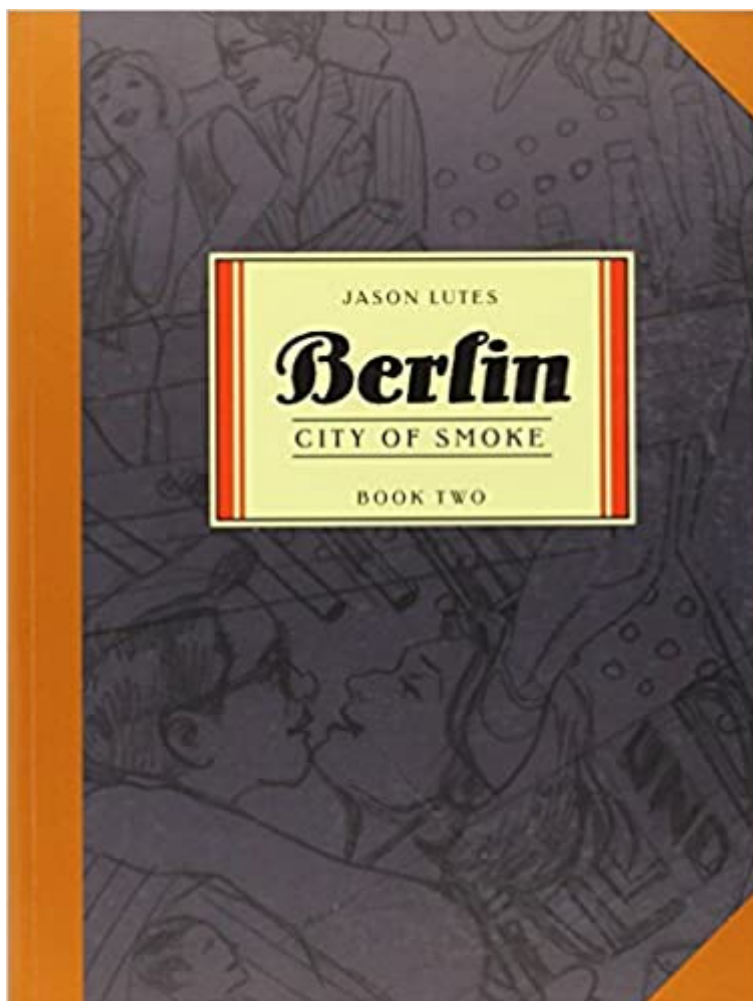


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# Berlin Book Two: City Of Smoke (Bk. 2)



## Synopsis

The second installment of the epic historical trilogyThe second volume of Jason Lutes's historical epic finds the people of Weimar Berlin searching for answers after the lethal May Day demonstration of 1929. Tension builds along with the dividing wall between communists and nationalists, Jews and Gentiles, as the dawn of the Second World War draws closer. Meanwhile, the nightlife of Berlin heats up as many attempt to distract themselves from the political upheavals within the city. The American jazz band Cocoa Kids arrives and quickly becomes a fixture. The lives of the characters within Lutes's epic weave together to create a seamless portrait of this transitory city. Marthe Muller follows her lover Kurt Severing as he interviews participants in the May Day demonstration, but she moonlights in the city's lesbian nightlife. Severing acts as a window through which the political shifts within the city and its participants can be seen. As with Berlin Book One: City

## Book Information

Series: Berlin (Book 2)

Paperback: 200 pages

Publisher: Drawn and Quarterly; 1st Edition edition (September 16, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1897299532

ISBN-13: 978-1897299531

Product Dimensions: 7.6 x 16.1 x 254.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 12 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #540,325 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #94 in Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Publishers > Drawn and Quarterly #405 in Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Graphic Novels > Historical & Biographical Fiction #910 in Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Graphic Novels > Literary

## Customer Reviews

“A comic of impressive scope, taking place in Weimar Berlin and touching on the issues of politics, aesthetics and technology in that cultural ground zero. San Francisco Chronicle on Berlin Book One “[Berlin] will be the longest, most sophisticated work of historical fiction in the medium. Lutes has a natural, clean, European drawing style, much like Hergé’s Tintin . . . This book has the density of the best novels. Time on

## Berlin Book One

Born in 1967, JASON LUTES is an American cartoonist whose work includes the ongoing Berlin trilogy, and the graphic novel Jar of Fools.

An extremely interesting comic of an extremely interesting era. I'm fascinated with the use of comics for historical fiction because the addition of visuals can do so much towards giving us the flavor of an era, something that's hard to hold in our minds since our own era is so different. It's has the maturity of a novel, but with the added dimension of visuals, and I'm hungry for exactly that type of comic (something you find often in Japan but that is all too rare in this country). I don't know where the story is (or, stories are) going, but I hope Lutes finishes it. (With its leisurely pace, I'm not sure anyone has that much stamina.) This is one of the few comics in this country that are truly written for adults, without the escapes of fantasy or superheroes or the like. It's ordinary adult life and it's fascinating.

Picking up immediately following the May Day, 1929 demonstrations, Jason Lutes continues his story of journalist Kurt Severing and student Marthe Muller in the waning days of the Weimar Republic. As with in *Berlin: City of Stones: Book One (Part 1)*, the voices of other Berliners weave in and out of the narrative - including a sub-plot involving some American jazz musicians that I particularly enjoyed. The story is bitter-sweet, not only in terms of the relationship between Kurt and Marthe, but for the city of Berlin itself. Again Lutes creates both a sympathetic view of Berlin in the late 20s and early 30s (as one character puts it, "It's a madhouse - things are on the verge of collapse! Can't any of you feel it? The air is thick with imminent disaster, and we spend our time doodling the days away like children") showing how Germany's post-war republic gradually dissolved into a fascist dictatorship. A closer read shows a real appreciation for the city - from the slang (referring to police as "Bulls" - slang that is not as benign as "cop" nor as acidic as "pig" - but somewhere in the middle) to depictions of the city - especially the neighborhood Wedding (referred to as "Red Wedding" for its strong working-class feel) to bits of dialogue about the Spree or a scene of the Seigelsaule. Clearly Lutes knows his stuff. While graphic novels may not be to everyone's taste, I would without hesitation recommend this book to anyone given its strengths.

I've eagerly awaited the appearance of Jason Lute second volume of Berlin. Now that it's appeared, I realize that it was well worth waiting for. But it also seems to me that there's a bit of a decline in the

meticulous craftsmanship that characterized the first volume. The story line continues in expected ways from an historical perspective, but in quite unexpected ways from the perspective of the characters. The most searing change is in the relationship between Kurt Severing, the increasingly disillusioned pacifist, leftist, and political journalist, and his young love Marthe Muller, whom he introduces to the cultural life of Berlin. What happens to Marthe and Kurt seems to parallel what's happening to the Weimar Republic in general: things fall apart. Much of *City of Smoke* follows the breakdown of the Republic: the increasing violence between fascists and communists, the virulence of anti-Semitism, the suppression of intellectuals. Jazz, lesbianism, homosexuality, and a general sense of fin de siecle are some of the themes that Lutes explores. Two shortcomings, while not at all fatal to Lutes' project, make the second volume of Berlin less wonderful than the first. At times, in order to add some historical detail to his story, Lutes becomes overly didactic (especially pp. 120-124). A weightier problem is the occasional sloppiness with which the panels are drawn. The artistry in Berlin, *City of Stones* was breathtaking. Here, occasionally, it seems cartoonish--for example, Lutes draws conventionally cartoonish clouds of anger above characters' heads instead of letting the anger showing on their faces tell the story (see, for instance, bottom panel on p. 173). In other places, the drawing lacks perspective and strikes one as preliminary sketches that were never completed (see, for example, the panels on p. 35). Still, Jason Lutes' is creating a masterwork with his Berlin saga, and I now await the third volume as eagerly as I did the second.

Jason Lutes takes us on a wild and seemingly dreamlike story of Berlin going mad. The development of the characters of Marthe Muller and Kurt Severing goes on a severe roller coaster ride as is indicative of the political times in this Prussian Capital. The development of the various subplots, with the Communists and the Jewish family, play out a rather chaotic display of emotions and political thought. Also Lutes introduces American Negroes into the cabaret lifestyle which ran rampant in the Pre-Nazi Berlin. Jazz, liquor and cocaine along with a decadent Teutonic advent guard populace were common mainstays in the "City built on a Marsh". The Author develops a flowing and quick prose along with a grand black and white depiction of a Berlin heading into the abyss of Nazism. Although this graphic novel is fiction, the very basis is historically accurate. Mr. Lutes is to be commended! Six Stars!! No Problem!!!

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