Book Club Discussion Guide

About the Author

Book Title: Far side of the sky
by Daniel Kalla

Born, raised, and still residing in Vancouver, Daniel spends his days (and sometimes nights) working as an Emergency Room Physician in a major teaching hospital. In his ‘off’ time, he writes and manages a dual career. He is the author of nine books, which have been translated into eleven languages to date, and his Shanghai trilogy has been optioned for feature films. A three-time finalist for the Spotted Owl Award for the Pacific Northwest’s best mystery novel of the year, Daniel has been dubbed ‘the next Michael Crichton’ by the Chronicle Herald.

The idea for his first medical thriller, Pandemic, sprang from his clinical experience in facing the SARS crisis of 2003. He has written five science thrillers and or medical mysteries, delving into themes and topics as diverse as superbugs, drug addiction, prions, DNA evidence, pandemics and patient abuse. Kalla’s sixth book, Of Flesh And Blood, is a multigenerational family drama, featuring a fictional West Coast hospital and interwoven storylines.

His latest novel, Nightfall Over Shanghai, completes his Adler-family historical trilogy. The novels weave together intrigue, medical drama and romance to bring to life the extraordinary and little-known chapter of the Second World War, when the cultures of Europe and Asia converged in Shanghai. Stirring and fast-paced, they are a grand,
sweeping account of a world in tumult and a moving saga about the value of family and courage in the darkest of times.

Daniel has appeared on or in ABC, NBC, FoxNews, CNN, CBC radio, The National Post, City TV, The Vancouver Sun, Entertainment Weekly, Kirkus Reviews and Publishers Weekly. He was featured on the front page of the Globe & Mail review section and has been interviewed on national TV on Global, CTV and CBC.

Daniel received his B.Sc. in mathematics and his MD from the University of British Columbia, where he is now an clinical associate professor and the department head of a major urban ER. He is the proud father of two girls and a female black lab.
About the Book

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November 9, 1938—Kristallnacht—the Nazis unleash a night of terror for Jews all across Germany. Meanwhile, the Japanese Imperial Army rampages through China and tightens its stranglehold on Shanghai, a city that becomes the last haven for thousands of desperate European Jews.

Dr. Franz Adler, a renowned surgeon, is swept up in the wave of anti-Semitic violence and flees to Shanghai with his daughter. At a refugee hospital, Franz meets an enigmatic nurse, Soon Yi “Sunny” Mah. The chemistry between them is intense and immediate, but Sunny’s life is shattered when a drunken Japanese sailor murders her father.

The danger escalates for Shanghai’s Jews as the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor. Facing starvation and disease, Franz struggles to keep the refugee hospital open and protect his family from a terrible fate.

*The Far Side of the Sky* focuses on a short but extraordinary period of Chinese, Japanese, and Jewish history when cultures converged and heroic sacrifices were part of the everyday quest for survival.
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Discussion Questions

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1. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it—amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored...?

2. Describe the main characters—personality traits, motivations, and inner qualities.
   - Why do characters do what they do?
   - Are their actions justified?
   - Describe the dynamics between characters (in a marriage, family, or friendship).
   - How has the past shaped their lives?
   - Do you admire or disapprove of them?
   - Do they remind you of people you know?

3. Are the main characters dynamic—changing or maturing by the end of the book? Do they learn about themselves, how the world works and their role in it?

4. Discuss the plot:
   - Is it engaging—do you find the story interesting?
   - Is this a plot-driven book—a fast-paced page-turner?
   - Does the plot unfold slowly with a focus on character?
   - Were you surprised by complications, twists & turns?
   - Did you find the plot predictable, even formulaic?

5. Talk about the book's structure.
   - Is it a continuous story...or interlocking short stories?
   - Does the time-line move forward chronologically?
   - Does time shift back & forth from past to present?
   - Is there a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints?
   - Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did?
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- What difference does the structure make in the way you read or understand the book?

6. What main ideas—themes—does the author explore? (Consider the title, often a clue to a theme.) Does the author use symbols to reinforce the main ideas? (See our free LitCourses on both Symbol and Theme.)

7. What passages strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that's funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character? Maybe there's a particular comment that states the book's thematic concerns?

8. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it?

9. If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask? Have you read other books by the same author? If so how does this book compare. If not, does this book inspire you to read others?

10. Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?
Reviews

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An amazing novel seeped in vivid descriptions of Austria and China.” — The Huffington Post

“The author of five medical thrillers and a family saga successfully switches gears here. With its unusual setting and blend of terror, hope, and love, this historical novel deserves a wide readership.”– *Library Journal*  *

Starred Review*

“An exciting, often touching story that combines wartime peril and romance in an attractive mix… (Kalla) knows how to weave a good tale, and his characters are endearing… deftly combines fact and fiction.” — *Booklist*

“I ate up this novel… Recommended.” — *Historical Novel Society*

“The Far Side of the Sky is a fast-paced, absorbing tale of war and love.”

—The Reporter Group

“One is reminded of Michener and Clavell: both very good storytellers… whose readers deeply enjoyed them for the things they learned, the lives they were allowed to share and the histories they were privileged to glimpse. That’s storytelling, pure and simple.” — *The National Post*

“A big-canvas story with some very well-drawn characters.” — *Globe and Mail*

“Kalla’s surgeon-steady hand deftly keeps this story moving forward. Readers are sure to develop a genuine interest in the characters’ fates and also learn about an aspect of Second World War history they probably did not know before.” — *The Vancouver Sun*

“There are many layers to *The Far Side of the Sky*, and Kalla tells several good stories against a complicated background.” — *The Jewish Independent*
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“A definite page-turner.” — Quill & Quire

“An exciting and beautifully written story about a city and people in turmoil. Another book likely to make my list of best books read this year.” — Diary of an Eccentric

“The must-read historical fiction of the summer.” — Jenn at Jenn’s Bookshelves

“Combining his medical background with meticulous research, Daniel Kalla has written the best sort of historical fiction, in which individual lives are shaken by the tectonic forces of history—and then miraculously reconstructed.” — David Layton, author of The Bird Factory and Motion Sickness

“Wartime Shanghai is captured in vivid, tumultuous detail in this adrenalized survival epic.” — William Deverell, author of Snow Job and Kill All The Judges

“Wartime Shanghai provides a magnificent canvas for Daniel Kalla to depict a world of people, religions and continents colliding. These are wonderful characters, and Sunny Mah is a heroine for the ages.” — Adam Lewis Schroeder, author of Empress of Asia