



Laika

Nick Abadzis

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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 moment in modern history, casting light on the hidden moments of deep humanity behind the cold hard facts. It is so much more than history - Laika's story will speak straight to your heart.

Laika Details

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From Reader Review Laika for online ebook

Amber says

i knew what would happen and i still read it. it was worth it but dang.

Melki says

Augh! What the heck was I thinking...reading a book where I KNOW the dog dies at the end?!?
I've spent my entire life avoiding Old Yeller for just that reason.

But, Laika's story intrigued me, so I gritted my teeth, and mostly enjoyed the ride.

In 1957, buoyed by the success of Sputnik, Khrushchev ordered up another spectacular stunt...a second satellite launch, just in time for the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution. The second satellite would carry a passenger - a dog named Laika. With less than a month to prepare, scientists were not able to engineer a way for the Sputnik II to return to Earth. It probably wouldn't have mattered anyway. Overcome by the heat, Laika succumbed about 5 hours into the trip. The stunt backfired, with worldwide outcry over the little dog being sent to her death.

At least I think that's what happened. By that point, I was blubbering so hard, I could hardly see the pages.

This graphic novel does a good job of mixing fact and fiction. Laika's early life as a stray struggling to survive on the streets was well-imagined. Particularly affecting were scenes depicting Laika's trainer, Comrade Yelena Dubrovsky's attempts not to get emotionally attached to the dogs in her care. The drawings feature nice attention to detail without being too "busy". I liked that all nighttime exterior panels included a drawing of the ever enticing moon.

Jessica says

I'm not crying, *you're crying!*

Betsy says

Dead dog books used to be a dime a dozen. Time was a kid couldn't walk into a bookstore without getting whacked over the head with "Old Yeller", creamed in the kisser by "Sunder", and roughed up royally by "Where the Red Fern Grows". Recently, however, dogs don't die as often as all that. You could probably concoct some magnificent sociological explanation for this, citing changes in the political and emotional

landscape of our great nation leading to the decrease in deceased literary pups, but as I see it, a good dead dog story is as hard to write as an original paper on Moby Dick. What else is there to say? Man's best friend dies and everyone feels bad. In this jaded culture it would take a pretty steady hand to find a way to write a dead dog tale that touches us deeply. Not a dog person myself, I direct your attention today to Nick Abadzis. I don't know how he did it. Laika, the world's most famous real dead dog (a close second: the dead pooch of Pompeii), is now presented to us in a graphic novel format. Though I prefer cats through and through, "Laika" the novel grabs your heart from your chest and proceeds to dance a tarantella on the remains. The best graphic novels are those books whose stories couldn't have been told any other way. "Laika" has that honor.

Her story was more than just her own. It encapsulated a vast range of people, many of whom you may have never heard of. As the book begins we see a man named Korolev leaving a Russian gulag in a freezing night. Eighteen years later, he is the Chief Designer of Sputnik and his success is without measure. Buoyed by the success of the successful launch, Khrushchev demands that his space program launch a second orbital vehicle within a single month. Enter Laika. An unwanted pup, abused and abandoned on the street, she's eventually caught and taken to the Institute of Aviation Medicine. There she is one of many dogs, trained for flight travel. Laika bonds immediately with her caretaker Yelena Alexandrovna Dubrovsky and endears herself to the other scientists as well. As it stands, however, no dog is better suited for space travel and Laika is slated to make a trip from which she will never return. Abadzis deftly describes the people who care for the little dog and the process by which she was ultimately abandoned and killed by both science and Cold War mechanics.

Laika's entire story, as conceived by Abadzis, is heartbreaking but there are certain moments towards the end that I found particularly easy to identify with. When Comrade Yelena visits Laika for one last time she can hear the dog saying her name with every bark, even when Yelena is too far away to hear them. She dreams that Laika is calling out to her for help. That she's scared and uncomfortable and just wants to get out and play. Anyone who has ever owned a pet will be familiar with this feeling. When the pet is missing or in pain, it's difficult to keep from emphasizing with it. How much worse then when the dog in question is imprisoned in a capsule and shot into the sky? Abadzis doesn't just show Laika's plight. He makes you feel it in the core of your being.

The last page of this book contains a quote that offers a 1998 statement from Oleg Georgivitch Gazenko. In it, he laments the way that Laika was misused. "We did not learn enough from the mission to justify the death of the dog." It's a dead dog book. Anyone who knows the story of Laika will be aware of that. But above and beyond the obvious this is an ode to dogs themselves. To the animals that we befriend and love and, ultimately, destroy. It's also about history, humanity, and the price of being extraordinary. No one can walk away from this book and not be touched. Consider Nick Abadzis a name to watch from here on in.

Alex Sarll says

Oh, that poor pup. Two topics that reliably get me welling up; dogs in peril, and memories of the space age. So when Korolev tells Laika "You will fly further and longer and higher than any living being from this Earth ever has", it doesn't matter that I'm not sure about Abadzis' art style; I'm putty. Good dog.

Greta says

This graphic novel is the fictionalized story of the first living creature in space, the dog Laika.

The author, Nick Abadzis, has done exhaustive research for his book.

However, there was no way to know what Laika's life was as a stray dog, so the first quarter of the book, dealing with this, is entirely fiction.

The story becomes more interesting and fact-based after Laika's capture by a dogcatcher and delivery to the Russian institute of Aviation Medicine.

It offers an eye into the rigorous training and preparation of the dog for her test flight in Sputnik II, and into Russia's space program and the people who were involved in it.

A very entertaining read, beautifully illustrated. Laika was never destined to come back, and this book makes you understand why, and makes you mourn for her.

Some readers will find this book too emotional. I can understand that, but I also think the story succeeded because of the emotional, atmospheric dramatization of the facts.

8/10

Lata says

A story of ambition, politics, and cruelty, leading up to the first Soviet launch of a living being into orbit. That being was a young dog that had been abused for much of her life then was sent to her needless death in an effort to meet a ridiculous deadline imposed by Khrushchev. I had a lot of difficulty reading this, not because this story is poorly told. Quite the opposite. Rather, Laika's death was a senseless waste, an outcome of the political and engineering struggles and personal costs the author describes of the one-up-man-ship between the US and the U.S.S.R.

Kate says

3.5/5

An interesting graphic novel that depicts the story of the lives of the scientists who worked on Sputnik I and Sputnik II, and sent a dog, Laika, into space.

Cindy says

Okay, let's get two things out of the way. One, this is a graphic novel. Two, this is a dead dog book. The

latter's not a spoiler--we're all reasonably intelligent people, we've heard of the Sputnik program even if we weren't around to personally witness its impact on the world. The dog dies, okay? That's not an acceptable reason to give this book a pass. (I'm talking to you, Ruth.) As for the former, well, if you're going to read one graphic novel this year, make it this one.

This is a tremendous piece of historical fiction. Or maybe fictional history? Fictional biography? And it's got pictures, too! What's not to love? Some of the players are real people, such as Sergei Korolev, who went from being a prisoner of a Siberian gulag to the father of the Russian space program. Or Oleg Gazenko, a leading "life scientist" and animal trainer in the Soviet space program. Others, such as the families who lose Laika to the streets of Moscow or the new dog handler Yelena who forms such a close bond with Laika, seem to be wholly fictional. The fictional elements give depth to the story and humanize (no, not the dogs!) the people involved. Everyone working on the launch knew the dog was going on a one way trip--the personal glimpses into the major players' lives help us to see how they might have justified that sacrifice to themselves and others.

There's a lot going on in this little book--Cold War Politics, the Space Race, Soviet fear/paranoia/propaganda ('Yes Comrade, of course I'm a loyal member of the party!'), and the ethical treatment of animals. I'd love to see classrooms using this as part of their curriculum. The author, Nick Abadzis, seems to have done his homework--he's incorporated a wealth of facts into the story but it flows seamlessly, never reading like an infodump. And (Cassie Edwards take note) he's included a lengthy bibliography at the end of the book for anyone seeking more information. Give this one a read...but be sure to have some kleenex handy. Lots of kleenex.

Orbi Alter says

3,3

Lijepa prica o Lajki i njenom jednosmjernom putovanju u svemir. Svida mi se nacin na koji ispreplICE fikciju i cinjenice i kako su sve sudbine nekako povezane. Sam zavrsetak je melankolican zbog tragike, ali najveći dio stripa me ostavio ravnodusnom.

Nekako mi zao da ovo nije ruski strip. Vjerovala bih toj atmosferi. Ovako je sve to stereotipna percepcija koja me zivcira i koju jedino izvlaci koliko toliko korektan crtez (premda nije moja salica caja).

Mjesec je u znacajnoj ulozi i iskakao je cijelo vrijeme, pa mi je bilo interesantno da njegove faze odgovaraju datumima.

Najpotresnije je eticko pitanje i izjava Gazenka kad komentira da mu je zao zbog svega jer da iz misije nisu saznali dovoljno da bi opravdali gubitak psa...

Scarlett Readz and Runz....Through Novel Time & Distance says

"Work with animals is a source of suffering to all of us. We treat them like babies who cannot speak. The more time passes, the more I'm sorry about it. We did not learn enough from the mission to justify the death of the dog." -Oleg Georgivitch Gazenko, 1998

If you think this is just another sad dog story...don't bother to read on.

This graphic novel is about a man that escaped the Gulag, a little dog that is caught on the streets of Moscow, and Sputnik II, the second Soviet Satellite that was launched into the outer atmosphere with its' first live passenger.

October 4th, 1957, it has been 18 years since Sergei Pavlovich has escaped the Gulag and returned to his work as a Rocket Scientist. On this day in Tyura-Tam, Kazakhstan, Sputnik I, the first artificial satellite, successfully launched to orbit around the Earth thanks to him. It looks like he is back in the game. With this achievement comes the pressure to top his assignment of another launch in time of the 40th Anniversary of the Russian Revolution on November 7th.

On the streets of Moscow, three years earlier, a sweet litter of 7 pups was born that a family can't keep. They try their best to find them homes and for most of them they do. Laika ends up with a family who's boy is an irresponsible teenager and taking care of another life is supposed to teach him a lesson. Well, that boy does the unthinkable and throws the dog into the river one night to get rid of it.

Laika befriends another street pup that knows its' way around the market to get scraps, but one day they are not so lucky. Laika is picked up by animal control and the other pup is beaten to death on the streets. (This is not for the sensitive dog person)

Summer of 1956 at the Institute of Aviation Medicine in Moscow, Alexandrovna Dubrovsky just landed a job as the new dog trainer assistant at the kennels. All the dogs in these kennels go through rigorous training to one day be sent into space. And this is where Alexandrovna meets Laika.

What happens from here you should read for yourself. It is a sweet, poignant read. Even for a comic book. I was pleasantly surprised, if not a bit overwhelmed to get so much out of it.

I really appreciated the afterword. Nick Abadzis did extensive research to write this novel and wove the available historical elements into this powerful narrative.

"A luminous masterpiece." – **Kirkus Reviews**

Seth T. says

Books with dogs tend to manipulate. That's just the nature of the literary and cinematic landscape. *Old Yeller*. *Where the Red Fern Grows*. *Homeward Bound*. It's like a rule. And rather than subvert this, *LAIKA*'s pretty up front about the fact that it will in no way deviate from the script. It relishes in its formulaic, heart-melting prison of manipulation and contrivance.

Really, unless you're a fan of being manipulated, the book's only saving graces are that it offers an eye into Russia's Cold War space program and that it occasionally remembers that its human characters have lives that don't center on just how adorable puppy-science-fodder can be. Hm. That sounds too negative—because I actually enjoyed the book when I wasn't noticing how intentionally manipulative it was.

So that everyone's on the same page: Laika dies in the end. This is as much of a spoiler as saying "Kennedy dies in the end" about a book narrating Kennedy's presidency. Author Nick Abadzis expects that the reader is aware of the poor dog's fate and so works pretty hard to create gravitas, to fashion a sense of impending dread. He even reveals early on that Laika is doomed and spends considerable time turning the stray pup into a hero whose loss we'll mourn. He even gives Laika a wholly fictional back-story and lets us drop into the dog's dreams of flying happily across the cosmos. Because a dog that gets shoved into a tiny rocket capsule is a sad thing, but a dog who's had a hard life but dreams of the freedom of space only to die out there in blazing hot, claustrophobia-inducing quarters is a damned tragedy.

Throughout the book Abadzis reminds us with a nod and a wink that we oughtn't get attached to the curly-tailed terrier—even as he pushes us to grow acquainted with a dog of Character and Resolve, a dog whose trust in the caretaker who will ultimately betray her is absolute. Don't get attached. Watch as Laika is so tenderly loved by the girl who can't keep her. Don't get attached, but watch as her new owner abuses her and then throws her in the river. Watch as she finds a canine friend and learns to survive on the streets of Moscow. Watch as she witnesses the brutal murder of her friend at the hands of an overzealous dogcatcher. Don't get attached. But here, watch as she is entered into rocket dog training in preparation for Sputnik II. Don't get attached as you watch nearly every human character involved become attached to her. Don't get attached, but watch how her handlers risk the Gulag by allowing their passions to govern their words on her behalf. Watch them cry and get drunk as she prepares to unwittingly die in space. Watch her get sealed into her flying coffin. Watch as the cabin temperature rises and she overheats. Watch as Laika dreams one final dream of spaceflight, born of her final fevered delirium. But don't get attached.

Nudge nudge. Wink wink.

And to seal the deal, Abadzis portrays those humans who do grow attached to Laika in human terms, having feelings and lives worth our attention; those who don't take to Laika, on the other hand, are monsters—cardboard sources of antagonism with faces caught in perpetual scowls. It's never wise to judge the motivations of authors, but it's easy to read Abadzis (rightly or wrongly) as a dog-lover who cannot comprehend the person who might not love dogs quite so much. In this book, sacrificing dogs near the height of the Cold War for the protection of a nation might sound like an alright idea, but that's just because you haven't met the dog. I can sympathize, right? but did I really need to have the idea batter me over the head and shoulders until I promised to yield to its persuasive technique? Probably not so much.

So with that out of the way, why is *LAIKA* worth your time despite its manipulations?

It turns out that the human story Abadzis weaves is actually pretty fascinating. We follow, essentially, three individuals. Sergei Korolev is released from his imprisonment in the Siberian Gulag and in his stupor-state, believes himself blessed by the moon. Decades later, we find him driven and ambitious, the lead architect of Russia's rocket program. Under his guidance, Sputnik has orbited the globe, striking fear into the American populace and making him a hero to the Russian government. Khrushchev demands a second Sputnik for a month later and this one will be manned. Korolev talks the premier down to using a dog instead and Laika's fate is sealed because Korolev will do anything to remain at liberty.

Yelena Dubrovsky is the least interesting lead from a dramatic perspective. She exists as the book's Laika-loving heart. Dubrovsky is hired on the same day as Laika's own arrival at the space facility and begins her

work as the dog's caretaker immediately. She works diligently to prepare Laika for whatever missions might come, helping her to recover from training in the centrifuge or on parabolic flights. She harbours an affection for Korolev but imagines that he cares for Laika as deeply as she does.

Oleg Gazenko is Dubrovsky's superior and finds his own affection growing for both the woman and her canine charge. Abadzis excels somewhat at portraying the man's frustration with his unreciprocated feelings. Gazenko and Korolev are easily the most interesting characters throughout and watching to see how their complexities will play out was, for me, the most rewarding aspect of *LAIKA*.

Beyond some interesting character motives and interaction, the peek into Cold War culture may be especially rewarding for those too young to have lived through the era themselves. All told, *LAIKA* is a good book marred only by an unfortunate reliance upon contrivance and emotional manipulation.

[review courtesy of Good Ok Bad]

Dov Zeller says

A lot of people complain about the manipulative nature of humans writing about canines who will die in the course of a story.

And some people openly admit that they appreciate the particular kind of pain that comes from these "dying dog" books.

But "Laika" is not, I do not think, a book that sets out to use Laika for emotionally manipulative purposes. On the contrary, the author makes it clear she's already been used enough (used to death) and Abadzis instead sets out to complicate and dignify the story of her life.

Abadzis makes some interesting choices in telling this well-researched and keenly fictionalized tale, and one of those choices is to give Laika a past. This is no accident or act of whimsy. "Laika" is not simply about a dog who dies (get out the hankies), but about a dog who lives, and whose life experiences and life history is as important as all the other lives in this book. Every animal we meet in these pages, human and otherwise, gets a fair and compassionate narrative.

As far as I'm concerned, this book moves away from emotional manipulation and into emotionally grounded ethical and philosophical territory. And Abadzis brings us this richness, and dignifies Laika's story without ever losing the relish a good writer has for telling a great dramatic tale. Laika is something of an Oliver Twist, but the painful ending can't be avoided.

I recommend this book to just about anyone, and I think it would be a great book to read in a middle school or high school classroom. A thoughtful teacher could take this book and run with it in many brilliant directions.

Negativni says

Laika je strip o sudbini istoimenog psa, prve životinje koja je bila u Zemljinoj orbiti.

Abadzis isprepliće stvarne događaje sa fiktivnima, pa pratimo Lajku od neželjenog šteneta do njezinog povijesnog leta 3. rujna, 1957. u sovjetskom Sputniku 2. Dio o odrastanju je fiktivan, prožet mistikom i elementima fantastike - na primjer njezini snovi o letenju, kao projekcije naših snova o putovanju u svemir - lijepo je isprepletan sa povijesnim događajima i stvarnim činjenicama.

Strip je zanimljiv i autor je uložio mnogo sati i truda u istraživanje svemirskog programa Sovjetskog Saveza iz tog vremena. Čak je, kako kaže u pogovoru, pazio da i mjesečeve mijene budu prikazane točno - što mi je izmamilo osmijeh na lice, jer sam se sjetio Titanika Jamesa Cameruna i Neil deGrasse Tysonova prigovora da je tamo nebo bilo ne samo pogrešno nego je jedna polovica neba bila zrcalna kopija druge polovice.

Tema mi je zanimljiva i htio sam saznati detalje tog povijesnog događaja pa me je to tjeralo na daljnje čitanje. A srećom i autor je veći fokus stavio na to jer su likovi samo imena, odnosno nisu nikako razrađeni. Svi Rusi su prikazani emocionalno hladnima, baš onako kako ih zamišljaju oni koji ih nikada nisu upoznali, osim kroz američke filmove.

Crtež mi se baš i ne sviđa, ali ima u sebi nešto stila i originalnosti pa funkcionira.

Strip mi je izmeću ocjena 3 i 4, no evo mu slaba četvorka - nešto sam darežljiv ovih dana...

Claire says

When I started working in a school, I thought that my strong immune system would keep me healthy even though all first-year teachers spend the whole year sick from new germs. Was I right? Not at all. It was the same with *Laika*. I knew that everybody else cried when they read this book, but I thought that somehow I'd be prepared, not that I'd find myself bawling into a bowl of pho on Clement St. And yet.

Laika is the story of the first dog to go up in space. It's not a spoiler to tell you that she doesn't come back. But *Laika* is really the story of the dog's -- and her people's -- life before she's launched in Sputnik II's tiny compartment. The Cold War, the space race, the USSR during that time, common human cruelty, loss, privation, powerlessness... all these provide a context and backdrop to Laika's story, so the heavy feeling starts a few pages in and continues to the end of the story. There are compassionate and kind people throughout, of course, which only increases how sad you feel while reading it.

Apparently Nick Abadzis meticulously researched this text, and I think the graphic novel format (beautifully done) gives it a real appeal to young adult readers... not to mention that it's a story full of injustice and difficult choices, themes that many teens feel deeply. If I worked with older readers, or in a history/social studies or even a science classroom, I would use this book in a heartbeat.
