



It Never Happened Again: Two Stories

Sam Alden

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Two exquisite stories drawn in Sam Alden's signature, flowing, and lush pencil style. In "Hawaii 1997," few words are spoken, but Alden's imagery evokes the magic of a night-time encounter at a Hawaiian resort. In "Anime" he explores the complicated dynamics of pop culture obsession. Sam Alden is one of the brightest young talents working today.

Sam Alden was born in 1988 in Portland, Oregon. In 2013 he was an official guest at the BilBOLbul festival in Bologna, Italy, and his ongoing comic *Haunter* will be excerpted in the forthcoming *Best American Comics* 2013 from Houghton-Mifflin. He now lives and works as an illustrator and cartoonist in his hometown of Portland, with plans to move to Montreal, Quebec, in the fall. Sam lives alone with no pets and has won no awards.

It Never Happened Again: Two Stories Details

Date : Published August 5th 2014 by Uncivilized Books (first published July 8th 2014)

ISBN : 9780988901469

Author : Sam Alden

Format : Paperback 96 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Comics, Fiction, Short Stories, Graphic Novels Comics

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From Reader Review It Never Happened Again: Two Stories for online ebook

Rae says

Sam Alden is a masterful storyteller and visual artist, but I have to question why this collection had only two stories that one can blow through in under 30 minutes. I wish his work was being published in a larger collection, or that he would take on a larger project than he's done up to this point. As for the actual content- there is no question in my mind that Alden is one of the greatest living graphic novelists of our time and will go down in history as such. There is such a natural talent that it is almost painful to look at.

Sonic says

Sam Alden has two very depressing stories to share with the world, and by golly he is not going to let his own laziness, or inability to draw or whatever, stop him from sharing these pointless depressing stories.

lol

I know I sound like a jerk here, but this book was "mildly infuriating." If you told me you had some half-ass sketches by Jack Kirby, I would be interested, ... but this?

Why was this published?

Angie says

Two very interesting stories about people looking for connections. In Hawaii 1997, a young boy on vacation in Hawaii spends a magical night playing with a girl on the beach. The beach is very different at night than it is during the day and it seems almost like a fantasy landscape to the kids. They only have that one night of connection though. In Anime, a girl is obsessed with an anime series and learns Japanese in order to travel there. She is looking for connections she can't seem to make at home, but finds things aren't really that different in Japan. Both stories are told through rough pencil sketches and very little text. There is a desperation in some of the images that really highlights the depth these characters want to connect to others. Very interesting!

Dov Zeller says

Spare and beautiful but also in its way excessive and meandering, the two stories in this book follow people who seek something elusive, a sense of connection and belonging. The stories are not similar, in a way strangely paired, but for the existentially painful circumstances and touches of humor. The stories aren't crafted to a kind of clean perfection. They're atmospherically sketched and a bit messy (unrefined), which I appreciate. What I was left with at the end was a feeling of the protagonists' aloneness and longing for connection which was, in itself, a kind of mesmerizing force, creative and destructive.

Helen says

This book, a graphic novel, consists of two short stories written and drawn by Sam Alden - I was impressed with each of them, Mr. Alden certainly can express much in his pencil drawing style, which refreshingly eschews slickness. The text of the first story (Hawaii 1997) is minimal, there is more text in the second story (Anime) perhaps because Anime was the more complex story, whereas Hawaii 1997 was more a "poem" in pictures, capturing a fleeting yet meaningful moment, while Anime examines the many strands that went into the bundle of alienation and possibly misery that comprises the protagonist, Janet/Kiki. Anime consists of a look into young adult angst, why Janet/Kiki can't really ever fit in, even when she has achieved the object of her dreams or fantasies - a trip to Japan. She's still dissatisfied with her life - the only time we ever see Janet smile is when a waitress at a donut shop in Japan compliments her on her flawless Japanese accent, after Janet explains that she taught herself Japanese online. This was the one moment of triumph for Janet, in a life of one disappointment after another, as depicted in the series of vignettes of disappointments, not fitting in, that make up the story. The story, like Hawaii 1997, is well-drawn and well-written - if the reader is supposed to feel pain in the end, that a small compliment for her incredible achievement of teaching herself Japanese, a notoriously difficult language to master, is the one thing that brought her joy, then the story accomplished its purpose. It's strangely powerful in that sense - maybe more so given the drawing style, it's very effective in conveying the "box" the protagonist is in - seemingly "trapped" in a job that she doesn't much like, living in a basement apartment with a boyfriend she may have just abandoned while on the trip to Japan, finding herself with no money at the ATM - which may mean she has missed her flight, and thus is stuck in Japan, unhappy with her family, and unable to even make friends, since the people she runs into at the bus stop regard her as somehow "dorky." I'm not sure if the reader is supposed to think of the ending of Anime as "hopeful" or "upbeat" - I just saw it as somewhat pathetic, that the compliment from the waitress resulted in the only instance of Janet smiling in the entire story.

Hawaii 1997 is a poem in drawings and a few words about a long ago fleeting encounter on a beach in Hawaii. The drawings express the enchantment of the evening, moonlight, shadows cast by palm trees, and so forth - the protagonist meets a girl who is reluctant to strike up a conversation, when the protagonist runs after her, before she vanishes she tells him that she will be the one "you will spend the rest of your life trying to find..." And so, this incident ends in mystery and frustration - what was it that Sam (the protagonist/author) did wrong? Why did the girl run away - or was the girl only an illusion, a mirage, an optical illusion caused by the shifting shadows and shimmering moonlight? It may be that Hawaii 1997 is a meditation on loss, and the passage of time - as 1997 is about 20 years ago, and Sam was clearly only an adolescent or even a child, when he was wandering around by himself on the beach in Hawaii. Or, the story once again encapsulates the protagonist's inability to connect with another human being - similar to the way Janet in Anime was unable to make friends, and even might have left her boyfriend at the end. Sam Alden, according to the book's blurb, was born in 1988 - if Hawaii is autobiographical, then he was only 9 years ago at the time of the encounter, or imagined/symbolic event, described in the Hawaii 1997 story.

Mr. Alden is clearly extremely talented and a very fine draftsman - Hawaii reminded me of a dream, the sketchiness of the pencil drawing style, which could be erased at any moment, is exactly like recollections of dreams, which seem to evaporate, fall apart, as one awakes - unless the dreamer jots them down right away. The special quality of the book is it's revelation of the truth of the difficulty of making connections with others - since we are all misfits, or alone, in some way, the book should be "relevant" or resonate with many readers. Exactly the way sad songs about lost loves are always the most popular numbers - since loss and the awareness of transiency and the passage of time, are universal sources of angst.

I am looking forward to new works by Sam Alden - he was able to recount, by means of a powerful/effective volume, consisting of two short stories, incidents of incredible emotional impact, even without many words. The power of Alden's work is in his drawings, the wise selection of incidents to highlight Janet's plight. For some reason, Hawaii 1997 reminded me (again - since another GN I recently read, The Fox and the Star, also reminded me of the St. Exupery classic) of The Little Prince. Does Sam achieve insight/an epiphany/self-knowledge/wisdom at the end of his chase on the beach - as the Fox did when he finally looked up at the multitude of stars? Was Sam's run on the beach symbolic of his life's journey - chasing after truth, perhaps? Perhaps this is reading too much into Hawaii 1997 - either way, the story and the book are both well worth reading.

David Schaafsma says

Two stories sketched out (and they really seem like they were copied from a sketchbook, pencil drawn, with some eraser marks still there, but this guy has talent. The first story is more accessible, a series of moments on a "Hawaii 1997" vacation, understated, few words, atmospheric. The second, "Anime," is actually more complex and may indicate yet another rich direction for this artist. This feels in some ways like young, unpolished stuff, but there is much potential in the artistry and storytelling.

Mika Lietzén says

A twofer in pencil; in "Hawaii 1997", a young boy on a vacation meets a girl, and a chase ensues. The drawings are rudimentary and barely there, but the nightly mood is good and the girl's final line in the story is priceless, breaking the fourth wall with glorious glee.

The second story, "Anime", features an obsessed anime fan preparing for her long-expected trip to Japan; the character is a train wreck in slo-mo, an unhappy social outsider, who perhaps believes that in Japan she will be happy. But as usual, wherever you go, there you are, and nothing really ever gets left behind. It's a great story, told with just the right narrative emphasis; most of the story dwells on the character's everyday life, with her somewhat disappointing trip to Japan condensed into several pages of mute panels. There's a little coda to her misery, though, a small thing that makes her day. And the reader's, too, for that matter.

Hollowspine says

"Hawaii 1997"

I wondered if he'd ever shared the story with others before. As children, so often supervised it's interesting to see what they get up to when alone. Also interesting to reflect how easily games are introduced when we're children, yet the strangeness of these brief encounters on vacation that often fade from memory. I enjoyed the sketched quality of the pages, which lent them a dream-like tone.

"Anime"

This one really reached me. I took many Japanese language and culture classes as an undergrad, basically for no other reason than an interest in Japan. I remember distinctly sitting in the hallway before my first Japanese language class with a few of my fellow students and thinking to myself, "I can't let anyone know that I like anime." Observing my fellows before that class I had realized that they were all much more enthusiastic about the anime/manga aspects of Japan than I would ever be. I knew how difficult it was to speak to people obsessed by something rather than merely interested in it, so I determined never to confess an interest in magical girls, mecha or battle manga, all of which I actually followed avidly.

Janet, or as she would prefer 'Kiki,' fits into that obsessed group. I could sympathize with her feelings of alienation and in-betweeness. I felt that she was waiting for her life to begin. If only she could go to Japan, somehow everything would make sense. Even at the bus stop, among people with similar interests Janet was awkward. If I were at that bus stop I wouldn't be like Danielle, encouraging her, but more like her unnamed Korean-American friend, turning away or looking at the ground to hide my disdain and embarrassment.

Alden's art was especially effective in the scenes where Janet explores Japan. We only see her back and her slumped shoulders as she attempts to navigate what one assumes she thought would be familiar welcoming places, yet instead finds busy, confusing and crowded world filled with people unconcerned with her or the magical world of Kiki's Delivery Service. She ends up returning to her comfort zone, the futon and dvd collection. No matter where one goes, one cannot escape oneself, that is the main message here. At the end Janet seems listless, she cannot even muster the energy to be worried when she misses her flight home. I wonder what will become of her

Harris says

After reading "It Never Happened Again," by Sam Alden, an artist I had not previously heard of, I will definitely look for more of his work. The two short stories included in this interesting graphic novel, "Hawaii, 1997" and "Anime," are both emotion rich and heartfelt depictions of life and how we try to fit into it. Sam Alden's sketchy, almost crude style, filled with rough pencil strokes on white backgrounds, highlights the feelings of alienation and loneliness of the characters. Its minimalism really fits the themes here.

In both stories, young characters find themselves wandering around trying to figure out their lives in relation to others. It reminds me of childhood memories that you recall vaguely as being something important, but you cannot put your finger on how. The first, "Hawaii, 1997" is an autobiographical account of Alden's trip to Hawaii as a preteen and his short friendship with a girl from New Jersey, while "Anime" follows the 20-year old Japanophile Janet (aka, Kiki), as she struggles with feelings of alienation in her Oregon home town and looks forward to her trip to Japan (but will this travel be as changing as she believes it will be?) Both stories skirt the line between melancholy and hope, like so much memory.

PvOberstein says

It Never Happened Again is a collection of two mini-graphic novels/comic series by Portlander/Montrealer Sam Alden the first of which was initially published on Tumblr. The two stories - Hawaii 1997 and Anime,

both deal with individuals feeling disconnected from their immediate world, both of whom attempt to “find” a sense of belonging. (I think.)

In Hawaii 1997 the search is very literal, the protagonist chasing an enigmatic girl across the beaches of Hawai'i, only to come up short. It works fine as an analogy, though I mostly wondered if the art style was meant to evoke the chaos and confusion of van Gogh's *The Starry Night*.

Anime, meanwhile, follows the tried-and-tested formula of sending an anime-loving geek from Middle America(?) to Tokyo, in an attempt to experience a culture that feels truer than the one they were born into. It's a quiet and somewhat poignant tale, unromantic in its depiction of the Otaku's Promised Land. Though as in the previous story, the penciled grayscale art style kept making me think of Megatokyo.

You can easily breeze through these stories, and will be rewarded with a vague sense of melancholy (or maybe ennui?). I can't say that either really 'spoke' to me, though.

(Bad Liara. No more reviewing meandering stories of discovery and meaning. You clearly lack the emotional range to appreciate them).

MariNaomi says

I loved this so much, I read it twice in a sitting, and then I pored over individual panels. What delicate storytelling and beautiful artwork. Sam Alden is a comics god.

Lara says

I saw this title on some list or another of best books of 2014, so I figured I'd check it out, but it honestly didn't do much for me at all. The illustrations are all sketched out pencil drawings, and some of them have a certain beauty to them, but I felt like in a lot of panels it was hard to tell what exactly Alden was going for. And while I understood the mood Alden was trying to evoke in each story, I couldn't actually feel it. I don't know, I guess I was just expecting something a little more fully developed somehow. Meh.

Matt Graupman says

I love and hate Sam Alden's comics. I love them because they're so confident and "out there." His beautiful pencils don't leave him anywhere to hide; you can see each stroke, every texture, and, in some cases, his underlying guide drawings. It's all right there, you can easily see how he crafts each panel. I hate his comics because I'm so jealous of how he's able to make such a feat seem so effortless; it's a rare and special talent that can pull off something so open and subtle.

"It Never Happened Again: Two Stories" is comprised of the autobiographical (?), nearly wordless "Hawaii 1997" and "Anime", a fictional tale about an outsider named Kiki who's fixated on Japanese culture, especially their animated cartoons. In each story, Alden is extremely successful. I can't say enough good things about his sketchy pencil art; I was simply blown away by many panels, in particular, one where a character is not wearing his glasses and Alden renders his blurry perspective in fuzzy erased lines. Amazing!

There is no doubt in my mind that Sam Alden is going to be remembered as one of the best comics creators of all time. His work just keeps getting better and better; more creative, riskier, and more unique. "It Never Happened Again: Two Stories" is the product of a passionate student of comics and, in my opinion, he's graduated and I'm dying to see what he creates next.

Xian Xian says

Borrowed from the library

I was looking through the library at school like usual and I found this, a small paperback. It was pink and brand spanking new. And to me, it looked like a novel, which was why I was weirded out by it. Most graphic novels that come in this size are usually manga, but this wasn't manga.

I never knew who this guy was and apparently his popularity came from Tumblr, I must've not had one during that time, because I've literally never heard of him or seen his artwork. Even the publisher is unfamiliar to me. And so I decided to read this during a Monday hour break in between my classes. It took me two days to read since I didn't want to take it out of the library.

The artwork made my eyes go inwards or something, I was completely shocked at it. Not because the artwork was complex and had beautiful lines, but because it was this sort of scrape in type of artwork. It was cute but it took awhile to get used to. It reminded me of how I use to just take a pencil and just scrape the graphite point against the loose leaf paper and then make drawings by using the eraser. Maybe I can put a picture here? My biggest problem with this volume is that it was honestly hard to see stuff, words and backgrounds, but thankfully it was only the first part.

<http://www.cakechicago.com/wp-content...>

Yep it looks like that, at least for that scene and this part is from the first short story in this duo, "Hawaii 1997". The first short story is a little vague to me, mostly because of the artwork and because I couldn't read the author's writing well. I feel like he did it on purpose and this is a short story so it will wrap up pretty fast and sweet whether you like it or not. Basically what happens is this kid lives in Hawaii and he visits a beach and is looking at the scenery. Then this girl comes around, attracts his attention and then he follows her. They play hide and seek or tag and she disappears, not in a spooky way, but in a I'm-all-by-myself way. It kind of resonates with me when I think about it now, when you're a kid, things are pretty surreal and they sort of disappear before your eyes or something and the world always seems to be out of your control.

The second short story is called "Anime". The artwork is more detailed in this and there's more dialogue in this, the first story had almost no dialogue at all. It's about this anime fangirl who loves anime so much that she wants to visit Japan and she learns basic Japanese. She wants to visit Japan and fantasizes it as a dreamland where she will be accepted for her anime fandom. This story sort of puts a message out there for people who fetishize cultures. There's a scene where she asks a girl who is Korean American about something Japanese (I don't remember) and the girl gives her a dirty look and reminds her that she isn't Japanese. When the girl goes to Japan, she's disappointed and lonely, culture shocked and shattered. She meets a Japanese woman in the restaurant who speaks English and feels somewhat comfortable with her lack of Japanese language and is somewhat at ease.

A reoccurring theme in these two short stories is misplacement and loneliness and no one hears or sees you.

It's vague, the story telling is minimal and instead lets you navigate it yourself. There's not much dialogue or complex imagery in this volume so you can read it one sitting. I'm disappointed I didn't know about this guy earlier and this is why I love libraries and fondling book spines, I always manage to find something super nice.

Rating: 4/5

Originally posted on Notes on the Shore

Cary says

consistently my favorite artist, consistent awe
