

Book
Club Kit

AFTER THE TEMPEST

A NOVEL

SASHA
PACINO



Cast of Characters

The Paronella Family

José Paronella, Protagonist and Visionary

Born in the impoverished olive-farming village of La Vall de Santa Creu, Catalonia, José grows up inspired by his grandmother's sweeping fairy tales of the nobility. As a boy, he vows to one day live like a king and build a castle of his own. Driven by this impossible dream, he journeys across the ocean to the wild southern frontier of Queensland, Australia in 1913. There, relentless ambition and gruelling labour define his life. But he perseveres, eventually earning his fortune and carving out a castle in the ancient rainforest.

Àvia, Storyteller and Catalyst

A central figure in José's youth, his grandmother serves as the keeper of folklore and magic in their village. Her vivid tales of royalty plant the imaginative seeds that ultimately drive José to leave Spain. Though her presence belongs to his childhood, her voice lingers as a psychological anchor throughout his lifelong journey.

Pare, Patriarch and Old-World Anchor

José's father labours in the olive groves for a local farmer. He embodies the strict traditions, severe economic realities and stoic endurance of life in 19th-century rural Spain. Left to hold the family together after the tragic death of his wife, Maria, he views the world through a lens of survival, familial obligation and generational duty, making him a stark contrast to his son's wildly imaginative spirit.

Mare, Lost Maternal Anchor and Silent Inspiration

José's mother is a deeply loved and central figure in his early childhood. She represents warmth, safety and the fragile innocence of infancy before tragedy reshapes José's world when she dies from a miscarriage while he is just a boy. Her sudden, untimely death shatters the family structure and leaves a profound void in José's life.

Pere, Estranged Elder Brother and Old-World Mirror

José's older brother chooses a starkly different path to survival. Leaving the poverty of their family's rural village, he establishes a more stable life in the nearby city of Girona. Due to his physical separation and his significantly older age, Pere exists on the periphery of José's childhood. As a result, he feels more like a distant uncle than a brother. For José, Pere is a living example of a safe, predictable life. Pere's cold wife, Antonia, ultimately pushes José to leave.

Antonia, Urban Foil and Symbol of Friction

Antonia, Pere's wife, is conventional and fiercely protective of her domestic space. Her perspective is shaped by her circumstances; she is childless in a culture that values motherhood. This infuses her home life with an underlying tension. When a young, dream-filled José comes to live with them, Antonia takes an immediate dislike to him. His presence in the cramped apartment feels like an invasive disruption, and she views him as a burden. Her rejection accelerates José's desire to break away from Catalonia, pushing him out of the narrow confines towards Navarre and, ultimately, Australia.

Enriqueta and Dolores, Caregivers and Guardians of Survival

Enriqueta and Dolores are José's older sisters. Following their mother's death, they are suddenly forced to forfeit their own childhoods and take on the endless daily chores required to keep the household running and support their father.

Fruitos and Teodoro, Providers and Familiar Strangers

Like Pere, Frutos has left home to find work. José rarely sees or hears from him. When José seeks work further afield, he stays with Pere instead of Frutos as the latter is still trying to establish himself. Teodoro is the closest in age to José. As boys, they exchange secret thoughts, but their relationship is curtailed when they are forced to start earning a living like their brothers before them.

The Soler Family

Senyor Soler, Neighbour and Beekeeper

Senyor Soler's life tragically ends when he dies from bee stings while tending to his hive. His unexpected death, which happens before Mare dies, awakens an understanding within José that life is as unstable as the atmosphere and must be seized with a dream-like ardour.

Senyora Soler, Widow and Guardian of Honour

Senyora Soler represents the rigid social expectations of the time. She originally agreed to the arrangement betrothing her eldest daughter, Matilde, to José. But when he vanishes to Australia for over a decade without writing a single letter, she is forced to guide her family through the social reality of a lost suitor, ultimately permitting Matilde to marry another man. When José does eventually return, she saves the family name by proposing he marry Matilde's younger sister, Margarita.

Cast of Characters Continued

Matilde Soler, Forgotten Betrothed and Catalyst of Realignment

Matilde is José's original fiancée. She waits until time and silence erode the promise. Assuming the worst, she marries another man and starts a family. When José returns to Spain to claim her, he is presented with a crushing reality check. He is forced to confront the consequence of prioritising wealth over family.

Margarita Paronella (née Soler), Soulmate and Co-Creator of the Dream

Margarita, Matilde's younger sister, steps into the awkward arrangement to restore her family's honour and fulfill the promise made to José. She leaps blindly into the unknown, leaving Europe to join him in Australia. Rather than being a shadow to his grand ambitions, Margarita proves herself his anchor.

Teresa Paronella, Princess of the Castle and Living Legacy

Teresa is José and Margarita's daughter. Born into the magical, bustling world of the Paronella Park during its heyday, she grows up surrounded by ballroom dances, film nights and lush tropical gardens. She is woven into the landscape itself, with José proudly naming a waterfall on the property in her honour.

Joseph Paronella, Son and Guardian of the Dream

As the son of José and Margarita, Joseph grows up alongside his father's castle. Where his sister, Teresa, embodies the social and artistic life of the park, Joseph represents the grit and mechanics required to keep the dream standing. He inherits his father's incredible work ethic but applies it to the gruelling reality of maintenance.

Other Characters

Salvador, Mentor, Shipboard Companion and Cultural Advisor

Salvador is a fellow Catalan, experienced traveller and seasoned immigrant whom José meets during his weeks-long voyage from Europe to Australia in 1913. Having already survived the culture shock of moving across the globe, Salvador possesses a hard-earned, pragmatic understanding of what it takes to survive in a foreign country. Recognising the raw ambition inside José, he takes him under his wing.

Stefano, Companion in Toil and the Tragic Cost of the Frontier

Stefano, an Italian immigrant, is José's bunk mate. They spend their days in the suffocating heat, cutting cane and dealing with the endless rats and snakes, not to mention the constant threat of injury and illness. Stefano's life is tragically cut short when he succumbs to Weil's disease.

Mr Henry Noone, Original Pioneer

Mr Noone, an Irish immigrant, is the pioneer who cleared the Stewart Creek bush and organised the first settlements. He goes on to build the legendary Mena Creek Hotel. So deep is his impact on the region the township and creek are officially renamed Mena Creek in honour of his youngest daughter, Philomena 'Mena' Noone. José builds his castle opposite Noone's hotel.

The Black Hand, Antagonists and Looming Threat

As José finds fortune and success, the dark shadows of the notorious Italian Black Hand—the Mafia's cousin—creep up behind him. The Black Handers send him an extortion letter and threaten to dismantle everything José has bled to build. The organisation represents the dangerous, criminal underbelly of the immigrant communities of the era.

Mother Nature, Environmental Antagonist and Artistic Canvas

More than just a setting, the ancient, untamed Australian rainforest acts as a living character. It is a beautiful but harsh and unforgiving entity that demands relentless toil from José. It stands as both the raw canvas upon which his grand castle must be built and the ultimate obstacle to his dream.

Discussion Questions

1. If you could describe the overall mood of the book in just three words, what would they be?
2. Which specific scene or passage stood out to you the most as a turning point for José?
3. Margarita leaps blindly into the unknown to marry José and becomes a true co-creator of Paronella Park. How did her pragmatism save José's dream from destroying itself?
4. José's real-life legacy is defined by building a castle in the rainforest. How does the book handle the theme of ambition versus obsession? Did you view his dreams as inspiring, all-consuming, or reckless?
5. In what ways do the cultural and environmental barriers of early 20th-century Australia shape José's identity? How does his relationship with the harsh landscape evolve throughout his lifelong journey?
6. How does the book explore the concept of 'home'? Does José ever fully reconcile his Catalan roots with his new life in Australia, or does he remain caught between two worlds?
7. The title implies a rebuilding period following a great storm (both literal and metaphorical). What do you think the 'tempest' represents most powerfully in his life—the political upheaval in Europe, the physical challenges of immigration, or personal grief?
8. Leaving everything behind to start over is a central theme. Have you or anyone in your family ever made a major geographical or life-altering leap, and how did your experience compare to José's?
9. If you were in José's shoes, facing isolation and a completely foreign environment, do you think you would have persevered or chosen a different path?
10. What do you think is the ultimate takeaway lesson about human resilience the author wants readers to leave with?

Recipes

Paronella Paella

(Gluten free, dairy free, lactose free, low fodmap vegan/vegetarian options)

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 1—2 tbsp olive oil (Making it low fodmap? Omit the onion and garlic and replace olive oil with garlic-infused oil.)
- 2 chorizo sausages, sliced (Making it vegan/vegetarian? Add a vegan/vegetarian sausage.)
- 4 free-range chicken thighs (Making it vegan/vegetarian? Add mushrooms instead.)
- 1 brown onion, diced (Omit if making it low fodmap.)
- 2 cloves of garlic, peeled and finely sliced (Omit if making it low fodmap.)
- 1 red capsicum, diced
- 1½ cups paella rice
- 400g can diced tomatoes
- 2 cups chicken stock (Making it vegan/vegetarian? Use vegetable stock.)
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 cup frozen green beans
- 12 frozen peeled cooked prawns (Making it vegan/vegetarian? Add 400g can butter beans)
- ½ a bunch of flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
- 1 lemon, cut into 4 wedges

Method

1. Heat the olive oil in a paella pan or large frying pan. Add the onion, garlic, capsicum, chorizo, chicken thighs and smoked paprika and fry.
2. Stir in the diced tomatoes and stock, then add the rice and stir again. Pop the lid on, bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer for 15 minutes.
3. Stir in the green beans and prawns. If using butter beans, add them now. Pop the lid back on and cook until hot through (about 3 minutes).
4. Season to taste with salt and pepper, then scatter the parsley leaves. Serve with the lemon wedges.

End of Sugar Cane Harvest Sangria

(Alcoholic and non-alcoholic options)

Ingredients

- 1 apple or peach, cored and chopped
- 1 orange, thinly sliced, then sliced into wedges
- 1 lemon, thinly sliced, then sliced into wedges
- 4 tbsp sugar
- 1 bottle (750ml) red wine (Making it non-alcoholic? Simply use a non-alcoholic red wine instead.)
- ½ cup orange juice
- ¼ cup brandy (Making it non-alcoholic? Add apple juice instead.)
- Ice to serve

Method

1. Combine the fruit in a large pitcher, then sprinkle the sugar over it. Using a wooden spoon, muddle the ingredients together.
2. Mix in the red wine, orange juice and brandy.
3. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours. Serve with ice.

Fun Facts About Paronella Park

1. Plan on visiting Paronella Park? Well, if you look closely, you can see José's fingerprints in the concrete structures.
2. Teresa did end up marrying Pino Zerlotti.
3. Paronella Park has more lives than a cat, enduring the floods of 1967, 1972 and 1974; a fire in 1979; Cyclone Winifred in 1986; another flood in 1994; and two subsequent cyclones—Larry in 2006 and Yasi in 2011.
4. The park was sold out of the family in 1977 and, for a time, was closed to the public. In 1993, the Evans family purchased it and remain its current owners.
5. The Evans family also bought Mena Creek Hotel, which Mr Noone built, in 2013.
6. In 2009, the original hydroelectric plant was fully restored, turning the heritage-listed park into an eco-tourism attraction that operates on 100 per cent carbon-neutral energy.
7. While many guests enjoyed swimming in Mena Creek during Paronella's time, today it is a strict no-no due to the murky water and confirmed presence of saltwater crocodiles—the resident eels can also deliver a painful bite.
8. Two movies have been filmed at Paronella Park: *Sniper* (1993) and *Celeste* (2018).
9. The most famous UFO event in Queensland history occurred just south of the park near Tully. On January 19, 1966, banana farmer George Pedley reported seeing a rotating, blue-grey saucer rise from Horseshoe Lagoon before it vanished into the sky. Upon investigating the scene, he and local police discovered a flattened, nine-metre circular 'nest' of reeds spinning clockwise in the water, alongside several smaller depressions nearby.

Further Reading

- **La Vall de Santa Creu:**
elportdelaselva.cat/en/tourism/what-to-visit/la-vall-de-santa-creu/
- **Paronella Park:**
paronellapark.com.au/about/the-park/brief-history
- **ABC:**
abc.net.au/news/2024-03-03/paronella-park-success-heritage-listed-history



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