

Sophia's War: A Tale of the Revolution

By Avi

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Sophia's War: A Tale of the Revolution By Avi

Lives hang in the balance in this gripping Revolutionary War adventure from a beloved Newbery Medalist.

In 1776, young Sophia Calderwood witnesses the execution of Nathan Hale in New York City, which is newly occupied by the British army. Sophia is horrified by the event and resolves to do all she can to help the American cause. Recruited as a spy, she becomes a maid in the home of General Clinton, the supreme commander of the British forces in America. Through her work she becomes aware that someone in the American army might be switching sides, and she uncovers a plot that will grievously damage the Americans if it succeeds. But the identity of the would-be traitor is so shocking that no one believes her, and so Sophia decides to stop the treacherous plot herself, at great personal peril: She's young, she's a girl, and she's running out of time. And if she fails, she's facing an execution of her own.

Master storyteller Avi shows exactly how personal politics can be in this “nail-biting thriller” (*Publishers Weekly*) that is rich in historical detail and rife with action.

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Editorial Review

Review

* “The book’s riveting opening scene, in which Sophie watches as Nathan Hale is hanged as a spy, foreshadows the danger she knowingly accepts by engaging in espionage. Few historical novels are as closely shaped by actual events as this one during the last 100 pages. Working within the bounds of credibility, Avi manages to keep the fictional narrator on the scene for a good deal of the action and uses real moments to bring the imagined story to its dramatic heights. A glossary of eighteenth-century terms and an author’s note are appended. Pair this intriguing historical novel with Sheinkin’s *The Notorious Benedict Arnold* (2010).”

—*Booklist*, August 1, 2012, ***STAR**

* “Newbery Medalist Avi (*Crispin: The Cross of Lead*) channels the mood, language, and danger of the Revolutionary War in this seamless blend of history and fiction, set in British-occupied New York City.... The book is chockful of fascinating historical details, including the conditions for those stranded in New York and the failed meetings between Arnold and John André, his (real-life) British contact. Avi doesn’t sugarcoat the brutal realities of war...in this rich, nail-biting thriller.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, August 13, 2012, ***STAR**

* “Sophia’s War is outstanding historical fiction, bringing to dramatic life the human story behind extraordinary events. The climax is a seamless incorporation of hard fact with thrilling espionage as Avi juxtaposes scenes of André and Arnold’s attempt to meet against Sophia’s efforts to stop them. Rich in period detail, the atmospheric prose vividly re-creates old New York and allows readers to experience Sophia’s conflicting emotions. A glossary clarifies 18th-century terms; in an author’s note, Avi reflects on historical fiction.” (*School Library Journal*, October 2012, ***STAR**)

"Avi's setting is impeccable (especially the descriptions of the prisons where rebel soldiers were kept); the intrigue on the home front, real; and the tension of living in enemy territory, intense." (*Horn Book Magazine*, November/December 2012)

"Newbery Honor-winning author Avi offers a gripping view of the Revolutionary War through the eyes of a 12-year-old spy.... With language drawn from the period (and appended in a glossary) and historical events forming the tight framework of the tense, imagined drama, Avi offers an action-filled novel with wide classroom appeal." (*Book Links*, January 2013)

About the Author

Avi is the author of more than seventy books for children and young adults, including the 2003 Newbery medal winner *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*. He has won two Newbery Honors and many other awards for his fiction. He lives with his family in Denver, Colorado. Visit him at Avi-Writer.com.

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Sophia’s War

IN THE MOMENTOUS year of 1776, on the twenty-second of September, my mother and I were rushing back to the city of New York. New York was where I was born, and where I had lived peacefully until just a few weeks before, when we had fled in fear for our lives. The war for our country's independence had come to our door.

First, my brother, William, along with thousands of other patriot soldiers, ferried across the East River to the village of Brooklyn to defend the city from a British attack. Alarmed by the danger, my father warned us we might have to leave. And indeed, the Americans lost that battle and retreated through Manhattan as Great Britain gained complete control of the city.

But there was no news of William.

Desperately worried, I could only hope he was still with General Washington's army, and not taken prisoner. At times—though no one spoke it—we feared he had been killed.

Too frightened to wait until we could find out, Father had said we must leave our house. It was a wise decision. Soon after British troops occupied New York, a fire erupted and destroyed many buildings. But since we had taken flight to a friend's farm north of the city, we lacked information about our home's condition. Knowing that everything we had—money and possessions—might have been consumed in the fire, much of our lives was in awful derangement. After some days passed, Father and Mother decided that we must go home—if we still had one—and try to reclaim our lives.


Not sure how secure the way would be, Father made the decision that Mother and I, being females, should travel first. It was his belief that English soldiers would not harm a mother and child. "Are they not," he said, "our kinsmen and a civilized people?" Moreover, we would travel on a Sunday, Lords Day. Surely, all would be peaceful. As soon as Father determined that the roads were not dangerous for him, he would follow.

So it was that before dawn on Sunday morning, Mother and I, full of disquietude, set out to walk the twelve miles to the city. With me clutching Mother's hand tightly and barely looking up, we took the road called Harlem Lane. I may have been willowy for my twelve years of age, and my name was Sophia (the Greek word for "wisdom"), but you could just as well have called me "Frightened" and been done with it. In truth, as we hurried along, all my thoughts were on William. He must come home!

It was late morning when we reached the outskirts of New York. By then my wood-soled shoes were soaking wet, my ankle-length linsey-woolsey dress was mud spattered, and the laces of my bonnet—a mobcap—would not stay tied.

As we approached a ripe apple orchard, we observed a group of red-coated British soldiers, armed with muskets and bayonets, marching toward us. By their side, a drummer boy beat slow swinking strokes. An officer, a heavy, sweating man with a nose as bright red as his hair and uniform, strode along in high, black jack-boots. Following him was a Negro. His slave, I supposed.

In the middle of the soldiers was a man whose hands were tied behind his back. Looking to be in his mid-twenties, and some six feet in height, he was considerably taller than the soldiers who surrounded him.

ressed in civilian clothing, he wore no jacket and had a white muslin shirt open at the collar. His light brown hair was arranged pigtail-style. In the slanting morning light, I noticed his blue eyes. I will admit, I

thought him handsome.

The young man walked with a dignified bearing, but his face was anything but serene. Rather, he bore a look of pale, raw intensity, with a gaze that appeared to be on nothing and everything at the same moment.

“What are they doing with that young man?” I said in a low voice to Mother.

She squeezed my hand, and in as fearful a voice as I had ever heard her utter, she said, “I think they are about to hang him.”

Openmouthed, I watched as the men approached an apple tree upon which a ladder leaned. From a stout branch, a noose hung. Just beyond gaped an open grave, with a grave digger standing by, shovel in hand. We stopped and, along with a few other citizens, watched.

When the officer shoved the prisoner to the foot of the ladder, I heard the young man say, “May I have a . . . Bible?” His voice, low and steady, broke on the last word.

“No Bibles for damned rebel spies!” the officer shouted as if he wished us onlookers to hear. “Hoist him,” he commanded.

Three redcoats, their faces blank, stepped forward. Two grabbed the young man’s arms as if to restrain him, though I saw no attempt to break free. Would that he had! The third soldier placed the noose round the prisoner’s neck and forced him up the ladder steps, even as another drew the rope tight under his chin.

As they did these things, each beat of the pulsing drum stabbed my heart.

Mother covered her lips with her fingers.

“Do you wish to confess?” the officer shouted.

I think the youth replied, but I was so appalled, I could not comprehend his words. In fact, such was my distress that I cried, “Have pity, sir. For God’s sake!”

The officer glared at me. “Be still, missy, or you’ll come to the same fate!”

I shrank behind Mother but peeked round to watch.

The officer turned back to his soldiers and shouted, “Swing the rebel off!”

One of the soldiers kicked the ladder away. The young man dropped. I gasped. His neck must have broken, for he died in an instant. Perhaps that was God’s mercy. Sometimes a hanging is nothing but slow strangulation.

Mother, pulling my hand, said, “Sophia! Come!” Sobbing, I stumbled away.

Later we learned that the young man’s name was Nathan Hale. Over time, his death proved of greater consequence than his life. Without any doubt, it altered the history of my country as it altered mine. Indeed, what I had just witnessed was the beginning of my extraordinary adventures.

I shall tell you what happened.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Grace Godwin:

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Donna Moore:

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