Despite the name, the release of Teen Titans: Earth One officially squelches any possibility of an “Earth One” continuity for DC, cleanly placing this story completely outside of any existing continuity. Of course, even a cursory read of this comic will quickly reveal the dramatic differences between this world and the one that birthed the original Teen Titans and prove that the separation was highly necessary. DC’s “Earth One” line has thus far produced origin stories for DC’s two biggest heroes and established itself as a reliable option for readers looking for a way into comics. Both Superman and Batman saw the circumstances of their creation heavily modernized and thrown into a more realistic, cinematic light. While this volume will be just as kind to those picking up their first comic, the ethos behind Teen Titans: Earth One is rather different. Instead of offering a modern, streamlined take on the Titans’ mythology, writer Jeff Lemire takes us down a drastically different path. Mixing a dash of X-Men and more than a hint of Runaways into the classic Wolfman/Perez formula, Teen Titans: Earth One introduces us to four teenagers growing up in Monument, Oregon when the emergence of strange powers and visions of a buried secret bring them together. Their visions are shared by Raven, another girl, living in New Mexico with her grandfather. Those familiar with Titans lore will already recognize some substantial changes to the structure of the story, but we’ll get to that in time. Taken on its own, as it appears to be intended, Teen Titans: Earth One has a good deal going for it. First, and perhaps most important for a teen superteam story, Lemire is more than able to write a convincing adolescent. Yes, we get at least one cry of “You don’t know what I’m going through”, but there’s an honest respect for the protagonists’ struggles and a knowledge of how they speak. Even better, he’s able to do so while imbuing them with consistent and varied personalities. You’d be amazed how many otherwise talented writers can’t manage that. Though Lemire’s Tara Markov is certainly an acquired taste, our protagonists each bring a certain hook to the table. True, they may be archetypal, but, thankfully, they’re never clichés. Lemire is very skilled at introducing elements of characterization through fluid, believable reactions to the twists of the plot. Gar Logan is a particular stand out among the children, demonstrating optimism, maturity beyond his years, and a somewhat self-destructive need not to get in the way over the course of the book’s 144 pages. But while this unobstructive way of conveying character is a great blessing, there’s only so much it can do. Trying to weave characterization into the story means that it can only last as long as the plot demands, and that can sometimes keep these characters from getting all too deep. Lemire’s strength is that he’s able to write the kids truthfully, you feel like you know them, but if you asked me to tell you much about them, I don’t know that I would be able to. Combined with how quickly the action gets started, there are some definite limits to what Lemire can achieve. While I can feel the affection Lemire has for the character, I’m not sure, having read this book at least three times, that I can definitely tell you anything about Victor Stone. Likewise, by nature of her geographical distance from the rest of the team, Raven doesn’t receive the most time in the spotlight. Or, I suppose, she receives the most time in the spotlight, depending on how you look at it. Regardless, Raven is written particularly well but doesn’t have the same room to, pardon the expression, spread her wings. I’m also a little concerned by the slew of Native American clichés that follow in her wake. But, for any trouble that the needs of the plot create, remember that it’s because it is packed to the brim with weird, often wonderful ideas. Lemire clearly has big plans for this world and he’s managed to make it feel fresh in a way that few debuts manage. There’s a beginning; middle; and end to this story, but this definitely feels more like the start of an ongoing series than the rest of its Earth One brethren. There’s plenty that’s simply not resolved here and, if you’re anything like me, you’ll want to know more by the time you reach the end.

That's a win for Lemire but, with another volume likely two or more years away, it may be a bit of a loss for the reader. The art team - Terry Dodson, Rachel Dodson, Cam Smith, and Brad Anderson - is great together. The book's style falls right in that sweet spot between cartoony and realistic to create a stylized look that you barely even notice, but almost certainly enjoy. Gar and Tara's designs enjoy a round, fluid look, while Vic's design is distinctly vertical and Deathstroke's revels in its stoutness. But there's an underlying realism, often the work of clever lighting, that balances all of the experimental qualities out. In fact, I really have to hand it to Brad Anderson. Particularly when he's working with cool colors, the flat, slightly muted tones look great. It's not all wonderful. The book has an about average number of unclear storytelling choices and Dodson struggles with certain characters. While it's only apparent in a few panels, I'm not a huge fan of what Dodson is doing with Starfire and this Deathstroke redesign is, frankly, pretty forgettable, but it's Terra that probably fares the worst for her ample panel-time. Though she often looks fine and occasionally stands out as a really nice character design, there's something about her face that never fully escapes a weird chipmunk-esque quality. Still, overall, this is a nice looking book. I don't know that it's a comic you'd buy for the art, but it does sweeten the deal. The style feels fresh and appropriate and there's a very welcome sense of diversity in how the characters are presented. I also commend the art team's use of light and blocking to communicate story. It's a bit of a teen superhero cliché, but, with this much plot and character to get across, it's a wise choice. There is one final element to consider: the translation. While there are familiar names aplenty, this is a very different approach to the Titans. In fact, at times this book can really make you wonder why it needed to be a Titans story at all. Marvel can host the New Mutants - of whatever iteration - and the Runaways, and Teen Titans: Earth One is certainly closer to the later, both in a rather literal way and a more metaphorical fashion. Couldn't DC have just published this and commissioned a different Earth One book for the Titans? Admittedly the story is cleverly based on the plot of Wolfman and Perez's New Teen Titans #1, but, with so many dramatic changes to the mythos, every knowing reference made me wonder why the book tried so hard to anchor itself in Teen Titans lore when much of it was being recreated from the ground up. I mean, Cyborg still struggles with feelings of parental betrayal and a desire to return to normalcy, but without the chip on his shoulder, the accident, the warmth, is he definitely Cyborg? Raven's powers are seemingly tied into her Native ancestry, completely removing the majority of her character! There will be fans who fume at Lemire's 'gaul' to alter these classic characters, but I think they'll be wrong. What I do wonder is why he tried to have it both ways. Though a couple of the familiar moments will elicit a knowing smile from fans, it feels like this either needed to be a complete reinvention or a more grounded interpretation. Some Thoughts: I was sold on this series by what I thought to be a wonderful redesign of Raven on the cover. It turns out that that figure was actually a not entirely representative Starfire and Raven was the girl at the top, who I theorized to be Equinox. While the snaking fabric and lighter coloration would have made for an interesting Raven, I was struck by how great Raven looked in this book. The design is for a very different version of the character but it combines this new outlook and history with the classic Perez look wonderfully. Speaking of Raven, It was pretty cool to recast Raven as a Navajo, however I don't know that you can honestly say that her heritage is relevant for any reason other than to lampshade her powers and give her access to one of those wise Navajo grandfathers who are always happy to instruct you in 'the old ways'. It's restrained enough to be considered frustrating rather than out and out offensive, but it would have been really nice to see the story actually reflect something about Navajo culture instead of regurgitating unhelpful white guilt and stereotypes. Well, maybe

we'll do better in that regard next time. The post Teen Titans: Earth One appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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