



# The Cabinet of Wonders

*Marie Rutkoski*

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## **The Cabinet of Wonders** Marie Rutkoski

Die Kinderbuch-Entdeckung dieses Frühjahres: Ein großartiges fantastisches Abenteuer.

Ein skrupelloser Herrscher und ein mutiges Mädchen sind einem dunklen Geheimnis auf der Spur. In der goldenen Stadt Prag beginnt ein dramatischer Wettlauf gegen die Zeit ...

Voller Wunderdinge steckt die Welt der 12-jährigen Petra Kronos, denn ihr Vater ist ein außergewöhnlich begabter Schöpfer kleiner magischer Spielereien. Nun soll er für den Prinzen in Prag eine besondere Uhr fertigen, wie die Welt sie noch nicht gesehen hat. Doch statt reich entlohnt, kehrt der Vater blind aus Prag zurück. Der Prinz hat ihm die Augen geraubt. Nur warum? Mithilfe ihres Freundes, der kleinen mechanischen Spinne Astrophil, will Petra zurückstehlen, was ihrem Vater gehört, und stößt dabei im Herzen des Palastes auf das »Kabinett der Wunder« und das Geheimnis der Uhr, die noch ganz anderes vermag, als nur harmlos die Zeit zu messen ...

- Abenteuer und Magie werden im alten Prag lebendig
- Warmherzig, spannend und mit viel Humor erzählt
- Für alle Leserinnen und Leser der »Bartimäus«-Trilogie

## **The Cabinet of Wonders Details**

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Author : Marie Rutkoski

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## **From Reader Review The Cabinet of Wonders for online ebook**

### **Miriam says**

I hesitated to give this four stars, as the heroine Petra was a pretty generic YA-fantasy bright and plucky lass who showed little development. And of course she almost immediately met up with a clever and jolly gypsy to help in her quest. What is it with fantasy writers and gypsies?! One, there were never so many friendly, helpful gypsies around that so many protagonists should have them as sidekicks, and Two, just because most people have never met any doesn't mean that it is ok for authors to continually stereotype them. But happily, Rutkoski does have some original twists on magic use and some great imagery. Her villainous prince and the sinister English diplomat Dee are more complex and interesting than her heroes (even if Dee has been stolen from history by many a writer prior). This was also a pretty quick read so I'm happy to continue the series and see if there is a bit more character development in later books.

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### **Owen Danyal says**

this was a page turner. it really hard to put down. i liked this book for several reasons my top reason is it was CREATIVE. talking spiders, magic clocks, stolen eyes a whole mish mash of creative fun. my faveriout part is a the begining when petra finds out the the prince has stolen her fathers eyes. she want revenge...

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### **Alison Livingston says**

Four chapters. That is all I give books these days. If it hasn't captured my interest by chapter four I put the book down.

The Cabinet of Wonders has a great story idea, but ultimately I could not get over the poor writing. I know the book was written for children, and thus more simplistic, but there are so many adjectives in the story as to render imagination bored and rote. An example: "She went into a room with a square window" Okay, I don't know about you, but I assume windows are generally going to be square, and if it isn't square, then let me know. Also if you are going to mention a window at all, it should be because the window is going to play a role later. That's a petty example, I know but the book is bursting with too much word fat. Not only that, but almost every conversation was artificial. The main character's father comes through the door with an old bloody bandage over his eyes, having had them gouged out by the prince and their pet mechanical spider asks him what the palace library is like! Huh? Then the father goes on to talking like he's not phased at all by being blinded and having to be pack-carted home by two thungs.

It just didn't ring true. It feels to me like this woman either speaks English as a second language or she somehow got her first or second draft of this thing published (and not the 10th-20th draft it takes to finish a good novel).

I am sad because the story was interesting and the author looks like a cutie pie, so I am sorry this one didn't work out. After four chapters I was done.

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## Nafiza says

I love, love books with strong, spunky heroines. And *The Cabinet of Wonders* has one of the spunkiest heroines out there. She's not infallible, in fact, she's entirely too fallible but there is a charm to her that draws you into her world and keeps you there right beside her as she has escapades that would make any respectable mama swoon. Petra's father, as you will know from the summary, has been relieved of his...uh...eyes by the boy-prince of the country in which he lives. So Petra decides to get them back. It's a foolhardy and almost impossible plan but Petra's not one to let little things like impossibilities slow her down.

The book is a glorious read. The pace is fast at times and honeyed at others. The fictional and real world intersperse brilliantly and you can almost believe that such a world once existed somewhere in time. The characters, all of them, are so awesomely crafted, their detail, their characteristics, the subtleties within their personalities – they are a pleasure to read. There is no real romance right now and I am sort of glad because Petra is, to me, not at that age where she is distracted by the notion of boys being more than playmates (we start off with Petra being 12). But there's a promise of it from two different boys who are going to hopefully turn into interesting men once the books continue.

The intrigue is well layered so that even at the end of the book, the promise of the future is delicious on your tongue and you can't help but imagine what other hijinks Petra will get into. And oh, there are mechanical spiders, puppies and monkeys – steampunk-ish. You can't lose with this book, guys. Marie Rutkoski's debut novel joins the ranks of much loved spunky-heroines-shelves that contains other gems such as Julia Golding's *Cat Royal* series, Stephanie Burgis's *Kat* series and *Bloody Jack* series by L. A. Meyer.

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## Shelli says

Overall, this book was a delight, at least to this early-50s-but-a-child-at-heart reader. Author Marie Rutkoski is a skilled world builder if a little uneven – 12-year-old protagonist Petra Kronos's hometown was non-descript and evoked absolutely no imagery in my usually very active imagination, but *Salamander Castle* in Prague (where a good chunk of the action – a little more than half, I believe – takes place) is lavishly conveyed. Details of layout, lighting, architecture, clothing, faces, etc. were exquisitely described, but skillfully imparted also were the moods and overall "personality" of different sections of the castle: the stables, the prince's private quarters, the dye-mixing lab in which Petra works. This imbalance in the care taken toward the verbal illustration of the palace vs. the lack of the same for the other locales (even Prague on the outside of the castle) wasn't really noticed until I finished the book, but then it explained why I just didn't find the earlier part of the book nearly as vivid or enthralling.

The author has obviously done a lot of research, as this can certainly be considered to be in the general realm of historical fantasy. She's used the folklore of the astronomical clock in Prague and the general framework of the Habsburg dynasty to situate her story, and in general she does a great job of convincingly weaving her narrative into 16th century Bohemia. However, there were a couple of **glaring** anachronisms that really bothered me, because they both will mislead young readers into believing wildly incorrect historical facts. Now, please understand, I'm not being a super anal-retentive stickler here – I don't mind at all if the characters use speech out of time, or if minor details don't fit, such as a character wearing a type of hat that

was not invented until 200 years later. But these two stick out more than that.

First, apparently young people in Rutkoski's 16th century Czech Republic have no sense of the concept of zero, as Petra's companion Neel describes it to her utter amazement, and claims its invention/discovery as one of his people's, the Roma (a.k.a. gypsies). Well, the use of zero mathematically – and even its name – was introduced to Europe nearly 500 years before, so I doubt that a reasonably well-educated child of 12 would be hearing of it for the first time in the timeframe of *The Cabinet of Wonders*. (Nor can I find any evidence that the Roma had anything to do with it.)

The second example may be more or less egregious, depending on how late in the 16th century the book is set. In addition to being utterly gobsmacked by zero, Petra has also never heard of the theory that our solar system is heliocentric. Copernicus published his groundbreaking book on the subject earlier that same century, and since Petra and her father (who are effectively magical metallurgists) are fairly knowledgeable about European happenings – especially with regard to science and magic – I am unconvinced that Petra would have not heard of Copernicus's work, since it raised quite a hullabaloo in European society.

The thing that gets me is that neither of these false revelations have ANYTHING to do with the plot, and are really just conversational fillers. In that case, why bother to create these alternative narratives around historical facts that kids will actually need to know the truth of in their future educational careers? I realize I dedicated a lot of words to this when I know it sounds kind of petty, and many of you might argue that I'm nitpicking. If you totally remove the issue of kids remembering these untruths once it's time to really learn about them in their academic careers, you're still left with what it does to the flow of the narrative, which is jolt you right out of it. The best example I can invent on the spot is something like this: Imagine that in the Harry Potter series, everything is exactly the same as Rowling wrote it, but for no reason connected to any plot points, she made the river that goes through London be the Danube rather than the Thames. That would not advance the fantastical plot elements a whit, and would instead make you say, "Huh?" and wonder if it was some weird mind-lapse typo and why an editor didn't catch it.

But my major complaint about *The Cabinet of Wonders* was the occasional contradictions in Petra's and Neel's (the main characters') behavior. This is likely a problem all authors writing young heroes have to grapple with, and I am likely particularly sensitive to it because I just came off of *extremely* glaring examples in the persons of Teo and Renzo in *The Undrowned Child*, where protagonist kids are intelligent and resourceful beyond their years, only to show up in the next chapter acting like petulant kindergarteners that you want to send to their rooms for a long timeout. This drives me nuts, and is actually the main detractor for me of the book at hand. Petra is appealing and smart and brave, but not so much so that she is unbelievable or a caricature. Neel on the other hand may be a *little* bit over the top – cocksure and undamaged by his rather rough upbringing and childhood losses and quite jaded for being barely out of his tweens. So there they are, each living independently and supporting themselves while plotting a daring heist and escape against a sovereign monarch and his entire armed forces, but then they'll get into an argument, and you'll seriously think they've both been suddenly possessed by hysterical, attitudinal toddlers that have dirty diapers and are 2 hours late for their bottle. These supposedly awesome, amazing kids occasionally turn SO infantile (in Petra's case, not only to Neel but to another character introduced midway through the book), that not only do you lose your respect, admiration, and empathy for them, but you straight up have the urge to smack them. As I said, I'm sure every author writing kids must work to find the balance between keeping a child hero relatable and age-appropriate, while still imbuing them with maturity and the special qualities needed to make them heroic. The operative word there is **balance** – a successful child hero cannot be bipolarly alternating between being preternaturally awesome and throwing temper tantrums section to section.

Fortunately, Petra and Neel aren't always as extreme as the worst-case-scenario prototype I detailed above, but Petra in particular is devalued in the readers' minds each time she reverts to being so pointlessly childish. (Advance notice: the situation actually worsens considerably in the next book in the series, *The Celestial Globe*, with Petra spending a long period of individual time with someone she is unrelentingly babyishly hostile toward, while Neel, on the other hand, all but morphs into a swashbuckling Errol Flynn.)

Thankfully, no other characters veer toward unbelievable (and unpalatable) extremes, but are well-fleshed-out with understandable motivations. The highlight for me in the cast of characters was definitely Astrophil, Petra's wise, mechanical spider companion. The plot is engaging and well-paced, and, as I said at the beginning, takes place in a version of our past where magic infuses life, both enhancing and complicating it.

My rating is really a 3.5 as opposed to a 3. I'll definitely be checking out more of Rutkowski's works – maybe ones without children. ;-)

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### **Ruby says**

Petra's father has magic to bring metal to life. He made her tin spider Astro and her best friend's dog along with several other critters that wander around their village. It is when her father builds a huge clock for the prince that things go bad. The prince orders his wizard to remove Petra's father's eyes and sends him back to the village blind. Without his eyes, how are they suppose to live and what does the prince need with them anyway? It's high time Petra found out.

This is a charming story filled with adventure and heart. Petra is a brave and often misunderstood girl with her little pal, Astro mumbling useful knowledge in her ear. Her partner in crime is a thief named Neel, who possesses the magic of ghost fingers, which allow entry into just about anywhere. Full of mystery and fun, this first story in the *Kronos Chronicles* is a gem for readers of all ages.

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### **david y biblioflick says**

Just brilliant. Sometimes, YA is too complicated, or trying to be complicated... and sometimes even repeating some ideas over and over again with an over powered heroine plus a "jaw dropping" twistsss, even with those concepts, they still received five stars and overhyped. That's why I'm reading children and sometimes adult sci-fi novels.

This book is aimed mostly for children, with it's light but quite good plot. The heroine is on par with the villain. And even with no twist in the end, this book is really good. Looking forward towards the next book.

This book have some flaws, the ending, for me became fast paced and the eyes being a (view spoiler) just bothers me a bit.

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### **Erika says**

I think this book felt a bit immature. Not in terms of ideas and writing style, because obviously this book is

meant for children and so isn't going to be "mature" in that sense. The ideas were great, though I think the author lifted heavily from other young adult fantasy books, most notably His Dark Materials (Astrophil felt kind of like a non-soul tin Pantalaimon to a very Lyra-esque Petra). I think mostly everything seemed to come together too easily - Petra never really had any difficulties doing anything - she simply decided upon a certain course of action, and then did everything she needed to without any true sense of complication. With the exception of the final escape scene there was no real sense of peril surrounding her otherwise dangerous quest. I just didn't feel terribly drawn in, and was a bit disappointed because I really liked the concept and all the fairly original fantastic elements in it but I just didn't enjoy it as much as I had hoped and wanted to.

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### **Lisa Nocita says**

The young Prince has commissioned a special clock to be made in his honor. But in his haste and greed, he wrongly assumes the clock has been finished to his specifications. He has the eyes of the clockmaker removed so that he cannot make another like it for anyone else. However, the clock is not finished and will not do all that the Prince desires. But the Prince decides that he wants to finish the clock himself and can do so with the eyes of the maker guiding him. The clockmaker is returned home, blinded. It is rumored that the Prince keeps the eyes in his Cabinet of Wonders. If the clock should ever be finished, it will change the balance of power in the kingdom and have far reaching consequences for the world. His young daughter, Petra, decides to take matters into her own hands to restore her father's sight. She slips away to the Castle intending to steal back her father's eyes. She is a clever and likable protagonist. Along the way, she enlists the help of new friends. Part alternative history, part fantasy, Cabinet of Wonders promises to be the first in a new series. Although you may have to suspend your disbelief a bit, it is a fast read with plenty of suspense and intrigue.

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### **Bella says**

I recommend The Cabinet of Wonders to all ages. I first read the book when I was 11 and I loved it. I just reread it again two years later and liked it just as much!

Petra Kronos is a fun, brave, and smart 12 year old girl, who is alarmed when her father returns from the prince's palace, blinded. The prince has stolen his eyes, but why? Her father claims that the clock he built for the prince, is not only stunning, but can also control the weather. However the prince blinded him before he finished the clock. Petras father assured her that the prince wouldn't be able to assemble the last piece and that the clock no longer concerned them.

Petra was doubtful, but when it started raining sand, she makes plans to go Prague and steal back her father's eyes. Petra is accompanied by Astrophil, her knowledge loving, tin pet spider.

In Prague she meets Neel, a storytelling and thieving boy from the Roma. Together they work to break into the Cabinet of Wonders.

The Cabinet of Wonders is a mix of magic, adventure, and a little history. I rate the book 5 stars.

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## **Patrick Burgess says**

### **Fun But Awkward**

Mechanical animals that are just like real animals only they can talk (and only live on oil made from wildflowers), people whose natural skills are augmented by magic, silver eyes that can be plucked from someone else's head and then exchanged for another's like any accessory, this is the quirky, whimsical world of Rutkoski's **Cabinet of Wonders**.

A little bit steampunk, a little bit historical adventure, and maybe a tad less enjoyable than I wanted it to be at times, it's still a book that the young and the young-at-heart and possibly even the surgically young of face will find engrossing. Personally, I found the heroine of the story, Petra, to be a little too reckless/oblivious for someone who's supposed to be so intelligent - maybe the plot tangles came off a little too contrived and choppy to sit well with me?

Maybe I'm looking for a little too much, philosophically, in a book that's meant for kids? Damn straight!

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## **Tamora Pierce says**

A fascinating book in which magic education is restricted in Bohemia (roughly similar to the Czech Republic before WWI) to nobles only, and those who aren't noble manage as best as they can. When Prince Rudolf steals Petra Kronos's father's eyes after her father builds a clock that could control weather, Petra runs away with her living mechanical spider to steal them back. In Prague she makes friends with a Romany (Gypsy) family, particularly Neel and his sister Sadie, who help her to get work in the castle. There she meets a wizard who has days when her skin oozes acid, the spy from England, Dr. Dee, and the prince himself, when he's wearing her father's eyes.

There is so much that is cool about this book--glass bombs that release wasps or waves, swap-able eyes, living mechanical animals, and the invention of a new primary color! Now I just have to wait for the second book. ::sigh::

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## **Emma Rogers says**

I really enjoyed this book, I grabbed it when I was at the library because Marie Rutkoski wrote one of my recent favorites; "The Winner's Curse". There's always a danger in reading more of an author after you love one of their books so very much, sometimes it's great but mostly it's a big let down. This book, however, was amazing. It was so different and fun, Petra, our young heroine, reminded me of Arya from Game of Thrones, and feisty, brave young girls are always fun to root for. I loved this reimagining of the tale of the famous clock tower in Prague, I'm sure we've all heard the legend of the man who was blinded after completing the clock so he could never build anything so beautiful again and I love that Rutkoski took this idea and ran with it and expanded on it in such a marvelous unique way. I loved the characters, there was such a great array of them, from the brilliant scholarly metal spider who was Petra's constant companion, to the little Gypsy boy with more sass in his pinky finger than I have in my entire body, the prince who is insane and beguiling, and Iris who was so loud and grumpy yet so lonely and kind.

I really can't wait to get my hands on the next book.



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## Lucy says

Petra Kronos lives an unusual life, but a happy one. She lives in a small Czech village with her father, an artisan who can move metal with his mind and works with invisible tools. When her father is commissioned by the prince to build a marvelous clock, he goes off to Prague—and comes back blinded. The prince has stolen his eyes. Even worse, the prince now has control of a clock that has the power to control the weather.

Petra doesn't know a lot about the world, but she knows this: she will go to Prague and somehow steal back her father's eyes. It's a tall task, but she won't be alone—she has the companionship for Astrophil, her tin pet spider, and the help of Neel, a Roma boy with fingers that extend into invisible ghosts that can pick locks.

What I like about this book: pretty much everything. Petra is a wonderful character—spunky, determined, immensely likeable, and often entirely naïve about the way the world works. What's wonderful about this book is that people call her on it—when she plans to do something ridiculous, like, say, sneak into the prince's castle and steal back her father's eyes, that doesn't get to be something that makes sense. She's young and sheltered, and sometimes that's why she succeeds—even when odds are against her.

I also love how sometimes this book nods at clichéd plot points and then moves past them. Like when Petra first goes to Prague, she cuts off her hair, to blend in as a boy—a classic spunky heroine move—and then discovers that no one is really fooled, and life would have been somewhat easier if she had just kept her hair and called herself a girl from the start.

The flavor of Marie Rutkoski's Czechoslovakia is also delicious, and unlike anything else I've ever read. A changing Europe with a dangerous prince who courts danger and fomenting unrest among his people. The commonplace feel of magical talents—and the nature of those talents is fantastic. Invisible ghost fingers that can pick locks. The ability to move metal with your mind.

Marie Rutkoski has a gorgeously creative imagination, and this is a beautiful book. It's the sort of novel that feels solidly based on a history only slightly different from our own—it feels like it might have been true in some parallel universe. It's lush with detail—even the little things—and feels like a full literary meal.

Cabinet of Wonders has a solid ending and stands comfortably alone, but is clearly the first in a trilogy (says so right on the cover) and I am eager and hungry for more from Marie Rutkoski.

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## Betsy says

It seems to me that today's average everyday fantasy author for kids has to walk a delicate line. You want to create an alternative history novel laden with magical elements? Fair enough. Here is the choice set before you. Nine times out of ten books of this sort, whether they're of the steampunk variety or the more common knights + wizardry type stuff, are written for kids thirteen and up. Think about it. The King of Attolia books, Philip Reeve's Larklight series, Jonathan Stroud's Bartimaeus Trilogy), and so on and such. All of these are

mature books for mature readers. They deal with large themes, long complicated plots, and dark motivations. So do you skew your book older or younger? Really, when you sit down and think about it, Marie Rutkoski's new series *The Kronos Chronicles* is a rare beastie. In her first installment *The Cabinet of Wonders*, Rutkoski opts for the younger end of the spectrum, combining just the right mix of kid fantasy within a well-planned historical setting. I'm as tired of new otherworldly series as the rest of you, but Rutkoski's new world is crisp and smart enough to win over even the most jaded fantasy fan.

When they brought her father home with bloody bandages over his eyes, that's when Petra Kronos got good and mad. Her father was given a remarkable commission: construct a clock for the prince himself in Prague. But instead of showering her father with gifts and praise upon its completion, the prince plucks out his eyes so as to make them his own (and prevent her dad from creating anything quite as nice again). Yet the clock is more than it seems. With the potential to control the weather itself, the Prince knows full well how powerful he could be if he just managed to put together the final piece. Now Petra is determined to steal back her father's eyes before that happens, even if it means befriending the Roma, sneaking into the palace, helping a woman who can leak acid through her skin, and reluctantly working alongside the magician and spy John Dee. Fortunately she has her tin spider *Astrophil* by her side and a host of talents that even she has been unaware of until now.

One of the problems I've had with a lot of fantasy novels lately is just how bloody long they are. Blame Harry Potter, blame *Twilight*, blame whoever you like but the fact of the matter is that a lot of authors aren't taking the hint that sometimes your novel really doesn't have to be 300+ pages. Now let's take a gander at *The Cabinet of Wonders*. Coming in at a trim 258 Rutkoski could have explained at length about everything from Petra's mother's death to the girl's experiences with her in-laws while her father was away. Instead we are plopped into the story midstream and Rutkoski has a clear enough sense of the story she's telling to fill the small background details along the way. The result is a story that moves at a quick clip but never hurries so quickly that you lose the plot's thread or get confused about where things are going. In spite of the fact that you are reading yet another book about a motherless daughter whose doting scientific father pays her little heed, this territory is still relatively new.

I was a bit partial to the writing too. Just because the author isn't indulging in ludicrous fripperies doesn't mean that she hasn't an ear for a keen description once in a while. Check out this quickie encapsulation of our heroine's eyes. "Petra's eyes were gray - or, to be more precise, they were silvery, like they each had been made with liquid metal anchored in a bright circle by a black center." More interesting still, Rutkoski sometimes makes the executive decision to switch point of view willy-nilly between Petra and someone near her. Interestingly enough, the person she does this with the most is the evil prince. Making the executive decision to enter the head of your villain is something we've been seeing a lot of in children's literature lately (see: *The Underneath* by Kathi Appelt) and is always a risk. You could go too far and confuse the reader with this change of personality. Rutkoski's transitions aren't as smooth as they could be, but they ultimately serve the tale she's telling and don't go so far as to hurt it or anything.

As the Author's Note at the end is careful to point out, the book takes place during the European Renaissance at the end of the sixteenth century in Bohemia, part of the Hapsburg Empire. In this note Ms. Rutkoski mentions that she was at first a little worried that people would take issue with the way in which she has "manhandled history". She has little to fear. Historical fiction is one thing. Pseudo-historical fantasy another altogether (though I'd be willing to debate with someone on this point). So while she may not be 100% accurate at all times I doubt anyone would demand it of her. In any case, she works in enough real details to give the book spice. I was particularly pleased with the moment when John Dee shows Petra a painting of Queen Elizabeth that shows her wearing a yellow dress covered in eyes and ears. It sounds like just another fantastical idea on the page, but the actual image (known as *The Rainbow Portrait*) is rather famous and well

worth searching out.

Let's talk gypsies. Over the years I've shuddered each and every time I've seen them in a work of children's fiction. Gypsies are like fairies or elves to most authors. You just throw them into a plot and hope that they end up kidnapping kids/telling fortunes at some point. There's never any acknowledgment that there are real Gypsies in the world, nor any complexity to their characters. So it was that I was amazed at how careful Rutkoski was with her Gypsy (which is to say, Roma) characters. In her Author's Note she acknowledges their past and the fact that they are "certainly real". And when she uses them in the book, it's almost as if she's mocking those old literary tropes. A Roma woman does indeed offer to tell Petra her future but when the girl politely refuses it's seen as the correct action. What's more, I loved how Neel would work Roma stories into the narrative alongside concepts like the "idea of zero". There's a lot going on here, and it's handled with evident care.

There isn't exactly a lack of child-friendly fantasies out there, sure. But we've finally gotten to the point where the Harry Potter wannabes have slacked off a little, leaving room for other kinds of series. And as for fantasies written with the 9-12 year-olds in mind, *The Cabinet of Wonders* is joining books like *Savvy* and *Out of the Wild* to entertain our slightly younger readers. With enough originality to choke a nag, Rutkoski firmly establishes herself as a new author to watch. I'll keep an eye eagerly peeled for her future books.

Ages 9 and up.

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