



Smash all the Windows

Jane Davis

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It has taken conviction to right the wrongs. It will take courage to learn how to live again.

‘An all-round triumph.’ John Hudspith

For the families of the victims of the St Botolph and Old Billingsgate disaster, the undoing of a miscarriage of justice should be a cause for rejoicing. For more than thirteen years, the search for truth has eaten up everything. Marriages, families, health, careers and finances.

Finally, the coroner has ruled that the crowd did not contribute to their own deaths. Finally, now that lies have been unravelled and hypocrisies exposed, they can all get back to their lives.

If only it were that simple.

Tapping into the issues of the day, Davis delivers a highly charged work of metafiction, a compelling testament to the human condition and the healing power of art. Written with immediacy, style and an overwhelming sense of empathy, Smash all the Windows will be enjoyed by readers of How to Paint a Dead Man by Sarah Hall and How to be Both by Ali Smith.

Smash all the Windows Details

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From Reader Review Smash all the Windows for online ebook

Amanda says

Wow! I couldn't put this book down. The author has written some characters so real that you think you know them in real life. This is a book about an event that changes so many people's lives. It takes you on their journeys to have the truth put on record. The attention to detail brings everything jumping to life straight out the book and makes you read on and on.

Cleo Bannister says

Jane Davis is one of those authors whose books all have an entirely different feeling to each other, Smash All The Windows being another example of what ties them all together, the brilliant depiction of the characters, whatever their age, circumstance or time period.

The centre of this book is a tragedy of the type fortunately most of us will only ever read about or watch in horror on news reports. Fifteen years ago at a fictional tube station St Botolph and Old Billingsgate, a crush occurs. It starts on an escalator and fifty-eight people lost their lives. Their loved ones have gone through an inquest and a class action before the most recent, second inquest which rules that the victims weren't at fault. The reader learns about some of the victims through their relatives who have never given up trying to ensure that a similar incident never occurs again.

My thoughts of the book instantly conjured up one I read in 2011, The Report by Jessica Frances Kane about the Bethnal Green disaster of 1943 where a crush on the entrance to the station resulted in a large loss of life of those seeking shelter from air raids. I'm sure you can pick your own reference, something the author herself addresses during the novel. What makes this book different is the wide range of fictional characters who are altered by the tragedy, from the parents, siblings and partners of those who lost their lives to the trainee lawyer who immerses himself in the points of law. All of these people are bought to life and while I won't deny this book is terribly sad overall there is some hope, even if all that hope consists of is that those people manage to get some relief from the day that changed their lives.

The story is told from different viewpoints we see Gina a mother whose marriage has fallen apart, her daughter just a teenager at the time of the tragedy having lost her childhood as she tries to support her mother. The secrets that they keep from one another trying to help or avoiding difficult subjects, we see it all from both sides. Whatever anyone says, people don't turn into saints because they've suffered and life can continue to be unfair. Another woman becomes a keyboard warrior having been unable to leave her house. Some of the families blamed those on duty, but what if they were victims too? How does that work. The past and the present run alongside each other, memories throwing us back in time to re-examine facts, and a special project creating a sense of community with those who never wanted to be members of this select group.

I saw Jane Davis's work as a project, almost as mammoth as Eric's research into the fictional tragedy and the art project that Jules undertakes. This is an ambitious piece of writing and I'm delighted to say one that works. Somehow whilst revolving around the tragedy this is a book to make you think, from the mundane to the more philosophical questions, yet all the while remembering that the readers want to connect to the book and its unique set of characters. I know I was urging them forward all the way.

An exceptional and engaging read.

Davida Chazan says

When a deathly tragedy happens, we often think only of those who died. But they aren't the only victims. In Jane Davis' newest novel "Smash all the Windows" she investigates the way the ripples of such an event increase the circle of victims. See what I thought of this book in my review, here. <https://tcl-bookreviews.com/2018/04/1...>

Jean Gill says

Intense, brilliant 'What would I do?' emotional roller-coaster

Layer by layer, we meet the people affected by a horrific, fatal disaster in a London underground station. We know from the start of both the disaster and the final court verdict, clearing the victims of 'mob behaviour' so the suspense comes from puzzling out motives, relationships and consequences. We get close to several very different characters and these people are so real that I am still worrying about how their lives will continue. I'm especially concerned for Eric, whose passion for justice led to this long-awaited verdict, but also, ironically, lost him his legal career. How true that too much passion causes damage, and it's the cool brains that can sustain these long legal fights to the end. Thank goodness for the Sorrels of this world.

I wasn't sure I wanted to read about tragic loss but, beyond the morbid fascination that draws us to read about accidents, there are moments of warmth, humanity and even heroism. What will stay in my mind is the way people in this story help each other, even in a crowd, even at risk of their own lives. How wonderful and important to have something in opposition to mob rule - I think Jules, the widowed French artist who shapes an exhibition from the survivors' loss, might call it 'esprit de foule' and challenge the negative association.

This is a book you want to talk about and I can see why it's being taken up by reading groups (encouraged by the author's suggestions for discussion questions) I buy every book Jane Davis writes and have never been disappointed. I love the way she combines Annie Proulx's meticulous use of factual detail with Jodi Picoult's moral dilemmas. She makes me wonder what I would do and she helps me understand other people.

Lynn says

Another compelling read from Jane Davis.

Catherine Gilman says

This is so real it seems that Jane must have experienced an incident like this to write in this way. It would have been so much easier to write a book about the shock horror of the actual incident, rather than explore the complexities of the impact on the people left behind in this beautiful, empathetic way - the characters are

all so different and yet complimentary and seem to be a very true representation of the multi-layered way in which tragedy can affect us and the way in which we survive and deal with it - in the end we have no choice. Brilliant book, must read more by Jane Davis for sure. Thank you Peter Snell at Barton's Books Leatherhead!

Trevor Stubbs says

Jane Davis' latest work is a gripping exploration into the inner lives of those closest to the victims of a tragic accident that killed over fifty people in London's rush hour. This is fiction but readers will be reminded of the all too frequent events – disasters and terrorist attacks – resulting multiple deaths in London and beyond. Each one of the victims in this story comes from his or her own separate family – a diverse spread of backgrounds, ages and cultures – yet their sudden tragic ends, and the struggle for recognition and justice, brings these families together, culminating in a joint cathartic event that brings healing like nothing else could. The victims move from the mere name and number given by the authorities to human beings with their own special story and a lasting impact on their world.

This book is brilliantly written, alternating between the past, the present and the decade-long journey between them. It is a cross-genre novel that ought to be read by everyone irrespective of age, culture, gender or learning because it is inclusive of people from all these backgrounds. If I were a teacher of English I would certainly recommend it to my students. It will not leave you, the reader, the same as you were before you read it.

Jo Barton says

All too often we watch dreadful disasters unfold on our television screens, and after the initial outrage, we spare little thought for those who are left to pick up shattered pieces of lives which have been terribly altered. However, it's not just about those who survive such a tragedy, it's also about the families left behind, those forgotten victims who have to fight for their voices to be heard when everything around them has gone quiet.

Smash all the Windows shares the emotional aftermath of a London tube station disaster and we meet the families of the victims as they consider the ruling at the second inquest that the crowd did not contribute to their own deaths. That this second ruling comes thirteen years after the original disaster only proves, once again, just how slowly the wheels of justice turn. With little hope of a normal life, the families endure as best they can but irreversible loss just seems to get in the way of living any kind of life, and coping with the aftershocks of grief and heartache never end.

This is a very different view of a difficult subject, and whilst the author confronts disaster in very contemporary style, she also brings her characters to life in a totally believable way. Running throughout the whole of the story is an aching vulnerability which I found quite heart-breaking, and yet, despite the burden of sadness which runs like an emotional thread, the story has, at its heart, a message of reconciliation and, dare I say it, a little bit of hope.

There is no doubt that Smash all the Windows is an emotional read, but it's also an inspiring glimpse into power of the human spirit, and how in the end, we all need to reach out to somebody, as we never really know when, or indeed how, our own journey will end.

KC says

This book draws you into the world of the many people affected by a major disaster and the author addresses the emotions and feelings surrounding some very difficult times - ones that many people in real life have had to (and still do) endure.

At times it is dark and mysterious, weaving you in and out of the characters lives before, during and after the incident, raising important points and sometimes questions, inviting the reader to think and reflect on those lives affected and how they carry on, giving you an insight into their thoughts and emotions.

You could almost be there with the characters as you read because they feel so real - a skill of Jane Davis' that I have come to enjoy when reading her books.

As you read on, it urges you to want to know more and all of a sudden you're at the next chapter, and taken off into another person's life caught up in the tragedy, which at times takes you a bit off scent but in turn, leaves you wanting more from the next person!!

So it keeps you hooked until they come back later in other chapters and you're right back there with them. I can imagine that's how it is too, as I said before, weaving in and out.... It looks at the whole thing from many points of view and I think it has bravely taken on a very sensitive subject whilst showing compassion and understanding.

It is a powerful, thought provoking read which raises awareness of the fallout from major incidents and interestingly, how it also brings people together.

Lorraine Devon Wilke says

This is a stunning book, written by an author so skilled at both the big and little, the near and far, the personal and the collective, that you'll walk away from the conclusion feeling as if you've truly been on a journey, an emotional, visceral, gut-wrenching, hope-instilling journey with a very human set of characters.

I've read and enjoyed other books of Jane Davis and have always found her to be an excellent writer, one with an ability to set time, place, and character with such detail and specificity that her work is memorable. But perhaps her most admirable, enduring trait is the sheer originality of her themes, and the literary, almost poetic, unfolding of her narratives.

In *Smash All the Windows*, the reader is immediately thrown into a mix of families and individuals who've experienced a tremendous tragedy: the death of their loved ones via a disaster in a London subway, one in which fifty-eight people are crushed to death when an overcrowded escalator malfunctions during the height of a pre-holiday rush hour. The tentacles of impact, grief, loss, and despair emanating from this one catastrophe are pervasive and overwhelming, and the story begins by introducing us to the handful of characters Davis chooses to follow, back and forth through time, from before and after the event, to pull apart and explore the whys and hows; the painful, searing experiences of each, whether those on the escalator or those mourning the ones who were.

I found some readerly organization was required to keep the characters straight at the beginning; I had to go back a number of times to recalibrate who was who, which was essential, given the tangential importance of each character's story, but once that settled in, the varied and poignant process of each survivor as they arched from devastation to, hopefully, some form of—if not acceptance—existential survival, is powerful.

There are two effective devices incorporated in developing the story: 1.) The contemporary inquest into who was at fault for this accident, a storyline that involves a passionate, obsessive attorney and his somewhat beleaguered partner and girlfriend, and 2.) The evolution of an art exhibit organized by one of the victim's husbands, now an artist of note, intended to honor and memorialize the victims and their families.

In the first, we are immersed in viewing the tragedy from all sides and from every perspective; in the second, we witness slow, tender, painful moments of healing brought about by the sensitive, selective gathering of pieces of the victims' lives into a powerful, moving art installation. Climbing inside both narratives—one tortuous and terrifying; the other tentative but uplifting—makes for a beautiful juxtaposition. Davis never fails to follow both with authenticity and beautifully articulated observation.

This is a compelling, memorable read; highly recommended. And once you're done with this book, if you haven't yet, go pick up some of Jane's other work. She won't disappoint.

Chantelle Atkins says

This is the third book I have read by Jane Davis, and it's safe to say I am a fan. I enjoy her writing style, and I feel I am in safe hands when it comes to her delivering memorable characters. This new novel does not disappoint. *Smash All The Windows* is a complex and ambitious novel spanning the lives of several characters who have been affected by the tragic deaths of 58 people on a London Underground escalator. Much in the same way the victims were blamed by the authorities and the press after the Hillsborough tragedy, the people involved have had to fight tooth and nail to get justice for their loved ones. The timeline jumps back and forth. Sometimes we are in the viewpoint of a character who died that day, and sometimes we are seeing the impact of their loss on a relative or friend. I grew to love all the characters, those living and deceased throughout this book and I can confess to shedding a tear or two as I progressed through the novel. It's a sad yet beautiful story about the human spirit and families search for truth and justice in the aftermath of a tragedy that should never have happened. Brilliant writing, perfect characterisation and a particularly perfect and poignant ending. Highly recommended!

Liza Perrat says

I have loved all of Jane Davis's novels, and her latest, *Smash all the Windows*, was no exception. This story starts twenty years after a terrible disaster, which I could easily visualise occurring in our times. It explores its effects on different people, and helps us to imagine how we might be equipped, or not, to cope with, and survive, such tragedy.

As usual, the author tells the story from the viewpoint of several excellently portrayed characters, her remarkable observational skills making us identify and sympathise with each character.

I enjoyed every character, admiring some more than others. Some simply struggle to get through each day as best they can. Others constantly search and dig, others lose their childhood during the years of grief. Jules was probably my favourite though, a poignant character; an artist able to pick apart the wreckage and rubble, and create something incredibly beautiful and defined. An exhibition entirely fitting for the Tate Modern art

gallery in London.

Weaving between the past and the present, Smash all the Windows manages, somehow, to be both heartbreaking and hopeful. It does not give the reader resolution, but it does offer acceptance and the ability to attain a certain type of harmony with the tragedy.

Dawn Gill says

I've read and enjoyed all of Jane Davis' novels. So when I saw this was due out, I pre-ordered and received my hard copy ahead of formal publication date. I love this book so much I ordered a further 3 copies for birthday gifts. As usual with a Jane Davis novel, this tells a story, and does so from a number of viewpoints. The story in Smash All The Windows is the journey of various people affected – directly and indirectly - by a disaster; the kind of disaster most of us can barely imagine being touched by.

At times this made me laugh, but mostly it made me think; it felt particularly relevant given the recent spate of UK events that occurred or were reported over on the past few years - I've been very fortunate and never been personally impacted by loss of anyone close, so when something such as Grenfell happens, I can only imagine.

Smash All The Windows did an exceptional job of helping me do this. It manages to be heartfelt, heartbreaking (there were tears) as well as incredibly uplifting. I really don't have the words to say how affecting and relevant and human this novel is. It's a brilliantly observed and beautifully written tale of the journey from tragedy to, no not resolution or closure; but peace and acceptance.

Every character is clearly, convincingly, sympathetically portrayed. The tragedy is a constant backdrop, but despite it being what has come to define each of the characters, it doesn't (I have no idea how this was possible to achieve) dominate over the personalities. Some of them I liked more than others, some I admired and most I loved. Eric (with the support of the indomitable Sorrel) digging, researching and some more digging to develop the 'sequence' that results in the final inquest. Donovan getting through each day as best he can, knowing that he is marked by all who know him. Gina barely coping as Tamsin supports her, losing her childhood in the process. Maggie whose starling is on the cover and Jules, an artist who creates beauty and meaning from detritus. The concept of the final exhibition is proper genius, worthy of the Tate Modern.

I cannot recommend Smash All The Windows highly enough.

Heather says

I won this book via the Goodreads Giveaway program. This has not influenced my review.

I am imagine this must have been quite difficult for the author to write. The book seemed well researched, so the amount of time it took to create the scenario, the characters, the background research - it must have been emotionally consuming for Ms. Davis. I wonder if the character named Eric is perhaps similar to how she feels in creating a book like this - it's all consuming.

This book is feels quite heavy, and it was a smart idea to alter the timeline to include the hopeful and "healing" present day story. This created lightness to the darkness of reading about loss and pain. I

appreciated the idea of unique stories for each victim as this is a true concept. No two stories are the same even within families. Some families grow tighter, some break apart, some stay together but live separate lives, and some just barely live. I appreciated the depiction of people coming together because of circumstance and out of necessity. The bond they had to build created something even more beautiful in the end.

Overall, this is a fascinating story about what happens after a mass tragedy: loss, blame, justice, figuring out how to keep living, and ultimately how to heal.

Margarita Morris says

Jane Davis' latest novel is a real tour de force. Writing about the aftermath of a fictional disaster at a London Underground station, she skilfully moves backwards and forwards in time to explore grief, loss and the process of coming to terms with what has happened. The writing is extremely rich and multi-layered. I liked the way she used the present tense to convey a sense of urgency whilst interspersing memories from the past in the past tense. This gives a very rewarding reading experience. The characters are strongly drawn and convincing. By the end of the novel you feel as if you know them well and have shared in their emotional journey.
