
Subject: Dave's Comics Capsules for March 2017
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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 week. An archive can be found on my homepage, <http://www.eyrie.org/~dvandom/Rants>
First big-money home improvement starting, reglazing and painting windows.

Items of Note (strongly recommended or otherwise worthy): Ms. Marvel #16

In this installment: Iron Fist (Netflix), Snarfquest Tales vol 1, Gold Digger #239-240, Champions #6, Totally Awesome Hulk #17, Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur #17, Ms. Marvel #16, Deathstroke #14-15, Astro City #42, Hanna-Barbera Future Quest #11 (of 12), Adam Strange/Hanna-Barbera Future Quest #1, Hanna-Barbera the Flintstones #9, Booster Gold/Hanna-Barbera the Flintstones #1, My Little Pony Friendship is Magic Deviations one-shot, My Little Pony Guardians of Harmony Annual 2017, My Little Pony Friendship is Magic #52, Transformers Annual 2017, Optimus Prime #5, Transformers Till All Are One #8, Transformers Lost Light #4, The Four Color Comic Book History of Comics #4-5 (of 8), Empowered and the Soldier of Love #2 (of 3).

Current Wait List (books either Diamond didn't ship or my store failed to order): Atomic Robo: the Temple of Od #1 (of 5, giving up on ever seeing this), Mickey's Inferno, Smoketown #1 (Diamond claims it's available, but hasn't shipped any to my store).

"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.

Iron Fist: Marvel/Netflix - In terms of overall plot, this is essentially the original Iron Fist run in Marvel Premiere, just sans costumes and with a few later-invented elements (like the Hand or the Crane Mother) added. In making the fourth "street level hero who mostly punches people" series, though, Marvel had to find a way to make Iron Fist stand out from the other three, which posed a problem: the two big things that distinguish Iron Fist are Problematic Tropes and being a Bruce Wayne Ripoff. They used enough Problematic Tropes to get in trouble, but didn't make them the central

conflict point, preferring to dive into tepid corporate intrigue on the not-Bruce-Wayne side. (Aside: the comics have never really made "Danny Rand, Corporate Giant" work for me. Danny's just not someone who would ever want to run a megacorp, he'd find someone trustworthy and hand off the reins as soon as possible...as he did with Jeryn Hogarth in the PM/IF comics.) You can't remove the Regrettable Orientalism without making it an entirely different character, so the best remaining option if you want to use the character is to confront it head-on and make that the primary non-combat conflict of the story.

That said, I suspect the reviewers calling it a horrible flop are either focusing exclusively on the cliches, or are simply trying to be hip by bashing a popular franchise. I haven't finished the season yet, but the actual execution of the chosen themes is pretty good (and there's a strong through-line of "children raised by abusive adults turn out pretty badly"). At first I disliked how rash and impulsive their Danny Rand is, but I can at least see the metafictional reason for it: with Luke being so much more stoic in this universe, Danny has to flip as well to maintain the contrast once they meet. (In-story, there's some plausible theories out there about why a kid raised with monastic discipline might be a rageball, but I have yet to see any concrete confirmation of this in the episodes I've seen.)

Overall, I'd put it on a par with Daredevil Season 2, and for a lot of the same reasons. If remnants of 1970s Chop Socky Exploitation bother you, you might want to skip this one...it's decent, but not good enough to overcome honest objections to the character's questionable origins. And I'm sure that before Defenders drops, someone will have a recommendation for which episodes you'll need to see in order to get the most out of the team story (if any). "Free" with Netflix subscription.

Snarfquest Tales vol 1: Elmore Studios - This is basically a point-and-click puzzle game based on the Snarfquest comic strip. This first volume, available on Steam for \$5, covers the story up to just before Snarf and friends enter the wizard's tower, so a decent chunk of story. However, a lot of the humor I liked from the Dragon Magazine strip has been removed, and the replacement jokes are pretty weak. The puzzles range from trivial to challenging, but are uniformly frustratingly slow due to either the interface limitations, design choices, or both. I'm not going to bother with future installments.

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.

None this month.

Trades:

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

None this month.

Floppies:

No, I don't have any particular disdain for the monthlies, but they *are* floppy, yes?

Gold Digger #239: Antarctic Press - The djinn-trap storyline wrapped up and a few weeks after reading it I couldn't recall having read it. About half an issue's worth of decent ideas stretched into a two issue arc. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Gold Digger #240: Antarctic Press - My store accidentally dropped this off my pull but had still ordered it, but that was enough to make me re-evaluate continuing...and I decided not to. This issue is a done-in-one that raises the stakes of the ongoing "Cheetah vs. Scar the Tuna" battle all the way up to apocalyptic, so it feels like a decent place to leave the book. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Champions #6: Marvel - I only picked this up because I thought it was going to be continued from #5, but apparently the end of #5 wasn't meant to be a cliffhanger, or really ever be picked up on again. This picks up from the Monsters Unleashed issue, with new villains who read like "who've been annoying me online lately?" stereotypes. Dropping the book now. Avoid. \$3.99

Totally Awesome Hulk #17: Marvel - Man, this arc just keeps going. It feels like the sort of thing that should have taken one issue, tops, and it's padded all to Deep 13 and back. Neutral. \$3.99

Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur #17: Marvel - Well, the "who is that Doom?" question is resolved in the most obvious way possible. The main thing this issue has going for it is a plot device that bumps everyone into their 1980s versions at an old mall, making it sort of an "X-Men '92" crossover of sorts. (The final scene kinda bugs me because anything the calculator Luna's using can do, she should be able to do in her head...come on, even Dollar Tree sells scientific calculators now.) Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Ms. Marvel v2 #16: Marvel - The whole "fighting a computer virus in the real world" plot has been used a LOT in comics. But usually it's an excuse

to do some sort of cyberpunk riff or Tron homage. Wilson is tackling the social side of this sort of fight, though. Where most fight-a-virus stories are about fear of technology, Ms. Marvel is facing fear of social change. We value secrets. We can't function without some level of privacy, and technology threatens that. So, rather than trying to fight the technology, Kamala realizes this issue she needs to fight the sociology. Oh, it's an old problem, literature has used secrecy and lack of communication as plot points for centuries if not millennia. And without explicitly namechecking the Champions, Kamala is being more true to that team's current mission here than anyone is over in that book. Strongly recommended. Find out the context for all those panels from this issue floating around online. :) \$3.99

Deathstroke #14: DC - Slade wraps up his latest round of business with the Feds and closes it by going to NYC to deal with a guy. Lots of family drama in the interstices, a guest star I didn't recognize despite advance knowledge she'd be there (so sue me, I haven't been keeping up with the recent Titans books, so I instead wondered what Deadly Nightshade was doing in DC and with rather different powers), and a somewhat confusingly paced fight scene. A nice Sienkiewicz cover, although the dog on it doesn't get introduced until #15. Mildly recommended. \$2.99

This issue and pretty much every \$2.99 DC title that week were bagged with an Into The Badlands B&W comic to promote the AMC series. Meh. I later found out Into The Badlands is basically Journey to the West, something that the comic utterly fails to get across.

Deathstroke #15: DC - Well, the "Twilight" arc name finally gets namechecked in-story, cute gag. No, nothing to do with sparkly vampires or ponies. But Slade did only mean to stay a while. More subtly than the end gag, this arc is about dragging Slade into the more black and white world of heroes and villains, while also reinforcing that he lives in the ethical twilight, where he does good and does evil and not always for the reasons he thinks he does. Recommended. \$2.99

Astro City #42: DC/Vertigo - Another "super past their prime" story, as we often see in this title, but a nice standalone about being a nice standalone. Pun intended. It's about working for decades to get what you think you want, then the rubber meets the road and you have to decide if it's what you really wanted in the first place. Recommended. \$3.99

Hanna-Barbera Future Quest #11 (of 12): DC - A proper penultimate issue, everyone gets their act together and enacts a Clever Plan which of course has things go wrong: no plan survives contact with the enemy. Parker sets up the conflict in such a way that we could be looking at a long drawn-out fight in #12, or a two page resolution followed by a lot of denouncement. Either would fit organically. After excessive farting around, the series is at least coming together well in the end. Recommended. \$3.99

Adam Strange/Hanna-Barbera Future Quest #1: DC - The H-B comics are sort

of getting annuals via DC crossover one-shots, each of which also has a backup story kicking off the next wave of H-B comics. For instance, this one has a Top Cat backup. The main story is fairly straightforward: Adam Strange's Zeta Beam is intercepted by some of the aftermath of Future Quest #12 (yeah, this book is a touch spoilery for the main Future Quest storyline) and the Quests try to help him get back home while dealing with some leftover Agents of FEAR. Decent writing and art, if nothing special other than a crab stealing a hot dog from Bandit. The Top Cat story is actually set in the DCU, with the title character having gone through a wormhole. I have zero nostalgia for the character, though, and nothing about this preview interests me. Mildly recommended. \$4.99

Hanna-Barbera The Flintstones #9: DC - The main theme of this issue is disposable culture. Things, people, we tend to use them and discard them. As such, the title characters are in a supporting role, with parallel stories focusing on Mr. Slate (a user/disposer) and on the Flintstone household appliances (the used/disposed). The religion subplot continues, with a god of strength arising to rival the merciful Gerald. The social messages are laid on with a trowel, but they're effective. Recommended. \$3.99

Booster Gold/Hanna-Barbera The Flintstones #1: DC - This is written by regular Flintstones writer Mark Russell, and drawn by an almost unrecognizably inked-over Rick Leonardi. I'm not entirely sure what Booster Gold's current role is in the Rebirth era, but he's played as a buffoon who blunders about in time, in a universe where pretty much every time traveler is no better. The message of the story is blunt and broadly-painted even compared to the regular Flintstones book, and seems to establish roughly the line between "just far enough" and "too far" in satire...with this book being on the wrong side of the line. Pretty disappointing. The backup feature is the new Jetsons by Palmiotti and Conner, which is a "Shiny Dystopia" set after environmental devastation and recolonization of Earth. Pretty standard themes tread by the "Bite Me, Grandpa" era of the Legion of Super-Heroes, and something of a shock-value revelation about Rosie the Robot. I doubt I'll be picking up that book. Neutral. \$4.99

My Little Pony Friendship is Magic Deviations: IDW - What if Celestia decided Twilight Sparkle could do fine on her own and that Prince Blueblood was the one who needed special attention? Now, Cook could have gone a sappy route and showed that with proper friendship and guidance anyone can be redeemed, but...well, she went the other way. But unlike how most "What If" stories show the worst possible outcomes, this story demonstrates that sometimes a nuisance in the right place can get good results too. Recommended. \$4.99

My Little Pony Guardians of Harmony Annual 2017: IDW - Basically a series of short pieces each aimed at promoting one of the Guardians of Harmony toys, strung together by a loose "the Changelings are back and invading the Crystal Empire" plotline. Not every artist seems to have been

shown the toys in question, though (Fosgitt seems to have glanced at the giant Spike toy and that's about it). Mildly recommended. \$7.99

My Little Pony Friendship is Magic #52: IDW - Lots of fighting and then prepping for the next fight, very little advancing of the plot. Mostly worth reading for the "Pinkie vs. Mythos Creature" sequence. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Transformers Annual 2017: IDW - A pair of flashback origin stories: how Bumblebee became an Autobot, and how Pyra Magna came to lead the Torchbearers. Optimus and Pyra chatting over a black hole while Starscream and his head-ghost of Bumblebee eavesdrop. Tramontano's line work is okay, but doesn't always mesh with the rotating colorists. The Bumblebee story does a decent job of providing him a reason to join, while also explaining why a certain plot device doesn't get used all the time. Pyra's story is muddier, both in story and art, and seems intended to set up something in the future, maybe. Mildly recommended. \$7.99

Optimus Prime #5: IDW - Interesting anti-parallel storytelling here. In the past, the truth about the Decepticons' actions is a turning point in the conflict, while in the present, the deeper truth about the Decepticons' ideals is the turning point. It even manages to redeem, to some extent, All Hail Megatron. The coloring is still all over the place and hard on the eyes, and I think Barber is biting off a bit more complexity than he can resolve, but it's decent. Mildly recommended. \$3.99

Transformers Till All Are One #8: IDW - This is not really a story that works well the first time through. Some of this is in the art, which gets a bit muddled at the climax, but mostly it's because the bulk of the issue is a mental struggle between Windblade and someone I don't recall hearing of before the last page of #7, and a greater danger who hasn't really been discussed on-page since the Marvel continuity. Yeah, there's some other supporting material like the Covenant of Primus that covers this, but overall it really feels like "OMG it's someone you've never heard of, run!" storytelling. Hint: when hanging a subplot on "someone is keeping a deep dark secret," it helps to make sure that the readers know why the secret is so bad. The narration of the first few pages sort of lay it out, but it's Metroplex doing the narration in a rather elliptical way, and it left me more confused than enlightened: and I already KNEW why the main baddie was to be feared. It would have been better if someone pointed out the danger two issues ago, asking everyone to make sure one of the zombie Titans wasn't (spoiler), the servant of and prison for (other spoiler). (If this did happen, I certainly don't remember it....) Very mildly recommended. \$3.99

Transformers Lost Light #4: IDW - Meanwhile, in an entirely different universe.... There's a LOT of exposition on plots and subplots, and a certain amount of complaining about the quality and timeliness of the exposition, and the usual Roberts dialogue tics. Recommended. \$3.99

The Four Color Comic Book History of Comics #4 (of 8): IDW - The tumultous 1950s! This is the era of comics with the most High Drama, where small personal stories blew up into Fate Of The Industry sort of stuff. Recommended. \$3.99

The Four Color Comic Book History of Comics #5 (of 8): IDW - Out of the chaos and ruin of the Wertham years strode a titan, with feet planted yards apart! And Stan Lee was there too and took all the credit! :) But first, the chronological stream rolls back for a bit, to establish the birth of modern fandom in 1930s science fiction publishing, as it now comes to bear on how comics evolved in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Still, despite a few pages on Robert Crumb's early years and a few other bits here and there, this issue is dominated by four figures: Lee, Kirby, Ditko, and Goodman. Goodman was the publisher and Stan Lee's boss, and while hardly an apologia for Lee's behavior, Van Lente and Dunlavey reveal Goodman's role in some of the crappier things Lee gets blamed for. Bonus new page on women in comics features Marie Severin. Recommended. \$3.99

Empowered and the Soldier of Love #2 (of 3): Dark Horse - The sinister plan is revealed, but it's not like Emp, Jette, and Captain Rivet are in a great position to do much about it. The part I found most interesting, though, was a nearly throwaway line about how magical girls are a thing in the Empverse. They're part of the "bargain babies" phenomenon, which has a lot of disturbing implications down the road (and could even hint at a Shocking Revelation in #3). Recommended. \$3.99

Whew, 23 comics, although a lot of them are one-shots and annuals, and I'm dropping two of the regular books (Gold Digger and Champions).

Dave Van Domelen, "That once you pray to a god of strength, you surrender all right to beg for mercy. And Gerald help us, we all need mercy. Because in the end, it's only our inefficiencies and the softness inside us that makes life worth living." - Mr. Slate, Flintstones #9 (grammar and usage issues Slate's fault)

Bonus Quote: "Wow, you are the worst Iron Fist ever." - character in Iron Fist, the identity of which would be a spoiler, but it's someone who'd be in a position to know.
