsome Leo who's a brute for about 280 pages of the book.

Yeah, I really have problems with Stockholm romances. Especially when the so called love of your life died about thirty pages ago. Really? You know having a Stockholm romance already puts the book on shaky ground. That scene had me raging.

Though, given the fact that Natalya was already a frustrating character, a frustrating character who had little to no redeeming characteristics.

I really think that Patrick was trying for a riches to rags vibe with character development. But at the end, I didn't feel like I sensed any character development from this character. She's still the same selfish twat like she was at the beginning of the novel. And I don't think her relationship with Leo (The Stockholm Induced Love Interest) helped.

However, sour characters and a romance that makes the early Disney princess's romances look develop has nothing on how the Russian Revolution is distorted in this book.

I'll be honest. Even though I had to do multiple projects and papers over the Russian Revolution, was coerced to reading Animal Farm, and watched the historically inaccurate animated film a dozen times in my youth, the subject matter can easily get confusing. Patrick's novel doesn't make it that much better.

I think part of it is that I couldn't sympathize for either side. I couldn't see their sides of things. The Whites were portrayed as being like the Duff sisters and the Reds were just portrayed as murderous fiends.

And then there are the mystics...

Really?

Like with the animated movie, this book decides to go with semi-evil mystics. Though I'll give it kudos for not having a zombie-ish Rasputin walking around. Just his...never mind for spoilers.

To be honest, I think Rasputin and the mystics always sort of get a bad wrap when it comes to fiction about the Russian Revolution. Never mind, that he played really no role to the tsar's downfall he's just an easy target-I don't think the beard helps. But I really don't see why such a big deal is made out of them when there's so many other historical figures to discuss.

I don't know...it's just I feel like the history itself is interesting enough where parties don't need to be added or changed to the story.

And that might've been the worst thing about this story.

The whole faberge egg plot really didn't work for me either. It really felt more or less like a McGuffin quest. The so called powerful object really wasn't even that powerful.

I don't even really know what it really did by the end of the book. Oh, I was told but I kept waiting for the stupid egg to show me the money...

The book never did.

I think for people who are wanting to know more about the Revolution or even expecting a fun Anastasia-ish themed novel, they're probably going to want to avoid this book. I think the best way to describe Tsarina is that Nelle was playing with Russian Revolution era Barbies.

Lyudmila Potekhina says

Ugh...what a tedious book. I could go on for a while, but let's leave it with unlikable main character and the poorly executed story of the Russian Revolution mixed with strange, intentional historical inaccuracies (I'm looking at you, Alexei Romanov) and the same, tired "Russia is a magical land of ballet and glittering palaces and fluffy snow" cliche that people are fond of using in novels and cinema. This book also deals with a very touchy subject and many people don't quite understand all the complexities of the time period. As for this book, it really shouldn't even be classified as historical fiction.

Sorry, but this book didn't sit well with me.

Regan says

I ended up actually really enjoying this! The fantasy element was pretty weak, but I loved the setting and the integration of Russian history.

Desirae says

"The rioters at the gates were loud, but no match for the music of the Winter Palace."

I wanted to love this, god damn it! I wanted to love it so friggin much!!!

Instead, it was

Bloody

Awful.

I can't remember the last time I reacted so negatively towards a novel, and I'm not even one of those people who went into it thinking "Alexei was only thirteen when he was killed" (but he was) and "those are not the accurate sequence of events." I was ready to let everything go and be swept up in the grandeur of imperial Russia, in the danger and intrigue of the Bolshoi, and in the sweeping first love of a Tsarevich who never got to rule. But I got none of that. Instead I got snippy, bitchy characters whose plights I was completely unsympathetic towards, and quite honestly a very limp plot, sprinkled lightly with one or two pretty sentences each chapter.

Natalya,

Is madly, hopelessly in love with Alexei, right from the beginning. Honestly, I would have preferred to see more back story involved with this, since the rest of the novel focuses on Natalya desperately trying to save Russia, his empire. Why not start a bit earlier in their relationship, or show us flashbacks?

Oh, and despite her great love for Alexei, not only does she betray the secret of the egg to the weird Babushka, but she also harbours *feelings* for Red Army leader Leo, who is a part of the organization that's trying to destroy the Romanov's.

DESTROY ALEXEI, NATALYA!!

There were other annoying characters and several stupid plot twists. The writing had rare brief moments of pretty, but yeah, this whole thing was a waste.

I wanted to love it. It had so much potential. Maybe I'm so pissed because I wanted to love it so much...

The Library Lady says

Dear Kirkus Editors:

Who are you having write these reviews and are you aware that whoever wrote this one was obviously heavily into the Stolichnaya when they read this book?

This book is awful. It has a laughable plot whether it's the fantasy element or the history. It has all the worst devices of YA fictions--the loyal but weak best friend, the dead mother, the clueless (and pretty much absent) father, the "perfect" boyfriend and the other guy, the one with a secret. J. Nelle Patrick/ Jackson Pearce/ Whatever Your Real Name Is, I spotted the guy right away. Can you say OBVIOUS? Because your writing screams of it.

Patrick/Pearce/Whoever She Is carefully explains how she mangles history as badly as anyone who has ever fictionalized the Romanovs. *And BTW, when Natalya refers to the Grand Duchess Olga, she'd have referred to her as such or as Olga Nicolaevna or at least Olga RomanovA--P/P/W didn't even get that right!*

She talks of how she "cried" every time she wrote about the Romanovs' deaths, but how many times does she write about it? It's described once, and that's about it. And her proud declarations about turning the Tsarevich and Rasputin into dimensional characters is simply laughable. Saying that Rasputin loved the Tsarina doesn't do anything but move your silly plot along, and as for Alexei, what shows how wonderful he was--that he doesn't want to have the servants bow to him? That he is kissy-kissy with Natalya? He only appears in a few scenes, and he's got all the depth of a mud puddle.

This is obviously not the end of this series. But I won't be purchasing any subsequent volumes.

If you were once into the awful cartoon "Anastasia", I suggest you go and watch that instead--at least the music was great. If you want more about the Romanovs--the REAL Romanovs--you can find it elsewhere. And if you want a fictionalized version go for *Angel on the Square*, written by Gloria Whelan, a terrific

writer.

Spare yourself. As for me, I'd like my time--and my brain cells--back.

Blythe says

Damn, that was awesome. I would have given it five stars if it weren't for something that really annoyed me towards the end; something that I felt was pretty unnecessary as a whole. But still, this was really awesome. And much different from what I thought it would be.

Review to come.

Michaela says

Without Further Adieu...

Before I mention anything about this book, I must say that I love Goodreads. I love it because of the recommendations it's given me. I love it because of the new friends it's given me. I love it because of the challenge it's given me to complete my reading goal for the year. I love it because it keeps track of all the hundreds of books I want to read. I love for the reviews I can read and determine if I want to read a certain book. I love it for endless reasons. But most of all, I love it for the many unbelievable books it has so graciously shared with me - books that on my own I *never* would have discovered. Such as this book.

Before the Book

Before I talk about the actual book itself, I will just mention that I've realized that I love historical-fiction. However, I've also realized that it is a lot more difficult to get myself to *love* historical-fiction books set in America or England because I've already read way too many of books set there. I love historical-fiction books set in China, India, Russia, etc. I love seeing the different cultures and how things were at that time and place. To me, it's like time-travel. In other words, wonderful. I was thrilled to read this book, because it is set in Russia during the time of Nicholas and the revolution.

Tsarina

This book was wonderful from the start. I loved the character of Natalya. Her character was well-formed, actually she was the perfect lead role for this story, she was sweet and yet had the perfect amount of imperfection that let you still love her. She was dynamic, and just an amazing character.

Watch Out From Here On - There Are Spoilers!

I loved Alexei! He was just perfect! And when he well um, (view spoiler), wow, I cried. It was TERRIBLE!!

And then, Leo. At first I hated him. And then I fell in love with him. He was wonderful, too.

Wow, and then when a certain Colonel Ivanovich was, um, BEATING UP LEO!!! I was kind of mad.

So, yeah, I loved this book. It was amazing, but I kind of got to a point where I just really got frustrated at Emelia. Like when she completely ruined Natalya's plans for freeing Leo by telling her uncle!

A Closing Thought

To close this review, I must say that I recommend this book to those ages 13 and up. It was really good, but there was some (not much at all but enough to make me say this) mature content. There was some romance, but it wasn't much at all. There was nothing else that I'd warn about. There was some magic, but it was different than other books I've read though, and I didn't have any problems with it.

YOU NEED TO READ THIS BOOK!! SERIOUSLY - IT'S AMAZING!!

Lyd's Archive (7/15 to 6/18) says

For a more concise summary, see Sarah Smith's review

2.5 stars.

NOT, in my opinion, perfect for Gemma Doyle fans. The Gemma Doyle series is *much* more complex and mature with a more intense and less logic-deprived fantasy element. **Also, Libba Bray doesn't screw with real people or much of real events.**

Overall, Tsarina is a **fairly average YA book with a good deal of historical inaccuracy, a lot of philosophical rambling, and a weak fantasy element that had logic issues.** It would be three stars, but the ending was awful. **I don't care about the romance, I need logic!**

If you want a semi-historical fantasy romance, I would read The Wrath and the Dawn instead. I only gave it three stars, but at least it doesn't screw with history.

If you came here for the fantasy romance, the fantasy element is pretty weak, except in the end, and there's a lot of holes in the logic. As for romance, there's about ten pages of it, mostly in the beginning. **Mostly, the underdeveloped characters are romping about revolutionary Russia in search of a magical Memuffin eliche Fabergé egg, breaking things in occasionally good purple prose, and misusing historical terms here and there.**

(see Juliet Camille's review, Beatrix's review Katherine's review, and Sara's review)

Here's what annoyed me:

1. The characters. Natalya rocked back and forth between saying stupid things like how the Reds were ruining the party she wasn't actually participating in, and thus dishonoring their country, and going on philosophical ramblings with lots of metaphors.

"Fair?" I asked, shaking my head....'the world is the world and we're cast into whatever roles we fall into. It's not my fault that I was born rich and you were born poor....You want to destroy a world of mountains and valleys and make a plain flat field."

There's also this one part where she just randomly dangles her legs over the edge of the train car door "something I never would have done the day before yesterday, but now seemed no more life-threatening than our current situation." **That paragraph is for the sole purpose of her discovering icicles with which she can open these cans of caviar they found.** And don't get me started on how stupid she is in the first chapter.

"If only they understood that Alexei would be the greatest thing ever to happen to Russia."

Why? Because he loves you? In the second chapter, she magically became better, but then she started talking about how Russian winters got rid of Napoleon and the Poles. **However Once she actually steps outside into the Russian winter in the present, she just starts talking about how pretty snow is as if it could never possibly be a problem.**

"It was a particularly enjoyable pastime, spotting the visitors - the people who didn't know just how to bow into the wind." She loves her country, supposedly for more than its parties, but for what else does she love it? Does she think that by her half-baked plan to get the magic egg and get her historically inaccurate bad-boy boyfriend on the throne mean love for her country?(view spoiler)

Logic? Logic? LOGIC??

As for Leo, he just seemed underdeveloped. It would be interesting if this was written in third-person so we could see what he was feeling too, otherwise he just seems a bit blank. And also, he's special. All the other "reds" are big, bad, ugly drunks, *except for Leo*.

Don't get me started with Misha.

2. There is about ten pages of romance, mostly in the horrible first chapter that made me want to throw this book like a frisbee. Natalya is led into the room where the magical egg thingy is kept by Alexei, who instead of being a twelve-year-old hemophiliac, is a charmingly mischievous somewhat bad boy, and then they kiss, Natalya saying stuff like "it felt like stars were swimming through me." And then when she starts falling for Leo, they do all that cliche "tracing the jawbone" stuff and she says stuff like "it felt as if he wanted to commit this moment to memory."

3. The fantasy element is weak and has a lot of logic issues. If the Romanovs have the egg, it will keep them in power while healing them and allowing them to resurrect flowers and make snow. The basic plot of this story is that Natalya and her stereotypically whiny and shallow best friend have to team up with Leo the big bad revolutionary to get the magic egg and, while he's not looking, return it to the Romanovs (how they find them is never considered) and then all will be well and there will be a perfect land or unicorns where everybody is happy. How can a magic egg do that? Also, why do the Romanovs suddenly fall out of power when the egg is taken, yet it still heals them and allows Natalya, being the beloved of our historically inaccurate bad boy tsarevich, to resurrect flowers for no apparent reason?
wait....Magic Egg?

4. The big complicated abdication thingy. In the book, it portrays everything as being happy until the Reds, which is a blanket term for everyone who doesn't like the Tsar and must be poor, take control, capture the Romanovs (because that's more dramatic) and force Nicholas to abdicate, making Alexei unofficially tsar. In reality, Nicholas abdicated from power under some pressure on a train returning from the military headquarters. Then a group called the provisional government took power while people decided what the heck they wanted after the Tsar left. Nicholas did abdicate in favor of Alexei, but then abdicated for Alexei, giving the throne to Nicholas's younger brother Mikhail, who purposely married a woman he wasn't allowed to marry to prevent this very thing from happening. He refused the throne, of course. The Romanovs were

placed under a fairly comfortable house arrest in their palace outside of St. Petersburg, which should be called Petrograd, but isn't, until the situation became more dangerous and they were moved to Siberia for their safety. It was only during that time that the Reds, a particular faction of rebels only recently created, took over and after a while moved them to Ekaterinburg, a revolutionary headquarters in the Ural Mountains, where they were all shot one day in July 1918.

Now whose idea was it to write a YA fantasy about the Russian revolution?

Wendy Darling says

Gorgeous, riveting, and heartbreaking all at once. Parts of this book made me desperately sad, even though I knew they were coming--and that is nothing short of spectacular writing.

Review to come.

Emily May says

Saint Petersburg was a city of illusions.

Holy hell, I want to go to Russia now. I mean, I did before. But now I *really* want to go. This novel so beautifully captures the cities of St Petersburg and Moscow at the height of the 1917 communist revolution. It expertly blends the historical facts with elements of Russian mythology and sensitively portrays both sides of the revolution by allowing you to come to your own conclusions about which side is to blame - if, in fact, either is. We see angry poor men being driven into the ground by the hard labour they perform, while their employers sit in cosy, gold-plated luxury. We see people being dragged from their homes and murdered by the aforementioned angry poor men for crimes they had no say in.

This novel asks that you think about one thing: It is not our fault where and into what circumstances we are born. We have no control over that. But are we to blame if we simply accept things the way they are without trying to change them?

The author says in her note at the end: *The Russian Revolution, truth be told, needs little to no fictionalization to be a fascinating time period, full of beauty and horror and wonder.* And I like how close to real events she has kept the framework of her story, how she weaves in the Romanov family, Grigori Rasputin and the imperial Faberge eggs (I found this addition quite fascinating). I couldn't put this wild tale of fact and fiction down.

I only realised recently just how important atmosphere is to a novel. It's not really something you consider outright when thinking about a book but I honestly believe it can make or break it. Consider your favourite books. Maybe they have an atmosphere of fast-paced, heart-pounding, will-they-live-or-die tension that drags you right into the centre of the story. Maybe there's a bittersweet sadness that makes you feel like you might burst into tears any second - even at the happy parts of the book. Maybe it's a spine-chilling

creepiness. But, whatever, atmosphere is what takes you out of the real world and plants you in another. World-building is nothing without atmosphere. My point? I am rarely so wholly absorbed into another place and time as I was with *Tsarina*.

Look at these quotes and tell me you can't feel the Russian air on your face and the excitement and terror of the revolution:

There were bridges from one to the next, and the canals were deep, maintained with stone walls that held the Neva River at bay. But we divided ourselves with harsher lines than the land did: the rich and the poor, the merchants and the nobles, the Whites and the Reds. When the river would occasionally flood the canals and blur the lines between islands and districts, we would hastily fix it, tighten things, firm up the boundaries and make sure the illusion, the lie, the fantasy held.

...

There was no mistaking a Russian winter. It was a unique thing, a creature born and bred for Russian soil, one that sometimes brutalized the natives but often served as our secret weapon. Napoleon's army was defeated not only by the Russian people, but by Russia herself.

...

It was lonely now, our houses islands amid broken seas of our old lives.

It is so beautifully written. Part survival story in some ways, part historical fantasy in others. Despite the way it starts with Natalya and Alexei declaring their love for one another, this is far from a mere romance. It is brutal, even more so because it is based in fact. You find yourself sympathising with both sides and hating both sides simultaneously. I love novels that can make you feel so many complex emotions.

I'm also not one for patriotism or nationalism; I find myself nodding along with Virginia Woolf's "My country is the whole world" quote... but I found it very easy to get caught up in the passion Natalya feels for her country. And I'm not even Russian! She has to make a decision whether to flee to France to escape the revolution or stay behind and risk everything to try and save her country, and I completely understood her desire not to abandon ship. There's a certain ferocious passion that infuses this novel and I think that's why everything I may not usually agree with makes so much sense.

How could a city so full of people feel so void of souls?

I was leaning towards five stars from very early with this book but I was just a little disappointed that the ending felt so rushed. We'd been set up in a beautifully atmospheric novel with characters I really liked, only for it to feel tied up too quickly. It didn't ruin the book but I thought it could have been better, which is why my rating is four stars instead of five. But don't be put off. This is an excellent book that I would recommend to all fans of historical fiction. I enjoyed it a lot. One final quote:

"You said it wasn't your fault for being born rich any more than it was my fault for being born poor. And you're right. But if we don't do anything to fix the world, if we just shrug and let children starve and soldiers die and people be treated like cattle . . . if we don't fix the world, Miss Kutepova, I believe it becomes our fault."
