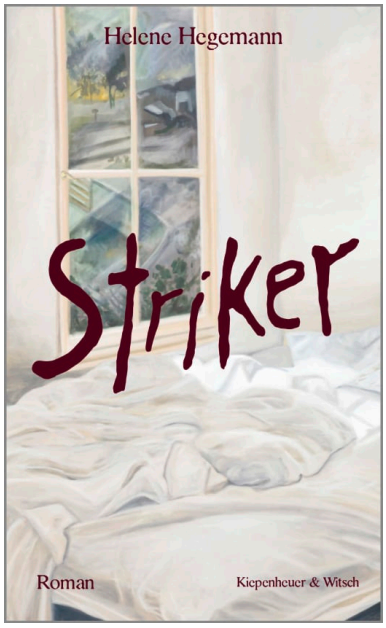

by Helene Hegemann
Kiepenheuer & Witsch
March 2025 / 192pp
Fiction

Striker

Striker

review

This compelling, original portrait of life in contemporary Berlin takes its title from a mysterious graffiti artist. But at the centre of the action is N, a female combat fighter, who lives in precarious financial circumstances and whose gradual crisis mirrors the polarization and precarity she sees around her.

The story starts with N training for a professional fight against her long-time rival, Ronda Shephard. Her mental preparation consists of an eclectic mix of mindfulness and self-negation derived from Eastern philosophy. Meanwhile, there are glimpses of the privileged world inhabited by her lover, a female politician; N herself feels she has more in common with the unhoused groups of people she sees living in her neighbourhood. But she is unnerved when one woman, Ivy, starts to store her things in N's hallway. When questioned, Ivy claims that she and her partner, Striker, a graffiti artist, will soon be moving up to the rooftop. N isn't sure whether Ivy is telling her the truth or whether she belongs to the unhoused population of the area and is suffering from mental health issues. Soon, N begins to get the uncanny feeling that Ivy's life is a mirror image of her own, like a kind of Doppelgänger: N has no family support in times of need and constantly imagines that she, too, will end up on the streets. In the world of combat fighting, she gradually finds herself baffled by sinister political tendencies that border on fascism. Over the course of the novel, N becomes obsessed with Striker and his anti-capitalist graffiti

that she starts to see everywhere; it is the polar opposite of Ronda Shepherd's shallow Instagram posts and the elitism of wealthy Berliners. At the same time, she becomes so afraid of Ivy that she begins to spend more and more time away from her apartment, almost as if training to become unhoused herself. Her lack of home takes on a psychological aspect, and she feels she is losing all sense of self.

Hegemann's signature mash-up of contemporary topics such as hyperconnection, alienation and consumerism culminate in a searing cultural critique that highlights the myriad contradictions of the modern world. While very much anchored in Berlin, and written in the German pop literary style, the urgent themes Hegemann addresses speak to universal issues such as wealth disparity, conspiracy theories, the collapse of democracy and rising crime.

about the author

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Helene Hegemann was born in 1992, and lives in Berlin. In 2010, she made her debut as an author with the novel Axolotl Roadkill, which has been translated into 20 languages. The film adaptation, which she directed herself, won the World Cinema Dramatic Special Jury Award for Cinematography at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. In 2013, she published her second novel Jage zwei Tiger ('Hunting Two Tigers'); this was followed in 2018 by Bungalow, which was nominated for the German Book Prize. In 2022, her short story collection Schlachtensee was published. She works as an opera, theatre, and film director.

Previous works: Axolotl Roadkill, Ullstein (2010), Jage zwei Tiger, Hanser Berlin (2013), Bungalow, Hanser Berlin (2018), Schlachtensee, Kiepenheuer & Witsch (2022).

Previous translations: Axolotl Roadkill, Corsair (2012).

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