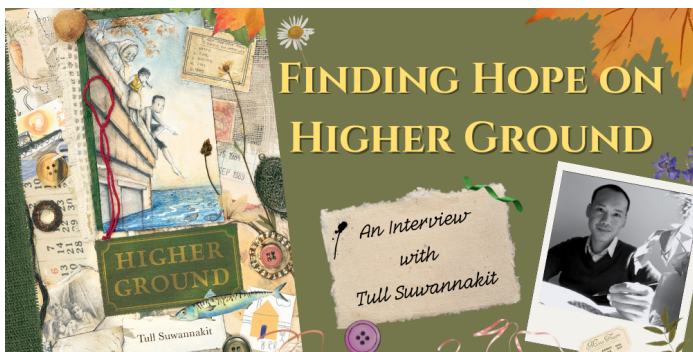


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Finding Hope on Higher Ground: An Interview with Tull Suwannakit

By [Young Writers](#) | [Author Interview](#)



We chat to author and illustrator Tull Suwannakit about his new book 'Higher Ground'

Higher Ground has such a unique style, blending a graphic novel, picture book and diary format – what inspired you to create the book in this way?

My inspiration comes from my personal experience growing up living in various parts of the world, in which scattered memories of life lessons, resilience and skills become a collection of diary entries. This, together with my background in animation and children’s book creation, helped bring my vision to

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life.

Could you tell us about the characters in Higher Ground? Do you have a favourite among them?

The protagonists of the story consist of; a grandmother who is old and frail, but keeps hope alive through her strong determination and words of wisdom, a boy and his younger sister who must learn all life lessons and skills in order to survive and overcome the harshness of the changing world they live in, and their pet rabbit. I find connection with the narrator of the story (the boy), as he reminds me of when I was a child around his age (8-9 years old), growing up and living away from home in a different country where resilience, independence and resourcefulness hold the key to adapting in an alienating new place.

Higher Ground explores powerful themes like climate resilience and hope. What message do you hope young readers take away from the story?

It is my hope that the readers can learn the importance of family values and to find those silver linings in times of need. Readers can develop a deeper understanding and respect for nature and to shape a more empathetic world through the underlying message of climate change. Lastly, sustainability and conserving of resources can also play an important part for the young readers.

Was there a particular scene in Higher Ground that was your favourite to write or illustrate?

I'm particularly fond of the scene in which the characters sat down for dinner together. It didn't matter to them how grand or simple the meal was, but what mattered was the feeling of togetherness. It's the wonders like these that encourage us to cherish every moment in life, which I find to be powerful and captivating.

What was the most challenging part of creating this book? How did you overcome that challenge?

Since the story spanned a number of years from beginning to end, one of my biggest challenges while illustrating this book was how to depict the characters as they grow and age throughout the story. I had to come up with detailed character sheets for each of the protagonists and work out how their physical appearance, mannerisms, features and postures changed as the story progressed

If you could step into the world of Higher Ground, where would you go and what would you do?

If that time really does come, taking refuge in a

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lighthouse might not be a bad idea. I would make a veggie patch up on the top deck where it would receive the most sunlight and rain. Perhaps I could use the beacon from the lighthouse to help the lost finding their way. I could also turn the lighthouse into a shelter for others and a place to exchange goods and supplies with other survivors that wander by.

You've worked on over 30 children's books - what made this project feel different or special for you?

I find that the multi-layered format of Higher Ground, which combine many elements together, making it different from anything that I have done before. What holds dear to my heart on this project is also the ability to instil my self-reflecting childhood journey into the development of the story, which creates believable and emotive-driven characters.

What's your number one tip for young storytellers?

Keep writing and it doesn't matter what you write.
Keep writing and it doesn't matter if it's perfect.
Keep writing because you like what you do.

Do you have any creative routines that help you get into the right headspace for storytelling and illustration?

Put on my favourite record, tidy up my workspace, light an incense, do a few random doodles, read a chapter of a book I have been trying to finish. Then it is time to get to work.

Can you share a hint of what you're working on next?

I am wrapping up on an anthology of Australian poems, which I provided the illustrations for. It is a collaboration with The National Library of Australia.

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us!

[Higher Ground is out now](#), published by New Frontier, and is available from all good bookshops.



About Higher Ground

Combining elements of a graphic novel with an illustrated picture book and diary, Higher Ground is an inspiring coming-of-age tale about resilience, courage and spirit, that illuminates how life can be beautiful even in the darkest of times.

After a great flood, a grandmother, her two grandchildren and their pet rabbit must learn to survive living on their rooftop garden, relying on scarce resources and limited space. Days turn into weeks, and weeks into months, but through life lessons and words of wisdom, hope emerges.

The book introduces young readers to themes of sustainable living practices and strength in the face of adversity and climate disaster, offering important life lessons for a generation of children growing up in an increasingly precarious society and environment.

The unique format creates an innovative and accessible reading experience suitable for ages five and above, while the stunning hardback package will be loved by adults and children alike; a book to be cherished and passed down across generations.

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