
Subject: Dave's Capsules for July 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>
Turned 50 this month, yay.

Items of Note (strongly recommended or otherwise worthy): My Little Pony the Manga vol 2.

In this installment: Our Fighting Forces (digital) #1, Adventure Finders Book 2 Vol 1 Chapter 9, The Rise of Ultraman Free Preview, Action Presidents #3 and #4, My Little Pony the Manga vol 2, Hex Vet Witches in Training, Hex Vet the Flying Surgery, White Ash #5, Midnight Sky #5, Sacred Six #1, Vampirella #10-11, My Little Pony Friendship is Magic FCBD 2020, Transformers '84: Secrets and Lies #1 (of 4), Transformers Galaxies #7, Transformers #21

Current Wait List (books either Diamond didn't ship or my store failed to order): Nothing.

"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.

Nothing this month. I picked up Gundala on BluRay at the end of the month, but won't get around to watching it until the weekend.

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.

Our Fighting Forces #1: DC - DC gave up on the 100 page giants as their wedge into Walmart and has shifted to blind-bagged assortments like those

Marvel's had near the checkouts for a while. Our Fighting Forces was one of the last (if not THE last) to hit shelves, and like several other of the later giants, Comixology is repackaging the new stories as single-issue shorts. In this piece is Priest's new Unknown Soldier story with appropriately murky art by Christopher Mooneyham. It opens with some fool trying to rob the Unknown Soldier's apartment and getting a bit of a lesson in more than one way, before segueing to a mission that establishes the New Normal for the Soldier. Dunno if there will be any followup to this, but it's got potential. Recommended. 99 cents on ComiXology.

Adventure Finders Book 2 Volume 1 Chapter 9: Patreon.com - After the rather emotionally heavy events of Chapter 8, it's good to get down to a mostly clear-cut "save someone from the unambiguously evil monster" story as a palate cleanser. The All Crown (Troops) Are Bastards element is still there and gets discussed after the fight, but everyone versus an armored giant is a welcome shift in tone to remind us that the protagonists can actually fix some things and do unalloyed good. Recommended. \$1/month on Patreon to unlock.

The Rise of Ultraman Free Preview: Marvel - Dunno if this is also available in hardcopy, I didn't notice it on my store's FCBD table, but it's free from ComiXology. Marvel recently acquired the Ultraman comics license, and they're definitely running with it here. The preview is mostly a cover gallery, with five pages of story from #1, and then two more pages from later in the issue, and a bunch of covers from the first four issues. So many variant covers. There's not really enough story in this to tell where they're going with it, though...there's three pages of the original Ultraman origin set in 1966, then jump ahead to 2020 and a character who is apparently part of the Science Special Search Party or something like it, and the two disconnected pages show her stumbling onto something a lot like the Ultraman origin scene, being menaced by monsters, and saved by Ultraman, but no real indication whether this is Ultraman's first appearance in 2020 (having hibernated or something since 1966) or just the latest Ultraman in a world that has known of Ultras and kaiju for 54 years. I suppose I could look up press releases to find out, but the preview issue should be comprehensible without reading outside press, eh? In short, while it's free, it certainly didn't inspire me to add the book to my pull. (Hm, Spider-Man's on one of the variant covers for #1...don't they remember he's supposed to show up on the cover of a #3 issue?)

Trades:

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

Action Presidents #3 and #4: Harper Collins - After a long pause, the next two volumes of Van Lente and Dunlavey's Action Presidents series is out,

along with new editions of the first two. #3 is Teddy Roosevelt and #4 is JFK. While not hagiographical, these are still pretty heavily pitched towards kids, leaving out or at least downplaying some of the darker aspects of both men. The History Turkey narrator device isn't working too well for me, though, and I think this series may be getting written down to the kiddies too much. I can't say Van Lente's losing his touch, because the Comic Book History of Animation from last month is still up to his usual standards...he might be suffering under a heavy editorial hand here, or editing himself too heavily out of concern for the target audience. Which is a shame, because his regular "not trying to write down" style is IMO perfect for grade school kids. Mildly recommended. \$10.99/\$13.50Cn each.

My Little Pony the Manga vol 2: Seven Seas - Picked up on a whim, as my store had a stack of them and as I've noted in previous months, I'm trying to buy stuff from them more often to support the store. I didn't expect much from what looked to be a string of single page vertical strips...and I was more than a little pleasantly surprised. (And I ordered vol 1, but it hasn't come in yet.) The "Groundhog Day" plot has been used a lot, including by Equestria Girls and by an episode of Agents of SHIELD this month, and I've seen it done well and I've seen it done boringly (Equestria Girls' version kinda thudded for the most part, for instance). Sometimes the key is to change your behavior for the better (as in the Groundhog Day movie), sometimes just hammering at the problem until the one or two people who remember the loop figure out the puzzle, sometimes a combination. And sometimes, you get Pinkie Pie as the person who remembers and things escalate. For extra fun, this is basically a Doctor Who riff on top of the usual time loop tropes (and does seem to deliberately establish an alternate continuity to the main MLP shows and comics). A really fun read. Strongly recommended. \$10.99/\$13.99Cn

Hex Vet: Witches in Training and Hex Vet: the Flying Surgery: Boom/Kaboom! Imprint - Weird backstory here. I've been supporting the creator, Samantha Davies, on Patreon for a few months now, after having seen her silent comics circulating through Tumblr for quite some time now. But I clearly didn't do enough of an archive trawl, because I had no idea these books were out until I read the (now recalled) CBLDF FCBD 2020 anthology, which had a Hex Vet short story set between the two volumes. (I decided to not review that FCBD book, agreeing with Boom's reasons for wanting it recalled, hopefully the short in it will be available in a future FCBD offering.) The premise of these stories is that there's a sort of (mostly-) gentle fantasy world along the lines of Miyazaki meets bowdlerized European fairy tales and witch stories. There's danger out there (and a long-term plot is brewing regarding Something In The Woods), but the focus of the stories is about nice witches in training helping take care of (mostly-)cute magical critters. The two main characters are trainees who haven't earned their pointy hats, Clarion Wellspring is too earnest and naive while Annette Artifice is cynical, has trouble dealing with people, and not helped by her family reputation as evil witches. So far, the main antagonist is their

immediate supervisor, Ariel Chantworth, who is a rather burly guy who represents all the Old School attitudes about nursing and education that make things harder on the protagonists (a real Nurse Blucher type, although we get to see some of his more sympathetic side once in a while). The head of the clinic seems to be the only person there who is actually comfortable dealing with other people, so of course she keeps getting called away at the start of the story and leaving the others in charge. The general theme is, "Think the best of people and animals and they'll show you their best...usually. Eventually." Artistically...a bit mixed for me. I really like how Davies draws animals and anthropomorphic animals, but her humans are a bit offputting for me, especially when she gives them the kind of solid black oval eyes that she gives some of the animals. Characters tend to get the black eyes when they're in the background, but it's a bit inconsistent, which is probably why it bothers me...some always have eyes with whites, irises, and pupils; some go all-black sometimes in the background; one human gets solid black eyes all the time, even when he's the focus of the panel. There's some interesting worldbuilding going on here, and I'm definitely going to keep up with the series, but hopefully Davies gets the hang of some of her visual motifs sooner rather than later. Recommended. Witches in Training (80 pages, including about 10 pages of "how to make comics" process) is \$8.99/\$10.99Cn/#6.99UK, The Flying Surgery (112 pages, almost all story, including seeing what the boss does when she goes off on her own) is \$9.99/\$11.99Cn/#7.50UK

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.)

(Nope, no Marvel or DC hardcopies this month.)

White Ash #5: Scout Comics - A bit confusing, mostly because a lot of the issue is from Seth's POV and he seems to be either outright "lolrandom" insane or deliberately affecting that persona for his own amusement. A lot of stuff happens for no good reason, and the "narrator" is unreliable. A bit over the top on excessive horror, even for a guy whose schtick is eating people. The issue is better in the scenes where it focuses on the protagonists, if only because the gratuitous dismemberment levels drop. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Midnight Sky #5: Scout Comics - The protagonist family reaches the alien stronghold in an unnamed theme park turned fortress (it's Disneyworld with the details slightly changed to avoid...problems), leading to all kinds of symbolism down the road. And the world is established as still kinda trying to move on as normal in some places, unlike the town where the series

starts...your basic boiling frog sort of deal, where people pretend things are still okay for as long as they possibly can. And as long as things are coming to a head, a few characters from previous issues reappear, albeit very briefly in one case. (I liked the subtle bit with the red stocking cap.) A forlorn hope is launched, but Pruett has already made it pretty clear that this is not the sort of setting where there will be a happy ending or a clean victory.... Recommended. \$3.99

Sacred Six #1: Dynamite - A spinoff briefly set up back in Vampirella #4 and with a premise convoluted enough that even the page of "not a recap, technically" on the inside front cover didn't really help. Jae Lee drew the regular cover and the opening segment, and then Gabriel Ibarra takes over with such a jarringly different style it's hard to tell when a character from the first scene actually shows up again, even when they're named on-panel. This is...not a good first issue. It has the sort of rapid fire scene changing that might have worked in a middle-of-the-arc episode, and Priest is usually good at juggling this sort of thing, but all the balls fall to the ground here. Neutral, might be retroactively better as part of a TPB. \$3.99

Vampirella #10-11: Dynamite - Dynamite was a bit lurching in how it caught up after the plague closure, and a lot of stuff came out all at once, such as two issues of the regular series in one month. These two issues finish telling the story of the crash and its aftermath, so there's flashbacks within flashbacks and the timeline bounced about quite a bit. Still not QUITE caught up to the present day as seen in the #0 FCBD issue, but getting there. Both are framed by counseling, with a priest in #10 and the recurring head-shrinker in #11. I had to re-read both issues before writing this review to get it all clear, but unlike Sacred Six I was able to get it all sorted out satisfactorily. Recommended. \$3.99 each.

My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Free Comic Book Day 2020: IDW - After a bit of a delay, the touted Season 10 storyline kicks off. The lead story is about Twi's first unassisted raising of the Sun, with Spike running around helping everyone get set for the ceremony. Or "helping" in some cases. The whole thing feels like the bit before the opening credits of an episode. The second story is basically an excuse to flog more of the Guardians of Equestria toys looong after they've all left shelves. I mean, how long has this story been sitting in inventory? The toys came out back before Toys R Us shut down. In between the two is an interview with Jeremy Whitley, who will be writing the Season 10 stories...he says that it takes about two issues to tell the kind of story that can be done in one episode of the TV show, which is...close, but I would tend to think three issues are needed to do a good job. Anyway, a FCBD issue has to tread a fine line between making people wanting to read more, but also not being required reading given that not every store will carry the FCBD books or let people put them in a pull. I think this erred a bit too much on the side of being missable.

Transformers '84 Secrets and Lies #1 (of 4): IDW - Continuing on from the basic idea of the #0 from last year, this continues to fill in the background of the original G1 cartoon miniseries "More than Meets the Eye," giving it a darker motivation (the mission of the Ark was to lure Megatron away from Cybertron and hopefully kill him and his top cadre, more than anything else) while providing excuses for how characters who showed up later in the cartoon were stuck on Cybertron or whatever. Furman aggressively splices together elements from the cartoon (mostly character designs, which were in massive flux when this story was told in the Marvel comics), the Marvel G1 comics, and his own War Within books from Dreamwave and IDW (although the rest of the IDW continuity seems to be largely ignored so far). There's even a two page author's commentary bit explaining where some of this stuff came from. It's an interesting exercise in paid fanfic, trying to fill in gaps that didn't really need filling. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Transformers Galaxies #7: IDW - Picking up from the one-issue story from a few months ago in the main title, catching up on what happened after Arcee, Greenlight, and Gauge got on the ship full of religious zealots fleeing Cybertron. As one might expect from how I phrased that, it didn't go so well. It's an open mystery, but told in a way that someone who missed Transformers #18 would find to be a closed mystery. A bit of a 40K vibe from writer Sam Maggs, although checking her CV shows nothing along those lines (mostly stuff like YA girl power superhero stuff and girls in fandom work). Recommended. \$3.99

Transformers #21: IDW - "Rise of the Decepticons" subtitle. While Megatron makes a big supervillain "giant hologram over the city" speech and there's some discussion about the Titans, most of the issue focuses on a search party out in the boonies stumbling across a bunch of Risers who were being kept on ice, and the predictable explosion into violence. (Despite the desires of the rather pacifistic search party, which includes the never seen on screen before Azimuth, deuterocanonizing her altmode as being one of those transforming watches.) The continuing theme is "watching in horror as things spiral out of control and ruin everyone's plans," which Orion Pax all but says during the one page he's on screen. I find it interesting that Ruckley has made it this far without bringing Optimus Prime on stage, but he's been all about the extremely slow burn. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Dave Van Domelen, "Boy, it's a good thing you don't remember these experiments! I'd have stopped me a *long* time ago." - Pinkie Pie trying to suss out the time loop, MLP the Manga vol 2.
