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## **Disappearance Diary** Hideo Azuma

In 1989 Hideo Azuma left his family and work and tried (unsuccessfully) to hang himself using the slope of a mountain. This autobiographical account of his slide into alcoholism and eventual recovery takes painful experiences from the darkest reaches of his mind and treats them with an overriding sense of a cartoonist's humor.

## **Disappearance Diary Details**

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Author : Hideo Azuma

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Genre : Sequential Art, Manga, Comics, Graphic Novels, Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir

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## From Reader Review Disappearance Diary for online ebook

### Adam says

Disappearance Diary is manga artist Azuma's memoir of 3 distinct periods in his life, covering periods of homelessness psychiatric treatment as ways of dealing with his alcoholism. Given the weighty subject matter, you'd expect a dark work involving deep self-examination; instead what we get is a light and humourous description of these predicaments, with plenty of character and charm.

I read this book for my local book shop's graphic novel book group, following on from last month's choice of Psychiatric Tales, which I found frustrating and disappointing. Thankfully, this book has everything which that book lacked - humanity, humour and enjoyable artwork. Azumi's drawing style is clear and informal, making it clear that although his subject matter is serious, he's not taking it all that seriously.

Not sure if I'm explaining myself all that well. Essentially, I really enjoyed this one. Recommended.

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### Stacy says

Once again, I am reminded that autobiographical comics just aren't my thing. A well-known manga artist shares the lowest points in his life - two periods of homelessness, and a bout in alcoholism rehab - in a funny, meandering way.

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### Anthony says

This book reminds me of a drifting life but this is great in itself; sad but kept me reading; pretty funny @ times of how he guy had to survive, live off of anything; love his tale of finding work, dealing w/ crappy bosses, still try to battle his alcohol addiction, manage his crazy manga work schedule, etc. opened my eyes to the workload of artists; author said he had like 2 serials, 3 full books, etc to work on per month

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### Vicki says

This is an autobiographical book split into 3 parts.

Part one covers a time when the author, Hideo Azuma, stressed out under pressure from work, left home and lived homeless for a while before being eventually discovered and returned by police.

Part two covers a similar incident that happened a few years later, although this time the artist moved to a new town and eventually became a qualified gas pipe fitter before being discovered and returned.

After talking about his gas pipe fitting days, within part two Azuma talks about his career from his debut as a manga artist to his eventual meltdown as an alcoholic.

Part three is all about the creator's experiences as an alcoholic, both in his normal life and after his hospitalisation.

Although this book covers some very harrowing times in the artist's life, events are always presented in a lighthearted way - the author states his intention to write about only the lighthearted or funny moments of his experiences so as to make the book a good read. This gives the reader a slightly divorced view of what happened, but puts us in a position to learn about Azuma's experiences and think about what happened whilst still being entertained rather than disturbed or depressed.

The artwork in this manga is drawn in quite a cartoon-y style, but is very accomplished in terms of character and background portrayal, as well as page layout and pacing, as befits a creator with a lifetime of manga creation behind him.

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### **fonz says**

Las desventuras de un mangaka japonés, que incapaz de soportar las enormes presiones de la industria y su demencial carga de trabajo, cae en la depresión y el alcoholismo y acaba pirándose a por tabaco y no vuelve, viviendo por ahí como un vagabundo primero, luego como obrero del gas y de nuevo, mangaka, para finalmente recaer en el pozo del alcoholismo y rascar su fondo. Azuma cuenta su historia de forma brillantísima, es capaz de tomar distancia de si mismo, narrando con extraordinaria ligereza y comicidad, muy al estilo Bruguera por marciana que sea la comparación, con unas caricaturas deliciosas y hasta achuchables, una realidad terrible, la de la enorme presión que ejerce la sociedad y la industria japonesa sobre los trabajadores, y los espantosos efectos que produjo en él el alcoholismo. Una mención para su santa y sufrida esposa, que merecería al menos compartir la mitad de los créditos de esta obra maestra.

La traducción de la edición española es un desastre, parece que ha entrado en imprenta un borrador de la misma.

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### **Emmy says**

A bit slow. While many of the reviews for this book praise it for being upbeat, despite the darker circumstances surrounding our main character (ie. alcoholism, mental illness, and copious amounts of stress), I found it hard to stomach at times, and often depressing. The last third of the book was very hard to get through (starting when he talks about his manga work, and going on to the end of the book). I'm sure this is a good book for someone, but just not for me.

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### **Jake Forbes says**

An oddly cute and cheery book about a manga artist whose midlife crises lead him to abandon work and friends to live as a homeless person. The little routines and encounters Azuma makes are quite touching, and his optimism after all of his hardships is admirable. Azuma's caricatures, staccato dialog, and observational approach make what would otherwise be very troubling subject matter (abandonment, depression and alcoholism) accessible, but perhaps at the expense of honesty. Azuma holds back whenever family is involved, and while it might not have been his intent, it does sort of whitewash his destructive behavior.

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## Ivan says

When one sees or hears the name **Hideo Azuma**, one either immediately thinks of lolita manga or simply asks, "who in the hell is that?" He's known as being the "father of lolicon," with many of his works being pornographic in some way. One would not expect this man to have much interest in drawing things outside of science fiction and lolicon, though he certainly has an impressive list of manga titles to his name.

So an award-winning book like *Disappearance Diary* comes as a bit of a surprise; it's neither pornographic nor science fiction, and is in fact an autobiography of sorts, told in a very humorous way.

Azuma features himself as a short, fat, goggle-eyed character in this recollection of his days as a hopeless alcoholic and as a homeless person. A story that would otherwise be painful, gut-wrenching and difficult to read is made entertaining and more pleasantly poignant through his use of humor and cartoony artwork. He isn't afraid to tell us the truth, and his sometimes frank presentation is almost as hilarious as his rather dry commentary.

At first we don't really learn what drives him to do this to himself. The book is not presented in chronological order and we are introduced to him when we are thrust into his first experience of being homeless. We do know that his homelessness is a choice rather than an unfortunate circumstance. We come to learn of his dependency on alcohol and cigarettes and his massive workload as an artist as the book progresses, as well as his rather pushover nature and the fact he even has a wife (largely unseen until the second half of the book).

The book is divided into three main sections, each dealing with a different time in his rather lengthy exile from the stresses of his life, and focus on the primary concerns he had during each period. In his first homeless experience, it was worrying about having enough to eat. In the second, it was dealing with certain individuals he worked with, and the ridiculous things he had to put up with from them ("YOU DIDN'T DRAW FEATHERS ON THE ARROWS!"). In another, it was his attempts to avoid difficult fellow patients in a hospital, along with the staff.

Azuma himself says that the manga "has a positive outlook on life, and so it has been made with as much realism removed as possible." It's very likely that some of the things he presents are indeed fictional, comedic twists on his experiences, but some appear to be very honest recollections, such as the threat of cirrhosis hanging over him like the Sword of Damocles, or his first capture by the police, who initially believe him to be the murder suspect they were after. His story is a fascinating one, and upon learning of his stressors and what he had to deal with as a professional artist, we can't really blame him for wanting out, even though his circumstances were largely his own fault. A person can put up with only so much, and it's easy to sympathize when he does everything he can to escape from what feels more and more like a prison to a life that, while certainly not easy, feels manageable by comparison. The dialogue is often as funny, if not funnier, than Azuma's stark narration (during a sequence in which Azuma has a severe coughing fit, a nurse says, "Oh, Doctor, there's blood!" to which the doctor simply responds, "THAT'S not good!"), and his cartoony visuals turn disgusting things into visions of hilarity (it's difficult to not laugh at his frequent vomiting, or the rather blunt depiction of him defecating in the forest). He even indicates that there was more, but that he'll save it for another time, leaving us to wonder if he might really provide a sequel, or if his parting words are another dose of his dry humor.

*Disappearance Diary* is an engaging, extremely funny manga, and a surprisingly quick read for a 200-page book. One doesn't have to be a fan of Azuma (or even familiar with him at all) to enjoy this story, but it may turn one into a fan before the final page is turned.

## Stewart Tame says

In 1989, Hideo Azuma was a successful manga artist. His work was popular, but he was having a harder and harder time coming up with story ideas. And so, one day, he told his wife he was going to get some cigarettes, and walked away from it all. He lived on the street, rummaged through trash for food, and just disappeared from his former life. He was eventually found, and returned home. This book is the manga he eventually produced about his experiences.

There are actually three separate sections to this book. The first tells the story of his 1989 disappearance. The second tells the story of his 1992 disappearance--yes, he did it again, this time finding a job as a pipe fitter in the next town. The third section tells of his 1998 hospitalization for severe alcoholism. Despite the dark subject matter, the manga is fairly light in tone. Azuma is able to see the humor in his adventures, and it's largely through this lens that they're presented. At first, it's a somewhat surreal experience to be reading alternative comics subject matter presented gag manga style. It grows on you pretty quickly though. The book is rounded out by two interviews with Azuma--one of them hidden under the jacket flaps. Highly recommended!

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## Blue says

Hideo Azuma hops from gag to gag in his very own memoir of three periods in his life, two of homeless living and one in the psychiatric ward for alcoholism rehab. His style is matter-of-fact and mocking, always finding the humor in the most dire situations, and making fun of himself. There are a few sequences that are quite tedious; for example, at some point he just runs through a list of publications he is doing serials for, names of editors, other manga artists, on and on and on. At another point, the reader is treated to some pipe line laying instructions, which were interesting to me, but I am not sure they would be for everyone. As one editor mentions to him at some point, some of the episodes end very abruptly, jumping to the next without much of a warning.

Perhaps what's most interesting in Disappearance Diary are the things the artist leaves out. There is hardly a mention of a family, so when his wife is mentioned 1/5th of the way, I was taken aback! That he has a wife that he basically has run out on to live in the woods as a homeless person is quite an important thing, one would think, that requires some self-reflection and, well, telling. Not according to Azuma. After that mention of his wife (and the missing persons report on him), his family only reappears very briefly when they commit him to the psychiatric ward for rehab. Then he does a flashback (I think... again, a bit confusing...) to when he was trying to make it as a manga artist, his wife was his assistant (meaning, she would finish up all the work once Azuma was done drawing and inking the important, action and dialog bits and characters, she'd draw the backgrounds and do some of the special effect inking, etc.) And again, his wife appears in one single sentence in the interview at the end of the book, where Azuma mentions finding his wife's written response so some notes he had taken about his very cold nights while he was living homeless. We have no idea if he has children, parents, relatives; what their reaction is to his up and leaving again and again; what other manga artists and publishers (employers) think about his behavior; do they even know?

Still, Azuma is very frank about many things that the Japanese are not known to easily talk about, ever. The art work is comical and expressive, the two things that really complement and align well with the stories and Azuma's personality as he depicts it on the pages.

Recommended for those who like radishes, sake, and those who have had the experience of getting flooded while camping/living outdoors.

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### **Helen says**

Really liked this, but the ending was really unsatisfying.

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### **Isaac Timm says**

I don't know how you can dislike a book introduced with the following: "This manga has a positive outlook on life, and so it has been made with as much realism removed as possible." Basically a journey through food with homelessness, how to be a gas pipe layer, alcoholism and recovery thrown in. Summed up it a manga about an artist and his art colliding told with humor and naked humanity. But always done with a wink: what is the artist telling you, what is he leaving out.

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### **Przemek Skoczyński says**

Rewelacja. Wiem, że odmian mang jest sporo i łatwo się pogubi, ale z tego co udało mi się o "Dzienniku" przeczytać wynika, że jest on nietypowy nawet dla komiksu japońskiego. Dzieło Azumy to relacja z kolejnych stopni wtajemniczenia obejmująca bezdomność, nałóg, pracę fizyczną w towarzystwie bardzo dziwnych osobników i wizyt w psychiatriku. Fenomen tkwi jednak nie w tematyce, a sposobie ukazania. Mnóstwo tu charakterystycznego dla Azjatów poczucia humoru, zupełnie innego niż europejskie. Czegoś co przypomina ironię, ale chyba nią nie jest. Te rozdziawione buki, przerysowane gesty i komiczne reakcje w połączeniu z tematem to coś, czego się nie zapomina. Jeśli ktoś kto nie zna żadnej mangi, zapyta mnie o którą jedyną, którą warto poznać, nie będę miał wątpliwości.

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### **Simon Fay says**

*"This manga has a positive outlook on life, and so it has been made with as much realism removed as possible."*

I enjoy biographies of down and outs. From George Orwell to Charles Bukowski, literary essays on the day to day routine of the homeless have always interested me. For starters, it's good to be reminded that no matter how successful or wealthy you are, it's a fast trip to the bottom. For whatever reason, I also find it compelling to read about the laundry list of tasks that a person on the streets needs to complete on a daily basis. Maybe it's because the line between survival and death is that much thinner: if you don't find a few extra cents in the day, you won't have somewhere warm to sleep in the night. On a much more base level though, I think that they provide an irrational bit of wish fulfillment. The idea of going out for a pack of cigarettes and never coming back must be something that a lot of people think about on stressful work days...

*Disappearance Diary* by Hideo Azuma is a unique entry to the genre. A popular manga artist in his native Japan, he grappled with both mental issues and alcoholism before ditching it all in favour of roughing it in the concrete jungle. As you can tell from the quote above, he outlined his sad experiences with a distinct

sense of humour, but I would have to say he is selling himself short by saying that all realism from his account has been removed. While he generally focuses on the ironies in each anecdote, there is usually a sharp sting that comes along with them simply from knowing that everything he writes is true. This combined with his manga style cartoons makes for a newspaper comic aesthetic that lifts the source material as well as anything Bill Waterson could have done.

Whether you're interested in Japanese manga or not, I'd push this on you with absolutely no hesitation. At the very least you'll experience a reality you've never entered before, and at best you'll feel like you've made a connection with a man you've never met.

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**-- says**

Very interesting read. The purposefully lighthearted tone Azuma takes with everything makes you question the reality of everything in the book, and that's on top of his status as a semi-reliable narrator that he starts off with. In any case, the pressures of the manga industry seem crazy to have to deal with.

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