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1906: A Novel

by James Dalessandro



About the Book

Screenwriter and novelist Dalessandro (**Bohemian Heart**) pens an imaginative and dense interplay between fact and fiction in this story of corruption, crime lords and the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Annalisa Passarelli, the Evening Bulletin's music critic, narrates the tale with a mix of first-person intimacy and cool omniscience. She's secretly helping the chief of detectives, Byron Fallon, gather dirt on a corrupt political syndicate headed by Adam Rolf, city attorney and power broker. Rolf (a fictional character) owns the "puppet-mayor,"? Eugene Schmitz (an actual person), and is supported by an army of goons and waterfront toughs led by the infamous Shanghai Kelly, who, as Dalessandro notes in his afterword, was actually dead by 1906. Byron aims to arrest the mayor, the police chief and the city attorney in one fell swoop, but when he is killed investigating a murder at the waterfront, it's up to his son Hunter, a Stanford graduate and fledgling police detective, to carry his mantle. Annalisa and Hunter appeal to an association of honest cops known as the Brotherhood (co-led by Hunter's brother, Christian), who are dedicated to destroying Rolf's machine, although Hunter also has personal vengeance on his mind. They secure incriminating evidence, but before justice can be served, the earthquake strikes, plunging the city into chaos. This plot-and all its subplots, one starring a beautiful Kansas runaway, another featuring tenor Enrico Caruso-might have worked beautifully, but Dalessandro employs too many B-movie theatrics, and the love story falls flat. Still, there's plenty of suspense to keep readers turning pages to the bittersweet conclusion. ? *Publisher's Weekly*

Discussion Guide

1. How did you feel about Annalisa Passarelli as the narrator of 1906? Women at the turn of the century were in a great period of transformation. Did you identify with her, feel that she represented that spirit?

2. Were you shocked to learn about the rampant corruption in San Francisco? About the treatment of Chinese girls and the Shanghaiing of unwilling sailors? What surprised you the most?

3. How did you feel about the history of San Francisco and the disaster? Were you surprised to read the methods employed by the politicians and the army to try to stop the fire? About the shooting of suspected looters?

4. Fans of the book have debated their favorite characters. Was there any that particularly resonated with you?

5. Historical novels often blend fiction and real life characters: at the end of the novel, Mr. Dalessandro explains who was who. Did you find the interaction --- and the guide to this --- a satisfactory effort?

6. The "Cain and Abel" elements of the Christian Fallon - Hunter Fallon relationship is a classic device for fiction writers, two brothers who are both at war and in harmony with each other. Did this remind you of any other pair of brothers and keep you engaged?

7. There is an old adage that "good bad guys" can make or break a good tale, as did Hannibal Lecter in "Silence of the Lambs." Mr. Dalessandro employed a wide array of inter-connected villains: Boss Abe Ruef, Mayor Eugene Schmitz, General Frederick Funston, Shanghai Kelly. How did they figure into the story, and did they represent the San Francisco that the author tried to convey?

8. Sometimes smaller, secondary characters can steal the story as well. What did Enrico Caruso represent to 1906? And what of Kaitlin Staley, the runaway Kansas farm girl, and her father, Sheriff Lincoln Staley. A legendary San Francisco character, Emperor Norton, was used as "Emperor Milton", and has but one real appearance, when he rescues Kaitlin: did you feel this spoke to San Francisco's love of zany characters?

9. The author wrote a "disaster novel" differently from others: he spent half the book building up the city of San Francisco and its broad cast of characters. Did you find that engaging, and did he accomplish his (or Annalisa Passarelli's) mandate to let you know what was, so that you could better gauge what was lost?

10. The author employed a unique device: having Annalisa as the narrator, relating her own personal experiences, then painting portraits of the activities of others, which she says in the prologue she created from things that were told to her, from letters from both the living and dead, stating that no one point of view could tell "this great tale." She also states it was a device she learned from her heroine, the pioneering journalist Nellie Bly. Did this work for you and hold your attention

11. One of the challenges of historical novels -- and the joy when it works -- is to be transported to another time and place, to hear and see and feel it like we were there. If 1906 did that for you, was there anything in particular that you found most effective?

12. Historic novels often try to tell us something big, offer us a theme, something that we may be losing in modern life. Was there anything that resonates with you.

13. Was there anything that you read that reminds you of current life, of lessons we have not learned, that make you wonder if we are really changing or growing as a society, or in fact slipping backward?

Author Bio

Since its publication in April, 2004, James Dalessandro's **1906**, an epic novel of the great San Francisco earthquake and fire, has fulfilled the prediction of the Chronicle's Heidi Benson and become ?a publishing sensation,? appearing regularly on Northern California Best Seller Lists for more than a year and reaching the top 100 on Amazon.com. Mr. Dalessandro has appeared on NPR's *All Things Considered*, *CNN* (Daryn Kagan, Anderson Cooper), Fox TV, NBC National News, Clear Channel Radio, and KQED television and radio. Warner Brother's Films is scheduled to begin production in 2005 on a $150 million film version of **1906**, from a script also written by James Dalessandro.

He is also the writer/director of the 1906 documentary, THE DAMNDEST, FINEST RUINS, with partners CAVMEDIA of Napa, California. The one-hour film is scheduled for release in 2006.

On January 25, 2005, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to set aside the city's official death count of 478 from the 1906 Earthquake and Fire, based on a resolution that he wrote and presented. It gives Mr. Dalessandro, Chairman of the Board of the City Museum of San Francisco, and Gladys Hansen, founder of the museum and Historian Emeritus of the City, until the Centennial on April 18, 2006 to produce a more accurate death count. The current list of casualties, assembled by Gladys Hansen in more than 40 years of research, is 3,400 and counting.

His previous novel, **Bohemian Heart**, a hard-boiled thriller about corruption and political assassination also set in San Francisco, introduced the descendants of the main characters in **1906**, the Fallon/Fagen clan, a group of opera-loving, motorcycle riding young cops bent on ending the rampant graft in their beloved city.

Mr. Dalessandro has had a long and distinguished commitment to his adopted home of San Francisco. In 1973, he founded the Santa Cruz Poetry Festival with Ken Kesey, Allen Ginsberg and Charles Bukowski, which for four year was the nation's largest literary event, drawing praise from Lawrence Ferlinghetti for ?giving a new birth to American poetry.? He published his first work, Canary In A Coal Mine, that same year.

In 1999, he published **Citizen Jane**, the story of a Marin County woman who founded a national victim's rights group and has helped solve 14 cold case murders. James is the screenwriter and co-executive producer of a Court TV Movie of The Week also called *Citizen Jane*.

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Publication Date: March 3, 2005
Paperback: 368 pages
Publisher: Chronicle Books
ISBN-10: 0811849414
ISBN-13: 9780811849418