Acknowledgments

One of the best-known characters in Russian folklore and fairy tales is the deadly Baba Yaga. She is the archetype of the fearsome witch or sorceress, hideous to look at, with a mercurial nature, who cannibalistically devours those who naïvely stumble upon her domain. (Baba Yaga tales inspired the story of Hansel and Gretel.) She is also known as ‘Baba Yaga Kostianaya Noga’ (Baba Yaga Boney Leg), because in spite of her ferocious appetite, she remains as thin as a skeleton. She flies or rides in a mortar, using a pestle as a sort of paddle. (The womb-like vessel and the phallic pestle seem to represent her dualistic feminine and masculine nature.) Never one for leaving a trail behind her, she sweeps away all traces of her path with a broom.

Throughout the Slavic region, the term baba connotes an old woman, and the Russian word yaga means ‘hag’. In addition to this name, this well-respected mythical elder is also referred to as the Guardian of the Underworld, the Mistress of the Forest, the Goddess of Death and Regeneration, the Wolf-Goddess, the Bone Mother, the Mistress of the Animals, and the Guardian Spirit of the Water of Life and Death. Baba Yaga rules over the elements, and her realms are the impenetrable forests of old Russia. She is the guardian of the frontier between the territory of mortals and the spirit world.

In the folk tales, Baba Yaga lives in a hut in the forest, a hut that seems to have a personality of its own. It can move about at will on its large chicken legs, and can even run after visitors who stumble into its domain. A fence made from the leftover bleached-white bones of Baba Yaga’s victims, whose blazing eye sockets illuminate the darkness, surrounds the hut. This fence is a clear signal to anyone who would dare to pass through its gate that he or she must be prepared for an initiatory underworld experience, a trial that could end in sudden death or life-altering enlightenment, depending upon the wits and attitude of the initiate.

Baba Yaga is a very misunderstood figure. She is not merely a stereotypical wicked witch; she is much more labyrinthine than that. She represents a highly complex duality. Although she is mostly portrayed as a terrifying old crone and monster, she can also play the role of a helper and wise woman. She is not good, but she is not entirely evil; she does eat people and decorates her fence with their skulls, but like all forces of nature, though often wild and untamed, she can also be kind. She is an ugly old woman, but at times she turns into
a young beauty. She sometimes gives advice and magical gifts to heroes and the pure of heart. Her home is at the same time a cemetery and also a place of divine magic.

Baba Yaga, this all-powerful Great Mother, is the giver of the gift of adulthood but also the giver of death. She is the Bone Mother who destroys but she is also the one who collects our white bones and pours the Water of Life and Death upon them, while singing her magic songs, helping us to be reborn. She is a magic symbol, the allegoric representation of a guide who helps people in their transition into adulthood, making young people responsible members of society. Her oven represents creation – the womb – a symbol of life and birth.

The heroes or heroines of the Baba Yaga tales often enter her domain searching for wisdom, knowledge and truth. Her hut is the place where these transmutations occur; it is the dark heart of the Underworld, the dwelling place of the dead ancestors who are symbolized by the grinning skulls around her hut. All who come to her hut ask to be fed or are eaten. She destroys and then she resurrects. In Baba Yaga stories, people symbolically experience a death, darkness, depression, or spiritual emptiness. They journey to Baba Yaga’s hut, a place where they might, with skill and luck, be reborn.

The stories of Baba Yaga in a condensed form parallel the riddle that is Russia. Those who enter her domain – searching for wisdom, thirsting for knowledge, hungry for truth – do it at their own risk. But the journey will be worth it. Restoration, renewal, nourishment and enlightenment can only be found by taking this journey into Baba Yaga’s underworld. In this book we make an effort to look for the truth and knowledge that such a journey can bring us.

Just as the people in the Baba Yaga tales look to the old woman for enlightenment, we, the authors of this book, have depended on the contribution and advice of others. Books are not written by authors in isolation. In developing the ideas for this book we talked to dozens of people in business, government and education. Their insights and recollections were invaluable. We learned something from their successes and their failures, and we tried to use that knowledge in our writing.

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of all these people. Above all, however, we are extremely indebted to the leaders described in our case studies. We would like to thank Jacques Ioffé, Roustam Tariko, Mikhael Khodorkovsky, Dmitry Zimin, Augie Fabela II, Maria Ilynia, Ruben Vardanian, and Olga Sloutsker for their willingness to talk and to trust a group of strangers. Without their contributions, this book would not have been possible.

We would also like to thank the institutional supporters of this project, the members of INSEAD’s Department of Research, in particular Landis Gabel, Anil Gaba and Alison James for their encouragement and support. We also gratefully acknowledge the work of two case writers, Pavel Pavlovsky and Irina Budrina, for their help in putting two of the case studies together. Robert
Treacy Ph.D., retired professor of American history, provided the historical analysis of the 19th century American robber barons. We would be remiss if we did not express our gratitude to Kathy Reigstad for her unfaltering enthusiasm and professionalism in editing the manuscript.

On a personal note Manfred Kets de Vries would like to thank Yuri Mattison and his team of guides, who live in the awesome mountains of the Pamir. Spending time with this group of very tough (but also very kind) men has been for him a catalyst to acquire a greater understanding of the Russian character, and also what makes for effective leader–follower relationships under extreme conditions.

Stanislav Shekshnia would like to thank his parents and God for bringing him into the world at the right time and the right place to be able to contribute an insider’s view to this book; his Russian business partners and colleagues, especially one of the heroes in this book, Dr Zimin, for first-hand lessons in Russian leadership; and Professors Sheila Puffer and Daniel McCarthy for initial lessons in applying Western management theory to the study of Russian business leaders.

Konstantin Korotov would like to thank INSEAD and NYU academics who have equipped him with the research methodology and solid theoretical background indispensable to carrying out research in organizations. A special word of thanks is made to his parents who have always encouraged his stepping into uncharted waters and his family, which has been supportive and tolerant throughout his academic training and the process of working on this book.

Elizabeth Florent-Treacy has many thanks for Professor Manfred Kets de Vries, first author of this book, for having opened countless doors and learning opportunities to her. To borrow from Chaucer: ‘Gladly wold he lerne, and gladly teche…He is a good felawe’. She also warmly thanks her father, Robert Treacy, who, when asked what time it is, always thoroughly explains how to build a clock, and her mother Carol, who took her to the library once a week without fail throughout her childhood.

Even though we gladly acknowledge the contributions of many others to this book, we, as authors, are fully responsible for its content and accept any and all of its faults. Our expectation is that by writing a book of this nature, we will make a small contribution in making Russia a better place. By presenting these various leaders – warts and all – as role models to the younger generation, we hope to contribute to the understanding of the way business people attain a heroic status – and the responsibilities that come with this status. By having made our own symbolic journey to Baba Yaga’s hut, we hope that all of us will be more prepared to deal with what once was the Russian Wild East.

Fontainebleau, France
Spring, 2004