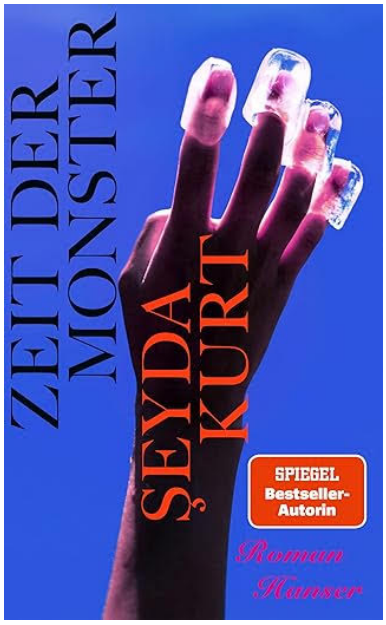


by ?eyda Kurt
Hanser Verlag
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Fiction

Age of Monsters

Zeit der Monster

review

?eyda Kurt's debut novel is set over seven days in the Cologne suburb of Kalk, where rumours of an approaching apocalypse and a coming messiah are spreading through the neighbourhood. Gangs in red tracksuits patrol the streets, a pub is ransacked, and a local priest is killed and then made a saint. Residents take refuge in the church as illness spreads, possibly linked to pollution from a defunct chemical factory, and the town begins to flood.

The unrest is traced to rumours spread on TikTok by the owner of a local gym, who wants attention for her neglected neighbourhood but quickly loses control of what she has started. One woman records her observations on a dictaphone before disappearing. Another collects objects into a rucksack and takes in a mysterious figure who gradually gains a name and a voice. A silver cup found buried in the churchyard, inscribed in Aramaic, connects the area to a monastery in Turkey and sets one character on a journey to find the Tablet of Destinies, a Mesopotamian mythological object.

Elsewhere in the district, the local council debates banning national flags and appropriate names for dried plants, while national news coverage shows the Chancellor discussing internal and external threats and promoting her favourite shampoo. The police eventually arrest those accused of spreading false rumours, and survivors begin rebuilding the town on a mound formed from waste left behind by the chemical factory.

The novel opens with a cast list and moves between characters in the third person, with one figure occasionally narrating in the first person. Perspective shifts frequently between residents, and the reader receives partial, sometimes contradictory information depending on whose viewpoint is in focus. Towards the end, the narrative follows one character to Turkey, then returns to Kalk, where many of the original characters have died or disappeared, and the tone shifts new beginnings.

Kurt is an established non-fiction writer and political commentator in Germany; this is evident in her prose, which moves between registers, incorporating passages of verse, multiple languages and regional dialects, biblical and Mesopotamian mythology, and in historical digressions spanning the First World War, the Armenian genocide, and the British military campaign in the Middle East.

The novel draws together political satire, myth, and close observation of daily life, exploring how community forms and holds together under pressure, and how rumour and myth-making shape real events. Sibylle Berg's *GRM. Brainfuck* (published in English as *Grime*, tr. Tim Mohr, Griffin, 2022) and David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* are both good points of comparison, for their structure of interlinked characters and storylines across place and time.

press quotes

> *What a tribute to so many lives whose stories were never told.*

Faith Akin

> *I had completely forgotten what it's like to be swept away by a great novel. Now I'm reading again, thanks to this powerful, intelligent and uncompromising tale of belonging.*

Melika Foroutan

> *This is an important novel for our times. Something of this masterpiece is deeply rooted in all of us.*

Joy Denalane

about the author



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?eyda Kurt is a publicist, columnist, moderator, and playwright. She studied Philosophy, Romance Studies, and Cultural Journalism in Cologne, Bordeaux, and Berlin. In 2021, she was a member of the team that won the Grimme Online Award for the Spotify Original Podcast 190220 – *One Year after Hanau*. She was named a Journalist of the Year that same year. In spring 2021, her non-fiction bestseller *Radikale Zärtlichkeit: Warum Liebe politisch ist* ('Radical tenderness – why love is political') (HarperCollins Germany) was published, in which she examines love norms within the intersecting forces of patriarchy, racism, and capitalism. Her second book, *Hate: The Uses of a Powerful Emotion* (tr.Jackie de Pont), was published

by Verso Books in 2025.

Previous works: *Hass. Von der Macht eines widerständigen Gefühls*, HarperCollins (2023), *Radikale Zärtlichkeit. Warum Liebe politisch ist*, HarperCollins (2021).

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