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The Arrival



Synopsis

A truly remarkable work of art that is already one of the most talked-about book of the season."A shockingly imaginative graphic novel that captures the sense of adventure and wonder that surrounds a new arrival on the shores of a shining new city. Wordless, but with perfect narrative flow, Tan gives us a story filled with cityscapes worthy of Winsor McCay." -- Jeff Smith, author of Bone"A magical river of strangers and their stories!" -- Craig Thompson, author of Blankets"Magnificent." -- David Small, Caldecott Medalist

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

There are some books that come across my plate that strike me as mildly amusing. There are some books I develop a passion for over time. But once in a very great while, one per year if I'm lucky, I will find a book that gives me a powerful shock. An almost electric, instantaneous passion. "The Arrival" by Shaun Tan is the most amazing thing I've had the pleasure to read in years. A silent story of sequenced panels, "The Arrival" tells the story of a man's immigration to a strange new land, and the people and places he discovers in the course of finding a place to call home. I have never read any book that puts the reader so perfectly into the shoes of someone who finds themselves somewhere that is completely and utterly bewildering to the senses. A man prepares to leave his family for a new world. Tearfully they let him go as he boards a ship for another land. Once he arrives, he finds himself at a loss. Everything from the language to the buildings to the birds is

strange here. The reader of this book sympathizes easily with the man since author/illustrator Shaun Tan has created a world that is just as odd to us as it is to our protagonist. Appliances consist of confusing pulls and toggles. People live and work in plate and cone-shaped structures, traveling via dirigibles and strange ship-shaped machinations of flight. As the man proceeds to discover how to find lodging, food, and work, he meets other immigrants who tell their own stories of hardship and escape. Through all this, our man grows richer for his experiences and even grows to love the odd little white-legged cat-sized tadpole creature that follows him everywhere. By the end, his family has arrived as well and the last image in the book is of his daughter as she helps another immigrant get directions in this dazzling and magnificent city. Sometimes you fall in love with a book when you remember all the tiny details and little moments in it. At one point our hero looks in a pot and sees a spiked tail of a boy's pet. The man is shocked and frightened and has to explain that he comes from a land where spiked tails have a horrific significance. Another time you get quick easy-to-miss little glimpses of everyday street scenes. A couple loading gigantic eggs into a cart on a street. A man getting a shave as a family of dog-sized hermit crabs scuttle underfoot. Street musicians surrounded by foxlike birds playing instruments you've never seen before. The book can feel like it's excerpting scenes from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* one moment and then *In America* the next. And I've rarely seen an illustrator capture images of laughter, real honest-to-goodness laughter, any better Tan has here. On his website, the artist credits much of his research to a variety of books about the immigrant experience, to say nothing of his father's memories of coming to Australia from Malaysia, interviews Tan conducted himself, and photographs that have found their way into this title as well. In another part of his website, Tan explains that in this book, "the absence of any written description also plants the reader more firmly in the shoes of an immigrant character." Tan is undoubtedly at his best when he allows the reader the chance to feel the sense of wonder and confusion that comes from immersing yourself in a culture you're unfamiliar with. At one point our hero has dinner with a charming family. They eat odd spiky dishes that are prepared with unfamiliar torches. They play instruments you've never seen before and speak of escaping unimaginable, almost metaphorical, horrors. You are the main character in this book. His confusion is your confusion, and quite frankly he seems to adapt to his surroundings far better than I think most of us could. The language you encounter at all times is indecipherable. Even the clocks and the forms of transportation are magnificent and frightening. Yet at the same time, many of the people the man encounters are kind and try to help him navigate about. Tan knows too that if he makes the familiar just a little bit unfamiliar, that alone can confuse someone. So when the immigrants pull into a harbor, they see two large statues shaking hands in lieu of The Statue of Liberty. I loved the animal companions that

latch on to the humans in this book. They reminded me of Philip Pullman's, His Dark Materials daemons, though if they have any kind of spiritual significance it's left to the reader to determine what that might be. As Tan says on his site, "I am often searching in each image for things that are odd enough to invite a high degree of personal interpretation, and still maintain a ring of truth." He is not interested in the kind of symbolism where one object will stand for only one thing. He prefers to let people interpret his pictures in whatsoever way they prefer. If you feel these strange little animal companions are meant to symbolize how a person adapts to their new location, so be it. Tan isn't going to tell you what to think. He's just going to give you a helluva story and then let you do the rest yourself. The art itself is phenomenal. Every language you see in this book is obviously made up, but no two languages you see here look the same. I repeat: You can tell the differences between separate imaginary languages. The realism of the style makes each picture look like a grainy sepia photograph taped inside a photo album. In fact, Tan has said that, "I was also struck with the idea of borrowing the 'language' of old pictorial archives and family photo albums I'd been looking at, which have both a documentary clarity and an enigmatic, sepia-toned silence. It occurred to me that photoalbums are really just another kind of picture book that everybody makes and reads, a series of chronological images illustrating the story of someone's life." So many of the memories in this book have a buckled quality to their corners. They look bent or pasted into the book in some way. There are wrinkles and tears and pieces that have flaked off over time. The quality of the sepia changes too. Sometimes the story is black and white, sometimes a golden honeyed-brown. In one sequence an old man remembers marching off to war. When going through a town the pictures appear in warm tones. Then we watch just the man's feet as they step over rocks and streams and the dead, and the palette grows darker and starker until we've just the blurred image of feet running. There's a quick view of the men attacking and then a single full page spread of black and white bones in a field. I didn't realize it at first, but I've been a fan of Shaun Tan's work for years. In 2003 I was living in Minneapolis, Minnesota during a time when their main library branch was undergoing renovations. On a whim I visited their off-site location and wandered through their children's room, looking for anything good. And there, standing all by its lonesome in the center of the space, was a striking picture book entitled, *The Rabbits* by John Marsden, illustrated by Shaun Tan. It was like nothing I'd ever read before. Published by the always magnificent Simply Read Books, the story was a crushing description of a native group of aboriginal animals destroyed utterly and totally by an invading society of rabbits. The words were heartbreaking in and of themselves, but the illustrations were the real draw. They contained magnificent intricate details hidden within page after page of text. Shaun Tan is like an industrialized and roughened William Joyce. His societies are full of dirt

and muck and unspoken unstated horrors. They can reek of displacement more effectively than fifty pages of text could ever convey. So while "The Arrival" felt familiar to me, I didn't immediately associate it with its creator's former works. The feel of vast unfamiliar cityscapes is still present, but Tan leavens this latest offering with his human figures. It seems almost unfair to the other publishers that Scholastic would have the wherewithal to publish not only this book but also Brian Selznick's, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* in the same year. Scholastic has been especially good lately at locating books with strong visual narratives and adding them to their catalog. From the re-released colorized versions of Jeff Smith's *Bone* series to Raina Telgemeier's graphic novel adaptation of *The Baby-Sitters Club*, Scholastic is pushing the envelope time and again. My deepest hope is that "The Arrival" finds its audience. Because I could write paragraphs and paragraphs more about the meticulous details and searing personal portraits found in this story, I'll just cut myself off now. Be sure to corner me at a party sometime, though, and I'll wax eloquent for days on end if you let me. It takes a deft hand to draw a book that can tell an emotionally resonant story without a single word and that works entirely in the medium of pictures. Shaun Tan says that "Even the most imaginary phenomena in the book are intended to carry some metaphorical weight..." I cannot praise this book highly enough then. Every story, every face, and every person in this book feels as if they carry the weight of a thousand memories. You read this book in no doubt that Tan's research and personal history has given "The Arrival" the hardest thing any novel can have; a soul. The best book published in America in 2007.

Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* may be the most beautiful book I've ever seen. *The Arrival* is a 128 page picture book that tells the story of an immigrant. It could be the story of any immigrant going to any new land, but it happens to be the story of a man heading off to a bizarre yet beautiful world that is so unfamiliar to anything that we know of today to set up a home for his wife and child. The food, the creatures, the jobs, the way of life, the way of travel...it's all new and bizarre and told beautifully through Tan's haunting, sepia toned artwork. Each villager that he meets has their own story of how they came to the land and what they left behind. What Tan presents is an homage to every migrant that's ever traveled to a new world and set up a new life for themselves. The story is told through pictures only - no words, and no words are needed. This is a beautiful book and I can't help but feel that every family should have a copy on their bookshelf.

Shaun Tan's book is a feast for the eyes and a gentle reminder of the difficulties that everyone faces adapting to a new environment. My son just started middle school at a new school and this book

was a lovely way of reminding him that change is hard for everyone, not just children. This book could just as easily be for adults however, as it's political overtones are clear: the drive to escape oppression, lack of freedom, and poverty.

I saw this book amongst a few Dr.Seus books on the shelf today. It hit me pretty hard when I started going through it. Me and my girlfriend are from vastly different countries with a language barrier, and this book hit on those feelings of displacement. We have both spent time feeling like an outsider in an alien land and without words this book conveys every little detail of the pain and hope of arrival. When we get back to my country I will buy this book immediately!

As a librarian, I am familiar with the pros and cons of what is termed the 'graphic novel,' but to be honest have never seen such an argument for them. This book tells its tale entirely in pictures, no little 'bubbles' of thought to distract from its honest and beautiful theme...not that you need them. Its sepia-toned and varied artwork 'reads' almost like an old-fashioned film strip, the eye drawn from one to the next in a continuous story. I 'read' the story through in a few minutes, but there is so much gorgeous detail that I could spend a few minutes on each page. Each section feels like a separate work of art. Not to mention the extraordinary themes of sacrifices for love, overcoming the past, hope for the future, empathy with others, beauty in simplicity, and many many others. The perceptive reader will catch the references to the very real past of immigration and war among the fantastical, but even a younger reader may enjoy the story of the young man in a strange place, working to bring his family where there is still peace and beauty. This book shines like a jewel in a dark world. In my opinion, if there is any sense in the book-award-winning world, this will gain the shining accolades it well deserves. Buy it, read it, absorb it, read it again, and put its message into practice. The world will be a better place for the kindness of strangers.

More often than not, wordless comics somehow inspire the reader to move faster rather than slow down and enjoy the view. Shaun Tan's sumptuously detailed drawings in THE ARRIVAL work to the opposite. I found myself holding the book out from my body so I could enjoy the images in full, lingering on a page or a sequence of panels and letting the enormity of the small moments the artist captures sink in and take effect. This incredible book recasts the Ellis Island experience as a journey to a phantasmagorical land of strange languages, machines, and creatures, creating a delightful visual metaphor for the alien wonders of a new world, even when that world is part of our own, separated from us only by an ocean. THE ARRIVAL is a stirring picture book of the best kind.

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