

OF COURSE, I HAVE MY DETRACTORS. THE MORE POPULAR A BOOK becomes, the more popular it becomes to hate on said book, which is why revulsion for Rupi Kaur's poetry has become a millennial personality trait. The majority of my reviews on Goodreads are five stars, but the one-stars are vitriolic. Uninspired colonizer trash, **one reads**. Another iteration of the white woman exploitation sob story formula: copy, paste, change the names, and voila, bestseller, **reads another**. And a third, which seems **way too personal to be objective**: What a stuck-up, obnoxious bitch. Brags too much about being a Yalie. I got this during a Kindle sale, and you can bet I made sure to get every one of the two hundred and ninety-nine cents I spent back.

The first time I get tagged in a bad review on Twitter (All the hype led me wrong, won't be reading anything more from this author), I text Marnie Kimball and Jen Walker, my new friends from the BookCon after-party. They'd given me their numbers and insisted that I reach out if I was ever having a hard time navigating the industry. Since then our group chat, cheekily named "Eden's Angels," has been my go-to source of support and industry gossip.

How do you get over rude shit people say about you online? I **ask**. This is so demoralizing. It's like they have a personal vendetta. Like I, personally, once kicked their dog or something.

Rule one: Do Not Read Reviews. Marnie does that weird thing older women do where she uses extra spaces and capitalizations, though I can never tell if they're intentional or typos. If they had anything good to say, they would have written their own books. They are Petty Little People.

Let them scream in their own echo chambers, **writes Jen**. Performing outrage is a bonding activity for them. Gives them serotonin hits, literally, there's research on this. Don't let it get to you. They're sheep.

That's good advice, if only I had the mental fortitude to not care so much about what people think of me. I keep reading through Goodreads tirades, vicious tweet threads, and condescending Reddit posts. I keep clicking on negative articles when they show up in my Google Alerts, even when the title promises nothing but self-righteous vehemence.

I can't help it. I need to know what the world is saying about me. I need to sketch out the contours of my digitally perceived self, because at least if I know the extent of the damage then I'll know how much I should be worried.

The most widely circulated hate piece is an essay review in the Los Angeles Review of Books by a critic named Adele Sparks-Sato, whose work I actually enjoy, because she's good at pointing out that the novels everyone else touts

as “the voice of a generation” are actually self-indulgent, narcissistic nonsense. She’s published some of the harshest criticisms of Athena’s work in the past (on Athena’s debut: “Here, Liu falls into the novice trap of mistaking a lyrical, self-othering sentence for a profound observation. Unfortunately, you can still be Orientalist even if you’re Asian. My read? Athena Liu needs to get over her own yellow fever.”). This time, she’s come after me:

“In *The Last Front*, Juniper Song misses an excellent opportunity to excavate a forgotten history and instead uses the suffering of thousands of Chinese laborers as a site for melodrama and white redemption,” she writes. “She could have, for instance, interrogated the use of Christian missionaries to convince young, illiterate Chinese men to work and die overseas, and who in France were largely recruited to keep the Chinese docile, tame, and cooperative. Instead she unabashedly praises the missionaries’ role in converting laborers. *The Last Front* hardly breaks new ground; instead, it joins novels like *The Help* and *The Good Earth* in a long line of what I dub historical exploitation novels: inauthentic stories that use troubled pasts as an entertaining set piece for white entertainment.”

Whatever. Who is Adele to tell me off about authenticity? Isn’t the name “Sato” Japanese? Isn’t there a whole discourse about how being Chinese and Japanese are totally different experiences?

Can this Adele bitch take a fucking chill pill? I text *Eden’s Angels*.

Marnie: With initials like ASS . . . no?

Jen: Critics build an audience by dragging others down. It’s the only way they can legitimize themselves. It’s a toxic culture. Don’t get pulled in. We’re better than that.