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Subject: Dave's Capsules for March 2020  
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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>

March 25 was the final shipment of comics from Diamond until the COVID-19 crisis has passed. There may or may not be a review column from me for April, it depends on whether I get anything relevant via other outlets. Yeah, shutting things down was the least bad solution, but it's still gonna wreck havoc on an industry rarely far ahead from the wolf's jaws.

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

In this installment: Superman: Red Son (movie), Ne Zha (movie), How To Be A Mindreaver, Transformers the Manga vol 01, Ghost Spider #8, True Believers Empyre: Vision #1, Marvels Snapshots Featuring Fantastic Four #1, Marvel Adventures Avengers (2020) #1, Vampirella #9, Dragonfly & Dragonflyman #5 (of 5), White Ash #1 and #3, Ragnarok the Breaking of Helheim #4, ROM Dire Wraiths #2 (of 3), My Little Pony Equestria Girls Canterlot High: March Radness, My Little Pony Friendship is Magic #88, Transformers #18-19, Transformers Galaxies #5-6.

Current Wait List (books either Diamond didn't ship or my store failed to order): Nothing this time. Next month...everything. Sigh.

"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.

Superman: Red Son: DC/WB - An adaptation of the prestige series from 20 years ago. I've long held that a comics adaptation of a video-based product needed one regular issue for every 10-15 minutes on screen. This is about 80 minutes not counting credits, and the 3 prestige issues work out to about 6-8 regular issues' worth of comic, so the ratio works out pretty well in reverse here. The story, already pretty compressed in that it spanned decades in a

relatively small pagecount, is given just enough room to breathe in this adaptation, which is done in the same animation style of the recent line of new-52-based direct to disk movies. Good voice work as well, mostly new voices for characters, but a few familiar ones (like Phil Lamarr as John Stewart). And, amusingly, the young Superman was voiced by Tara Strong.

I'll admit now to having never read the original, although I did read the epilogue from the rack back when it came out. Interestingly, the epilogue was NOT included in this version, and frankly I think it's better for the lack. The comic's epilogue was a bit too clever and plot-twisty. Nothing in this adaptation contradicts the comic's end twist, so I suppose if you like it the bit still applies. (Yeah, I'm talking around spoilers for a twenty year old comic, but it's a Big Damn Twist...look it up if you wanna know and don't want to read the comic itself to find out.) Anyway, a solid Elseworlds sort of concept...what if Kal-El's ship landed in Russia in the late 30s and Superman grew up to try to create a soviet-style utopia, with alternate versions of a lot of the usual Justice Leaguers as allies and enemies. The Russian accents felt a little forced...it would have been good direction to have the accents only appear when characters were speaking English, and vanish when everyone was speaking Russian (except maybe have foreigners speaking with an accent in that case). But that's a minor quibble.

I got the Blu-Ray version, the DVD did not come with the DC Showcase short featuring the Phantom Stranger. It's set in the late 60s or early 70s, with a group of hippies luring an innocent young thing into a horror story sort of deal. At first it seems like the Stranger would just narrate, but he does appear in the actual story. It's a little weird doing it in the standard DC animation style, though, as the baddie ends up looking like Kon-El in a wig. Like a lot of Showcases, it's done as a period piece, in this case a cross between "Satanic panic anti-Hippie" movies of the 60s and the sort of code approved demonic stuff DC could do during that same period. Recommended. Price varies by store and format.

Ne Zha: Well Go USA/Enlight - This is the U.S. release title for 2019's Birth of the Demon Child Nezha, the space in the name tends to come and go in various adaptations. Not exactly comics related, but Nezha is a recurring character in Chinese culture, especially thanks to his connection to the Monkey King story. (As far as I can tell, he was never the inspiration for a Dragonball character, but his big moment in Journey to the West was in the opening chapters, and Dragonball mostly picks up with characters from the quest portion...and moved away from that before mining too deeply into JttW.) Anyway, this is an action comedy done in CG, originally done for IMAX and similar formats. So, lots of wow effects moments. Nezha's always been something of a bad boy in myth and legend, and this takes the tack that he's explicitly the reincarnation of a powerful demon seed...bumper sticker peeing Calvin (of & Hobbes) with a pyromaniac bent. Your basic "everyone fears him, and with good reason, but he just wants friends" deal, but with a timer on his life (because the Jade Emperor is a bit of a dick). If that sounds kinda Naruto...yeah, there's definitely similarities, but Nezha isn't as

well-adjusted. Given how many gods and immortals and stuff are involved in the story, the core message of "Fate is what you make it" contrasts pretty strongly...to the point I have to wonder if it was tweaked slightly in the translation to appeal better to American audiences. Then again, there's really no tweaking the anti-authority nature of the title character, and they definitely modernized the story by making Nezha's mother a co-equal demon-slayer in partnership with his father. It was a huge hit in China, got no U.S. theatrical release to speak of (maybe some Fathom Events sort of screenings), and is available at Walmart on disc because they're a pipeline for home release of dubbed Chinese blockbusters. Recommended. Price varies by format, but around \$15.

### Digital Content:

Unless I find a really compelling reason to do so (such as a lack of regular comics), I won't be turning this into a webcomic review column. Rather, stuff in this section will generally be full books available for reading online or for download, usually for pay.

How To Be A Mindreaver: Patreon.com - (<http://patreon.com/eddlai608>) This started as part of a mixed-topic Webtoons site (first Mindreaver at <https://tinyurl.com/s4frmzc>), and got a lot of shares around facebook. Edd Lai has since started a Patreon that is focused on the Cthu and Luna stories, but it's worth poking at the Webtoons site as well, as I've found a few "spinoff" strips there that weren't on the Patreon. The Patreon only covers the more recent strips, as well, so it can be tricky to hunt down all the pieces. But it's worth doing so. While Lai's English language skills are sometimes shaky, the basic ideas are very strong. Usually funny, sometimes touching, once in a while downright heartbreaking. Definitely worth putting up with the rough patches, though. Recommended. \$1/month Patreon gets all the newer content as far as I can tell, I think he's still working on the site and figuring out what the higher tiers get.

### Trades:

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

Transformers the Manga vol 01: Viz Media - This is a hardcover collection of manga originally published in TV Magazine, translated to English. This volume runs from the beginning through the start of Headmasters, and has a large section of color pages at the end that present non-comic-form art from TV Magazine. I "read" the Beast Wars II and Neo manga in TV Magazine, which I guess would be in volume 4 if the series goes that long (volume 2 comes out in May with the rest of Headmasters and all of

Masterforce, volume 3 is due in October and covers the Victory, Zone, and Battlestars material). And, of course, reading these translations hits me with a sensation familiar to those of us old enough to have enjoyed undubbed, unsubbed anime only to find out later how inane the writing was once translations came out. Like, you can't blame it on bad translation, it's just bad writing originally. Even within the limitations of being serialized in a magazine aimed at little kids, Masumi Kaneda's writing isn't that great. Ban Magami's art is pretty good, though, especially once the animation models were available for reference (the first installment is a bit rough because it's going from toy package art in many cases). As with most translated manga these days, they don't mirror-flip the pages, so they read right to left and back to front, which is always at least a little awkward for people used to right to left, but is even moreso in a hardcover that's digest sized (8"/20cm tall, 5.75"/14.5cm wide, about an inch/2cm thick). The production values are good, and the bonus material in back is a welcome addition, but I would almost have preferred an untranslated book so I could pretend the writing was as good as the art. (Okay, I do have the complete collection untranslated already, but it doesn't have all the bonus art.) Mildly recommended, mostly for those interested in Transformers artifacts. \$24.99/\$33.99Cn/#17.99UK (about \$10 cheaper on Amazon, but shipping is heavily deprioritized, like a month or more estimated time to arrival).

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.)

Ghost Spider (2019) #8: Marvel - The mystery of the Storm twins on Earth-65 gets some advancement, but a lot of the issue is about Peter-616 trying to warn Gwen about CRADLE (the badly-forced fascistic "protect the children" government organization launched for the Outlawed event), and then her blowing off steam afterwards. As extended "this crossover is stupid" tirades go, this is pretty good, at least. Recommended. \$3.99

True Believers Empyre: Vision #1: Marvel - That's the official title, but it's actually a reprint of Giant-Size Avengers #4. I picked this up on impulse for two reasons: trying to support my local shop a little more in the last week of new comics for a while, and realizing that I'd never actually read this story...just read ABOUT it. On the one hand, a lot of it has since been retconned, pretty heavily in places. On the other, it's clearly full of its own retcons as the true origins of Mantis and Moondragon get revealed, etc. And MAN is it talky. A big chunk of the issue is a Cotati in Swordsman's corpse Explaining Things, and Vision and Dormammu spends a much time dialoguing at each other as actually fighting. Frankly, a summary of this issue makes for a better read than the actual issue, but hey, it's a

buck. Mildly recommended. \$1.00

Marvels Snapshots featuring Fantastic Four #1: Marvel - Another "look for ways to give the shop my money" buy...I was reluctant to pick up any new series (like TF/Terminator) since the second issue might never come out, but this looked like a one-shot. And with Dorkin and Dyer in the credits, I figured it was a decent bet even if it was to be continued. (Yes, it's a one-shot.) Set around the time of Avengers Disassembled, it follows a puff piece news crew going around Johnny Storm's hometown as his high school reunion is about to take place. Deep cuts into the solo adventures the Human Torch had back in the 60s, catching up with supporting cast, retired villains, and so forth. A decent story...nothing really wowed me, but it was well-executed. (Also, there's a hidden Fight-Man reference.) \$4.99

Marvel Adventures Avengers (2020) #1: IDW/Marvel - Katie Cook writes Marvel heroes, woo. Well, out of continuity and somewhat flanderized Marvel heroes. Thor is amiably dense rather than merely acting that way, for instance. It's your basic sitcom cliché plot of "protagonist breaks thing, tries to replace it before the owner notices, hijinks ensue," but with giant porcelain figures and a fight scene. I really like Cook's writing on her own properties and on My Little Pony, but this felt a little flat. Like she was playing it overly safe. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Dragonfly & Dragonflyman #5 (of 5): Ahoy Comics - We find out what happened to Stinger-Omega that got Dragonfly all weepy about it in Wrong Earth, as the sort-of parallel stories wrap up. Eh, a lot weaker than Wrong Earth overall. If there's any other "prequel" series, I'll be giving them a hard pass...and I'm going to think twice about any Wrong Earth continuations...I'm starting to think all the good ideas got used up already and now it's the second tier stuff. \$3.99

Vampirella vol 5 #9: Dynamite - And now we catch up to the FCBD issue, seeing the crash happen and what other cast member are doing at the time (very little repeating of the FCBD scenes specifically, rather we get panels before and after the ones in the FCBD...clever interweave). So, time is a flat circle or something, and now we have context for where we began. Recommended. \$3.99

White Ash #1 and #3: Scout Comics - Okay, #1 does make it pretty clear from the get-go that there's weird stuff afoot. I mean, most of the issue is about the protagonist trying to tie up a couple of loose ends so he can get the heck out of his nowhere Appalachian mining town, giving us a tour of the local quirks...but then there's the snake dude killing his way through the storyline, and that's kinda different. :) #3 is heavy on the exposition (and some only slightly gratuitous T&A) as the protagonist gets some of his "WTF?" questions answered. Things are just getting interesting again, when comics stop happening, sigh. Recommended, but may require some patience and faith that the series will continue. \$3.99

Ragnarok: the Breaking of Helheim #4: IDW - And more Norse-inflected stories involving Nidhogg. Well, mostly Thor hanging out with a bunch of wolves in Helheim, and getting their origin story via flashback. Gathering allies for the next fight, etc. This really feels like Simonson is putting two 3-issue arcs into a six issue series...and I'm getting bored by the pacing. If #5-6 only end up available in a full-series trade I doubt I'd bother. However, IDW hinted that there would be "catch up bundles" of some sort, so maybe we'd get #5-6 as a giant-size issue for \$7.99 or something. Very mildly recommended. \$4.99

ROM: Dire Wraiths #2 (of 3): IDW - More fighting on the Moon, more ablative cast in the horror movie mold. And given that this seems to be following the IDW1 ROM continuity, the good guys will probably all die. I suppose #3 could surprise me whenever it ends up coming out, but I'm not really into "heroes die" horror. #1 looked like it could go either way, but this issue firmly establishes that there will be very few survivors aside from Dire Wraiths. Neutral. \$4.99

My Little Pony Equestria Girls Canterlot High: March Radness (one-shot): IDW - A trio of Equestria Girls stories by different writers but all by the same shojo manga styled artist. Every so often the art drifts more in the direction of the show's model sheets, but usually the expressions are straight out of How To Draw Shojo Manga. Fairly weak writing as well. The only good part of this special is "The Fall of Sunset Shimmer," by Cook and Price, set during Sunset's student years and chronicling how she came to know about the magic mirror and end up banishing herself to the Canterlot High world. Only 8 pages, but more interesting in both art and writing than the entire rest of the comic's best moments put together. Mildly recommended. \$5.99

My Little Pony Friendship is Magic #88: IDW - This was to be the last "regular" issue before the big Season 10 arc, so the regular cover is a group shot of all the protagonists and supporting cast Fleecs could cram in. The Haytona race story wraps up, lessons are learned, and Rainbow Dash realizes it might be the end of an era. The Moral Of The Story is delivered a bit ham-handedly (flank-hoofedly?), but otherwise it's a decent story. Recommended. \$3.99

Transformers #18: IDW - A side story in the wake of the fall of the tether (the main plot picks up again in #19), featuring Arcee, her mate Greenlight, and their newly forged daughter Gauge (well, Greenlight is Gauge's mentor in the way Bumblebee was Rubble's mentor, but Greenlight and Arcee are a couple, so). It starts prior to the disaster, with Greenlight seeing which way the wind is blowing and wanting to get her family offworld while the getting is good. Then the tether falls, and it's a race across Cybertron to get to the ship before it leaves. But they're too ethical to not stop and help out a few times, including helping Strongarm deal with some

looters. Arcee continues to be an ancient badass in the new continuity, an assassin in the old wars. A nearly self-contained story, so if you were wondering how Ruckley's writing on Transformers goes without getting tied up in plots that take forever to go anywhere (and even longer now), this is a good single issue to pick up. Recommended. \$3.99

Transformers #19: IDW - And back to the main plot, in which the pieces are picked up after the tether fall and Megatron engages in the Night of Long Knives to clean up loose ends both in the Ascenticons and the Rise. And some of those knives are stabbing in Bumblebee's direction, his attempts to avoid being "cleaned up" dominate the issue. Kind of inevitable stuff, with semi-disposable Treadshot and Catgut being sent to do the job in a running fight scene among the ruins. The main interesting thing about it (and it's not THAT interesting) is that it establishes Nucleon exists, and that subsisting on it too long mode-locks a Cybertronian. It sounds more like a sort of emergency rations, though. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Transformers Galaxies #5-6: IDW - These came out pretty quickly after #4, making me wonder if Raimondelli had trouble meeting deadlines but Milne did not. Anyway, this is a two-part story, thankfully given the timing of the shutdown. The "present" action seems to be set shortly before the start of the main series, although there's some flashbacks to farther back in Cliffjumper's unremarkable and unremarked life. Apparently, Bumblebee is famous and well-liked and all that, even on colony worlds. And Cliffjumper is always in his shadow. Mistaken for Bumblebee in a new paint job, that sort of thing. It's the bane of his existence. And he finally thinks he's getting some respect when Deathsaurus brings him along on an Energon harvesting mission to a world inhabited by organics...yeah, not happening. I mean, you don't have to know who Deathsaurus is in other continuities to get the point from his name that maybe he's not a nice guy. Anyway, this two-parter is about Cliffjumper finding his place in the sun, as it were, and it does a good job of giving him a distinctive personality and role. Recommended. \$3.99 each.

Dave Van Domelen, "I'M NOT SKIPPING SCHOOL BECAUSE YOUR DIMENSION DECIDES TO BE STUPID!" - Gwen Stacy, regarding the Outlawed event, Ghost Spider #8

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