



Underground Soldier

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Fourteen-year-old Luka works as an Ostarbeiter in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe, alongside Lida from *Making Bombs for Hitler*. Desperate to escape the brutal conditions of the labour camp, he manages to get away by hiding in a truck under a pile of dead bodies.

Once free, Luka joins a group of Ukrainian resistance fighters. Caught between advancing Nazis in the west and Soviet troops in the east, they mount guerilla raids, help POW escapees, and do all they can to make life hard for the Nazis and Soviets. After the war, Luka must decide whether to follow Lida to Canada — or stay in Europe and search for his long-lost mother.

Underground Soldier is a companion book to *Stolen Child* and *Making Bombs for Hitler*, and a perfect entry point into the series for new readers, as the books can be read in any order.

Underground Soldier Details

Date : Published 2014 by Scholastic Canada Ltd.

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From Reader Review Underground Soldier for online ebook

Mary Clare says

I didn't realize, until I was over halfway through this book and paused to look at a few professional reviews, that this is a companion novel to Skrypuch's "Making Bombs for Hitler" which I have not yet read. This made me feel so much better about the strange lack of exposition at the start of "The War Below" since protagonist Luka evidently was introduced in the other novel. Gradually, the narrative does stand on its own with a suspenseful story arc. Luka is a thirteen-year-old Ukrainian who, as the book opens in 1943, has just escaped from a Nazi work camp. He is determined to make his way back to Kyiv (something I learned while reading this book is that this is the preferred spelling of Kiev) to reunite with his parents. There is plenty of realistic detail about Luka's arduous journey, and I was quite intrigued by the politics involved as Ukraine shifts from Soviet to German control and then back again as the war draws to a conclusion. I suspect that young readers may be a bit stymied by the numerous flashbacks, particularly in the earlier chapters. While the flashbacks are delineated by italics and an odd change to present tense narration, the device still is not very effective. The structural shortcomings are compensated for by compelling characterization and interesting historical detail.

Karissa says

My son got this from his book fair and really wanted me to read it. It was a decent historical fiction novel about a 12 year old boy who escapes from a slave labor camp and then goes on to join a Ukrainian underground group.

It was interesting to read about a part of WWII that I didn't know much about. The book is written in fairly simple language but was engaging and interesting.

Overall this was a well done historical fiction novel about a part of WWII that I didn't know much about. I would recommend to middle grade aged readers who are interesting in WWII. I wouldn't really recommend for adults because the story and language are very simple.

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

The novel Making Bombs for Hitler is the story of Lida Ferezuk, who was taken from her home in the Ukraine, put in a cattle car and sent to a slave labor camp, where she eventually ended up making bombs for the Nazis. In that same cattle car was Luka Barukovich, also taken from his home in Kyiv, Ukraine. Lida and Luka become friends and watch out for each other in the slave labor camp, but when the opportunity for escape arises, Luka decides to risk it at Lida's urging.

The War Below begins in 1943 with Luka hiding in a truckload of corpses, hoping to escape the camp, return to his home in Kyiv and find his father, who had been taken away by the Nazis and sent to Siberia. Now, wounded, wearing a hospital gown and bare foot, Luka jumps from the truck about two kilometers from the camp, in the rain, and finds his way to what appears to be an abandoned farm. The farm, however, is the

home of Helmut and Margarete, an elderly couple who feed and clothe Luka, and urge him to remain with them until spring. But when he discovers that their son is a power-hungry officer from the camp he has just escaped, Luka decides it is time to leave.

By now, the Nazis are losing the war, and there is constant bombing around Luka by the British and Americans. Sticking to wooded areas, Luka meets Martina Chalupa, a girl who has been living and surviving in the woods for a while. The two decide to continue on together, and between Luka's knowledge of natural medicines and remedies (thanks to his pharmacist father) and Martina's survival skills, the two do well together.

Eventually, Luka and Martina run into members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, an underground (literally) resistance group. Both Luka and Martina decide to stay and fight with the resistance, Luka as a medical helper and Martina as a soldier. Luka stays with the resistance until the end of the war in 1945, when he is told to head west rather than east. Stalin has decided that if Russians and Ukrainians were captured by the Nazis, put to work and survived, they are traitors to the Soviet Union and are put to death.

Eventually, Luka makes his way to a displaced persons camp, where he begins searching for his mother and his friend Lida, in the hope that they both survived the war. Eventually reunited with Lida in the DP camp, he is lured away again with the promise that his father has been found and is living in Kyiv. Anxious to see him, Luka boards a truck with other Ukrainians returning home. It very shortly turns out that they have been duped by NKVD (the Soviet secret police) and the plan is to kill them as traitors. But if you have read *Making Bombs for Hitler*, you pretty much know how Luka's story does not end on that truck.

The War Below, originally published under the name *Underground Soldier*, is every bit as solid a novel as *Making Bombs for Hitler*. Both books have been reissued, and they are part of a trilogy. The third book, called *Stolen Child*, is the story of what happens to Lida's younger sister Larissa, and, I am sorry to say, it is the only one I haven't read yet, but I am hoping it will be reissued as well.

Luka is a strong, resourceful, compassionate character, though he is also racked with guilt at not being able to save his friend David, killed in the Nazi massacre of Babi Yar in 1941, and at leaving Lida behind when he escaped the labor camp, and at not being able to help Martina more. Skrypuch very cleverly incorporates background information about what Luka experienced in Kyiv when the Nazis arrived, so that the reader really understands what is going on for him.

When I wrote about *Making Bombs for Hitler*, I said it was a real eye-opener for me in terms of what went on in the Nazi slave labor camps. I had the same reaction with *The War Below*. I haven't really read much about the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UIA), and how they operated and found it fascinating. Yes, I've written about other resistance groups, but I find they are all unique (see *Uncle Misha's Partisans* by Yuri Suhl, also about the Ukrainian resistance)

The novel is narrated in the first person by Luka, and it is a captivating novel. From the moment I began reading, I couldn't put it down. And, although there is a lot of overlap with *Making Bombs for Hitler*, repeating information you might already know, it really doesn't take away from the story at all, but also means this can be read as a stand alone novel.

Skrypuch is not afraid to confront and interrogate the cruelties of the Soviet and Nazi regimes, and I again feel that I should warn readers that there are some graphic descriptions that might not be suitable for some sensitive readers. But, I also have to say that the overall story is one that shouldn't be missed, mostly because the Eastern Front is not one most of us are terribly familiar with, though that is beginning to change.

Be sure to read the Author's Note at the back of the book, and you might also find the brief description of the certain historical events included in *The War Below* to be helpful.

This book is recommended for readers age 10+

This book is an ARC received from the publisher, Scholastic Press.

Jennifer says

When a young adult novel starts out with the sentence ... “The corpses around me provided an odd sort of comfort.” ... you know that the author isn’t going to waste any time getting you involved with the devastation and the unrelenting tension to come with this historical fiction. You immediately recognize that an important story is about to be told, and this is certainly one of them.

Underground Soldier is a stand alone book but it pairs up so well with *Stolen Child* and *Making Bombs for Hitler*. When a twelve-year-old boy’s only goal is to escape a Nazi work camp so he can get back to his home and hopefully the surviving members of his family, you are taken on a heart-breaking journey as he tries to survive. Alone, hurt and hungry, he needs help but he finds it hard to know who to trust. This young character beautifully illustrates the determination, courage, resourcefulness, and just plain doggedness that it must have taken these souls to live during Hitler's reign during WWII and Stalin’s brutality afterwards. How can we live in a world where men made of flesh and blood can be so vile and evil? (Interesting thought on 3 small words with the same letters but in different order ... live vile evil ... see, same letters but stark contrast in meaning) (Hitler & Stalin must of had dyslexic souls) (I know ... funny but not funny ... I'm sorry)

The Ukrainian people suffered alongside all of the Jewish people as they were pushed and pulled between the Soviets and the Nazis. So many moral dilemmas were forced upon ordinary people during that devastating time. These dilemmas were well explored through all of the young recurring characters. This author manages to make you feel like you know these young people personally by the end of the third novel and you’re cheering for their happy endings.

I think one of the best questions that I came away from this book with was, is it possible not to choose sides in a war? When you’re two choices are evil or evil ... what then??

We, as parents and adults, have to make sure future generations know and understand these stories regardless of how devastating they can be. This book (actually all 3) certainly succeed in introducing this compelling piece of history to a new audience. I myself enjoy learning about old subjects in history that aren’t overly talked about anymore. It's good to make the past new again.

I so totally recommend this book and the other two as well. Of the 3 Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch novels that are tied together by common themes and characters, this one was my favorite for some reason. 4½ stars for sure.

Traci says

This is the story of a 12 year old Ukrainian boy named Luka who was separated from his family during WWII. First the Soviet’s sent his father to a Siberian work camp, then the Nazi’s gained control of his village

and sent him & his mother to separate work camps. The story opens with Luka escaping the work camp by smuggling himself out in a wagon full of corpses. Against all odds, & with a help of a fellow escapee, Luka survives long enough to make it to the Carpathian Mountains. There he joins the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, a brave group of men women & children who have established a network of underground bases and hospitals and who are fighting both the Germans & Soviets. This book is meticulously researched and sheds light on the plight of the Ukrainian people at the hands of the Soviet Union & Germany. In the author's note I learned that after the war Stalin killed many people who had survived German work and death camps, claiming they were traitors because they didn't fight hard enough when they were taken by Nazi soldiers. For that reason people were afraid to share their stories until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. I haven't read the companion book, *Making Bombs for Hitler*, but am moving it to the top of my to-read list!

Stacey says

Underground Soldier was as equally as well-written and heart-wrenching as *Stolen Child* and *Making Bombs for Hitler*. In fact, this title hit me harder than the other two- maybe it was the vivid descriptions of being in the midst of war and battle. I would love for Skrypuch to write more about these characters and how they coped with life post-war. Highly recommended for G4 and up. Some of the G5 students are reading the trilogy with their teachers and many others are reading it independently, and they are hooked!

Ms. Yingling says

Copy provided by Young Adult Books Central

Luka and his family lived in the Ukraine, where his father ran a pharmacy and let Luka help with the medicines quite a bit. His father was taken off by the secret police, and Luka ended up by himself in a concentration camp. There, he befriended Lida (from *Making Bombs for Hitler*). When he ends up in the hospital with a wound to his thigh, Lida encourages him to escape. He does, in a death cart, and jumps out before he gets to the mass grave. He manages to make his way across the countryside, scantily clad and injured, and takes refuge in a barn. Eventually, he tries to steal food, but the couple, Helmut and Margarete, find him. Having two sons of their own, they take pity on him and get him squared away. Eventually, he learns to trust them even though one of their sons is in the WehrMacht and could turn his parents in if they caught him harboring a prisoner. Luka stays for a while, but is determined to make his way to Kyiv to find his father. With the war going badly for the Nazis, it's not safe for him to go towards the city, and he ends up becoming involved with the Ukranian resistance with Martina, a girl who helps him survive in the forest. Once liberation comes, Luka searches for both Lida and his father, hoping that the Red Cross can help him find them.

From the tense beginning, where Luka is trying to escape in the death cart, to the end, where he is able to find some peace, this is a riveting read. Having it set in the Ukraine, with the resistance, adds even more interest to a topic that some would consider to be overdone. As much as I think sometimes that there are too many books about World War II, I know that there are lots of readers who enjoy these books, and that there

is always room for fresh titles on new topics.

It also helps that *The War Below* covers many facets of the Jewish experience-- flash backs to daily life in Kyiv, time in the camps, and time hiding out in the wilderness. I wish that more books followed characters after liberation, when times were especially tense and unsettled. The end of this book reminded me of my all time favorite, Moskin's *I am Rosemarie* (1972).

The cover of this book is compelling, and will make for an excellent display when accompanied by Gratz's *Prisoner B-3087*, Bartoletti's *The Boy Who Dared*, this author's companion title and McCormick's nonfiction *The Plot to Kill Hitler*.

Cindy Mitchell *Kiss the Book* says

The War Below by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch. 256 pages. Scholastic, 2018. \$18. Language: G; Mature Content: G; Violence: PG (Holocaust deaths, fighting)
EL, MS – ADVISABLE.

Luka may be young, but he has already survived one trip to hell – life in a German work camp, where the main goal seems to be killing off as many people as possible. Pretending to be a corpse helped him escape, but he is in no less danger. His goal is to hide in the mountains until the war is over. While he encounters some help along the way, even meeting Martina, another young survivor who joins him on his journey, the pair just going from the frying pan to the fire. They've been taken in by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, but they are caught between Hitler and Stalin – and both are happy to kill all of the insurgents.

While most of the danger will be familiar to anyone who has read Holocaust books, the information and danger encountered by the UIA will probably be totally new. Students who enjoyed reading *Making Bombs for Hitler* will also enjoy this.

Cindy, Library Teacher

<https://kissthebook.blogspot.com/2018...>

Stephanie Bange says

Originally published as “Underground Soldier” in 2014 by Scholastic Canada, this is the WW II experience of fictional character Luka Barukovich, a young teenage boy from Kiev, Ukraine, after his escape from a labor camp in Germany and the path his life takes through end of the war.

Luka grows appropriately through the years, starting as a naïve city boy (being caught trespassing and stealing on Helmut and Margarete's farm, being trailed in the woods by Martina) through his experiences as a soldier (killing a German soldier) and medic (helping in surgery with the doctors) as part of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (an underground group fighting both Germans and Soviets) and survival after the war in the

displacement camps. Luka witnesses horrible atrocities (read the opening), wears his emotions on his sleeves, and maintains great consideration for others.

Inspired by true stories told by survivors, Skrypuch does a fantastic job of bringing to life the rarely told story of this partisan-type group of Ukrainians fighting under the radar. She has received recognition and awards from Ukrainians for telling their WW II stories. This book picks up where “Making Bombs for Hitler” leaves off. I recommend reading Skrypuch’s the WWII books in order, as Luka has flashbacks of David many times in the story and is reunited with Lida in the end. The third book in the trilogy – Stolen Girl – is scheduled to be released in the U.S. in February 2019 by Scholastic.

Recommended for grades 5-8.

Tanner says

This really explains a lot about the war. How it changed life and tell about a kid that going trow the war. It tell how people turn in to Nazi and more. Please read if you love history book.

Marney Hawes says

A worthy companion to Making Bombs For Hitler. Exciting to say the least, as well as heartbreaking.

Valerie Sherrard says

Another triumph for Marsha Skrypuch! Underground Soldier tells the story of teenaged Luka following his escape (hidden in a pile of corpses) from a German slave labour camp. What follows his daring escape are months and years as a soldier with the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, while the threat of discovery and death are never far away. This action-filled story of life on the edge offers the reader a first-person view of what it was like to live in a world where exploding bombs and the loss of loved ones was a daily reality. A marvellous addition to the Stolen Child and Making Bombs for Hitler novels!

Abby Chaput says

It definitely helps to have read Making Bombs For Hitler before reading this, as it continues to mention Lida who is not the main character in this book. Overall this was an interesting story that I enjoyed, and showed another perspective of the character Luka from before.

Breanne Bannerman says

<http://breannebannerman.wordpress.com...>

Mrs. Notton Class says

In the book, *The War Below*, by Marsha Firchuk Skrypuch, the main character's name is Luka. This story is about World War 2 and this book is in the middle of the war. Luka is from Kyiv but he was taken away to a slave labor camp along with his mother but they did not go to the same one. His father was taken away before they were and he was taken to Siberia. Also, at the slave labor camp he had gotten hurt bad from making bombs so his best friend named Lida encourages him to escape.

After he escapes, he has a long journey and meets a lot of nice people that help him out. In this story, the main problem is that Luka is trying to find his family and get back home. But he has to be really careful not to get caught or get killed. The first people who help him with his problem are people that live on a farm a little bit away from the labor camp and their names are Martin and Margreete. They help him for a little bit but then he must leave but they give him stuff for the journey. The next person that helps him is a girl named Martina who he finds in the woods and they become best friends and help each other out. Then they find the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and they are so excited. Since they can help fight against other people and all they have wanted to do was to have this war over and they could make that happen.

Someone who would like this book is someone who likes action packed stories with a lot of suspense and that has you on the edge of your seat. Also, a person who would like this is if you are interested in World War 2 or history because this book takes place during World War 2. I would rate this book 3 out of 5 stars because I thought that some parts were a bit slow. For example, when he was in the woods, I felt like that time took a long time so I wished the author would have taken some of that out. If you like these kind of books read, *The War Below* by Marsha Firchuk Skrypuch.
