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The Winter War: A Novel



Synopsis

When the Soviet Union invades its tiny neighbor Finland in November 1939, Marko volunteers to help the war effort. Even though his leg was weakened by polio, he can ski well, and he becomes a messenger on the front line, skiing in white camouflage through the forests at night. The dark forest is terrifying, and so are the odds against the Finns: the Russians have 4 times as many soldiers and 30 times as many planes. They have 3000 tanks, while the Finns have 30. But a tank is no help in the snowy forest— a boy on skis is. And the Russians don't know winter the way the Finns do, or what tough guerrilla warriors the Finns are. Marko teams up with another messenger, Karl. Gradually Marko learns that Karl's whole family was killed by the Russians. And Karl has a secret—he's really Kaari, a girl who joined up to get revenge for her family's deaths. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Even though this book was written for older children and teens, I enjoyed it. It is an accurate representation of Finland's Winter War against the U.S.S.R. in the winter of 1939-1940. This war

began when Stalin and his henchmen claimed that tiny Finland attacked the U.S.S.R. Using this phony provocation as an excuse, the Soviets invaded Finland with more than a million men, thousands of tanks, artillery pieces and airplanes and dozens of ships. They would need more before it was over. They would not need the brass band which they brought along to celebrate their victory. In his memoirs, Khrushchev claimed that the Soviet Union had more than one million casualties in this war. There is debate over the actual number. This novel tells the story of the fighting through the eyes of a boy recruited to be a company messenger. Even though the heroism and sacrifices of the Finnish people are depicted, the novel does not glorify war. The hardships and the fear are not glossed over but neither is the fact that the Finns overcame the odds and remained a free nation at the end of the war despite losing about 10% of their territory.

This was a good read and the story moved along quickly. The author did a good job in putting the reader into the shoes of the main character and painting the scene. The only downside was that I wanted to know what happened when the book was over.

This book was for my husband and he was very happy to get it. He has read it and enjoyed it.

I thoroughly enjoyed this one. This book was such a joy to read.. a truly wonderful story and just loaded with facts about the Winter War. The only thing that could have made it better would have been had Finland not lost Karelia to the Red Army. Either way, tho, Finland was the true winner of that war.. no matter how history wants to record it. :)

Great way to read a little history with a story of the people behind it. They had sisu!

A very good book! It's got a lot of what kids will like including boys: action, real-life situations, humor. A good way of learning a bit of history many Americans aren't familiar with, and from an inside perspective--that of a young person caught up in it. The author does a good job of making his young character relatable and believable, showing how the war turns his world upside down, and showing a lot of really good details of the war in a believable way through the young character's eyes. The writing style is straightforward, competent, and on the simple side, occasionally a bit too simple for me--for instance, flashbacks to the character's past always start with the character pausing & starting to actively reminisce, which I find unnecessary. But perhaps that's to be expected in a book for younger teenagers, which is definitely where I would categorize this one--11, 12 and

13-year-olds might be its best audience. Still, it was a worthwhile read for me as an adult to learn some history in an engaging way, and I would also recommend it to other adults who are simply curious to know what happened when Russia invaded Finland.

This book really captured my attention and interest. I've always wanted a novel that went into depth of the Winter War and to learn more about what Finnish families went through during that time as well as the soldiers. There are historical books on it, but not so many novels. This story is basically about a young man named Marko who loses his best friend Johan to a bombing from a Russian plane and he decides to fight in the war to save his country and avenge his friend's death despite his weakened leg. This novel really shows how Marko and the other soldiers had "Sisu" and fought for their freedom. Even though it is written for teens and young adults, it is very well written and I would recommend it for anyone with an interest in Finnish history or who just wants to read a good book.

Other than a few relatively minor "willing suspension of disbelief"--can a girl really dig a trench large enough for a horse, chop wood with a dull axe, help a boy carry injured men in stretchers uphill over difficult terrain while on skis, and carry an ammunition can in each hand, also while on skis across difficult terrain all in the "worst recorded winter"--the story is actually very good and engaging. I had a hard time setting this book down.

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