
Subject: Dave's Comicbook Capsules for September 2019

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Dave's Comicbook Capsules Et Cetera

Intermittent Picks and Pans of Comics and Related Media

Standard Disclaimers: Please set appropriate followups. Recommendation does not factor in price. Not all books will have arrived in your area this month.

An archive can be found on my homepage, <http://www.eyrie.org/~dvandom/Rants>

Got my flu shot for the year, have you?

Items of Note (strongly recommended or otherwise worthy): Cheshire Crossing, Way of the Househusband vol 1, Empowered vol 11. (Yeah, all trades/GNs, go figure.)

In this installment: DC Superhero Girls (2019), Adventure Finders Book 2 #4, Cheshire Crossing, Star Rangers: Magical Space Cadet Squad #1, The Way of the Househusband vol 1, Empowered vol 11, Agents of Atlas #2 (of 5), Ghost Spider #2, Ironheart #10, Death's Head #3 (of 4), History of the Marvel Universe #3 (of 6), Deathstroke #47, Vampirella vol 5 #3, Midnight Sky #1, Ragnarok: the Breaking of Helheim #2 (of 6), My Little Pony Friendship is Magic #82, Transformers #12, Transformers Galaxies #1, Transformers/Ghostbusters #4 (of 5).

Current Wait List (books either Diamond didn't ship or my store failed to order): Nothing this month, but Empowered got delayed until the end of month.

"Other Media" Capsules:

Things that are comics-related but not necessarily comics (i.e. comics-based movies like Iron Man or Hulk), or that aren't going to be available via comic shops (like comic pack-ins with DVDs) will go in this section when I have any to mention. They may not be as timely as comic reviews, especially if I decide to review novels that take me a week or two (or ten) to get around to.

DC Superhero Girls (2019): DC/Netflix: As the previous DC Superhero Girls line sort of petered out, Lauren Faust (of My Little Pony Generation 4 fame) was hired to relaunch it. This started as a series of shorts, often shown during commercial breaks on Cartoon Network or put on DC's official YouTube. But recently (probably before this month, I wasn't watching closely) a full season of 11-minute episodes got put on Netflix, consisting of a 4-part team origin story and then 9 more episodes featuring a fully-equipped team (the biggest differences being with Bumblebee, whose outfit in the four-parter was clearly bodged together from whatever was at

hand, but which was a sleek powersuit in the remaining episodes). Generally light-hearted, and unlike its predecessor it stuck with the Secret ID concept. These six heroes (Supergirl, Batgirl, Wonder Woman, Zatanna, Bumblebee, and Green Lantern Jessica Cruz) aren't attending a school for heroes, they're attending a regular high school and Babs figures out that they're all supers. While Faust does go back to the same archetype well as MLP in some cases (Zatanna is totally Rarity, Bumblebee is very Fluttershy, Supergirl is fairly Rainbow Dash), there's also some mix and match and it's not a total riff on the Mane Six. Jessica also diverges most strongly from other portrayals of her, in that her issue isn't fear (as in the comics and the Lego DC stuff), but rather she's an ethical pacifist. There's also a bit more variety of body types (Supergirl looks more like Power Girl at her butchest, Bumblebee is very skinny), which sadly the toy line ignores in favor of giving them all identical Barbie bodies. Plotwise, the series is largely "don't think too hard" in nature, leaning on tropes and not worrying too much about stuff like blowing a secret ID or where Batgirl got the resources to build their base. I do think they did some rearrangement at the last minute of the episode order, though. The ninth episode #Beeline (all episode titles have hashtags) features Bumblebee facing a veritable Legion of Doom...most of whom get introduced in episodes #10-13. One doesn't even have her powers until a later episode. I guess they decided that the Catwoman intro episode made for a stronger "season finale" (technically there's another 13 episodes in the season, just not on Netflix yet, but Netflix loves them some half-length seasons) with Kara finally learning a lesson about being a meathead. I still think "Bumblebee gains confidence" would have been a stronger ending given how much she had to grow just to be a hero in the first place. Anyway, if you have Netflix, it's worth at least checking out the first four episodes, but this isn't a good enough series to justify getting Netflix for a month just to watch it.

Digital Content:

Unless I find a really compelling reason to do so, I won't be turning this into a webcomic review column. Rather, stuff in this section will be full books available for reading online or for download, usually for pay. I will often be reading these things on my iPhone if it's at all possible.

Adventure Finders Book 2 #4: Patreon.com - Time to get back on the road, drop some orphans off at the orphan town before heading off the map (well, at least the map included in this issue) to get some very important paperwork done. As with the previous book, the intended destination is unlikely to be the focus of the story, but rather all the complications on the way. Much of this issue is told as montage, bits and pieces of the first leg of the journey, and it works pretty well. Nice ominous threat at the very end, for once not from the usual suspects. Recommended. \$1/month level on Patreon.

Trades:

Trade paperbacks, collections, graphic novels, pocket manga, whatever. If it's bigger than a "floppy" it goes here.

Cheshire Crossing: Ten Speed Press - Okay, weird backstory for me on this. Over ten years ago, I came across a webcomic called Cheshire Crossing. (Still available online at <http://www.cheshirecrossing.net/> .) Kinda bad computer-drawn art, but enough to tell the story, which was quite intriguing. Yeah, there's been lots of updates and deconstructions and reconstructions of the Victorian/Edwardian Girl Adventure genre, but this one grabbed me. Dr. Rutherford (historical figure) with the help of Mary Poppins (not) gathered together a trio of young girls who had been to other realities and then ended up in and out of mental institutions because no one believed them. But he did, and so Dorothy Gale, Alice Liddell, and Wendy Darling became roommates. And that's when the trouble really started. Throughout four online issues, they crossed over into each others worlds, fought an alliance of the Wicked Witch of the West (she got better) and Captain Hook, and generally took zero crap from anyone. Well-done evolutions of the characters, with Dorothy still being fairly polite and seeing the best in everyone, Alice being a foul-mouthed bitch who has 1000% had it with doctors and hospitals, and Wendy as a carefree adventurer secure in the knowledge that she can always just fly away from anything she can't stab to death.

Cut to a few weeks ago, I'm doing a check of the YA graphic novel section at Barnes & Noble, and I see a copy of this graphic novel propped up atop one of the bookcases. Art looked nothing like I remembered, and the author's name had slipped my memory, but the title Cheshire Crossing never had. Paging through it, I saw it was clearly an update of the old webcomic, with better art, so I grabbed it. Imagine my surprise to find that the author was Andy "The Martian" Weir. In fact, in his foreword, he blames his frustration with the art side of Cheshire Crossing for his switch to working on The Martian. And the art is by Sarah Anderson, a name I felt I should know, even if the style was fairly standard manga riff. Oh, it's the artist behind "Sarah's Scribbles," which I don't need to follow directly because almost every one of her strips ends up on my Facebook feed.

Basically, Anderson used the original comic as thumbnails, keeping the panel layout of the original but often radically changing the composition within each panel. She redesigned all the characters, which did make things a little rough for me at first because of the changes (e.g. "Alice" to me was a blonde with spiky bangs sticking straight forwards, but Anderson's version has medium brown hair that while short is not spiky...I have found I tend to strongly identify people via hairstyles, which can throw me when one of my students changes their style).

The original ended on a cliffhanger of sorts, because Weir gave up on it after finishing the first arc. But maybe if this sells well enough, he and

Anderson will collaborate on a volume two. Strongly recommended.
\$14.99/\$19.99Cn

Star Rangers: Magical Space Cadet Squad #1: Kickstarter - This project is sort of a fusion of Magical Girl and Super Sentai tropes, a long-time labor of love by the creator, Diane Solis. It was pitched as an LGBTQ-positive comic about a teenaged girl discovering she has superpowers and ending up in the world of the Star Rangers. Once in a while I'll back a Kickstarter because I want to support the creator or the goals of the project, rather than out of an inherent interest in the product itself, and this was one of those cases (I can afford to throw \$20-30 every so often at a KS, I see it as giving back to the community). I mean, I'm certainly familiar with both Super Sentai and (to a lesser extent) Magical Girls, but mostly at a remove, via friends on social media. Interestingly, the last significant Magical Girl project I bought, Ryk Spoor's Princess Holy Aura, had a similar attitude as Star Rangers in that it's not particularly ethical to drag teenagers into the world of magic and monsters.

On the plus side, Solis has clearly put a lot of thought into this book, with a detailed backstory that is only hinted at in this 66 page "triple sized" first issue. (This suggests that the plan is for future issues to be standard floppy length, and even this is pretty slim to be counting it among Trades/Graphic Novels. It is manga digest sized, though.) On the minus side, both sets of tropes being mined are notorious for the importance of color...and this is a grayscale comic. I had to read it three times to make sure I had all the characters figured out (one is only named in a scene where she's not physically present, and never appears at the same time as a similar-looking character, so that was my main source of confusion), and some of the obfuscation seemed accidental rather than intentional. I got clearer information about the protagonist's mother from the stretch goal trading card than from the actual story, for instance. And the KS campaign gives away a big plot point about a rival girl that's only barely hinted at in the actual story. So...lots of rookie mistakes.

No idea when the next issue will come out, or if it will be another Kickstarter campaign or some other means of distribution. I'm just interested enough to give it another shot despite the clear learning curve issues, and would encourage the creator to set up a color gallery somewhere to help readers identify everyone...easier to visualize when you know that this particular shade of gray is supposed to be green or magenta or just light brown hair, for instance. \$10 cover price, but it was the \$20 Kickstarter level.

The Way of the Househusband vol 1: Viz - This is another of those things, like Cells at Work, where I've seen a lot of excerpts floating around on Tumblr, so once I saw there was an official translation available I pre-ordered it. The high concept is "What if a high-ranking Yakuza member got out of the life and became a househusband?" (Aside: I've seen it as

House Husband and Househusband in various places, but the book's indicia and logo express it as the single word Househusband.) If this were a movie, you'd expect a big fight scene in his apartment at some point (either very bloody, or a Jackie Chan style "try to keep everything neat and clean while not dying" set piece), but Kousuke Oono doesn't go that way. No big fight scenes (a few very short ones), just a very aggressive "fish out of water" sort of deal, as the protagonist tries to adjust to domesticity but was basically raised in the Yakuza. So he approaches all the problems of being a househusband with the attitude of a former Yakuza boss, fiercely protecting those he loves but (usually) without violence. Fortunately, his wife is generally able to deal with his peculiarities, but does draw the line at finger joint sacrifice apologies. She's odd in her own way, mostly being an anime/manga nerd deeply into "Crime Catch Policure" (potential spinoff series for Kousuke) and apparently capable of violence herself when it's called for. The first volume only barely hints at how the two met, but it seems to have been at a point in his life where he was simultaneously at the top of his game and ready to pitch it all and try a new way of living...her presence tipped the balance. He tries very hard to be a good husband, but, as he puts it himself, "I survived the underworld, a place that nicknamed me 'the Immortal Dragon.' Yet somehow you think I'm capable of being charming?" There's a few running subplots, including one that involves a former subordinate of his, but this is mostly a collection of vignettes, slice of very weird life stories. Strongly recommended. \$12.99/\$17.99Cn/#8.99UK

Empowered vol 11: Dark Horse Comics - Almost two years in the making, in part because Adam Warren has developed repetitive stress injury from drawing, the Big Damn Running Fight Scene with Empowered versus Almost Everybody (thanks to mind control). But it's not just an issue-long trial by fire fight scene, it's also chock full of flashbacks (having psis involved contributes to this, but is not the only reason) and a LOT of Secret Origins come out. While it turns out some of the apparent foreshadowing about Emp herself was a red herring, the truth may be even worse in some ways. Plus, some of the more ominous aspects of the setting are dragged more fully into the light, if only because so much is now on fire that there's more light to see by. The result is that several long-term threats are resolved for good, but in the process we get to see that they were just side effects of the real long-term threat waiting in the wings. As a strongly "payoff" installment, it's not really a great place to start, but strongly recommended to anyone who has read any part of the series and might have missed that this (finally) came out. \$19.99/\$25.99Cn (some "character is nude but no Naughty Bits are visible" scenes)

Floppies:

No, I don't have any particular disdain for the monthlies, but they *are* floppy, yes? (And not all of them come out monthly, or on a regular schedule in general, so I can't just call this section "Monthlies" or even

"Periodicals" as that implies a regular period.)

Agents of Atlas (2019) #2 (of 5): Marvel - One look at the cover, and I knew I'd be cringing a lot at awkward and forced romance. It wasn't quite as bad as I expected, mostly because Silk was on hand to snark about it, but it was by no means good. And no backup with the Parker version of the team this time, so my interest is dropping. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Ghost Spider (2019) #2: Marvel - You know, if you're gonna snark about someone not trying hard enough to hide their identity, you should do more than Latinize your last name into something so weird that everyone who sees it is gonna be googling what it means. Especially given how ESU has been ground zero for so many science-related villains over the years (Curt "the Lizard" Connors is currently on the faculty, for instance). The story is a mix of "first day at school, making new friends" scenes, dealing with the Man-Wolf plot from the previous volume, and "Professor Guarinus" being creepy. Miyazawa's art style is distinctive enough I keep expecting Kamala Khan to be wandering through the background. A lot of the story revolves round planning and "I should do X" stuff rather than much doing, so it's not as satisfying a read on its own...writing for the trade, basically. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Ironheart #10: Marvel - Welp, heard that this book is cancelled too, but at least it appears they'll get to wrap up the first big arc. Unfortunately, this arc seems like pure setup for a longer-term plot that now will have to be either wrapped up super-fast and unsatisfyingly, or get left as a dangler. Silhouette provides some more explanation of how this all connects back to New Warriors (albeit without the text box footnotes that would be helpful) and the banter level gets cranked up. Plot isn't much to write home about: exposition, head for the plot device, fight more magical mooks, big reveal. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Death's Head #3 (of 4): Marvel - Running fight, basically, splitting the group and giving time for some revelatory exposition and fearmongering. Not much in the way of surprises, and Zama's art continues to be at the grungy end of the spectrum, but a decent read. (I originally had a longer review here, then I realized I was giving away too much of the plot in the process.) Recommended. \$3.99

History of the Marvel Universe #3 (of 6): Marvel - 1960s and early 1970s retold as happening some time in the 21st Century, but otherwise no major retcons this time around. A couple of times it's acknowledged that the narrator is Galactus and he's talking to Franklin Richards, but that framing device otherwise recedes into the background. A useful resource for keeping up with what Marvel considers to be continuity right now, although any X-Men stuff has to be taken with a grain of salt in light of the ongoing retcon-o-rama in Powers of X/House of X. Recommended. \$4.99

Deathstroke #47: DC - There's almost nothing I can say about this issue that isn't a massive spoiler. Well, okay, Jericho continues on his path towards "power corrupts, and gives you weird skin color," but that's more of a subplot this issue. The spoilery stuff is the interesting stuff, of course. Recommended. \$3.99

Vampirella vol 5 #3: Dynamite - Post-crash therapy has now become family therapy as Vampi's mom has shown up and insisted on joining the discussion, to Dr. Chary's increasing annoyance. The art is hit and miss, and feels like it made HEAVY use of reference and/or tracing, because the expressions aren't always quite valid for the scene, same with the poses (at one point Dr. Chary's glasses are falling off, then they're back on despite him not being in a position to do so, suggesting the artist was referencing images from different sources). Priest does a good job of juggling the mess of retcons that is Vampi's publishing history, though. Perhaps a therapy session is the best way to work through messy continuity? Recommended. A touch on the NSFW side. \$3.99

Midnight Sky #1: Scout Comics - My brother's second series for Scout, this one written by publisher James Pruett. The basic premise is "They Live" meets "Invasion of the Body Snatchers," against a backdrop of failed (sabotaged?) geo-engineering that has shut out direct sunlight. The protagonist is a now-single mother (in early scenes we see her husband, who was replaced early on in the invasion, and they are...no longer together), who now has to keep her children alive despite the terrible secrets both bear. A lot of this was teased in Scout's FCBD offering, which appears to be set some time close (probably slightly after) the "now" of #1. The plot device that lets humans spot the alien impostors is a bit ill-defined right now, hopefully some of the apparent contradictions are ironed out in #2 once the "dropped in the middle of it" opening resolves. Tentatively recommended, it's kinda balanced on a knife's edge depending on whether Pruett gave decent amounts of thought to his plot devices. There could be some pretty clever twists waiting to happen, but there could also be some pretty tired cliches in the wings. \$3.99

Ragnarok: the Breaking of Helheim #2: IDW - Mostly Thor strolling into an Obvious Trap and being mostly amused rather than threatened by all the threats. He's not quite channeling Groo here, but there's times it feels awfully close. Given that the main implied threat of this arc is Hel and Thor hasn't gotten to her yet, at least his nonchalance makes sense. Mildly recommended, mostly for Simonson art and the occasional Snarky Thor. The bonus features that justify the extra dollar of cover price are slimmer than usual, a lettercol and three pages of process work on the cover. \$4.99

My Little Pony Friendship is Magic #82: IDW - Okay, so the premise is that Cerberus is misbehaving again, so Princess Celestia decides one of the Mane Six needs to give him some obedience training, and Rarity's the only one unable to dodge the Mandatory Bonus Duty. In the end Rarity decided that

there was a Good Reason for this, a typical "Celestia wanted me to learn something, but was a jerk about it," MLP plot, but it really doesn't work. Not even a little. It's really just, "Which one of the Mane Six would be worst at this for comic effect, yet still be able to flank-pull a way to make it work by the end of the issue?" Neutral. \$3.99

Transformers #12: IDW - Meanwhile, before #11.... Rather than have cut away to this story at the time it happened, Ruckley shows he doesn't really get comics tropes by devoting the normally important #12 to a side story that happened on Sentinel Prime's ship between finding out about the murders and getting back to Cybertron. I mean, it definitely provides important insight into how Cybertron deals with the rest of the galaxy, and establishes Nautica 2.0 as a significantly different person than Nautica 1.0, but it isn't really an Issue Twelve kind of story. Telling it as a break in the action a couple months ago would also have let Sentinel's return happen in Issue Twelve, marking the end of a traditional unit of comics storytelling. Decent enough taken as itself, just oddly placed. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Transformers Galaxies #1: IDW - First spin-off in the new continuity, not solicited as a miniseries, but set to switch focus with each arc. The first arc is about the Constructicons, but it also gives us a view of Termagax prior to the founding of the Ascenticons. The story switches between "now" (which is still long ago, but concurrent with the main series) and the days soon after the end of the War Against The Threefold Spark, the most recent Big War in this timeline. Newly forged, the Constructicons set out to rebuild Iacon from the ruins, but in the process they find a Plot Device that eventually led to their exile in the present day. I am also led to wonder if Termagax is really being fooled by Megatron in the present day storyline, or if she's manipulating him into his current course, given her role in the early life of the Constructicons. Art is by Livio Ramondelli, whose style I generally don't like, but at least it fits the post-war ruins of the flashbacks and the dismal exile of the present day. The writer is Tyler Bleszinski, who I've never heard of before. Googling shows he started out as a sports blogger, founded a well-regarded sports site, and then resigned to spend more time with his family. I guess he got bored and went looking for a second career? Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Transformers/Ghostbusters #4 (of 5): IDW - Optimus switches to his SDCC color scheme between issues, and the protagonists have their first direct encounter with Kremzeek. Plot is pretty by the numbers, but the banter is good, and the pacing works well. Recommended. \$3.99

Dave Van Domelen, "JINGLE JINGLE #%\$@ING JINGLE!!" - Tinkerbelle being emphatic, Cheshire Crossing
