



## Night Witches

*Kathryn Lasky*

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Sixteen-year-old Valya knows what it feels like to fly. She's a pilot who's always felt more at home soaring through the sky than down on earth. But since the Germans surrounded Stalingrad, Valya's been forced to stay on the ground and watch her city crumble.

When her mother is killed during the siege, Valya is left with one burning desire: to join up with her older sister, a member of the famous Night Witches—a regiment of female pilots who fly light planes through curtains of fire to bomb crucial targets.

Using all her wits, Valya manages to get past the German blockade and find the Night Witches' hidden base. That's when the *real* danger starts. The pilots have been assigned a critical mission, one with the power to inflict serious damage on the Nazis. Valya will give anything to fight for her country, but when the person she loves most goes missing, she must make a choice between duty and the deepest desires of her heart.

## Night Witches Details

Date : Published March 28th 2017 by Scholastic Press

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Author : Kathryn Lasky

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## From Reader Review Night Witches for online ebook

### Stephanie Bange says

During the Seige of Stalingrad, sixteen-year-old Valentina Baskova – Valya – finds she is alone. Her father, a Russian pilot is MIA, her grandmother was killed during an explosion, her sister Tatyana has gone to join the Night Witches (a battalion of young women pilots), and her mother was killed by a sniper. Determined to join the Night Witches in action, she meets Yuri (a classmate who is now a renowned sniper), becomes proficient in trench warfare, and finally gets to fly. After many successful flights, she is shot down, escapes death, and locates her sister who is being held as a POW. Lasky has obviously done a great deal of homework on this little-studied topic, as it is filled with detailed descriptions. However, at times, she works too much information into the action of the story, dropping in some Russian language (translated) along the way. References to American and British children's literature and culture (rather than Russian) by Valya feels forced. (Why is she talking about Rita Hayworth? Huck Finn? Peter Pan? The Wizard of Oz?) Also, the many references to music throughout (her mother teaches violin) seem a bit forced. Characters seem a bit stereotypical at times. Many of the things Valya experiences and accomplishes in the story seem too incredible to have happened to one young girl during wartime. Some coarse and strong language is included – more as the reader progresses in the work. While it might have been authentic to the time, it is jarring to be read today. This work would be so much more valuable if a bibliography for further reading or other backmatter were included.

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### Kales says

I wanted more from this book. I enjoyed the subject and the characters. Their development was fantastic. It was a fascinating part of history that I knew nothing about. But it went too fast. I could have read another 200 pages about this. I wanted more depth and grit. Sometimes the speed was intense and I couldn't keep track of what was going on. Especially when listening to it on audiobook. That was difficult but it was still enjoyable and I liked the topic.

Conclusion: When I Find it On Sale

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### Courtney says

The protagonist was a bit too "Western" in her thinking for her to be a believable Russian Night Witch. I was also disappointed in the author's writing, there was no suspense. The story was definitely told, not shown, with no real tension built. It was basically written as "and then, and then, and then". I wish I had read a non-fiction instead, which is a rarity for me.

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### Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

It 1941, and the Nazi have just begun Operation Barbarossa, their invasion of Russia. Nazi soldier have surrounded Stalingrad on three sides (the fourth side is the Volga River), making it impossible for people and

supplies to get in or out of the city. After her mother was killed by a Nazi sniper, Valentina Petrovna Baskova, or Valya, 16, sees no reason for not joining her sister Tatyana as a Night Witch, a fighter pilot with the 588th Regiment. Her father, a pilot, hasn't been heard from since he left to fight, and is MIA.

With the help of Yuri, an old classmate now turned Russian sniper, Valya sets off for the river where ferries are rumored to be taking people across in the morning. Unfortunately, so many people are fleeing Stalingrad, that Valya is unable to get on the ferry, and ends up unwillingly manning antiaircraft guns in Trench 301 run by another school friend, Anna.

Valya is stuck fighting in the Trench 301, always looking up into the night sky and wondering if one the Night Witches she sees could be her sister, making her long to be part of it all the more. But no one in the Trench 301 really believes a 16 year old can fly a plane. Finally, it is again rumored that civilians will be allowed to cross it. Valya makes it to the docks, but just as she is about to board, Yuri shows up and pulls her away, saving her life.

It's in the dead of winter that Valya finally makes it across the frozen river, escorted by Yuri, who seems to know exactly where the secreted 588th Regiment is located. At last, Valya makes it to Night Witches, and finds her sister Tatyana. And despite all she has already been through, her real adventure as a Night Witch has only just begun.

Night Witches is a pretty exciting, fast-paced story with perhaps a little poetic license. Valya is a strong female main character, who exhibits plenty of level-headed self-confidence even in a dangerous situation, yet retains the impulsiveness of her age. I have to admit, however, her jealousy and the way she constantly compared herself to her older sister annoyed me (um, too close to home, perhaps?). Still, the very strong bond between the sisters which becomes all the more evident when Tatyana's plane is shot down and Valya refuses to believe she could be dead and vows to find her.

The story of the Night Witches is not a familiar story to today's readers, and Lasky's book certainly has a great deal of appeal going for it. Since most WWII books for young readers focus on the home front, the war in European theater, and to a lesser extent, the war in the Pacific theater, Lasky has included some information as part of the narrative to give readers some sense of context. But, the use of female fighter pilots was such an unusual phenomenon in WWII, that I would have liked Back Matter with some addition information about the Night Witches and perhaps suggestions for further reading.

While there is some strong language, and some of the fighting is a bit graphic, especially while Valya is fighting in Trench 301, it isn't overly done. My first introduction to Russia's women pilots was in an old book called *Comrades of the Air* (1942) by Dorothy Carter, a story about a female pilot in the ATA who ferries a plane to Russia, so it is nice to read a book from a Russian perspective.

Did you think that Valya was too young to fly? Here is an interesting article about Russia's Night Witches from [The Atlanticmagazine](#) about the real women pilots who actually did range in age from 17 to 26.

This book is recommended for readers age 13+

This book was an EARC received from Edelweiss/Above the Treeline

Since Night Witches is a YA novel, may I recommend a work of nonfiction as a supplement to those interested in these brave pilots called *Night Witches: The Amazing Story of Russia's Women Pilots in WWII* by Bruce Myles and published by Chicago Review Press.

This review was originally posted on The Children's War

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### **Cindy Mitchell \*Kiss the Book\* says**

Lasky, Kathryn Night Witches: a novel of World War II, 224 pages. Scholastic, MARCH 2017. Language: G; Mature Content: PG (some very mild racy talk); Violence: PG (war deaths).

Valya, 16, desperately wants to help protect her city of Stalingrad during the attempted Nazi invasion of World War II, by joining her sister Tatyana as a Night Witch – a female U2 pilot. Working tirelessly to take out Nazi searchlights and other targets. Even should she find her way to the Night Witches, she will still need to prove her abilities and survive each deadly bombing run.

Lasky has illuminated another little-known side of the World War II story – this time bringing a human side to Russians as they provided the second front against the Nazis. This book is much more accessible than M. T. Anderson's Symphony for the City of the Dead. While the title may evoke thoughts of magic, this is purely based in the real world. I can't wait to share this with many students. The only question I have is "What happened to Yuri?!"

MS – ESSENTIAL. Cindy, Library Teacher  
<http://kissthebook.blogspot.com/2016/...>

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### **Erika (OwlwaysReading) says**

[https://www.theatlantic.com/technology...](https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/)

Soo... excited! This article ^^^ has me so jazzed :D

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### **Sarah says**

I enjoyed this as an introduction to a fascinating topic, but the author managed to take a fantastic, interesting topic and turn it into a bland middle-school report. There were glimmers of lovely prose throughout, but not enough to elevate the rest of the book.

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### **Owen says**

The story of both the Night Witches regiment and our main character's journey through the second world war is told in broad strokes. Valya is well-intentioned and empathetic, even if she often seems to be swept along by the story and her cultural references are suspiciously western. She tells us most of the story, although there are occasional bits where the narrative passes to others, and she tends to gloss over big portions of the time covered by the story. In some places, the story uses coincidences to get characters out of trouble, which is less interesting than watching them struggle to get out of trouble themselves. The story also likes to introduce us to historical figures, regardless of how much it makes sense for them to be present.

Regardless, it's an enjoyable if predictable story for anyone who's interested in the Night Witches or stories of true heroism in general.

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### **Cassi says**

When I first learned about this book I knew that I needed to read it. It's totally up my alley. I'm a huge fan of historical fiction and I love unique kinds of WWII stories and books set in Russia. I got all of these things in the course of this book. It was everything I hoped it would be and it was really fantastic.

Part of what I really liked about this book was the fact that it is a book about World War II that felt both unique and familiar. The author did a great job in establishing the setting and immersing the reader in it. Most books I have read about WWII take place in Germany, France, or Poland. I don't think I've ever read one set in Russia and I really enjoyed that. It showed a different side of a familiar period in history. It felt exciting and new while adding complexity to something I feel like I know about. And that to me is exactly what I want in historical fiction. I learned something and I was entertained.

But World War II wasn't just the setting for the book, it was also the plot. And I really enjoyed the plot as well. It's definitely a story about war as the character is taken from her home to become. That in and of itself was interesting with plenty of action and daring battles. Plus this book doesn't hold back when it comes to portraying war. It definitely shows some of the more brutal aspects not only for those who are fighting but also for those on the Homefront. There are some brutal moments in this book and helped to establish the setting as well as the plot.

It's also a really fast-paced story. It's short and doesn't take long to read (I finished it in a day) because you do become invested in the story and don't want to stop reading but you also can really power through it. I usually prefer my books to slowly build to a thrilling conclusion and while there was an exciting ending here it didn't slowly build. It had a handful of smaller climaxes that felt connected but still independent of one another. There is no specific plot and at times it does make for a story that felt a little disconnected but for the setting and plot that did kind of work.

I also enjoyed the characters here. The main character of Valya was incredibly likable and easy to connect with. For a lot of the book is constantly underestimated and incredibly determined to fight for her homeland and to be useful in a way she knows she can be. I really liked that about her and it made her a great protagonist. There were also plenty of great secondary characters. I particularly liked the relationship Valya had with her sister Tatyana. You can tell they cared about one another but they still argued in a very sisterly way. I also liked some of the other Night Witches like Valya's friends Mara and Galya. Many of the characters weren't huge parts of the story but I still became emotionally attached to them and found myself concerned about what would and did happen to them. It's a good sign when you connect with a character without even realizing it.

All in all, Night Witches was a really good historical fiction young adult novel. It had a setting that was engaging and interesting, a plot that was full of action and adventure, and characters you can connect with.

I would absolutely recommend this book to fans of historical fiction especially if you like books set during World War II. But even if you aren't a fan of the genre the book is still engaging and interesting.

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### **viktoria says**

**tl;dr:** This book was *so flipping interesting*. It occurred to me, somewhere around the first quarter, that I had never read a WWII fiction book that took place in the USSR/Russia and I need to read more in the future, because the combination of that and Night Witches fascinated me so much. Plus, I really liked Valya as a character. That being said, I really wish this book was better written (even though it's probably meant for the younger end of the YA spectrum). It's definitely guilty of "telling, not showing" and "massive info dump summary," especially in the parts where you want the details and scenes. But it's so intriguing and interesting, and definitely worth an evening of your time.

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### **Daphne says**

Great book, I knew nothing about the Russian side of World War II. I love how strong these young women were. It is very sad to see what children were going through during this terrible time.

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### **David - proud Gleeman in Branwen's adventuring party says**

Review to come

*(I really will get around to writing this review, I swear!)*

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### **Eliana Salazar says**

( Contains Spoilers! ) Night witches by Kathryn Lasky is a very interesting book, it is about Valentina, Valya for short, a girl from Russia during world war 2. Her sister, Tatyana , is a Night witch, girls and women who fly in the night and drop bombs on Nazi fuel depots. Valya wants to fly but is held back by her mother, until she is killed before her eyes. She meets a sniper, Yuri, and grows affection for him. Valya manages to escape her hometown and makes it to the airfield where her sister is. She finally gets to fly, becoming a Night witch and fighting this war. I recommend this book to anyone that likes World war 2 stories, or is interested in the topic. Also, I recommend this book to middle schoolers and high schoolers

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### **Krystel says**

I had no idea that Russian women flew bombing missions during WWII. I'm intrigued by the subject and liked getting the Russian perspective on that period of history, but the execution left something to be desired. I think in the end I would have been happier with a non-fiction title about the Night Witches. Not a bad book, but not a favorite.

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### **Barbara says**

Until I read this book, I knew absolutely nothing about the women pilots who helped wage war against the Nazis on behalf of Russia during WWII. Dubbed the Night Witches because that's the time when they flew their missions, these women made a real difference in the direction the war was taking. The story focuses on sixteen-year-old Valentina Baskova whose father has taught her how to fly. While her home of Stalingrad suffers under a siege by the Germans, Valya desperately wishes that she was old enough to fly missions like her older sister, Tatyana. She gets her wish after her grandmother and mother are killed, and she temporarily joins several teens who are fighting the Germans with whatever they have on hand. After a sniper, a former classmate, helps her steal a plane, she joins the other female flyers and quickly proves her worth. While I liked the detail about the missions and the very real danger in which the flyers were in every time they took off and headed for their targets, I wasn't so sure that things would have lined up so neatly for Valya so that she could steal a plane with no repercussions and happen to find her sister later as POWs were being marched through the snow. I wasn't sure why Valya was so suspicious of the elderly woman who saved her life late in the book either. The vague references to the country's leaders lacked detail and may serve to leave readers unfamiliar with Stalin confused as to what was going on. I would have liked to have had some notes about historical context for Valya's homeland provided. Still, I learned a lot from reading this piece of historical fiction, and I turned the pages as quickly as I possibly could to find out what would happen next.

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