

TAN, Shaun. *Tales from Outer Suburbia*. Crows Nest, NSW : Allen & Unwin, 2008.
92p.
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Illustrated Short Stories. Age 12+ A new Shaun Tan publication is always a treat and ***Tales from Outer Suburbia*** is no different. There is much to pore over and savour in this lavishly illustrated book for older children. Fifteen tales written by Tan, illustrated in varying styles, populate the book.

Tan recognises some of the politics that have influenced Australia over the last few years: *Alert but not Alarmed* is a humorous interpretation of how xenophobia was turned around, to the benefit of all mankind. *Wake* is a warning to those who think cruelty to animals is acceptable. Globalisation is one focus of *Our Expedition*. Designed as a page from a newspaper, the depth of *The Amnesia Machine* is linked to the articles surrounding it; meaning can be made from the articles which appear only in part. Comment on interpersonal relationships abound: *Eric*, *No Other Country* and *Broken Toys* allude to the richness of life lived in harmony with others. *Grandpa's Story* is an allegory of the trials and sacrifices of a successful married life.

Tan's use of colour and illustrative style is interesting; the apparent grey wastelands of *Grandpa's Story* reflect the difficult times, the colour used in the last page is the happy ending. The frescoes and almost religious paintings of *No Other Country* depict the richness of belonging. The suburban malaise is successfully rendered by muted tones and sparse reality in *Stick Figures*.

Tan has created some weird and wonderful characters, places and concepts, giving children and parents or teachers much to discuss, ponder and interpret. The stories move from playful to serious and thoughtful. The end papers are hilarious and time seemed to disappear while I pored over the numerous illustrations.

Designed to look like a parcel sent through the mail, the contents page uses postage stamps to point to the chapter names and page numbers. They are a delight and, of course, beautifully illustrated. I also love the acknowledgements page, with the date-due slip and the old Browne borrowing system used to impart thanks.

Tales from Outer Suburbia is a rich book, both in illustration and meaning. With a sumptuous presentation, this is another winner for Tan! Highly recommended.

Judith Way (VIC)

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