

Valley of Swallows

Tal der Schwalben

by Seraina Kobler
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Fiction

nominated for the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize 2026

review

Seraina Kobler's fourth novel, *Valley of Swallows*, imagines 'a different Switzerland in a new time', where the cities have fused into a dominant '*Metropolitane*' and the Alps have become a sealed exclusion zone, officially for power generation but in practice because repeated disasters have made the mountains ungovernable.?

Alesch Mastai is a scientist at a University on Lake Geneva, leading a team working on subthermal fusion. Daily life around Lake Geneva looks picturesque, but is characterised by shortages and strain: smashed shopfronts, protests, queues, and the sense that the social contract has started to fray.?

At a heavily-guarded energy conference in a luxury hotel, Alesch is handed an envelope and a small package that reminds him of his childhood, and Annetta, his first love. The package contains pages torn from an old book of Alpine legends. One tale, titled 'Am ewigen Firn' ('On the eternal firn') – ironically, since the firn is now under threat due to the irreversible melting of the glaciers – has protagonists who are also named Alesch and Annetta, and whose love story ends tragically, with Annetta becoming a ghost that causes many natural disasters.

When the university lab is forced to shut temporarily after an incident that may be sabotage, Alesch is given an assignment with a political edge. He is to return to his home village of Pradetta, in the

mountains, which is now inside the restricted zone. It is Alex's job to persuade those residents who have not yet signed relocation agreements to do so.

It is a tense homecoming. The locals are wary, the landscape is visibly changing, and Alesch's loyalties are split between the people who stayed, the policymakers who need signatures, and the instincts he has learnt to distrust.

Sitting at the crossroads between climate fiction, dystopian suspense, and questions of belonging, Kobler's cli-fi premise is threaded through with deft storytelling. The narrative is written in clear and propulsive prose, and provides plausible specificity on energy research without tipping over into hard sci-fi. The multilingual texture, with touches of Romansh and French, helps root the story in a very Swiss sense of place and fracture. It should appeal to readers of climate-forward speculative fiction with strong regional character, such as Charlotte McConaghy's *Migrations* and Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife*.

Find out more:
https://www.diogenes.ch/leser/titel/seraina-kobler/tal-der-schwalben-9783257073775.html

about the author



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Seraina Kobler, born in Locarno in 1982 and grown up in Basel, studied linguistic and cultural studies before working as a journalist for publications including the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* Eventually setting up as a freelance author, in 2020 she published her debut novel, *Regenschatten* ('Rain Shadow'). Her first Zurich-based crime novel featuring officer Rosa Zambrano, *Tiefes, dunkles Blau (Deep Dark Blue*, Pushkin Press, 2024), spent months on the Swiss bestseller list. Seraina Kobler lives with her family in Zurich.

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