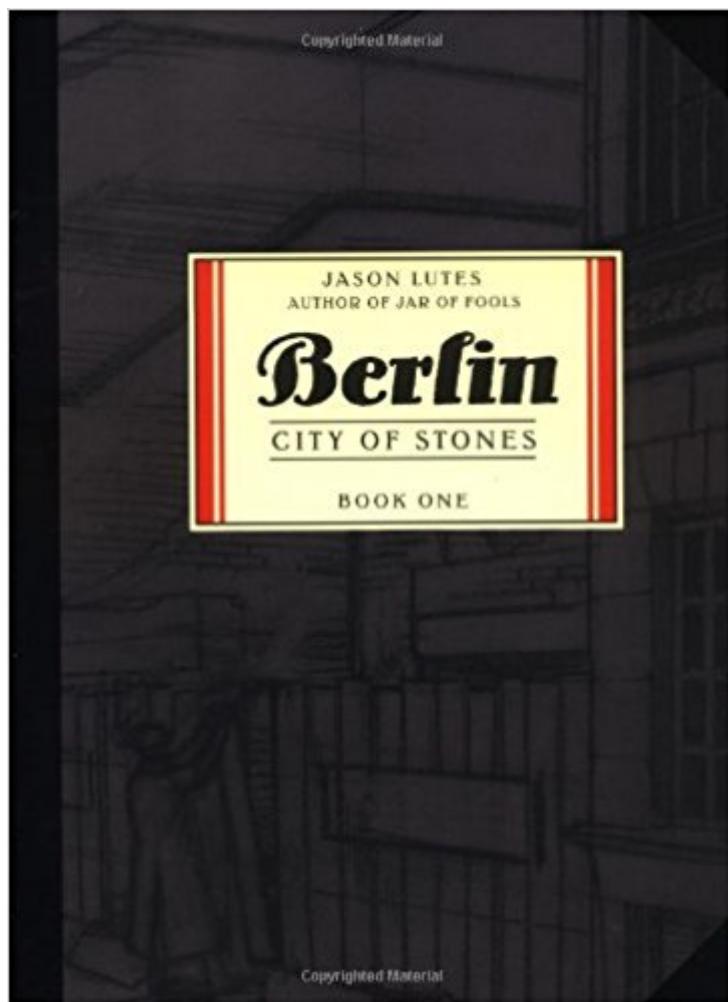


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Berlin: City Of Stones: Book One (Part 1)



Synopsis

Berlin: City of Stones presents the first part of Jason Lutes' captivating trilogy, set in the twilight years of Germany's Weimar Republic. Kurt Severing, a journalist, and Marthe Muller, an art student, are the central figures in a broad cast of characters intertwined with the historical events unfolding around them. City of Stones covers eight months in Berlin, from September 1928 to May Day, 1929, meticulously documenting the hopes and struggles of its inhabitants as their future is darkened by a growing shadow.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It's difficult to think of a story with a greater sense of elegant, nuanced foreboding than Jason Lutes's Berlin, Book One: City of Stones. Set in the Weimar Republic-era of German history, Lutes's story takes an unimaginably large and historically important time and observes it through the small lives of a band of sympathetic protagonists. The author spends the most time with his main characters, Kurt Severing and Marthe Müller, but the quality of Berlin is such that the reader cares emphatically about the fate of the rest of the cast: the lovelorn dyke art student, the recently separated single mother, even fleeting characters like the street policeman or the overworked newspaper editor. Even so, the shadow of the coming war cautions us not to get too attached to these people. They are imperfect, bickering, and naïve in their ideologies--just like real people. Brutality will soon follow, and the vulnerability of each of the characters haunts the pages. Using the graphic novel form to tackle an issue like the rise of Nazi Germany is fraught with traps, not least of

which are comparisons to other works, such as *Maus*, as well as literary criticism for minimizing such an important topic. Lutes navigates these hazards well, creating sparse black-and-white sketches that often render a mood wordlessly. Whole pages go without text, and it serves the story well. As much can be told by showing a character in a window's evening reflection, eyes inked as darkened sockets, than through retelling details of (now) familiar historical events. The story itself has a rambling and philosophical feel, focused on details that become all the more poignant for their insignificance. One segment--where Lutes shows Marthe's walk onto a newly snow-covered street--tells us everything we need to know about this character, without much actual action occurring. Lutes doesn't use moments of transcendence to make a point or add sentimentality; instead, he firmly grounds us in this time and place. Without knowing more about the next volumes, it's impossible to say whether Lutes will use this attachment against the readers later, knocking down his characters cheaply, allowing the shortcuts demanded by the burden of history. The last pages of this book--with a disappointingly predictable resolution--hinted in that direction, but the overall tone of the book indicates that something much richer and deeper will happen along with the inevitable loss. --Jennifer Buckendorff

Jason Lutes is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design. He has worked as an art director and editor for various alternative media and comics companies but he's happiest being his own boss. He freelances from his new home in Asheville, North Carolina.

I have yet to read the second book, so maybe I'll come back and give this five stars once I do, but after finishing this I was impressed with how Jason Lutes was able to balance two different decades with approximately four different sets of characters with four different plot lines, all about to converge on a single date. The complexity of Germany's political situation from 1918-1929 is handled so delicately, subtly resonating in the backdrop of every chapter. I'm only giving it four stars for now because as it stands, I feel as though I need to know how it ends before I can properly review it and gather my complete thoughts

I love Berlin - there is something about the people, the pulse and rhythm of life in that city more than any other that speaks to me. Therefore I had to read Jason Lutes' trilogy of the city, set in the waning days of the Weimar Republic. In the winter of 1928 and spring of 1929, Berlin found itself still suffering from the war and increasingly divided between fascists and socialists. Historically, Lutes is dead-on: the bohemian days of the early 20's are gone, replaced with economic depression and a

sense of desparation as the Weimar Republic began to implode. With this backdrop, Kurt Severing, a journalist and Marthe Muller, a young art student find themselves caught up crises both personal and part of the larger upheaval of the times. Yet what really pulled me in wasn't so much the plot around Kurt and Marthe, but the broad cast of minor characters who pop in and out of the story. In this, Lutes does the city - and its inhabitants - justice enriching the story as Berliners wrestle with a haunting sense of loss from the war while facing their own small frustrations and the larger dissatisfaction with the political and social status quo. Added to this rich narrative tapestry is Lutes' clean drawing style, that for me, captured the spirit of that time and place. My enthusiasm about the book is certainly influenced by my fondness for the place and my professional interest in the time period. With that said, one could do much worse for a graphic novel in terms of art, story and attention to historical detail. Recommended.

I'm not easily impressed by graphic novels (I hate the term "graphic novels," but will use it until a better one comes along). Partly this is because most of them--like most conventional novels (and films, for that matter)--are mediocre. But mostly it's because the genre is an extremely difficult one--more akin to poetry than prose fiction, because the author/artist necessarily must convey meaning through a word or two, or a facial expression, or a single panel--and thus is hard to pull off. Jason Lutes' *Berlin: City of Stones* is, hands-down, the very best graphic novel I've ever read. Lutes is a poet who's able to express a world of meaning in just a few words and his incredibly evocative drawings. A raised eyebrow, a clenched fist, a look of wonderment or anxiety on the faces of his characters: these are all he needs to tell his story. And what a magnificent story it is. Using the early, turbulent years of the Weimar Republic as a backdrop, Lutes introduces a cast of characters that grow on the reader in an incredibly powerful way. There's the love story that involves the rather world-weary but still idealistic journalist Kurt Severing and the still-youngish but emotionally wounded artist Marthe Mueller. There's Anna, the boyish lesbian, who falls in love with Marthe, her fellow art student. There's jaded, cynical Margarethe, who's either Kurt's wife or his longtime paramour (it's not clear which). There's David, the young Jewish boy who escapes from an increasingly unfriendly world by hero-worshipping Harry Houdini (the consummate escape artist). There's Otto and Gudrun, a working class couple barely able to keep their two kids, Heinz and Silvia alive. Otto and Gudrun react to the economic and political chaos of the Weimar Republic in opposite ways: Gudrun is a Red, while Otto becomes a follower of the up and coming National Socialist Party. Their separate choices are representative of the greater political and cultural choices each of the novel's characters must face. They're also not unlike choices faced by contemporary readers of

Lutes' Berlin. And there's another Otto, a dedicated Red who befriends Gudrun and who obviously is in love with her. The second volume of Lutes' projected Berlin trilogy will be out shortly, and I for one can't wait. There was a bit of a cliffhanger at the end of the first volume (I won't say what it is so as not to spoil things for those who haven't yet read it), and I'm anxious to see how Lutes follows up on it. But most of all, I'm eager to re-enter a world that, although presented in the minimalist way that's characteristic of graphic novels, has become astoundingly real, thanks to Lutes' genius.

To many people, the city of Berlin represents the seat of power for the Nazi government. While it is true that officially Berlin was the Capital of the Third Reich, it never really was the heart and soul of this criminal enterprise. Nazism emanated from Southern Germany. Since the end of World War II, Berlin has been the center of Cold War diplomacy, espionage and a center of a showdown between Democracy and Communism. Being a large metropolis which holds a large eclectic population, most people see Berlin as an evolved city that has transformed itself away from its supposed Nazi heritage. But the question in fact must be asked and that is, was Berlin the hotbed of Nazism? I really don't think it was. In the end it followed the rest of German politics and acquiesced to the Swastika. What Jason Lutes has created shows us a Berlin which many people don't know about. Through the eyes of Lutes' two main characters artist Marthe Muller and journalist Kurt Severing, we see a city splintered and very much in political and cultural transition. Lutes creates several subplots to show the reader the true mindset and essence of these turbulent times. The historical background of the effects of World War I and the subsequent disasters caused by the Treaty of Versailles are shown in the actions of the people residing in Berlin in 1929. Mr. Lutes' use of black and white graphics captures the feeling of this Prussian Capital in transition. The background of buildings and city scenes are images which truly reflect a true Northern Teutonic setting of the times. This graphic novel reads and images very well. It represents a genre classic to be savored. 5 Stars! No Problem!!

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