



# The Assassination of Brangwain Spurge

M. T. ANDERSON  
and  
EUGENE YELCHIN



## About the Book

It's been more than a hundred years since an elf returned to Elfland — alive, that is — after going to the goblin kingdom. Yet the historian Brangwain Spurge, holding tight to a priceless peace offering, is catapulted deep into enemy territory. At first, the spindly elf is graciously entertained by Werfel, a goblin archivist and his assigned host. (Goblins are renowned for their hospitality, as well as their brutality.) Before too long, though, Werfel discovers that Spurge is not just a spy, but also rude, badly informed, and very likely to get them both killed. Told with witty text and mixed-media artwork that both illustrates and undermines the prose, this daring adventure is full of double crosses, blunders, cultural misunderstandings, pitched battles, intriguing ideas, and a few missing fingers.

### Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used as writing prompts for independent work.



## Discussion Questions



1. There are many ways to tell a story, as *The Assassination of Brangwain Spurge* makes clear. Who are the narrators of this novel? What does each contribute to the story? Which narrator do you find to be the most trustworthy? Why?
2. This book has two authors, M. T. Anderson and Eugene Yelchin. Why do you think their shared credit is fitting?
3. Why does Clivers, a proud member of the Order of the Clean Hand, choose Spurge for this dangerous mission to the goblin kingdom? How does Clivers underestimate his old classmate? Despite losing so many fingers, why does Clivers remain loyal to the elf king?
4. Take a closer look at Spurge's transmissions back to Elfland. According to Clivers, they depict "whatever he pictures in his mind," his impression of things as opposed to reality (page 160). If Spurge were using a camera, how would his transmissions be different? Would they be more honest? Why?
5. For the goblins, "hospitality was holy" (page 29). What risks does Werfel take to be a good host to Spurge? Why does Spurge mistreat his host? When does he stop acting like a bad guest and start behaving like a good friend? How does that transformation save his life, and Werfel's, too?
6. Books that depict warfare, treachery, and personal humiliation tend not to be very funny, but this one is often hilarious. What is your favorite piece of comic dialogue? What is your favorite comic scene? Why?
7. Spurge survives his many ordeals, so why do you think this book is entitled *The Assassination of Brangwain Spurge*?
8. "Werfel thought of the old saying: *Elf and goblin, we all have pointy ears. So true*" (page 81). Beyond their ears, what other characteristics do elves and goblins share? What qualities set them apart?
9. Would you rather be a goblin or an elf? Why?
10. When he finally sees them for himself, Werfel is appalled by Spurge's transmissions back to Elfland. Why are they so disturbing to Werfel? Why is Spurge so embarrassed by them?
11. Compare the rulers of the two kingdoms. What does each expect from their subjects? How does each hold on to power?
12. Like most elves, Spurge is disgusted by many goblin practices, including their devotion to discarded skin. What do you think of goblins' reverence for old flesh? Why is Spurge's experience with his own skin at the end of the novel so significant?

13. Despite mounting evidence of the rot in his homeland, Spurge is blind to Elfland’s problems through most of this novel. Yet Werfel clearly sees the corruption in the goblin kingdom. Why is one scholar more open to disturbing truths about his country than the other?
14. Military strength is highly prized in most nations, but what about intellectual strength? How do ideas and values contribute to a country’s security? How do Werfel and Spurge prove the potency of brain power?
15. Perhaps you’ve heard the assertion “History is written by the victors” in a classroom or on television. What do you think it really means? Does it apply to this novel? Why?
16. At the end of the book, Spurge and Werfel are described as “friends who want to change the world together” (page 516). What challenges do they face? Do you think they’ll succeed? Why?



## About the Creators



M. T. ANDERSON is the author of *Feed*, winner of the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize; the National Book Award–winning *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation, Volume I: The Pox Party* and its sequel, *The Kingdom on the Waves*, both *New York Times* bestsellers and Michael L. Printz Honor Books; *Symphony for the City of the Dead: Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad*; *Landscape with Invisible Hand*; and many other books for children and young adults. He lives near Boston, Massachusetts.



EUGENE YELCHIN is a Russian-American author and artist whose books include *Breaking Stalin’s Nose*, a Newbery Honor Book; *The Haunting of Falcon House*, a Golden Kite Award winner; and *The Rooster Prince of Breslov*, a National Jewish Book Award winner. He has also received the SCBWI Tomie dePaola Award for illustration. He lives in Topanga, California.



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