

THE WORD

**GROWING UP,
COMING
HOME**

We chat with Singapore-born, California-based writer Sandi Tan on the release of her new book



WHAT DO YOU TELL PEOPLE YOUR BOOK IS ABOUT?

I try to tell people it's a supernatural

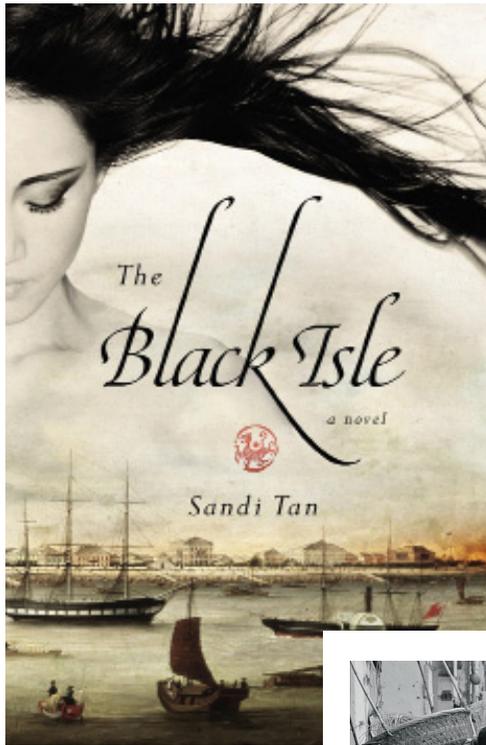
coming-of-age story with a strong heroine that's also a capsule of Asia in the 20th century, from colonialism through World War II to independence and beyond.

TELL US ABOUT CASSANDRA AS THE PROTAGONIST.

I think readers identify with Cassandra because she is wild, passionate, brave and imperfect. *The Black Isle* is very much the story of her journey from young girl to responsible, powerful adult, and is as much about the taming of Cassandra's emotions and desires as about the harnessing of her supernatural skills.

WHERE DO YOU IMAGINE PEOPLE READING YOUR BOOK?

On the beach, on the plane, but mostly in bed in the middle of the night. I've received numerous letters from readers who tell me



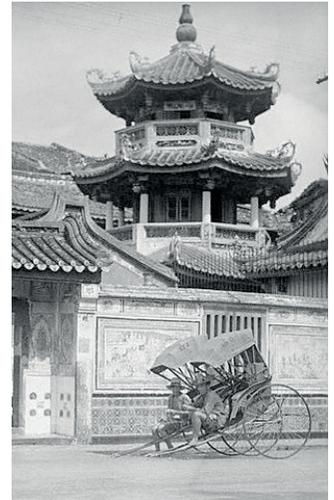
they've stayed up all night reading the book. Others say I owe them sleep because they're so scared they couldn't go to sleep!

WHAT BOOKS DO YOU ENJOY?

Housekeeping by Marilynne Robinson, *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville, *2666* by Roberto Bolaño and *Train Dreams* by Denis Johnson.

WHAT'S YOUR SINGAPORE HOMECOMING RITUAL LIKE?

I must stop at the truly fantastic Kinokuniya bookstore to load up on new paperbacks and books on Asia. Meet friends on stormy afternoons at the gorgeous National Museum (the café has great glass walls through which to watch rainstorms!), and to visit my favourite tembusu tree at the old Botanic Gardens on Cluny Rd. My favourite food stops are Blue Ginger for Peranakan food, Hua Ting (at Orchard Hotel) for refined Cantonese, Sabar Menanti on Kandahar Street for spectacular nasi



These black and white photos are examples of those that gave author Sandi Tan inspiration for her debut novel

padang, Komala Vilas on Serangoon Road for their special rawa masala dosai and crunchy murukku.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR LATEST VISIT HOME.

I was startled by how many of the old Club Street shophouses had been reincarnated into simulacra of places you'd find in New York or London, albeit in miniature. Then we drove up to the hidden dead end of the street and gawked at my grandfather's old haunts and I realised we could be nowhere else but Singapore. ★

Hachette Book Group, RRP S\$22, ISBN 9781455516544. Available at MPH Bookstores.