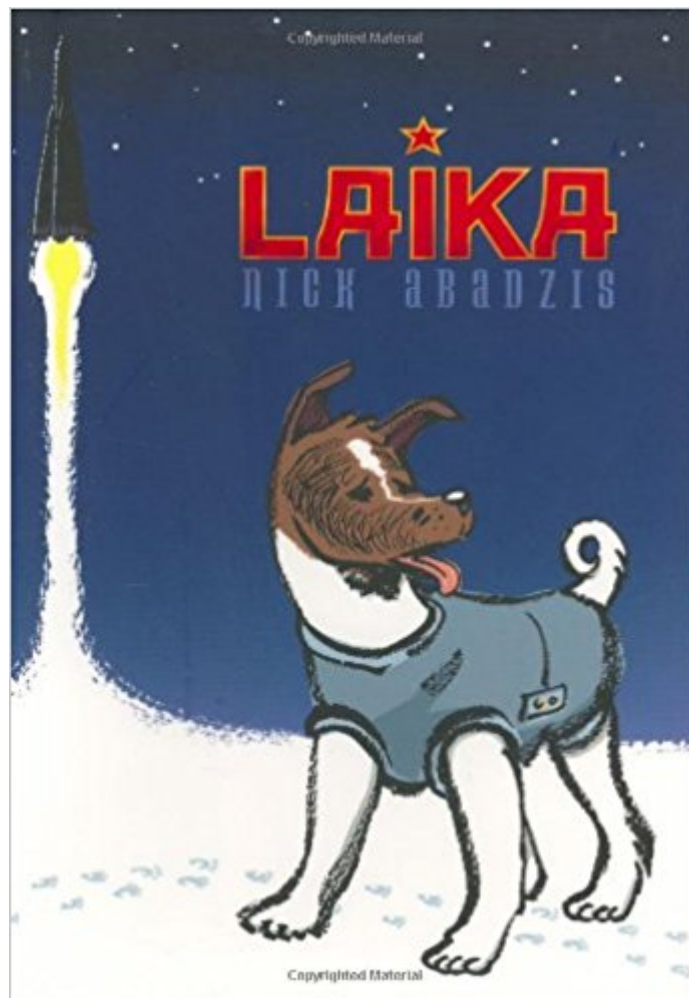


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Laika



Synopsis

FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES ONLY. From the dog's point of view, follows the adventures of the dog sent into space by the Soviet Union. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Laika was the abandoned puppy destined to become Earth's first space traveler. This is her journey. Nick Abadzis masterfully blends fiction and fact in the intertwined stories of three compelling lives. Along with Laika, there is Korolev, once a political prisoner, now a driven engineer at the top of the Soviet space program, and Yelena, the lab technician responsible for Laika's health and life. This intense triangle is rendered with the pitch-perfect emotionality of classics like *Because of Winn Dixie*, *Shiloh*, and *Old Yeller*. Abadzis gives life to a pivotal moment in modern history, casting light on the hidden moments of deep humanity behind history. Laika's story will speak straight to your heart. Questions for Nick Abadzis Jeff VanderMeer for .com: What inspired you to pick this particular topic for a graphic novel? And why, for example, a graphic novel as opposed to a strictly written account? Abadzis: I'd known it was a good story since I was about six years old. It had always been at the back of my mind as a story to tell. In 2002, new information came to light about the Sputnik II mission and specifically Laika's death. That was the spark, although back then I envisaged something much shorter. It, uh, grew. Why a graphic novel? Well, comics are my language. It's the medium that I'm most familiar and comfortable...so it was first choice. .com: What

most surprised you while researching Laika? Abadzis: There were a few things. I had no idea there were so few Soviet engineers and scientists involved in the nascent space program--not to trivialize their incredible achievement but, in many senses, they just winged it, borne along in great part by Korolev's force of will and political maneuvering. Also it was interesting to find out how much the Soviet scientists cared for their cosmodogs. Events conspired to make Laika a sacrificial passenger on board Sputnik II, but they really did honor their canine cosmonauts. There's even a statue of Laika in Moscow. Perhaps this book will go some small way to re-establishing her position in history: whatever the circumstances, and whether you agree with what they did or not, she was the first earthling in orbit around this planet.

.com: Was there anything that didn't make it into the graphic novel because it just didn't fit? Abadzis: There was quite a bit, actually. I could have done with another hundred pages. But I'd taken a bit of time to write and thumbnail it (which I do at the same time) and when that stage was finished, the publisher and I realized that the 50th anniversary of the Sputnik launches was fast approaching. When I first pitched the idea to Mark Siegel at First Second, neither of us realized that it was so close. It felt like we needed to be a part of that, so I drew it extremely fast--two hundred pages in a little over eight months. It's an understatement to say that it was extremely hard work. What got left out was a longer explication of Laika's origins; the scenes with Mikhail, her first owner were much longer.... Originally, I did have an idea of doing three books: Laika would be the first, Gagarin the second, and a full-on comic strip biography of Korolev [the driven engineer on the project] would be the final part that would bind together events seen in the first two. Maybe one day. Certainly, elements of Korolev's life that I felt were important to the story made it into the final version of the book.

.com: Did you worry about the sentimentality inherent in the situation? How did that affect your decisions in creating the graphic novel? Abadzis: I suppose it would have been easy to make it another cutesy, twee, and overly saccharine dead-dog story but that wouldn't have been true either to my taste or to the socio-political system and culture I was attempting to portray. Laika--the real Laika--was a cute dog, as photographs attest. There's no getting away from it, and there's plenty of evidence to suggest her owners thought so, too. I didn't want to anthropomorphize her, at least not to the extent that she was spouting speech/thought balloons like, say Tintin's Snowy (which works just fine for those books). Having made that decision--which I didn't really feel was an option, in any case--I knew that to really do it justice, I'd have to do a lot of research. The sentiment of the story, such as it is, would take care of itself and be implicit in certain character's actions or words (or not, as the case may be).... All that said, it'd be disingenuous to suggest that, in dealing with a true story that involves dogs and their owners (even if they happen to be scientists in a Soviet cosmodog program), there wouldn't be a bit of emotion.

There's plenty (and I hope the reader feels it). But there's also the harsh reality of the time, the place and the confluence of events that put Laika into space. .com: What are you currently working on? Abadzis: I'm currently working on a new graphic novel for older readers called *Skin Trouble*, which is also for *First Second*. I'll leave it to your imagination as to what that's all about, suffice to say it'll be an ensemble piece, character-wise. I've also got a children's graphic novel in the works. Can't say anything about that at all, but I'm looking forward to drawing it.

Classic dog-story themes such as loyalty serve as a backdrop for this fictionalized account of Laika, the first living creature launched into outer space. A charming and scruffy little dog, Laika survives an uncaring master and life as a stray before becoming part of the Russian space program circa 1956, just as the Soviet Union had achieved a huge victory over American competition. With a stilted romanticism that doesn't fit the story's tone, Laika is established as "a very special dog," but soon the focus of the complex tale turns away from the dog to Yelena Dubrovsky, the trainer responsible for preparing Laika and the other dogs for the rigors of testing. Through Dubrovsky, the progress of the program and the incredible pressure on the scientists are given effective form. The rough-hewn art, similar to the Joann Sfar's work on the *Dungeon* books, makes the characters appear constantly nervous and uncertain, lending immediacy to the all-pervasive atmosphere of strict formality and enforced patriotism. An extensive bibliography of sources is appended. Karp, Jesse

This story is bound to be a bummer, if you understand the historic, tragic fate of Laika. Abadzis embraces that tragedy and humanizes it, and gives us what feel like real insights into the people involved. It is hard to imagine reading this book without gaining a true sense of sadness about the countless animals humans have chosen to experiment on as if they were only unfeeling objects. By focusing on just one dog, Abadzis makes animal experimentation more immediate and personal. There's also a subtle criticism of "the system" here, because the humans involved are rarely individual monsters. They have feelings and make decisions within a web of social demands that inevitably lead to Laika's tragic end, and we cannot help but feel that her caretakers are also victims of this web, like her. The visual art style is generally clear and focuses on telling the story. The one downside is that the human characters have many lines on their faces, and it can be difficult to discern what the artist is trying to tell us with these lines. Are they emotion? Age? Sometimes the faces feels a bit scratchy without a clear reason why, as if everyone in this tale is haggard. Regardless, this is a story worth telling, and Abadzis has not shyed away from its sadness,

weaving together both the human and the canine points of view in a narrative that is compelling and enlightening.

I was already well aware of the 'official' story of the Soviet space dog Laika (aboard Sputnik 2) but this terrific and poignant graphic novel by Nick Abadzis fills in the missing pieces of Laika's story with skillfully (and seamlessly) interwoven fact and fiction (not too unlike James Cameron's "Titanic" in that regard). Real characters like rocket designer Sergei Korolev and fictional characters such as Laika's various previous owners are well integrated. Laika and the various other dogs in the Soviet training program have their simple, primal (touching) thoughts conveyed to the reader via thought captions which really 'feel' how a dog would/should think. The details of the period (late 1950s Soviet Union) are very authentic, and the characters are all part of a lovely (and heartbreaking) tapestry of Laika's life. The story moved me very deeply.

A wonderfully written and drawn story, that is mostly factual. Being an animal love, I couldn't stop thinking about Laika and feeling terribly emotional after finishing the book (a couple of months ago), and continue to feel sad even till today :'(

This book is incredibly well written and illustrated. It's fantastic. But as a dog lover, it destroyed me. I had planned to take my time looking at the different illustrations closely and processing the story, but the illustrations of Laika's facial expressions were heartbreaking. It was a great book, but it was so hard to read.

This tender graphic novel deals with the birth of spaceflight from the point of view of Laika, the first dog in space, who went aboard the Soviet Union's Sputnik 2, in late 1957, in a flight that was never meant to return to Earth. As the story is told here, after the success of the first Sputnik in October 1957, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev wanted to capitalize on the propaganda value of the world's first satellite and pushed for a new launching for the anniversary of the Russian revolution, just a month later, this time bringing into orbit for the first time a living being into space. There was little time for preparing a proper satellite, so a non retrievable rocket was launched. Thus, the moral of this tale is that a dog's life was sacrificed for the honor of the nation (there was little scientific value in Sputnik 2). The story here has three protagonists: Laika, the female stray dog turn sacrificial space pioneer (a moving, presumably invented story about her troubled, wandering life as an unwanted dog before being caught for the Soviet space program is presented here in the first

chapters), Korolev, the driven and ambitious chief designer and a former gulag inmate during Stalin's time, and the fictional Yelena, the female lab technician in charge of Laika's health who, despite the advice of her superiors, comes to care for her personally. With drawings that are attractive without being flashy, this is a very entertaining book. It is also quite poignant, without being overtly sentimental.

This was a very sad but well written story. Pacing was good - I've managed to read this in an hour or two. The art style can be weird but it shouldn't distract you from the story. Graphic novels can contain adult themes and this certainly has many. Without spoiling too much, there is some blood and as well as some violent scenes, however there isn't any gore depicted. This type of graphic novel is better suited for an older child. My particular copy had a stamp and sticker for a library on it. I tried to remove it but it was too sticky and I ended up leaving it on the cover. Otherwise, I am happy with my purchase.

Old Yellow, Where the Red Fern Grows, Shiloh, Because of Winn-Dixie... each generation needs a good tearjerker featuring a dog. Based on the true story of an abandoned puppy who becomes the first space traveler, Laika by Nick Abadzis is a graphic novel for people of all ages. Blending fact and fiction, the attractive visuals and readable text are well balanced. It was fun to go back and read about the early days of the space program. There are lots of great historical photos featuring Laika and other space animals. The book is a wonderful tribute to all of the animals who gave their lives for the space program.

Great book, a bit of a tear jerker. Gives you a nice little out of the box look at the story of Laika, from her and her caretakers point of view. Laika was the test dog sent in to space by the Soviet Union's space program Sputnik 2. It will also make you think twice about animal testing as well.

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