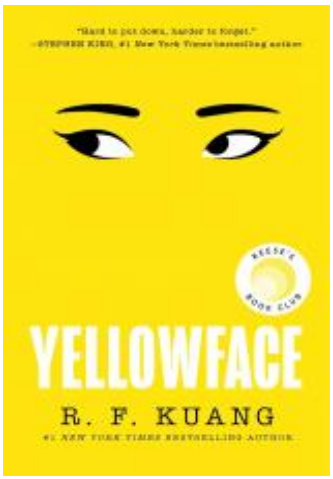
Yellowface

by R. F. Kuang



About the Book

White lies. Dark humor. Deadly consequences. Bestselling sensation Juniper Song is not who she says she is, she didn?t write the book she claims she wrote, and she is most certainly not Asian American --- in this chilling and hilariously cutting novel from R. F. Kuang, the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of BABEL.

Authors June Hayward and Athena Liu were supposed to be twin rising stars. But Athena is a literary darling. June Hayward is literally nobody. *Who wants stories about basic white girls?* June thinks.

So when June witnesses Athena?s death in a freak accident, she acts on impulse: she steals Athena?s just-finished masterpiece, an experimental novel about the unsung contributions of Chinese laborers during World War I.

So what if June edits Athena?s novel and sends it to her agent as her own work? So what if she lets her new publisher rebrand her as Juniper Song --- complete with an ambiguously ethnic author photo? Doesn?t this piece of history deserve to be told, whoever the teller? That?s what June claims, and the *New York Times* bestseller list seems to agree.

But June can?t get away from Athena?s shadow, and emerging evidence threatens to bring June?s (stolen) success down around her. As June races to protect her secret, she discovers exactly how far she will go to keep what she thinks she deserves.

With its totally immersive first-person voice, YELLOWFACE grapples with questions of diversity, racism and cultural appropriation, as well as the terrifying alienation of social media. R.F. Kuang?s novel is timely, razor-sharp and eminently readable.

Discussion Guide

1. Roland Barthes published the essay ?The Death of the Author? in 1967 on whether or not the author?s identity and biography are relevant to the meaning of a text. What do you take the ?death of the author? to mean? Do you agree? How much does the identity and biography of the author affect how you interpret a text, if at all? Does it change things if the author is still living? If they died over a century ago?

2. June feels betrayed by Athena for writing a story about a traumatic experience she suffered during college. Do you think what Athena did was wrong? Robert Kolker?s 2021 piece, ?Who is the Bad Art Friend??, also raised questions about whether or not it is ethical to publish fiction drawn explicitly from someone else?s life. What obligations, if any, do authors have towards living subjects who inspire their stories?

3. Can we ever argue that someone does or doesn?t have the right to tell a certain story? Where do we draw the line between this and censorship? What makes for ?bad? literary representation? What constitutes the ?harm? done by bad literary representation?

4. Much of June?s anxiety about her writing career comes from paranoia about how other authors perceive her and compare against her. John Banville once offered the following advice for young writers: ?I remind them, as gently as I can, that they are on their own, with no help available anywhere.? Is writing a necessarily solitary activity?

5. The text employs recurring imagery of masks and skin; June imagines unzipping Athena?s skin and pulling it on over herself. Consider also films like Jordan Peele?s *Get Out* and James Cameron?s *Avatar*, which explore (to differing critical degrees) the white desire to slip into another skin. In what ways is this trope salient to understanding racialization today?

6. June justifies finishing Athena?s manuscript by arguing it is better for her story to reach the world than to linger unpublished, or to be posthumously published in unfinished form. Do you agree?

7. June and Athena?s friendship seem defined by the way they constantly hurt each other. Why do you think they were drawn to each other? Why did they keep seeing one another?

8. Athena in many respects rankles against her canonical status as an Asian American author. She rants about being pigeonholed; she rejects overtures by younger Asian American writers. Why might she feel resentful towards her own community?

Author Bio

Rebecca F. Kuang is the #1 *New York Times* and #1 *Sunday Times* bestselling author of the *Poppy War* trilogy, BABEL: An Arcane History, YELLOWFACE, KATABASIS and TAIPEI STORY. Her work has won the Nebula, Locus, Crawford and British Book Awards. She is the Millard Distinguished Writer in Residence at the College of the Holy Cross.

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