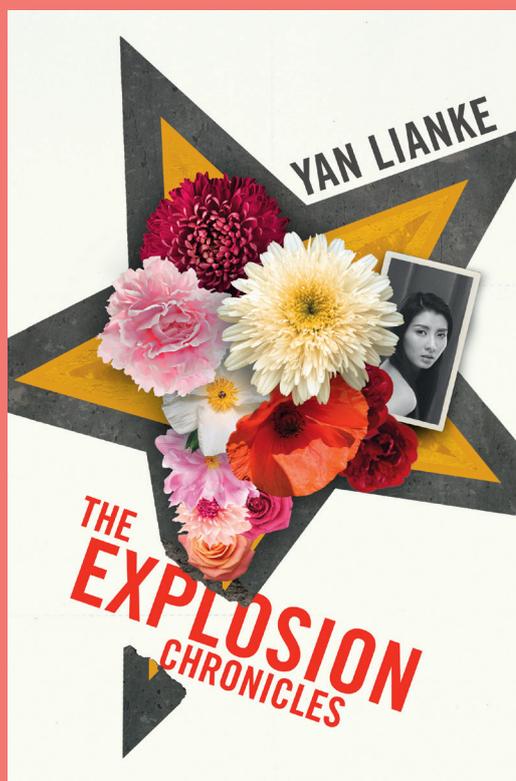


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# Reader's Guide



Other novels by Yan Lianke  
*Lenin's Kisses* (2004)  
*The Four Books* (2010)

## The Explosion Chronicles Yan Lianke

Translated by Carlos Rojas

Chatto & Windus

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### About the author

Yan Lianke was born in 1958 in Henan Province, China and currently lives in Beijing. He is the author of numerous novels and short-story collections, including *Serve the People!*, *Dream of Ding Village*, *Lenin's Kisses* and *The Four Books*. He has been awarded the Hua Zhong World Chinese Literature Prize, the Lao She Literary Award and the Franz Kafka Prize, whose previous winners include Vaclav Havel, John Banville and Harold Pinter. He has also been shortlisted for an array of prizes including the Man Booker International Prize, the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize and the Prix Femina. He currently holds the position of Sin Wai Kin Visiting Professor of Chinese Culture at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

### About the translator

Carlos Rojas, born in Atlanta, USA in 1970, is the author of *The Naked Gaze: Reflections on Chinese Modernity*, *The Great Wall: A Cultural History*, and *Homesickness: Culture, Contagion, and National Transformation in Modern China*. As well as being the co-editor for a number of books on Chinese and Taiwanese culture, he is the co-translator of Yu Hua's novel, *Brothers*, and has translated Yan Lianke's novels *Lenin's Kisses* and *The Four Books*. He teaches on a variety of topics ranging from prostitutes and vampires to cities, migration, and disease. He lives in Durham, North Carolina.

### About the book

With the Yi River on one side and the Balou Mountains on the other, the village of Explosion was founded a thousand years ago by refugees fleeing a volcanic eruption. But in the post-Mao era, the name takes on a new significance as the rural community grows explosively from a small village to a town to a city to a vast megalopolis.

Behind this rapid expansion are three rival clans linked together by a web of ambition, madness and greed. They transform their hometown into a Babylon of modern times – an unrivalled urban superpower built on lies, sex and thievery.

### Discussion points

There are many fantastical events and images in *The Explosion Chronicles*, but it's often hard to tell the difference between what is, or could be, real, and what isn't. Yan Lianke is making a bigger point here about the 'reality' of daily life in China now. How unsettling was it as a reader to experience the blurring of that boundary?

Yan Lianke also plays fiction off against fact in this novel, including his own appearance as the narrator of the book. Can you think of other novels that use this author-as-narrator device, and consider the differences in intention and effect between them and *The Explosion Chronicles*?

Women play a very important role in this novel, contributing significantly to the economic and political growth of Explosion as well as the feud between the ruling families. Was this a surprise to you?

Yan Lianke has said that the only true thing on the TV news in China is the date. Since this book was published in China, we have ourselves entered a post-truth world. *The Explosion Chronicles* tells a seemingly outrageous, incredible story. But does it seem less incredible as we open our eyes to our own changed reality?

### Themed reading

Frank Dikötter *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-62 (Peoples Trilogy 1)*  
Zhang Xianliang *Half of Man Is Woman*