

Rewriting fairy-tales is a popular endeavor for writers, and often involves telling the story from the perspective of the villain. Alas, it's not a terribly original idea, and rarely works well. The reason these stories are still with

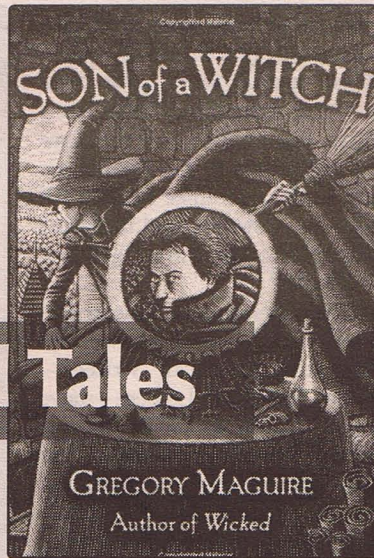
Wicked Tales

us is they were well told to begin with; tampering with the basic plot and characters destroys what made the stories good in the first place.

That said, when I first came across Gregory Maguire's *Wicked—The Wizard of Oz as told from the Wicked Witch of the West's point of view*—I was skeptical. Not to wax poetic, but fortunately it was a terrific book. Thankfully, so is Maguire's new sequel, *Son of a Witch*.

Maguire isn't just retelling Dorothy's quest down the yellow brick road. Instead, he has taken L. Frank Baum's land of Oz and expanded the concept, giving it a rich history and a perilous present. In *Wicked*, we followed the green Elphaba (unnamed in the original, Maguire created a name for the Wicked Witch of the West by putting a phonetic spin on Baum's own initials, LFB), from her curious birth to her watery death. But far from changing the story, the author developed it, breaking Elphaba out of the "bad guy" role by creating a world that could brand a woman evil because of the colour of her skin.

Now, in *Son of a Witch*, Maguire is taking the story to the next level. Through the rule of the Wizard, Oz has devolved into a repressive state governed by fear. Elphaba, one of the few people able to stand up to the



Son of a Witch
by Gregory Maguire
337 pages, \$36.95

a Witch follows Liir's journey from boy to man, his struggles with his relationship to his likely mother and, not surprisingly, his destiny to help free Oz.

It may sound silly, but Maguire pulls it off. From talking animals who are being persecuted (for the crime of wanting to be considered first class citizens) to a nomadic tribe that worships a dying elephant trapped in human form and a self-appointed emperor claiming the ear of an unnamed god, Maguire treats his fantastic subjects with a respect and reverie that is both captivating and provocative. He has changed the land of Oz from a simple child's landscape to a complex world torn apart by politics and greed. Maguire also knows how to go beyond the simple plots and happy endings of fairytales by giving his stories realistic characters who struggle, fail and make bad decisions. These are characters we can relate to—even if they happen to be green, a goat, or stuffed with straw.

At the end of *Witch*, Maguire leaves us with a perfect setup for book number three—which, although it has yet to be written, I've already added to a future Christmas wish list.

—Sarah Gignac