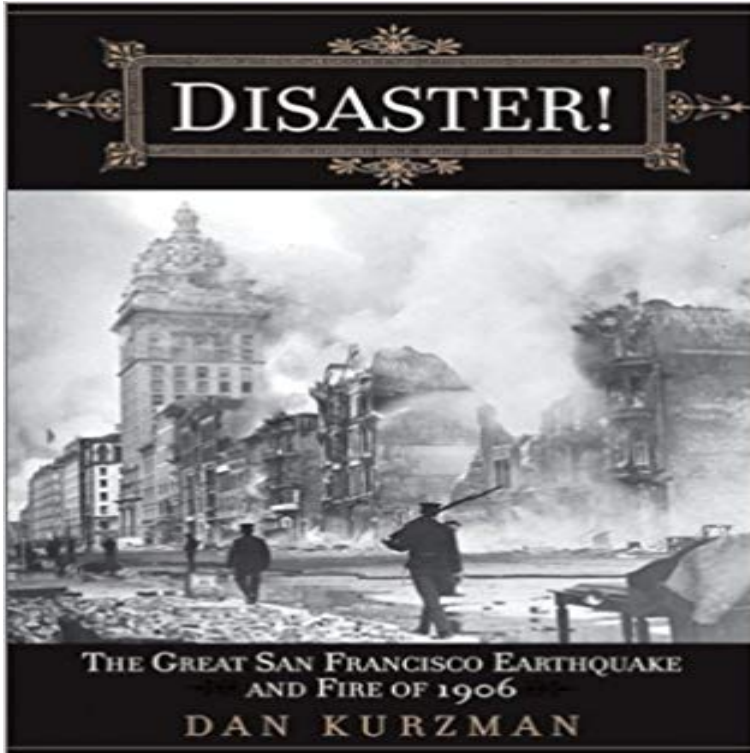


Disaster! The Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906



Just after 5 A.M. on April 18, 1906, an earthquake measuring 8.3 on the Richter scale ripped through sleeping San Francisco, toppling buildings, exploding gas mains, and trapping thousands of citizens beneath tons of stone, broken wood, and twisted metal. Herds of cattle stampeded madly through the streets. The air reverberated with the panicked screams of the doomed and dying. And then came the fires: hellish, gas-fueled conflagrations so hot that molten glass ran down gutters. A mother crushed the skull of her trapped son with a rock so he wouldn't burn alive. A couple defiantly went ahead with their wedding even as the flames closed in. Rats from boats that smuggled prostitute slaves into Chinatown began to spread bubonic plague through the city. With water mains destroyed, firemen could only stand and watch for three terrifying days as the fires consumed the remains left by the earthquake. Adding to the terror were soldiers, some drunk, who shot, bayoneted, or hanged in the street at least five hundred suspected looters and other often innocent victims. As many as ten thousand people died in the catastrophe. Drawing on meticulous researched and eye-witness accounts, Dan Kurzman re-creates one of the most horrific events of the twentieth century. It is a breathtaking, magnificently composed pastiche of personal tragedies. Kurzman captures the fear and madness that raged through a hell unequaled in the peace-time history of this nation. Yet, amid the rubble and death, the author also uncovers extraordinary courage and humanity and honorable acts as noble as any ever celebrated. More riveting than fiction but, incredibly, true, *Disaster!* is unforgettable history -- a masterful account of the calamitous demise and astonishing resurrection of an American city...and the triumph of a rough-and-tumble populace that refused to succumb to nature in its most merciless mood.

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