

The Neverending Story (German: Die unendliche Geschichte) is a German fantasy novel by Michael Ende, first published in 1979. The standard English translation, by Ralph Manheim, was first published in 1983. The novel was later adapted into several films. The majority of the story takes place in the parallel world of Fantastica (Phantásien in the original German version), a world being destroyed by a mysterious force called the Nothing. The first protagonist is a young warrior who is asked by the Empress of Fantastica to set off and find a way to stop the Nothing; the other protagonist is a boy from the real world, a reader of a novel with the same title, for whom the story gradually becomes more and more realistic.

Plot - The book centers on a boy, Bastian Balthazar Bux, who is neglected by his father (who has sunken into despair after his wife's death) and is bullied by his schoolmates. Whilst running from some of them, Bastian bursts into the antique book store of Carl Conrad Correander. Bastian steals a book from the store called *The Neverending Story* which Correander has been reading; he hides in his school's attic, where he proceeds to read the story through the rest of the day and the night, not realizing that he has effectively become a part of it. After a while of reading he is magically transfixed and is brought into the book. The book begins in Fantastica, when a "will-o'-the-wisp" goes to ask the Childlike Empress for help against the Nothing, which is spreading over the land. The empress is ill, which is believed to be the cause of the Nothing (or vice versa); she sends the only person who can stop the Nothing, a boy warrior named Atreyu, to find a cure for her. Atreyu is a brave person, being considered a warrior even though he is a young boy of Bastian's age. While on his quest, Atreyu meets characters such as Morla the Aged One, the incorporeal oracle Uyulala, and the gnomes Urgl and Engywook. Atreyu also meets Falkor, the luckdragon, who helps him along the way. After Atreyu and Falkor get in the way of a fight of the wind giants, Atreyu gets thrown off Falkor's back and ends up in Spook City. There, Atreyu meets Gmork, the werewolf, who has been following Atreyu since the early days of his quest, intending to kill him. In the course of his quest, Atreyu learns about the true nature of Fantastica and the Nothing: Fantastica is a representation of the dreams and fantasies of the real world; the Nothing and the sickness of the Childlike Empress are the effects of the lies humans use in their greed for power; it is the denial of dreams and fantasy which is destroying Fantastica. The only thing that can save Fantastica is a human child, who must give the Childlike Empress a new name to start again the cycle of life in Fantastica. Falkor and Atreyu return to the Ivory Tower, where the Childlike Empress lives. But since Bastian, in his lack of confidence, hesitates to take the step into Fantastica, the Childlike Empress confronts him with the fact that whatever he may think, he has already become part of the *Neverending Story*, and he must carry out his part in it. Bastian does so by crying out the name he has chosen for the Empress: 'Moonchild'. Bastian comes to Fantastica and meets the empress; she asks him to help re-build Fantastica with his imagination, and he subsequently has many adventures of his own in his new world. With the help of AURYN, a medallion that links him to the empress, that grants all of the boy's wishes and, thus, gives him power over all the inhabitants of Fantastica, Bastian explores the Desert of Colors, battles the evil witch Xayide, and meets the three deep thinkers. In the Desert of Colors, he is told that the inscription of The Gem "Do what thou wilt" means it is his job to find out his own True Will ("and nothing is more difficult"); certainly not wishing whatever comes to his mind, even though The Gem does fulfil these wishes. Bastian and Atreyu become friends. However, due to Bastian's continuous wishing with The Gem, he begins to lose his true self, as wishing costs one memory each time. Atreyu, who feels responsible to get Bastian safely back to the Real World, thus becomes increasingly more worried about him. Xayide exploits the growing tension between the two, driving Bastian to a lust for power and eventually having himself crowned as Childlike Emperor. Atreyu leads a rebellion against Bastian, but narrowly escapes with his life. Upon pursuing Atreyu, Bastian stumbled on a colony of humans who were trapped in Fantastica - having lost all their memories as they had recklessly indulged in the power of AURYN - and realizes what has nearly become of himself. (These men, for lack of something better to do, are getting occupied by a monkey to throw letters at dice with the intention to create this way, in infinite time, all possible stories, expressly

including the Neverending Story). Bastian sets out to find the only thing he can wish for without losing himself: his own True Will, which will also bring him back to the Real World. He is told that he needs to cross the Fog Sea for this. The Fog Sea can only be crossed in the (total) community of the Yskalnari, who do not know the word "I" nor have any identity save the collective one. It becomes Bastian's wish to be accepted as part and parcel of this community; this wish, also, is fulfilled. Yet it breeds Bastian's next wish, to be loved as a person with a personal identity - a wish which the Lady Aiuola (and her compassionate living-place, the Changing House) is ready to see done. After a long stay in the Changing House, Bastian finds out that his True Will is to do himself what the Lady Aiuola did to him, viz. love. Yet, as this was the second last wish he had to use (forgetting mother and father for it), he does not yet know whom. Thus he mines for little mosaics in a Mine specifically existing for the purpose, where he finds (forgetting his name for it) a mosaic of a man in a glass box. He instantly knows this is what he seeks, even though he has forgotten that the man really is his father, who, after his mother's death, fled into emotionlessness and cold routine. At this point, he is found by Atreyu, and, in remorse, lays down AURYN (the use of which Atreyu always advised against), only to find out that on this point, The Gem itself becomes the passage-way of both worlds. After Atreyu volunteers to bring the stories Bastian began to an end (something considerably difficult, especially because of some senseless wishes of Bastian), and also vouches for his name (it is only allowed to pass into the Real World if you still remember something) he is allowed to drink from the Waters of Life and bring them to his father also, finally freeing him from his "glass box" to life and love again. After returning from Fantastica, he is distressed that the water in his hands has vanished. Yet he finds that he has, in fact, managed to bring the Waters of Life to his father when the latter, upon hearing Bastian's whole story (taking considerable time) and the sad end of it, bursts into tears. Having grown to a responsible person wishing to shoulder the consequences for what he has done, Bastian decides to confess to Carl Comrad Correander about stealing his book and losing it (it has vanished also), but Mr Coreander surprisingly never seems to have had the book Bastian had seen him reading in. However, the bookstore keeper, to another surprise of Bastian, is not inclined at all to disbelieve him; he reveals he has also ("certainly") been to Fantastica, and the two readily agree to see each other soon and talk about their respective experiences. But as Coreander surmises, this is not the true end of the story, as Bastian is now likely to lead others onto their way to Fantastica in order to preserve both worlds. Yet (to repeat a phrase often repeated in the book at the unfinished end of a plotline), "this is another story and shall be told another time".

AURYN is a mystical Ouroboros talisman in The Neverending Story. In the novel, AURYN is always spelled in capital letters and is revered by all Fantasticans, referred to as "The Gem" and "The Glory" (German: das Kleinod, der Glanz). It is a symbol of its mistress, the Childlike Empress, who is also called "The Golden-Eyed Commander of Wishes" in reference to her relationship with AURYN. While the book makes noteworthy the point that the image of AURYN is on its "cover(s)", it does not actually refer to it as AURYN. A common misconception is that AURYN is a simple magical object that grants wishes. The truth is that AURYN's power flows from the Childlike Empress and that it can only be used with her permission. The powerful amulet cannot be used against her and if she does not grant the use of it to someone they are unable to influence AURYN. The name of the amulet is not the same as that of a simple inanimate object. The word 'the' never precedes that amulet's name (i.e., never "the AURYN"). Instead, it is used simply as AURYN, a proper noun like a person's name.

Two mythological serpents, symmetrical, bite at the other's tail. In the book, they form an oval, and are not intertwined. One serpent is white and one is black. Each has an eye to correspond to the color of the book's print, red and green. The two snakes represent the dual nature of the two worlds, Fantastica and Reality, but also the twin nature of their mutual creation and destruction. On the back of AURYN are these words: AURYN helps guide Atreyu through Fantastica in his quest to find a cure for the ailing Childlike Empress, and in turn defeat the Nothing. It serves him

clandestinely, but does return him to the Ivory Tower. Although Atreyu believes himself to have failed in finding the human child past the borders of Fantastica, the Childlike Empress informs him to the contrary and that indeed the boy had been with him all along. In the hands of the Childlike Empress, AURYN displays greater powers even in the face of the Nothing. She releases seven spirits to serve her as she ventures across her tattered realm to find the Old Man of Wandering Mountain. They carry her chariot and provide a haven for Atreyu and Falkor within. Bastian blesses the Childlike Empress with her new name. She presents him with AURYN; her only request being that he follow the instructions written on the back. While it grants him the power to make wishes and imagine more of Fantastica, it drains him of his memories which are his only way back to his world. Bastian searches for the same obscure boundaries of Fantastica, only to realize it is within AURYN itself. In the mystical interior of AURYN, two gargantuan serpent statues stand sentry, one shining brighter than white, the other darker than black. They guard the Waters of Life, a waterfall and pool that serve as the exit from Fantastica. The statues refuse Bastian's passage, for he had left many stories unfinished in Fantastica. Atreyu, however, agrees to undertake the quest, which allows Bastian to return to his world. When Bastian touches the waters, their truthful properties dissolve the illusion of his glamour wishes, and he returns to being a fat little boy, instead of a Fantastican prince, but this time he has learned to love himself as he truly is. At this point the snakes of AURYN allow him to return to his world.

Susan L. Nickerson of Library Journal writes in a review that "Imaginative readers know the story doesn't end when the covers close; the magic to be found in books is eternal, and Ende's message comes through vividly."¹

"The two parts of the novel repeat each other", as Maria Nikolajeva states in her book *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature*, in that Bastian becomes a hero but then in the second half he "acts not even as an antihero but as a false hero of the fairy tale." The characters of Bastian and Atreyu can also be seen as mirror halves.

La storia infinita esamina come le storie beneficiano le persone, dando loro storie e futures, aiutandoli fantasia esplorare le possibilità, e aiutandoli a conoscere chi sono. Mettendo in evidenza l'importanza delle storie nella vita dei Bastian e gli abitanti del Fantastica, il libro solleva le questioni circa i rapporti tra narrativa e il mondo reale, lo scrittore, il lettore, e altre storie. Sebbene Ende pone queste domande, non ha mai le risponde, preferendo la ricca indeterminazione di ambiguità. L'unica idea che promuove sia l'importanza di fantasia.