



City of Endless Night

Milo Hastings

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When but a child of seven my uncle placed me in a private school in which one of the so-called redeemed sub-sailors was a teacher of the German language. As I look back now, in the light of my present knowledge, I better comprehend the docile humility and carefully nurtured ignorance of this man.

City of Endless Night Details

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Author : Milo Hastings

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From Reader Review City of Endless Night for online ebook

Anna says

The important thing to know about 'City of Endless Night' before reading it is the date of initial publication: 1920. It is a speculative dystopian fantasy set in 2151, steeped in the aftermath of the First World War. I therefore found myself fascinated by the currents of subsequent events that Hastings picked up on. In his vision of 2151, there is a (presumably democratic?) World Government, which rules everywhere except Berlin. The city is now a subterranean megapolis of 300 million Germans, protected from the outside world by a massive domed fortification and ruled by the imperialist Hohenzollern dynasty. Our protagonist and hero is an American chemist named Lyman, who finds himself in Berlin through a chain of coincidences involving a potash mine and takes on the mantle of one Karl Armstadt. The ease with which he does this, and his impressive ability to assimilate into German society, is both a plot convenience and an interesting comment on human flexibility. Although underground Berlin is undoubtedly a dystopia, it is a carefully organised one in which most (men, at least) appear satisfied with their lot. Armstadt's ambivalence is quite evident to the reader.

Hastings predicts Nazism in several chilling respects. The Hohenzollern regime is based upon a racist and antisemitic system of eugenics. All undesirable, non-teutonic bloodlines have evidently been removed from the population and their removal from the whole world is stated as an eventual aim. The main role of women is as progenitors. The imperialist regime is not merely a monarchy, however. It combines imperialism with elements of socialism, recognising the vital importance of the working class to the continued survival of the state. It is likewise striking to read Hastings anticipating in 1920 a Second World War spurred by a resurgent imperialist Germany. The weakness and downfall of the League of Nations is also predicted.

This book is thus fascinating for what it says about the time when it was written and geopolitical fears after the First World War. It is also an effective novel, as the dystopia it describes is so well thought-through. Obviously the current reader has to wave away some fake science, but the structure of the Hohenzollern regime is interesting as well as horrifying. Whilst giving the reader a tour of its class issues, sexual politics, and education system, the plot throws in witty trifles like the charity work done by the royal family. Lyman, the likable point of view character, is a sort of everyman whilst also being a talented chemist. This allows him to fit in whilst rising socially. Amongst the other characters I liked Marguerite, who gets the chance to voice some strident criticism of the roles accorded to women in Berlin.

Although written like an adventure story and suffering from a trite ending, this book is well worth a read. It is a thought-provoking and historically astute dystopia with a beautifully melodramatic title. Whilst the world outside buried Berlin barely gets a mention, the underground city itself is vividly described and lingers in the mind. Also, the chapter titles are priceless in their bald description, my favourite being 'In which I Salute the Statue of God and a Psychic Expert Explores My Brain and Finds Nothing'.

Josef Hernandez says

A very strong apocalyptic novel

For a full review, please go to <https://areviewerdarkly.blogspot.com/...> and follow me on Twitter @josenher

Jacob says

I really really liked this novel. The author is oddly prescient, especially when you consider he wrote this in 1919. Basically World War II occurs but at the end the Germans wall in and bunker proof the entire city of Berlin, digging down 60 some levels to hold out against a world coalition. Ray guns (an entirely defensive weapon, more like energy shields) keep ground troops out and the only warfare consists of occasional bombing of the "roof" and sapper struggles far below in the mines. A chemist (chemistry plays a large part in this world of 2041) manages to infiltrate the city several generations after they go underground and finds a utopia that is part Nazi Germany and part Brave New World, with a sprinkle of Kaiser's Germany thrown in. The descriptions of the city structure (physically and organizationally) are intriguing, but unlike Brave New World, the characters are real and the plot compelling. Having never heard of the novel or author I was pleasantly surprised to have found a hidden gem. I would recommend this book to anyone with a curiosity about what ifs or utopian novels--even if you don't have an interest, this is a well-written sci-fi lite that is worth the time. Strong 4 star rating.

Cynthia Dawson says

This is one of the most artfully crafted books I've ever read. Really sad to have to turn it back into the library. The characters were well defined, the world building was wonderful, and the prose was delicate. I adored the science. It reminds me of the MaddAddam series because of 1. The science and 2. The lack of a huge climatic ending. It does have an awesome ending but truly the beauty in this book lies with the journey to get there.

Charles van Buren says

A little of this goes a very long way, January 8, 2016

Verified Purchase(What's this?)

This review is from: City of Endless Night (Kindle Edition)

Mr. Hastings imagines a horrible future for a fragment of Germany in this story of an alternate ending to WW1. A lot of discussion of various forms of government and philosophies including eugenics and socialism takes up a large portion of the novel. To actually believe that Imperial Germany could have gotten to this point requires a mighty suspension of disbelief. Either that or being firmly convinced that poor Kaiser Bill and the Hohenzollerns were evil proto-Hitlers. Parts of this novel read much as some of the crude anti-German propaganda from the Wilson administration and friends. There were crude pamphlets and movies such as The Beast of Berlin and Wolves of Kultur distributed throughout the U.S. This novel began life as a serialized story during that era. In fact, our view of Imperial Germany is colored by this propaganda and the crimes of the Nazis. Many modern historians recognize that Imperial Germany was no more at fault in WW1 than Imperial Britain and others on the allied side.

Anna says

This was one of the most amazing books I have ever read. I absolutely and thoroughly enjoyed every second of the read. I was disappointed when I finished that the story had ended.

J.S. Green says

Milo Milton Hastings (1884 - 1957) was a nutritionist and inventor of the forced-draft chicken incubator and Weeniwinks. Fortunately, Weeniwinks never caught on but his poultry ideas were more far-reaching. (FYI: Weeniwinks was a health-food snack for kids made from grains and no sugar – which is probably why Weeniwinks never caught on.) But Mr. Hastings was also the writer of a 1919 science fiction and anti-Utopian novel called *City of Endless Night*.

Set in the year 2151 the world enjoys freedom except for one "black spot on the map" which is the "walled-city of Berlin." Except it's not just a massive concrete wall that protects Berlin but a roof, too! 300 million Germans live underground in an enormous fortified city of 60 levels. And in spite of continuous bombing campaigns, the German invention of a death ray has protected them from invasion ever since the end of the First World War. Meanwhile, an American chemist named Lyman de Forrest (who speaks German and has had an interest in Germany since his youth) develops a technology to reclaim the abandoned potash mines of Stassfurt, perilously close to Berlin. But while exploring he discovers a way into a nearby German mine, and accidentally becomes trapped. By coincidence, however, he finds a dead German who looks surprisingly like him. Even more fortunately, the man was a chemical engineer and Forrest is able to assume the identity of Karl Armstadt.

Yes, this book was a free Kindle download. Yes, I know it sounds pretty bad. And honestly, reading it felt about as enlightening (and embarrassing) as watching reality television. But eventually it turned into a rather intriguing novel where "Karl" is trying to figure out what's going on and fit in. His position gives him some privileges and he learns how the city functions on a practical as well as social basis, and this is where it got interesting (and I stopped feeling embarrassed about reading it).

Remember, this was written in 1919 – less than a year after the end of WWI – and yet it comes uncomfortably close to predicting many of the conditions that subsequently happened under the Nazis. It describes a government of "autocratic socialism" which closely controls not only the press but education and even the diets of its citizens, where calories are doled out based on labor position. More chilling, however, is the idea of racial superiority based on Teutonic blood, and science and eugenic breeding becomes the central feature of German society. History and religion are rewritten in ways frighteningly similar to what Hitler's propaganda machine created. Even anti-Semitism comes up! And those aspects that didn't match Germany came closer to events in the Soviet Union.

Now, don't get me wrong: I'm not saying Hastings was some sort of prophet. A number of the parallels seem merely coincidental or even forced: the intense WWII bombing of Berlin; the Berlin Wall; even a Second World War against Germany. But it surprises me how many aspects where he was actually pretty close, and I wonder how he guessed so well. Probably he was just lucky, or perhaps fears of what eventually came to pass were already shared by some or many at the time – I'm just not familiar enough with the world mindset

at the end of WWI. Would I recommend this book? Heck yeah! If you like reading old sci-fi novels you might find it interesting like I did. At any rate, it turned out much better than I expected and lasted a lot longer than Weeniwinks.

Elizabeth says

p 183. "The obstructionist policy of this party was inherent in its origin, for it was inspired and held together by the ideas of a dead man, whose followers could only repeat as their test of faith a phrase that has come down to us as an idiom - 'What would He do?' 'He' being dead could do nothing, neither could he change his mind, but having left an indelible record of his ideas... this made for solidarity and power and quite prevented any adaptation of the form of government to the needs of the world that had arisen since his demise."

p187 on voting: "But suppose they should sometime fail to re-elect him?" / "No danger.. there is only one name on the ballot and the ballots are dumped into the paper mill without inspection... Voting everywhere is a very useful device in organised government. In the cruder form used in democracies there were two or more candidates. It usually made little difference which was elected; but the system was imperfect because the voters who voted for the candidate which lost were not pleased. Then there was the trouble of counting the ballots. We avoid all this."

I had to keep in mind at all times the year the book purported to take place (2151) and the year in which the book was written (1920). A dystopia of what an overly-ordered eugenic society in a tightly confined space could become. Of interest:

- * use of the terms "First World War" and "Second World War"
 - * eventual failure of the League of Nations (although it lasted from 1919-1983)
 - * p184 "the emasculation of the League of Nations by the American obstructionists caused, or at least permitted the rise, and dominance of the Bolsheviks..."
 - * prediction of a Second World War that pits Germany against the rest of the world (1983-2041)
 - * prediction of a global conflict between communism/socialism and capitalism
 - * prediction of eugenics forming an integral part of German identity as it puts itself at odds with the world (although given the high level of eugenics throughout the Western World between the World Wars, perhaps this isn't surprising at all)
 - * thoughts of how rapidly effective eugenics could be (within 6 generations, have enduring and strongly distinct differences in physical appearance, mental ability, and gender ratio of babies per generation)
 - * views of women (both as expressed by the author, and purportedly expressed by this strongly male-dominated eugenic Teutonic society)
 - * a Berlin Wall (although in the book it is entirely encircling and covering an underground city)
 - * expulsion of Jews from Berlin (all that remains of Germany)
 - * that expulsion accomplished by making pork a required element of daily diet (potentially less effective than as expressed in the book)
 - * use of the catchphrase "What Would *** Do"? (in this book "What Would He Do", referring to a now-deceased but still influential-to-his-followers American political leader who strongly opposed the League of Nations)
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D.M. Dutcher says

An interesting "black Utopia" about a future Germany.

It's hundreds of years after World War I. A World State has been established after the successful dominance of the League of Nations, and it governs the globe in relative peace and harmony, save for one spot: Germany. By the use of a ray weapon to maintain its airspace, Germany has refused to submit to the rule of the League, and has tunneled down. The city of Berlin is now a gigantic subterranean metropolis shrouded in mystery. The World State can do little more than bomb it for political show.

Until one day a chemist discovers a way to neutralize some poisonous gas used by the Germans as point-defense, and decides to launch an impromptu attack on them. He manages to swap his identity with one of the dead Germans, and penetrates the city to find out a horrible truth. This Germany is an eugenic state of the highest order, with workers bred in castes and segregated by levels. Can he escape and bring light to this City?

It doesn't read as dated at all, and is eerily prophetic. It was written in 1920, just after the war, and its focus on eugenics and talk of a blond, blue-eyed master race is chilling considering in just twenty years we'd see the fruit of this. The future Berlin is also compelling. It's a scientific state where people are bred in castes and segregated by levels, each for a specific function. Workers are bred for stamina, their calories metered out and given a strict schedule of sex and television watching. In a well done spot of black humor they go on strike because they are such creatures of habit that working less and having more leisure makes them uncomfortable, and they go on strike by continuing to work without wearing a pin that shows they agree with their ruler.

Intellectual workers live on their own level, and women are split up into Free women, who enjoy a hedonistic lifestyle of sex and money, and breeder women who are kept for when a specific worker contributes enough to be allowed to father children. These levels have some of the best scenes in the book, with the grey shrouded mothers locked in motherhood almost as in a cage, and a particularly powerful scene where our scientist hero meets a girl on the Free level who despairs of the futility of being what essentially is a perpetual prostitute, forced to court men or her food money will run out. (view spoiler)

The scientist adjusts to life in Berlin a little too well, rising to minor nobility. His movements each show the nature of a cynical society based on perpetual warfare transforming itself into a machine, and it's only with the aid of a few dissidents that he even has a chance to escape.

It's a strong world, and a rebuke to the idea of a scientifically planned society. He calls it a Black Utopia because the society works-the people in it are more or less happy with only a few dissidents, and without the protagonist on the inside, could easily keep going. There's a lot of scenes of quiet horror in the book, like how mothers out of all the castes are identified by number, and schools instill rational hate in their students. It's a lot better than you think it would be.

However, there's some problems. One problem is that the main character is bloodthirsty, as is his society. The World State has been trying to attack Berlin for a hundred years, and the main character decides to attack the Germans as soon as he realizes he has a chance to. This was written shortly after WWI, so the idea that the League of Nations was a pure good seems naive in hindsight. The protagonist also seems to go native a lot, in order for the book to explore each level of Berlin, and the idea he has to escape gets forgotten until the very end. The end also is too brief, and doesn't really go over what happens when Berlin loses-

you've just opened up a society where people are bred for their roles to the point of not being able to sit down instead of stand up when doing line work. It may be impossible for tremendous numbers of them to adjust at all.

It's still an interesting read, and an unusual dystopia that can be eerily prescient and naive at the same time. The author himself is incredibly surprising. You'd think this book was written by an intellectual, but he was just a small-time inventor most known for his contributions to chicken incubation. Definitely give this a try if you are into dystopian novels.

Laure says

Score 4.5 stars.

Many people make a big deal about the fact that this book was written in 1920. It is true it is somewhat prescient of what was to come regarding WWII. It is based after all on a city of Berlin where survival is due to eugenics and other 'twisted' models of society. It would not surprise me if this book was on Margaret Atwood's bookshelf too.

What I would also like to point out is that it is a good adventure book with incredible detailed world building and a very enjoyable (somewhat short) read. Dive in readers.

gvw says

Curiously Prescient

There is something about the nature of this book that seems very much ahead of its time.

In the guise of an alternate future where the world has united against Germany, the author writes a character from the outside world who assumes a stolen identity in the barricaded and isolated city of Berlin- the last stronghold against the World Government, depicted as a black spot on the map that had haunted the protagonist.

In a fortuitous circumstance, he infiltrates this society and his guise is most perfectly suited for him. It seems only too easy thrashed would speak the language and find someone that closely resembles him as well as shared his profession, whom he could conveniently dispose of and therefore observe this world undetected. This is just part of the story- the tale of a man in culture shock but with an almost ethnographic eye for this bewildering world he finds himself in.

This is where this book really shines. It seems almost unbelievable this book was written almost a hundred years ago... and yet some things just don't change. People can have cultures which manifest the same basic needs and drives and impulses- universal motivations, that are expressed in a variety of different ways.

Some issues this book touches are still things we struggle with in the modern world. The idea of human worth, the value of resources, economic efficiency. Just how much humanity is worth sacrificing to maintain control? How much control can be exercised to manipulate the masses before they rebel? What kind of cost are we willing to pay for the enforcement of morals- furthermore what moral benefit what demographics?

The ethical dilemmas of those days, the idea of German superiority, eugenics, genetics, human rights, female rights, ethnic cleansing. All huge issues in the 1920's... and still huge issues to this day.

Despite the decades that have passed, the ideas of this book are still very much alive. Although the protagonist has some views which seem fairly standard to a reader of today, his viewpoint must have been somewhat radical in a time when so much of the progress we take for granted today had not even happened yet.

I find it a most curious read. A bit light, somewhat preachy at times, but incredibly interesting and I would highly recommend it.

Joseph Jupille says

I try to be very chary with the five stars, but I have to say I found this book breathtaking. I think that mostly has to do with the eery accuracy of his predictions.

My copy, published by Wildside Press, had no original publication information, only reading "This edition published in 2006 by Wildside Press, LLC, www.wildsidepress.com". No real publications page. The type is very old looking, the printing quality is rough, but that can sometimes be affectation by a particular imprint. Some typos as well, which reinforced the *Samizdat* feel of it. The author seems like an interesting guy, check out Milo Hastings via wikipedia, and the protagonist doesn't sound very removed from the writer.

Now, I usually know publication information, but here I didn't. It was recommended to me by someone whose judgment I trust deeply, and I never bothered Googling the author, who was unknown to me. So as I am reading this story, a utopia/dystopia, certainly futuristic but utterly human, I am wondering when it was written. The protagonist is a scientifically dazzling, unadorned but intellectually well-rounded chemist who is seeking to erase a black spot from the map of the world, the spot representing the fortified city of Berlin, autocratic Germany, the only deviation from the gold that maps the extent of the democratic World State. We find him as a boy contemplating five great maps hanging in his uncle's library. 1) "The Age of Nations, - 1914"; 2) Germany's Maximum Expansion of the First World War -- 1918"; 3) "The Age of the League of Nations, 1919--1983"; 4) "Maximum German Expansion of the Second World War, 1988"; and 5) "A Century of the World State", running to the setting date of 2041. As I have said, the entire world is awash in gold, and only the black spot of Berlin remains of socialist (red) and autocratic (black) alternatives to democracy.

All of this is a long-winded way of saying that the rendering of the 20th century was close enough to the real thing that I was certain the book was written post-World War II. But I see that it was written in 1919, and published in book form (perhaps the very form of the edition I have) in 1920.

Wow. This dude, like, saw the future of the rise of fascism in Germany and the advent of World War II. And it wasn't just a lucky guess. Like all good futures, it was an extrapolation. Actually, it's in two amazing extrapolations.

The first involves his analysis of modernity, and especially its dark underbelly. The Germany he invents is a nightmare of scientific rationality, technical efficiency, dispassionate eugenic and social engineering. Again, in a point, it's the dark underbelly of all that warm and fuzzy progress we so enjoy.

The second involves his analysis of the German character. I don't recommend this to my German friends -- it cannot make for comfortable reading. It's painful for me, and I am French (albeit a Germanophile and certainly a Europhile). (On the other hand, you all have been so thorough in confronting war guilt, that it might be worth checking out.) Here, in a nutshell, Milo Hastings more or less predicts the rise of fascism and the advent of WWII, on a roughly accurate timeframe.

Now, that's all he gets "right", but, well, he gets right perhaps the most important events in European history within a roughly accurate timeframe a half-century forward of when he was writing.

Again: I went to check the publication date, and it was 1919. I tore through the book very quickly, utterly fascinated.

I think this book is amazing. The protagonist briskly moves history forward, a bit too smart to believe, too-frequently lucky, but fascinating nonetheless. The narrative unfolds much more successfully than Huxley's did in another book I just read, *TI* Island. It's done through dialogue, protagonist's reading, research and reflection, etc. It's a little quirky, not perfect but rarely dull.

The world that Hastings constructs is terrifyingly believable. It's probably most terrifying because he was so uncannily accurate in other respects. Given how much of real history he got right, his imagined future is all the more plausible.

I won't go into all of the details. But he basically presents us with an imagined ethnography of the German people. Everything is there -- the symbolic belief systems, the politics, the economics, the sociology, the technology, the science, the family, demographics, international relations, etc. There are a few places where I have holes in my understanding, or perhaps don't quite buy what Hastings has laid out --social control and room for change coexist a little bit too frictionlessly, for example-- but he has laid out an entire world in compact, readable, and impossible-to-resist form.

I won't talk much about the story. It's a good story, a good vehicle to run us through the world as it might have been and still might be.

If you like futures/dystopias/utopias, this one's for you. Amazing. Five stars.

Ana says

<https://anaslair.wordpress.com/2016/0...>

I have to admit I struggled with the writing on this one. This is completely different from anything I have read. The book was written in 1919 and I found the prose difficult to understand at times (English is not my native language), quite contained and very matter of fact. Yet, I still felt engaged. The book has strong politic and socialist components but it leaves room for more humane assessing as well. There is a bit of romance and enough tension of all sorts to want to keep reading.

However, right from the beginning there were things that irked me, namely how everything came together for our main character. As the narrative initially developed, things seemed to fall into place much too easily for him. (view spoiler)

All these questions and others bothered me throughout the story.

But the fact is it is a very disturbing one. The Germany described here is nightmarish in its potential to become real at that time. This book is astoundingly futuristic, in a way that I could not help but think how it all must have inspired Hitler. I mean, I was never much of a fan of History, but it seemed like the guy tried to replicate much of what went on here. That is so terrifying.

Although there were quite a few plot holes and I found the development of the story too easy for our main character, this is an amazing classic that everyone should definitely read at least once in their lifetime. Having just finished it, I am still chilled.

M.A. Notaras says

Considering this book turns 100 years old this year, it is amazingly prescient. It's the story of an alternate future, where WW2 never really ended but the Nazis barricaded themselves underground Berlin in a massive several hundred storey city. Today's political situation is eerily the same - one race/cultural group claiming superiority/supremacy over the rest of the world - a repetition of history. After 100 years the novel hasn't dated much - even though the language is a little formal (compared to today), the city itself is trapped in a type of 'time warp' allowing that formality of speech to be acceptable. Lots of interesting social commentary and social structural invention. City of Endless Night is about how one of the "Allies" accidentally infiltrates the city, his luck in masquerading as one of the locals and his attempt to escape. A good read, I really enjoyed it.

Wilde Sky says

In the future Berlin has become a 'country' of 300 million battling the rest of the world.

This was a random selection from the library (I'd never heard of the book or the author) and I'm glad I picked it up. The story was set in a future world that (considering the book was written in 1919) was surprisingly accurate in some aspects. The central characters are all well drawn / developed / believable, the story line has its own logic and the imagined world was fascinating (think George Orwell mixed with Philip K. Dick) – a ruthless world of dispassionate efficiency and eugenics.

My overall rating is 4.5 – as the ending was too positive for me.

If you like future dystopian stories this is definitely worth a look.
