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BOOKS New York, New York

Twitter fans giveth, and Twitter fans taketh away. *Blood Heir*, a young adult (YA) fantasy novel by Amélie Wen Zhao, got its start from a Twitter pitching event for marginalized creators, which helped Zhao secure an agent and, eventually, a six-figure book deal.

On January 28, she announced that she asked her publisher, Delacorte Press (an imprint of Random House, based in New York City), "not to publish [the book] at this time."

Her announcement came after some YA "influencers" complained that the novel showed racial insensitivity. "Influencers" are YA authors and fans with many followers on Twitter, who sometimes receive "advanced readers copies," so they can preview books and create interest prior to publication.

The controversy surrounding *Blood Heir* has since spread beyond the YA Twitter community, with some supporting Zhao's decision, and others decrying it as the result of a "Twitter mob."

Blood Heir is set in the fictional Cyrilian Empire, where Princess Anastacya Mikhailov must live in secrecy because she shares the same blood and powers as the empire's enslaved population, called Affinites. One of the blurbs for the book said,

In a world where the princess is the monster, oppression is blind to skin color, and good and evil exist in shades of gray . . . comes a dark Anastasia retelling that explores love, loss, fear, and divisiveness and how ultimately it is our choices that define who we are.

Explaining the controversy on *Slate*, Aja Hoggatt wrote, "Influencers are saying that the book shows a black girl being rescued from the slave trade and subsequently dying so that the white protagonist can live."

The novel doesn't specify the princess's race, but Twitter critics say Zhao's story is a reflection of African American slavery and systemic racism in the United States, and the author should have shown more racial sensitivity.

In her apology, Zhao, who is ethnically Chinese, explained:

The issue around Affinite indenturement in the story represents a specific critique of the epidemic of indentured labor and human trafficking prevalent in many industries across Asia, including in my own home country. The narrative and history of slavery in the United States is not something I can, would, or intended to write, but I recognize that I am not writing in merely my own cultural context. I am so sorry for the pain this has caused.

Zhao put the novel—which had been planned as the first book in a trilogy—on an indefinite hold.

Random House Children's Books, Delacorte's parent company, said in a statement, "We respect Amelie's decision, and look forward to continuing

our publishing relationship with her." Reported in: slate.com, January 31.

RADIO Cleveland, Ohio

A radio station in Cleveland, Ohio has decided to stop playing the classic Christmas season song "Baby, It's Cold Outside" after at least one listener said the song has predatory undertones amid the current "Me Too" movement.

WDOK Star 102.1 pulled the song from its rotation after receiving a call from a listener who suggested it is inappropriate, and the radio station posted a poll about the song on its website.

The song, written in the 1940s, has a woman singing that she should leave a man's house, as he sings reasons to lure her to stay. It starts with, "I really can't stay," to which the man responds, "but baby, it's cold outside."

While some might view the song and its lyrics as a playful, coy back-and-forth from another time, Cleveland Rape Crisis Center President and CEO Sondra Miller said it may have a different meaning to a rape survivor. She said her organization supports the decision to stop playing the song.

The station said it posted a poll about the song on its web site and a clear majority of respondents supported the decision to remove the song from the station's lineup. However, a separate poll on the station's Facebook page showed over 90 percent of people say it's a classic. Reported in: katv.com, November 30, 2018; Fox8, November 30, 2018.