

Booklist

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The Storm We Made.

By Vanessa Chan

Jan. 2024. 352p. Scribner/Marysue Rucci, \$27 (9781668015148); e-book (9781668015162)

The lofty incentive is “Asia for Asians, a world in which white men didn’t always win.” The century-and-a-half of British occupation of Malaya (now Malaysia) is about to be interrupted by the invading Japanese, who will become savage, decimating masters until their defeat at the end of WWII. But before that, Malayan wife and mother Cecily believes the charismatic General Fujiwara’s promises of racial autonomy and decides to become a spy, convincing herself that she’s enabling a freer future. Ten years later, in 1945, Cecily’s family implodes—retribution, she knows, for her prior actions. Malaysian-born, Brooklyn-based novelist Chan’s debut is an intricate puzzle in which she deftly moves narrative pieces in time and among viewpoints. Cecily’s colluding confessions are intertwined with her children’s experiences under Japanese rule. Her son disappears. Her younger daughter is hidden to save her from sexual enslavement. Her older daughter perilously serves drunken soldiers in a tea house. Chan’s author’s note reveals that because her grandparents and other survivors “do not speak about their lives from 1941–1945” under Japanese rule, Chan resurrects and shares their missing stories.

— *Terry Hong*