



by Michael Wallner

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Children's & Young Adults'

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The Time of the Scorpion

Die Zeit des Skorpions

review

The time is the near future, the settings Italy and Germany. Climate change and man's exploitation of nature's resources have caused ecological imbalance. Desert is covering most of southern Europe and is expanding further, swallowing up cities, towns and landscapes. On the north side of the Alps, a natural barrier to the spread of the desert, tropical climate is maintaining a landscape rich in vegetation and food. Power lies with those who can control the supply of water.

The story starts when the main character, fourteen-year-old Tonia Raffainer, witnesses the death of her father during a sand storm, in which her family's home collapses. Left to fend for herself, she witnesses a Tuareg warrior talking to the local priest and is instantly drawn to his appearance. But, understanding that the Tuareg would never accept a girl in their group, she becomes 'Antonio', shaves her hair, and dresses in her father's clothes. The rest of the book describes her many adventures, ending in the devastated city of Rome, where, near the doors of the Vatican, she and her group are attacked by 'Fliegenkinder' (fly children), who creep out from the stones and start feasting on their living flesh.

Monks from the Vatican save them, and they are nursed back to health in the amazing oasis of the Vatican gardens. There Tonia bathes in a spring under a waterfall for the first time in her life, and is caught by her friend Dula, whose relationship to her has changed from innocent friendship between boys (as he supposed) to physical attraction.

Of course we are only a little way along the line at this stage. A mysterious square cube adorned with the emblem of a black scorpion, gigantic caves filled with water which could save life in southern Europe, an explosion, an earthquake, a shifting of the earth's plates – these are only a few of the props and spectacles in this weird, post-catastrophic musical.

The style of writing is clear, depicting realistically the setting, actions and circumstances without the use of teenage language or any unusual rhetorical devices. It conveys feelings and nature's magic through actions and precise descriptions, and in doing so paints a frightening picture of tomorrow's possible world.

press quotes

'Think Alan Furst with a different sort of hero, and a darker, more visceral edge.' – *Booklist on April in Paris*
'Wallner's harrowing debut, a love story of sorts though there's little romance, rings with authenticity.' – *Publisher's Weekly*
'The whole story is excellently told, an enthralling book in the best sense of the word.' – *Hessischer Rundfunk*

about the author

Michael Wallner was born in Graz, Austria, in 1958. He has worked as an actor and director and now lives in Berlin. In 2006 Luchterhand published his bestselling *April in Paris*, a major international success with translation rights being sold to twenty-two countries.

Previous works include:

April in Paris (2006)

rights information

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