

Babel

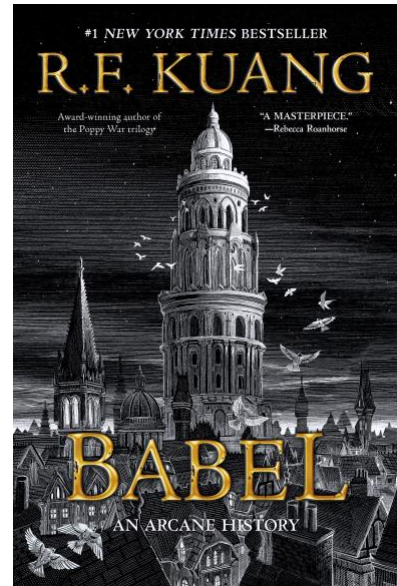
By R.F. Kuang

Reviewed by: Cheri Li, 16

Star Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity

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During the era of British mercantilism and colonialism, Kuang sets up a magical realist world centered at Oxford. Babel, the translation institute, serves the British empire through the power of engraved silver bars that can do everything from advancing weaponry to enforcing architecture. However, these silver bars get their power from translations of foreign languages. The main protagonist, Robin, was brought to England as a young boy, raised by university professor Robert Lowell, and trained under him to serve the British crown. Robin's Chinese heritage soon comes into conflict with the colonialist ambitions of Oxford, so he joins the Hermes Society, which works to undermine Babel. As Britain escalates conflicts with China, Robin and his friends at Babel are forced to pick a side.



Babel was a moving, engaging dark academia novel with well-developed characters and themes. The portrayal of colonialism and the critical examination of violence in response to oppression frames the novel very well, especially through the added fantastical element of silver-working. That being said, the serious themes explored in this novel made it extremely dense and advanced, and the topics discussed were addressed through a lot of dialogue between characters. The main character, Robin, has a deep internal conflict about his loyalties towards China, Oxford, and his friends and family, and the story told mostly through his perspective marks his character development as he handles losing his ignorance. Ramy, Victoire, and Letty provided depth to the story, representing different perspectives during this era, and each character's conflict was representative of the overall themes of the fight against racism and colonialism. Though it was difficult to relate to the specific conflicts of characters, the more general ways they struggled with overcoming ignorance, fought for something bigger than themselves, and managed their personal connections was portrayed in a way that made it easy to empathize with the characters in the book. Because the book was dense, illustrative, and thematically deep, I would recommend the book to anyone 15 or older. Overall, Babel was a high-level but engaging read. I would highly recommend this to someone interested in languages, dark academia, and fantasy.

Recommended Titles:

Blood Over Bright Haven by M.L. Wang

Katabasis by R.F. Kuang

The Poppy Wars by R.F. Kuang