



by Eckhart Nickel
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Fiction

Punk

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review

PUNK is the latest novel by German author and journalist Eckhart Nickel, whose previous book, *Spitzweg*, topped bestseller lists and was shortlisted for the German Book Prize. Set in Germany in the near future, *PUNK* is a satire-infused dystopia brimming with nostalgia and pop culture references.

The novel opens at a piano recital. The narrator, Karen – a 1980s music buff – watches from the front row as her twin sister Kirsten begins to play a Mozart sonata she had mastered perfectly the night before. After just two bars, Kirsten stops, and begins again. And again. Eventually, Kirsten gives up and leaves the stage. When Karen comforts her afterwards, Kirsten says that it felt oddly as though her hands were no longer her own. Overnight, a mysterious *white noise* begins to take hold.

Fast-forward a few months, and the world has changed: the *white noise* has swept through Germany, filtering out the highs and lows of everyone's emotions and infiltrating every aspect of life. 'Unhealthy' foods and behaviours are no longer tolerated, music is banned, and a shadowy ministry of entertainment assumes control.

Karen, now a university student, is looking for a place to live. She visits a flat shared by Ezra, a retro enthusiast, and his tech savvy brother Lambert. Their apartment is full of now banned music – the brothers are particular fans of The Smiths. For some reason,

the *white noise* appears unable to penetrate their flat.

Karen moves into the flat and joins the brothers' new band: PUNK. Their signature music relies on just two guitar chords, and they are getting ready to participate in an upcoming – in-the-know only – competition. But the competition never takes place: the official responsible denies that it was ever to happen at all. The trio find themselves on an empty stage with no jury, no competitors, and no audience, unsure whether the *white noise* will ever permit their music to be heard.

Drawing parallels between the all-pervasive *white noise* and big tech in today's society, Nickel combines societal critique with echoes of William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* and a soundtrack to rival Keiren Gillan and Jamie McKelvie's *Phonogram*. This is an intelligent novel with plenty of wit that will appeal to music aficionados and fans of dystopias alike.

Find out more:

<https://www.piper.de/buecher/punk-isbn-978-3-492-07282-3>

press quotes

'An Alice in Wonderland for the 21st century.'

Frank Hertweck, SWR Lesenswert

'Eckhart Nickel's book reminds us of the energies that are released when you throw caution to the wind and simply jump.'

Johanna Adorján

'Nickel is an eloquent storyteller.'

Deutschlandfunk

'Crazy!'

Barbi Markovi?

about the author



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Eckhart Nickel, born 1966 in Frankfurt am Main, made his literary debut with the short story collection 'What I Think', and co-edited the literary magazine Der Freund with Christian Kracht. His first novel, 'Hysteria', was longlisted for the 2018 German Book Prize; his highly praised second novel 'Spitzweg' was shortlisted for the 2022 German Book Prize.

Previous works: Hysteria, Piper (2018); Spitzweg, Piper (2022).

rights information

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