



by Stefanie vor Schulte
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Fiction

Boy with Black Rooster

Junge mit schwarzem Hahn

review

Stefanie vor Schulte's debut novel, *Boy with Black Rooster*, is an engrossing and enchanting fairy tale for adults, offering readers some ideal (post-)pandemic escapism. Set in a pseudo-medieval past, the adventure of the orphaned boy with a pure heart instantly captures the reader's attention, with a cast of wicked villagers, sinister horsemen and a mad, Miss Haversham-style princess. Vor Schulte's spare and dreamlike voice perfectly complements the fairy-tale setting.

The young boy of the title is Martin, who is orphaned after his father descends into madness and murders the rest of the family with an axe. Martin's only friend and guide is his pet cockerel, which can talk – but his fellow villagers believe the bird to be the devil. Only Franzi, a young barmaid, treats the boy with any kindness.

One day, Martin witnesses a young girl being kidnapped by a mysterious horseman and can't shake the scene from his mind. Soon after, a painter visits the village and recognises Martin's pure heart. The painter and the boy leave the village together and travel the land, which has been ravaged by war. When they are reduced to foraging for food, the painter finds it increasingly difficult to resist killing the cockerel. With a heavy heart, Martin must leave the painter behind.

On his own, Martin rescues an injured horseman from werewolves and returns him to his family, who take Martin in. The family live in a

town presided over by a deranged princess, whose horsemen steal children for her to play with. When the children get too old, she has them murdered, sometimes hanging them from the so-called Frauenbaum (“women-tree”) by their hair.

When cranes fly over the town, announcing the start of autumn, the princess orders the drawbridge to be shut and sends out riders to find new children for her. Until they return, the townspeople must survive the winter on limited food and firewood. Eventually, the riders return, bringing the painter with them.

Martin completes a series of tests to be granted an audience with the princess. When he challenges her about the stolen children, the cockerel flies at her, frightening her to death. Martin is reunited with the painter and they escape the town, taking the stolen children with them. They return the children to their families and make for Martin’s village, where he settles down with Franzi.

Boy with Black Rooster was inspired in part by Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* and has hints of Angela Carter. Nominated for the Klaus-Michael Kühne Preis 2021, it looks set to capitalise on the success of Naomi Novik’s *Uprooted* and has the potential for very wide appeal.

Rights already sold to: Italy, Mondadori Libri

press quotes

I have just finished reading the book and am utterly thrilled – finally, a rare jewel amongst all the noise. The language – what a gem this is! I wish this book great success.

Sybilla Irmscher / Thalia im Eastgate, Berlin

What an absolute joy! I retreated from the world entirely while reading it, because you simply can't put this book down. You have to know how it ends.

Gabriele Maier / Grimmelshausen Buchhandlung, Oberkirch

about the author



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Stefanie vor Schulte was born in Hanover in 1974 and studied Theatre and Costume Design. She lives in Marburg with her husband and four children. *Boy with a Black Rooster* is her first novel.

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