

## The Lions of Leningrad

**Jean-Claude van Rijckeghem**

**Thomas Du Caju, Illustrator**

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In the graphic novel *The Lions of Leningrad*, Russian adolescents fight to survive German attacks, starvation, and Joseph Stalin's iron-fisted rule.

Following a gunshot at a Leningrad concert in 1962, a man is arrested. He recounts the adventures of four teenagers, Maxim, Pyotr, Anka, and Grigory, twenty-one years before. Extended flashbacks show the foursome undertaking a daring escape from the Nazi vanguard, even as the first cracks in their friendship begin to show.

The four friends, who are from families of varying social, political, and financial backgrounds, have very different experiences during the infamous Siege of Leningrad, leading to an act of betrayal that sees its resolution at the concert, decades later.

The characters are engaging, helping to break down the overwhelming scale of the city's suffering and loss by focusing on their individual motivations and obstacles. Against the terrible backdrop of war, the book portrays their difficult transition from childhood to adulthood through budding romantic feelings, and in the life-or-death decisions they're forced to make.

The art gives a visceral sense of the savagery of survival, but it's also elegant in its handling of emotions, whether they are obvious or subtle. Each member of the large cast is made distinct, and the attention to detail in the interiors and overhead views of the city is striking.

*The Lions of Leningrad* captures a critical time during World War II with dramatic flair.

PETER DABBENE (March / April 2022)

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