



by **Tonio Schachinger**

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Fiction

🏆 Winner of German Book Prize 2023

🏆 170,000 copies sold

Realtimes *Echtzeitalter*

review

Winner of the 2023 German Book Prize, 'Realtimes' tells the coming-of-age story of protagonist Till in a famous Viennese elite school, as he deals with petty middle-class ideals and a reactionary educational environment.

Till is a young boy from an average middle-class background, and because his parents can afford it he attends an elite Viennese school, preparing for a bright future. Although he is neither very rebellious nor an actual outsider, he doesn't quite fit in. His class teacher is old-fashioned, dictatorial and petty, clinging on to outdated values and educational methods.

When Till's father dies suddenly, he retreats from his peers and from the dogma of the school into Age of Empires 2, a strategic online game, becoming part of a community of amateur and professional players around the world. Playing the game in every spare minute he has, he becomes, as a prominent commentator says, a 'promising young prodigy', and the most successful young player on the international scene.

Till's life centres on Age of Empires and school becomes a side gig. He is clever enough not to fail his classes. His remaining school years, set against the background of the political scandals amongst Austria's elite, are divided between training for gaming competitions, surviving the school's reactionary values and morals, trying to

reconnect with his mother (who tries to understand the importance of the game and her son's status in that world), finally dealing with his father's death, and falling in love with a German-Senegalese classmate. Till survives the pandemic and completes his education, attempting to find his direction in life.

Although the theme of the quest for freedom in the face of educational despotism may be familiar, Schachinger's caricature of authority is also a celebration of the coming-of-age novels of his literary predecessors. 'Realtimes' is keenly observed, and has emotional growth at its core. The German Book Prize jury described it as 'reflect[ing] the political and social conditions of the present with subtle irony...deal[ing] with the social place of literature in a narratively outstanding and contemporary way.'

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about the author

Tonio Schachinger was born in New Delhi in 1992. He studied German at the University of Vienna and Linguistic Arts at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. *Nicht wie ihr* ('Not Like You'), his first novel, was shortlisted for the German Book Prize in 2019 and nominated for the Rauris Prize for Literature. His second novel, *Echtzeitalter* ('Realtimes') won the German Book Prize in 2023. Tonio Schachinger lives in Vienna.

Previous works: *Nicht wie ihr*, Kremayr & Scheriau (2019).

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