
Subject: Dave's Comicbook Capsules for October, 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>
I dressed as a slice of pizza for Halloween, amusing my students.

Items of Note (strongly recommended or otherwise worthy): Nothing this time.

In this installment: Spider-Man Far From Home, Doom Patrol Season 1, Batwoman (CW), Wonder Woman Bloodlines, Watchmen (HBO), Adventure Finders Book 2 #5, It's Not Scary GN, Cosmoknights vol 1, Iyanu: Child of Wonder HCF Edition, Marvel Action Black Panther #3, Agents of Atlas #3 (of 5), Ghost Spider #3, Ironheart #11, Death's Head #4 (of 4), History of the Marvel Universe #4 (of 6), Deathstroke #48, Vampirella vol 5 #4, Midnight Sky #2, My Little Pony Feats of Friendship #2 (of 3), My Little Pony Friendship is Magic #83, Transformers #13, Transformers Galaxies #2, Transformers/Ghostbusters #5 (of 5).

Current Wait List (books either Diamond didn't ship or my store failed to order): Kaijumax Season 5 #1

"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.

Spider-Man Far From Home: Marvel - Overall, a good movie. The broad strokes of the Plot Twist are obvious to anyone who knows the least bit about Spider-Man, but they still managed to make the Big Reveal worthwhile, including tying things back into the first Iron Man movie. I did find some of the Teen RomCom elements annoying, but they receded into the background once the main plot got rolling. And while there's still a LOT of unanswered questions about the long term effects of the Snap, a few of the basics did get sketched out. The mid-credits scene was a bit too much cliffhanger given that it wasn't until after a while after the movie came out that Sony and Marvel came to terms about extending the deal (FFH was the last movie under

the original Spider-Sharing deal), but at least things did work out on that end. Recommended. Price varies by format and retailer. I didn't get the one with the "Night Monkey" action figure, since I'm not keen on the ReAction style that was used.

Doom Patrol Season 1: DC/WB - Good to see a timely release of the streaming-service content, I admit to being a little worried that they'd hang onto the online-only stuff as a carrot to sell more subscriptions. (While I can afford another few streaming subscriptions, I prefer to watch TV shows on my TV, and at the moment that means Netflix, VUDU, and Hulu are the only major provider options with my current hardware.) So, this is mostly inspired by the pre-Vertigo version of Grant Morrison's Doom Patrol (in the sense that Vertigo didn't yet exist when Morrison started up). The actual backstory is shifted around a bunch...there was a "silver age" Doom Patrol, but Robotman wasn't part of it, nor were Rita Farr or Negative Man. In fact, the team we see is basically the entire core silver age Doom Patrol, plus Crazy Jane. (The show's silver age team was Mento, Tempest, Celsius, and Lodestone, doing a bit of generation mixing there as well.) They start out as a bunch of shut-ins, freaks who are out of place even in a world of superheroes. But when the Chief goes missing, Cyborg (Vic Stone) comes looking for help in finding him (in this continuity, the Chief helped Silas with Vic's systems). A big chunk of the season is the core team wanting nothing to do with the superhero deal, and assuming the Chief will come back eventually, he always does. Mr. Nobody is the prime mover (played wonderfully by Alan Tudyk), but not all of the arcs revolve around him, sometimes he's irrelevant and once or twice he even helps out because it wouldn't do for someone else's plans to mess up his own. Bits and pieces of Morrison's stories get adapted, with the Decreator arc being the closest to the original (albeit with a new resolution I find more interesting). Pretty good acting from all involved, and thanks to flashbacks and psychic weirdness events Brendan Fraser even gets to play himself as a human in several episodes (the show has some nudity, and Brendan's butt is the first instance of it). There's also plenty of body horror (Rita Farr's recent retcons in the comics are used here...she doesn't grow or stretch so much as turn into a blob), and a whackload of cussing. Fraser gets a lot of range out of "What the F***?" and it is basically his catchphrase. Annoyingly, the extras are all censored, which makes following Willoughby Kipling's dialogue in one of the deleted scenes kinda hard. (Yes, they keep Kipling around, even though they could potentially have used Constantine...Marc Sheppard does a good job of portraying the dissolute Trenchcoater.) The bonus content consists of some extended scenes (including the one where Kipling swears a lot), a gag reel, and a featurette about filming in Georgia...probably not enough extra to be worthwhile if you already subscribe to the streaming service and don't expect to need to rewatch the show later. But I found the Blu-Ray set overall a good value. Recommended. Price varies by format and retailer.

Batwoman: DC/CW - Promising, based on the first few episodes of the series. One thing I like about the structure so far is that they're not

tying the season to a single arc, the way many recent seasons of DC/CW shows have gone. Nor is it split into distinct Books like Black Lightning. Rather, there's two prime movers this season: Kate Kane's messed up family, and Batman's legacy. While there's some elements taken from her current comics incarnation, this is a Gotham-centric series and I get the feeling that they're not going to be so quick to kill off some of her enemies. So, plenty of conflict coming from just her own family and their various roles in Gotham. Meanwhile, Batman has been missing for a few years, and Kate's decision to put on his (heavily altered) costume to deal with her family issues has kicked up a major hornet's nest. The producers have said they don't have any plans to bring Bruce back yet, but that's fine...they can get a lot of mileage out of old Bat-foes deciding to see if this new bat-person is worthy of their time. And it lets them string out the family issues without turning it into the Thinker season of Flash, where every victory has to be turned sour so that things can last all season. Batwoman can definitely have some clear and clean victories over the villain of the week, to help temper the "can't stop Alice yet" teases. Recommended.

Wonder Woman Bloodlines: DC/WB - Direct to video, this is not in continuity with the DCCU, but kinda rhymes in that Parademons are involved. It opens as a modern-day origin story rather than WWI or WWII. Then cut to five years later, so the movie wraps around "Justice League: War". The parademon stuff isn't addressed in the rest of the movie, so it was likely meant as retroactive foreshadowing of the events of JL:War. The flashback sequences run through Diana's introduction to Man's World, staying with Dr. Sandsmark and her daughter Vanessa (not Cassie). By the time Diana is ready to become Wonder Woman, Vanessa is feeling alienated, as her mother has started fixating on Diana as a more interesting daughter figure. Cut to the "present" and Vanessa is getting in trouble, with Diana asked to keep her from making a life-ruining mistake. Needless to say, she kinda fails at this, or else there'd be no movie. Or less of one, anyway, as there's rather a lot of plot threads crammed into this one: Dr. Cyber wants to get Amazon tech, Diana wants to reconnect with her mother, Vanessa wants to be her own person and does so in the most self-destructive way available, Steve Trevor's been just off-screen in every nu52-based movie pining for Diana, Villains Inc. is being assembled, etc. Mind you, it all fits together reasonably well, but MAN is Wonder Woman over-motivated in the final battle. There's the usual couple of DCAU TV episodes as extras, a featurette about Cheetah, and a new DC Showcase short featuring Death and an artist at the end of his rope (and his life, obviously). Nice enough story about easing the passage of a tortured soul, although I think it would have been better had they not shown his final masterpiece at the end...the actual work (by Jae Lee, IIRC) was something of a letdown. Overall, recommended. Price varies by format and retailer.

Watchmen: DC/HBO - So, my cable company gave me a free weekend of HBO, and I watched the first episode of Watchmen. Frankly, for most of the episode, it felt like a police procedural with masks. A few bits here and

there to remind you that it's a different world in which strange things happen, although so far very little of that impacts the story. Maybe it gets more closely tied in later on, but it really felt like a story that could have been told without using the Watchmen IP. Heck, in some ways it felt more like a Marshal Law show, given that it focused on masked police officers. Not bad, but nothing to make me want to add HBO to my cable package. Plus, there's the whole ongoing "DC/Warner is pissing all over Moore" aspect to sour it for people. It certainly wasn't good enough that I'd recommend anyone overcome creator-rights concerns to watch it. (I didn't even check to see if I could get the second episode during the free period, sorry.)

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 #5: Patreon.com - An unusual break from the focus on the protagonists. They're still in it, but this issue tells the tale of how they saved a village from Arao cultists (a scriptural quote from which sounds awfully lot like bits of the Pentateuch, such as Deuteronomy 20). There's very little dialogue, mostly shouting incoherently (or simply shouting in a language that the person telling the tale didn't understand), an interesting shift in storytelling style. While giving away nothing about the future of our protagonists overall, it gave a general "And things are now better, all because the strangers saved the one who would eventually save us all," sort of resolution. So, you know, spoilers in that the world doesn't completely collapse into devastation in the near future, I guess. 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.

It's Not Scary: 9 Volt (Kickstarter/ AaronAlexovich.com) - Not a comic, technically, although it does use speech bubbles and sometimes has panels. However, as per the bonus Kickstarter story of Serenity Rose, Sera herself is supposedly the author/artist of the book. So, it's metafiction within a comicbook. Those who got in on the Kickstarter also get an app version (sold separately in the Apple and Android stores, but not available in the Kindle store) that adds animations, sound effect, and voice acting to the story. Anyway, the art book (also available to KS backers) reveals that this started life as a quick pitch to Nickelodeon, got tweaked a bit for one-pagers in an

anthology series, and finally launched as a children's book. It's a slim but wide volume, 9" tall by 12" wide in full digitally painted color, done in Alexovich's usual "spooky but kid-friendly" style as seen on *Serenity Rose* and *Stitched*, and the high concept is "What if a normal kid got dared to go ring the doorbell on the spooky Addams-Family-ish house on the hill...and an excitable little girl answered?" Sunny von Shock, the excitable little girl, shows Milo, the normal kid, around her decidedly weird house, all the while proclaiming this or that thing to be "not scary," as per the title. Eventually it does get a touch scary, even for Sunny, at which point it's time for intervention by her parents Hieronymous and Kaija (who is, as the name suggests, a sort of anthropomorphic kaiju). Lots of background details to explore, even in the paper version. The app does work on a phone, but it's a little small to get the proper effect, and the scenes are not pinch-and-zoomable. The vocabulary level of the book is on the high end for a Kids' Picture Book, but in conjunction with the app could help an ambitious young'un learn some new words. Recommended. \$20 for the book at AaronAlexovich.com, \$4.99 for the app in the Apple Store or Android Store.

Cosmoknights vol 1: IDW/Top Shelf - In the distant future of humanity, a sort of feudal system has arisen in which aristocratic families rule the colony worlds (a world with no aristocrats tends to decay into a backwater). But rather than use the old Earth practice of cementing alliances via marrying off daughters, they instead offer up the daughters of aristocracy as prizes in power armor jousting matches, so rich guys can marry into important families by hiring Cosmoknights to win the tournaments, and the important families also maintain their own rosters if they want to win their way into alliances. Yes, it's about as "women as objects" as you can get. The main protagonist Pan is a commoner girl whose best friend growing up (and, later on, romantic interest) is her homeworld's princess. She helps her friend escape the planet ahead of the tournament, and it pretty much wrecks her colony's economy in the process...oops. But a few years later, a pair of strangers land on her homeworld in search of "no questions asked" medical attention. Pan's mother is about the only no-paper-trail doctor left in the decaying small town, and Pan is not really good at the "no questions" part. Needless to say, she stows away on their ship and gets swept up in the world of the Cosmoknight tournaments in the process. The whole thing is available as a webcomic at cosmoknights.space (it wrapped up the serialization a day or two after the hardcopy hit stores), if you want to try before you buy. A few of the setting premises are "don't poke it too hard, it's flimsy" in nature, but a lot of things can be handwaved away by saying that each world looks like the rulers want, within the limits of their budget. So one world looks like small town 1950s America with hovervehicles, another like a JRPG high tech fantasy world (swords and sorcery chrome, but tech running things), and another like something out of cyberpunk. The faux-medieval homeworld of one of the women Pan gets mixed up with isn't backwards, it just has an aesthetic. Anyway, the overriding theme is "Princesses saving themselves," just in a high tech setting and with a heaping side order of "smash the patriarchy." An enjoyable read, recommended. \$19.99/\$25.99Cn

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.)

Iyanu: Child of Wonder Halloween ComicFest Edition: YouNeek Studios - I picked up several of the free offerings at this year's Halloween ComicFest (basically FCBD in October), but this was the only one that interested me enough to want to comment on. YouNeek is an imprint that does its serialization through an app and then normally only does hardcopy for trades and giveaways like this. The entire studio is dedicated to African-themed stories, a combination of delving into African folklore and exploring Afrofuturism themes. Iyanu is set many generations after the fall of a civilization that had either hit Singularity or collapse just short of doing so, with everyone huddled behind walls against the Corrupted wildlife left over from the fall. So...the premise has a lot of Attack on Titan in it, down to a teenaged protagonist with special powers that others fear. But it is missing the toxic doses of angst and teenaged PTSD (so far, anyway), and has me interested enough to keep an eye on when it becomes available in trade. I might go ahead and download their app and check out the free samples of their other books as well, but that's something for next month's review column at the earliest. Unfortunately, when I checked their website on October 30, there was no indication of when Iyanu would go live, and no mention of the book on their front page, a bit of a PR bobble on their part. \$Free

Marvel Action Black Panther #3: Marvel/IDW - Kyle Baker's arc comes to a disappointing end...I get the feeling he was asked to write to a younger audience and overshot that into "dumbing it down" territory. Dropping the book now. \$3.99

Agents of Atlas (2019) #3 (of 5): Marvel - Given how the city of Pan has now shown up outside of this title (granted, in an Atlas tie-in series), either they're shooting for some pretty tight continuity here, or whatever the Dark Secret of Pan might be won't be enough to get it shut down for a while. I'm guessing dragon politics, based on the backup story from #1. While there's a couple pages of serpent-fighting, this is mostly politics at the personal, corporate, and international levels, which means the issue pretty much lives or dies on its dialogue. Pak's dialogue is okay. Mildly recommended. \$3.99.

Ghost Spider (2019) #3: Marvel - Too many Miles Warrens, man. Both the Earth-616 and Earth-65 versions are involved in Gwen's life now...fortunately there's helpful "what dimension is this, again?" captions when the scenes

change. I haven't read much else of Earth-65, but I'm getting the feeling it works kind of like the CW-verse's Earth-2...not a complete good/evil mirror deal, but any given person is more likely to be bad with precious few flips to the good side to compensate. Storyline is still holding my interest, although there's some bits of needless obfuscation...would it have killed Vernon to actually say what species of animal the new splicer villain is? (I mean, I figured it out easily enough, but the dialogue was needlessly coy.) Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Ironheart #11: Marvel - Significant infodump time, revealing a bit of a pacing problem for this arc. Some of the stuff about Riri's dad should have been brought up earlier, so that we wouldn't need to get her Secret Past stuff in the same issue that the villains did their own infodump about who everyone was and what their plans were. And that's on top of all the narration splash pages in the last two issues, making me think that the original plan was to let all of this unfold over a lot more than 12 issue, but when the "cancelled with #12" order came down it was time to just spew plot all over the place. There's still room for some decent "stuff happening" amidst all the plot dump, but it feels like maybe Ewing got cocky about expectations for series length. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Death's Head #4 (of 4): Marvel - The moral of this story is that you just can't improve on the classics, yes? But you CAN try new things, and let them live long enough to see how they work out on their own terms. Both Wiccan and Necker are trying to force something to happen rather than just live their lives and see what develops, and it takes the pragmatism of a freelance peacekeeper to get them to stop looking at the horizon and focus on what's important. Which is to say, getting paid. Running a business here, yes? Recommended. \$3.99

History of the Marvel Universe #4 (of 6): Marvel - Welp, the framing sequence finally establishes how Galactus knows all this stuff even as Franklin has forgotten parts of his own early life. This issue covers the Dark Phoenix Saga through to the beginning of Heroes Reborn...I quite like the retro splash page depiction of the Spider-Clone Saga. And yes, pretty much the entire Claremont run and the early 90s X-continuity mess are crammed into this issue, with a lot of editorial cleanup done to fit in the host of retcons...it almost kinda makes sense now. That's no small feat, there. Recommended. \$4.99

Deathstroke #48: DC - The mystery of one of the Deathstrokes is resolved, albeit with a few "that's not really how that should work" holes, and most of this issue is devoted to the Deathstroke we've come to know in this title...but there's still the other one running around being inconvenient to a lot of people. And Jericho's having to deal with his own moral crisis, the whole Year of the Villain thing. Too bad the book's ending with #50, but I guess at least that means Jericho will get final resolution without having to spend an entire year waffling about it. Recommended.

\$3.99

Vampirella vol 5 #4: Dynamite - The therapy session has caught up with the events that made Vampi a public figure, rather topically in a bit of Los Angeles area wildfire. As flashback devices go, where we already know some of who did or did not survive, it's at least entertaining in its own right thanks to Dr. Chary. Recommended. \$3.99

Midnight Sky #2: Scout Comics - Three timeline layers this time. The "Day It All Changed" flashback catches up to the sky burning, but there's also one a few years later which seems to imply that it took several years between that event and society collapsing entirely. (Either the colorist took too much license in that scene, or it took years for daylight to completely go away.) This is starting to feel like another book where individual issues are too fragmented to stand on their own, as with Smoketown...I'll give it another issue or two before deciding if I want to pause reviewing them until I have the whole story (or a bigger chunk if this is expected to be an ongoing), though.

My Little Pony Feats of Friendship #2 (of 3): IDW - Big exposition dump to explain the antagonist's beef and clarify that she's not aligned with any previous villains. And while it's still kind of repeating Cozy Glow's "break up the Student Six" plot, at least this issue makes the antagonist work harder at it...fooling someone twice isn't impossible, but it should be harder. Apparently Yona cusses a blue streak in Yakkish. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

My Little Pony Friendship is Magic #83: IDW - Zahler pens a done in one mystery that drops enough Sherlock Holmes references to construct a complete Sherlock out of. Near as I can tell, though, the actual plot is not lifted from Doyle. It takes place in an unnamed "highland ponies" town in "the North" (lots of planets have a North), which all looks like a Scottish city in vaguely Edwardian times, if with some modern (or as least later-era) touches. In the end, of course, the mystery is solved and friendships mended. Some of the references are pretty forced, and the mystery is necessarily simplistic, since it's A) a done-in-one story and B) the comic tends to write down more often than the show did. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Transformers #13: IDW - Bumblebee continues his infiltration of the Ascenticons while Springer and Sideswipe track down a group of Rise terrorists in the sessile body of a Titan. (Side note: I guess we won't be getting a new Jhiaxus toy any time soon, since his brief appearance in this issue is using his IDW "retool of Armada-style Generations Starscream" body.) Sentinel Prime continues to act like Ruckley is ripping off Alan Young's Toy Box Comics. For all the action scenes, this feels pretty slow-moving. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Transformers Galaxies #2: IDW - It was a little harder to slog through

Ramondelli's art style this issue, in part because it's more important this time to be able to tell the six Constructicons apart, and his murky style makes that hard even with Bleszinski having everyone using each other's names with great frequency. As for the core story, it's decent in a worldbuilding sense, explaining why both the Constructicons and another subgroup might make a heel turn even though it would make more sense for Cybertronian society to celebrate them and keep them happy. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Transformers/Ghostbusters #5 (of 5): IDW - Mainly a running fight scene, although early on Starscream realizes he has no reason to stick around, so he nopes on out. Swearing vengeance on Venkman, of course. Megatron goes through a few incarnations and tricks over the course of the fight, at least one of which was clearly just thrown in for fan service, but in the end it works out and Ectotron gets a new mission in life. Some good dialogue as in previous issues, but the plot is fairly by the numbers. Recommended. \$3.99

Dave Van Domelen, "Of course, you do realize...you're going to Hell." "I thought you didn't believe in Hell." "I don't. But making out in a church is some rude ****. I were you, I'd start lookin' for them lightnin' bolts." - Dr. Chary and Vampirella, Vampirella v5 #4
