



Sin Titulo

Cameron Stewart

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Following the death of his grandfather, young Alex Mackay discovers a mysterious photograph in the old man's belongings that sets him on an adventure like no other—where dreams and reality merge, family secrets are laid bare, and lives are irrevocably altered.

CAMERON STEWART'S EISNER AWARD-WINNING WEBCOMIC!

*The complete webcomic in one volume.

*Neo noir mystery thriller with semiautobiographical elements.

Sin Titulo Details

Date : Published September 25th 2013 by Dark Horse Comics (first published June 11th 2013)

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Author : Cameron Stewart

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From Reader Review Sin Titulo for online ebook

Ross McLean says

This is one of those great surrealist stories that eludes direct interpretation. I always had a sense of what the book was gesturing towards: reality, unreality, creation, destruction, art as invention, art as translation...I could never fully grasp it or put it into words but I knew that it was there and was touching upon a nerve of truth within me.

I loved it all, even if the final info-dump was a tad rushed. It would have been better if this information was spaced out a little more, or if the comic had just been longer and the ending was given more time to breath. Oh well.

The art was wonderful and fit the tone perfectly. Every panel conveyed a palpable sense of unease. I'm new to graphic novels, but I'm confident that this will remain a favourite.

Seth T. says

“When someone in World-Building presents you a summary of their world, trace back the inspirations and influences and treat their world only as a combination of those sources.”

[Panels from “Adel’s Return” in *Spera*, vol 3]

In the third volume of Josh Tierney’s *Spera*, the author concludes with a short story, “Adel’s Return,” a bit of a coda in which Tierney (among other things) explores briefly the nature of the worlds we create versus those who would hope to diminish those worlds. His investigation develops via an in-narrative couple of high school classes, World-Building and World-Breaking (both introductory courses). World-Building is the province of the idealists and World-Breaking belongs to the cynics. World-Building is the whole output of the creative and imaginative self, in which a builder invests their lives and experiences, everything they are. World-Breaking is merely a set of tricks, illusions by which the cynic might chip away at the value of anything another creates. “Adel’s Return” is a cool chapter in the middle of a cool series and flirts thematically with what I see going on in Cameron Stewart’s *Sin Titulo*. Serendipitous that I read them in the same week then, right?

One of the things about worldbuilding we don’t often recognize is that it’s only tacitly the province of fantasy and sci-fi authors. Tolkien and Bradbury and Dick and Rowling and Martin are only showing us their amateur efforts in their novels. At the end of the day, a world you give a name is a world you’ve written off as one of your lesser creations. The real deals are those worlds that we continue to build and hone and craft across the landscape of our whole lives. We never think to name these because, really, what’s in a name? A cheap taxonomy? A way of excluding all the glorious and vibrant details? A commodification of our imaginative selves? Genuine worldbuilding is the cosmos we create and recreate with every waking experience—and a good number of those that ricochet through the meat of our subconsciouses, informing our dreams and learning from the same. Genuine worldbuilding is not Middle Earth or Hogwarts or Westeros or Earthsea or whichever other podunk barely realized fantasy realm we’re so fond of. The real-deal worldbuilding takes place in every moment in the heads of every person across the globe. Billions and

billions of worlds being constructed by the minute with a fidelity and complexity never imagined by any of the inhabitants of our favourite published fictions. It's the unnamed, unpublished fictions that are the real majesties of the human creative spirit—only we're so velocitized to their presence that we forget how incredible they are.

It's in the connections that you and I forge between ourselves and the objects around us (whether animate or inanimate) that we develop the story of the world. The relationships that we draw up and then (magnificently) prove, whether between human or animal or vegetable or mineral or—most elusive of all—ideological, are fictions we craft to lend credibility to a universe that is plainly beyond the scope of any of our powers to comprehend. And because we are each of us so adept at worldbuilding, at composing a believable circumstance in which the stories of our lives might unravel themselves, we never blink at the suspension of disbelief that goes on when we do simple things like pay for gum in a supermarket line. Or when we attend a class on macroeconomics that we're merely auditing. Or when we watch a Youtube parody of Peter Jackson's film adaptation of JRR Tolkien's published story version of a storyworld that he created long before he refined it for the page. We're so talented that we would never dream of couching our interaction with the world in terms of suspended disbelief. It's only when *our* worldbuilding conflicts with the builded worlds of those around us that we encounter dissonance.[1]

So yeah, worldbuilding is serious, big-deal stuff. It's also so completely normal and average that we almost safely ignore it completely and only use the term to describe its lesser cousins, fantasy worldbuilding and science-fiction worldbuilding. Cameron Stewart hints at this not-quite-subterranean sense of world creation in *Sin Titulo*. That he does so through thoroughly science-fictional terms does little to dilute his comic's exploration of the worlds we craft for ourselves. The book doubles as both a mind-bending, reality-melting thriller *and* a discussion of what it means to build worlds (in any of its senses).

I probably might not have come to think of Stewart's story in this way had I not sat and puzzled over the purpose of the book's title, *Without Title*, sin titulo. What kind of works are the ones that remain untitled? Either the pretentious ones or the ones that seek most baldly to engage the viewer, reader, listener, or audience. Presuming that Stewart's work is not pretentious (a preference and presumption I'm willing to extend simply for how beautifully composed his artwork is), that means that Stewart wants us to think more about his work than what he's laid out most plainly in the map of his panels and in the legend found in his bubbles. He hopes his readers will depart from the trail, explore a little, forge a path through the underbrush of his story. I mean, obviously I'm guessing here. But I think the clues are there.[2]

As the bulk of Stewart's discussion of worldbuilding occurs in his climactic, expository finale, I'll demur from speaking too specifically. The author does discuss the difference between worldbuilding and true worldbuilding, founding his argument on a sort of embellishment of the Platonic forms. He posits that the true artist's concern is with creating reality rather than imitating it. In a way, we could read this as a dismissal of Tolkien-esque worldbuilding and a promotion of the kind of reality-forging that takes place in you and I in every moment. He doesn't stop there and I'm not sure he or his characters would be entirely comfortable with this reading, but that's the story within his story that affected me—the story of several characters trying to build realities in which they won't be sickened by themselves and their weaknesses. A story that somewhat exists as pedagogy, a nudge to the reader toward an existence in which the stories we

create for our lives eliminate our weakest selves and one in which our histories are not our fault.

It's a neat trick Stewart devises and it's well told. I'm not sure how ultimately convincing it is, but I'm also not sure it's intended to be that kind of a tract. Rather, Stewart leaves breadcrumbs to discussions that will be had outside his work—discussions in critical forums, bookclubs, classrooms, and in the space that exists between spouses and their conversation while driving to dinner on a Sunday evening. *Sin Titulo*, actually, is almost the perfect bookclub novel. Under two hundred pages, sitting squarely in the John-Warner-coined genre of the white, male fuck-up novel, and fraught and teeming with those kinds of interpretive hooks that lead to high anxiety frenzy and argument in the better bookclubs that dot the national landscape. It's a book about social anxiety, severed relationships, love and its absence, second chances, and the means to constructing a life that will be, at last, worthwhile and whole. Stewart's built something rather beautiful (for all its ugly bits) and even if I'm reading it entirely wrongly, I'm happy to be a part of the mythos that it develops.

I'd never read a book entirely composed by Cameron Stewart, and for all I know this may have been his first solo comics work. Whatever the case, *Sin Titulo* is a lovely production. The pages, while long and squat, hold bold and thick-lined panels filled with dynamic art—made moreso by the choice to use a taste of burlap for the book's only shader, earthy and monochromatic. The paneling sits in a uniform four-by-two grid (though here I've only reproduced rows of three for legibility reasons, *and* I don't wish to spoil any story surprises). *Sin Titulo's* cover gives up one of its greatest images, the recurrent lone tree, but at a certain point when the motif breaks from format, I found myself caught unguarded by its forceful presence. Again, lovely work.

Different readers will appreciate Stewart's narrative more or less than each other, and probably across a great range. Its twisting nature is of the kind that especially appeals to college-aged men who delight in those mind-blowing what-is-real-anyway stories like *The Matrix*, *Donnie Darko*, *The Thirteenth Floor*, and *Dark City*.^[3] Readers less enamoured with that particular trope may find themselves struggling over whether the narrative earns its conclusion. It's one of those stories that has a thousand dangling threads twenty pages before its final page and then neatly ties them up with a bunch of people standing around talking exposition. That works within the tradition Stewart's engaging here, but non-fans could be frustrated by what they might (I think unfairly) categorize as a Scooby-Doo Ending.

And at any rate, all this just builds on *Sin Titulo's* value as a great bookclub choice. Bookclubbers will have tons of fun drinking too much mulled wine and arguing about the book's titlelessness and which character is the worldbreaker^[4] and which girl they ship for poor Alex and whether he deserves anyone. Someone get Oprah on the line.^[5]

[Review courtesy of Good Ok Bad.]

Footnotes

1) And from there come the frustrations and fights and divorces and murders and wars which comprise the

bulk of both our nightly news and our entertainment.

2) Plus, I have a double ear infection so all sorts of things make sense that might not otherwise coalesce. I feel like I might actually be magic right now.

3) All movies that I have enjoyed, fyi.

4) I mean, if they've read *Spera* vol 3 maybe?

5) I don't know. Does she even still do a bookclub? I haven't seen those gold seals in a while, but since the Borders closed up in my town, I haven't really gotten out to brick-and-mortar (do they still use brick and mortar?) bookstores in ages.

Ondřej Halí? says

Intenzivni mysteriozni surrealistická jízda která má vše, tedy schází tomu nějaký dobrý závěr. Ten sám o sobě vyzníl stylem že se autor snaží na poslední chvíli vše poslepuvat a tak tam hodil chlapka co má radoby hluboký duševní monolog.

Až na to, jsem si to užil a bylo to i, užijete, snové a prostě...

Pokud hledáte Surrealistický Thriller, tak tohle zkuste.

David Schaafsma says

This is a tale that draws on surrealism, dream state, the reality vs fiction divide, the nature of art, horror, noir and autobiography (Stewart says some of what transpires in his graphic novel actually happened to him) to create a pretty satisfying mix. Reminds me of Bunuel, Kafka, Lynch, as events spiral out of control... only to be explained in some sense by a guy near the end who probably works a little too hard and long to tell us what the tale is about. Still, I say again, I liked it. The art is great, and the story, which is not meant to be "realistic" in any conventional sense, makes us care about this guy who might be seen to be in a life crisis, at a turning point where he is required to figure out how to make sense of his life. He loses his grandfather, his girlfriend, his job, his grip on reality... Lots of strange things happen that make the logic of the tale more dream than straightforward biography, but that makes it interesting,

Wayne McCoy says

In Cameron Stewart's *Sin Titulo*, Alex Mackay finds himself in a living nightmare. The kind you might find in a David Lynch movie. Strange and nightmarish events descend on Alex's life and culminate in a surreal ending.

When Alex's grandfather dies, Alex finds a strange picture of a young blonde woman in his grandfather's belongings. When he sees the same woman at the funeral, he pursues and then loses her. The mystery deepens and he finds his life being turned upside down. He makes allies and enemies along the way. A

homeless man who is frightening. A man who paints the same scene over and over again. It culminates enigmatically, and perfectly.

Art and story by Cameron Stewart are brilliant. Using only 3 colors for the entire book, the panels have a film noir style. The story is strange and horrifying, and I enjoyed the ride.

I was given a review copy of this graphic novel by Diamond Book Distributors and Netgalley in exchange for an honest review. Thank you for letting me review this strange and wonderful graphic novel.

Sam Quixote says

Alex Mackay visits his grandpa at a nursing home only to discover he's been dead for over a month! He begins looking through his grandpa's leftover belongings and chances upon a photo of the old fella with a mysterious blonde wearing shades. As Alex looks deeper into the identity of the lady and what her relationship to his grandpa was, his journey will take him down a very twisty rabbit hole and possibly even another dimension – but will he survive?

I was looking forward to Cameron Stewart's *Sin Titulo* as I love his art from books like Jason Aaron's *The Other Side* and Grant Morrison's *Batman*, but was apprehensive as great artists rarely make great writers. Such is the case with *Sin Titulo* except it's not badly written, it's just that the storytelling is so scattershot that it makes reading this a flummoxing experience and I think it's because Stewart's not a good enough writer (yet) to make all the pieces fit in a way that works best.

Stewart keeps things lively by chucking in lots of David Lynchian quirks to the plot as Alex follows a repulsive male nurse from his grandpa's nursing home to discover a strange building filled with rooms in which are a telephone and monitor upon which the mysterious blonde lady with shades appears. The story is peppered with flashbacks from Alex's childhood (many of which Stewart says are autobiographical) as he recalls his parents fighting the night he injures himself falling down the stairs only for his abusive father to take his frustration out on his alcoholic grandpa who's dozing nearby. Other memories include a childhood nightmare monster hiding behind the furniture and the time an older woman in the office he worked in propositioned him during an office party.

The haunting image of the idyllic empty beach where stands a lone tree repeats through the text as Alex meets other characters who are also familiar with the scene despite it appearing only in his dreams. Other odd images like the blindfolded butler, the blackouts, the coincidence following coincidence, the character who explodes for no reason(!), and the warping between realities all make *Sin Titulo* an interesting read but frustratingly hard to get a handle on. So many storylines never go anywhere and moments in the plot make no sense, like Alex – injured- leaps out of a four storey window and lands in a bush unharmed only to coincidentally meet a man who turns out to be the husband of the mysterious blonde woman and relentlessly draws the beach and tree scene.

The problem with setting up so many bizarre plot threads and characters reveals itself when Stewart tries to explain some of them in an effort to tie the story together into something cohesive and meaningful. He does this via a character similar to the Architect at the end of the *Matrix Reloaded* where one of the last scenes in the book is just an extra-long speech where Alex asks a question and receives a long-winded explanation. The final part of the book is unbearably overburdened with exposition while the final page itself is anticlimactic and forgettable.

The book reminded me of the kind of stuff Charles Burns is doing at the moment with his X'Ed Out series which are weird and wonderful books that make a chaotic kind of sense. The reason I don't feel the same way about Stewart's book is that there are simply too many plot holes that make me think that Stewart lost his grip on the story at some point and couldn't quite recover it after. It's not that I didn't understand the story entirely – the “life is what you make it” line at the end pretty much sums it up - but I think if one were to study the book more deeply, that it wouldn't make much sense purely because so much is unexplained to the point that entire sequences don't add up. Couple that with the depressing story filled with miserable, angry people and the unimpressive conclusion, none of which make the prospect of repeat readings necessary to figure out if there are deeper meanings, and Sin Titulo becomes much less than the sum of its parts.

I'd say it's worth a look if only for the great art and sense of mystery as the bizarre plot unfolds, just don't expect to come away understanding much – if not all – of what transpired. Sin Titulo is interesting at times but is overall an unsatisfying and obtuse read.

Vasilis Giannopoulos says

Based on this comic, I think Stewart is a really good artist and a decent storyteller. The only problem of this story is the story itself. Vague ideas, too many subplots not necessarily tying up together and all in all I am not sure I understood what this comic was about and what actually happened. Three stars for the art and the lively and gripping writing and I will be surely rereading this to try to make up my mind about the story.

update: Almost one month later I reread this graphic novel and indeed I understood and liked it a little more. I still find the ending more unclear and unsatisfactory than I would have liked but it's surely a story worth reading.

Ευθυμ?α Δεσποτ?κη says

Τι κ?ψιμο ?ταν αυτ?! Τι απ?στευτο, υπ?ροχο, αξιολ?τρευτο κ?ψιμο. Διαβ?ζεται μονορο?φι, δεν αφ?νει τ?ποτε στην τ?χη. Η λ?ξη mind-fucking εφευρ?θηκε για να το περιγρ?ψει. Το απ?λαυσα απ? την πρ?τη ως την τελευτα?α του σελ?δα.

Felipe Assis says

Na contra capa vem sugerido "un misterio surrealista en la linea de Haruki Murakami o David lynch" e é exatamente isso... Rolou também uma forte influência de tale of sand, sem a menor sombra de dúvidas, os próprios personagens principais se assemelham bastante. Muito bom experiência diferenciada

Raina says

Very Lost-ish twisty-turny, rabbit-hole story, beautifully illustrated.

I wanted it to make a little more sense, but that could be my own taste/preferences. I'd love to see what

Stewart did with a more realistic story.

Ill D says

When I copped Cameron Stuart's Sin Titulo, I was immediately grasped by the title. With some training in the Spanish language, I gleefully (if not reductively) translated it as, "without [a] title." Although the Google Translate results have shown that I'm right (more or less), whether or not you know an iota of Spanish, the eponymously emblazoned Sin Titulo cannot be decoded from its title alone.

Interestingly enough (Abre los Ojos) a companion piece (of the A&V variety) and it's spiritual successor (The Matrix) both have been clearly pillaged here for referential effect. Sharing a visual and intertextual veneer with another complimentary source (Inception), a highly choppy and heavily overwrought cerebrally realigned mobius strip consisting of multiple strands finds itself uncoiled and recoiled unto a caduceus of the seen and unseen variety. Much like Lapham's quasi-noir Po-Mo offering Stray Bullets , Stewart's creation veers way too far into the realm of the experimental. And clearly, without a predetermined end point of sorts, fine grains of unseen gossamer find themselves tossed into the machinery of the narrative, to it's detrimental effect.

On the flip side, like yet another spiritual cousin of sorts, Mazzuchelli's Asterios Polyp , too takes a dream-world/heady trip unto a far greater pleasant undertaking. Talent and judicious applications of the chop up style were utilized to far greater effect. Here, a drab pallet consisting only of dark green, black and greys ensconces an equally snipped (up) story that has been re-glued in all the wrong places. Bordering on the realm of the excessive, a dearth of chapters or any chronological demarcation (which are both present in Pulp Fiction and Stray Bullets) leave the product bloated and difficult to decode amongst it's fleshy labyrinths.

If the Minotaur of Crete and Damocles of Syracuse were to combine first and unleash second their martial prowess upon the realm of artistry, Cameron Stewart's unaptly titled, Sin Titulo could have found itself in a salutarly pruned situation. Yet, with a single (not-so-smooth) operator operating not-so-correctly, a creation that is far more in love with itself than could ever be enjoyed without, falls into it's own Narcissistic trap. With lungs deluged by the product, we too are drowning with Cameron.

Kind of difficult to enjoy when you're drowning. X_X

Fernando Gálvez says

Un trabajo con una narrativa cercana al thriller psicológico mezclando un viaje onírico del cual no sabemos, hasta el final, si la experiencia vivida junto al protagonista tiene un significado o solución concreta o si nos quedan más preguntas sin resolver que al inicio.

Andrea says

I thought this had really cool potential but it lost me in the end. Definitely a cool idea, I just wish it had been expressed a little more clearly.

Dani Shuping says

ARC provided by NetGalley

This is the collected volume of the Eisner award winning webcomic.

After the death of his grandfather, Alex Mackay discovers a mysterious photograph of a young woman with him...a young woman that Alex doesn't know. This photo leads Alex on a journey to discover who she is and down a rabbit hole that he never intended to enter. A rabbit hole where dreams and reality merge together and secrets are revealed...secrets that should never have been brought to light. And lives are changed forever.

This is the first time I've read/seen Cameron's work and I have to say I was quite impressed with the artwork in the story. The line drawings are deceptively simple in that on the surface they just seem to capture the shape of the character, but as you look closer you see such amazing depth, the wrinkles on a person's face, the details in the clothes...it's just fantastic to see. Cameron is also a master of using a simple color tone palette, with white, black, and brown. It helps create this gorgeous depth to the images, such as on page 14 where we see Alex sweating and the shadows are created by the light brown color and a beam of light shines out, it's just gorgeous.

The writing on the other hand...leaves a bit to be desired sometimes, as sometimes the pieces of the story just don't seem to fit well together, which is a problem when you're moving through multiple timelines. Don't get me wrong, the character are compelling as we try to discover the meaning of the picture and the woman, but as we move towards the climax of the story it just seems like the multiple layers of the story start collapsing in on itself. For example, we've got a man that explodes for apparently no reason, Alex jumps out of a window and manages to meet the husband of the woman that he's looking for who draws the same scene over and over, but we never really find out why. It's like the threads unravel in various places, or we're not getting all of the story. The last part of the book where Cameron attempts to explain everything, just becomes rather longwinded as it's one character (like a narrator) telling Alex what's going on and it just doesn't quite work well.

This seems to be the first story that Cameron wrote and published himself (at least from what I can tell from Google) so I can give him a bit of leeway in that he was trying to make this first story a great one. And it has it's moments, but...it just leaves too many unanswered questions for me and I wanted a bit more. I look forward to seeing what Cameron writes next, as I'm sure he'll continue to improve. I give this 3.5 out of 5 stars.

Matthew Brady says

I'd been meaning to read this for a while, and I'm glad I did, since it's quite good. It's a strange noir story with surreal elements and an interesting metaphysical plot, but it works best as an experience, a series of odd things happening to some guy after he discovers some secrets related to his recently-deceased grandfather and starts having recurring dreams and meeting sinister characters. It's one of those stories where all manner of craziness keeps happening, with each new twist digging the character a bit deeper into a life-changing world he never knew existed. This sort of thing can end up being unsatisfying, since it's hard to come up with

an explanation that justifies everything that happened, but Cameron Stewart sticks the landing pretty well, I think, and he builds such a great world through his excellent art that the whole thing makes for a compelling, creepy, thought-provoking experience. I liked this one a lot.
