

Confession time: I might be the only reviewer who actually hasn't ever read much from Mark Millar. I'm more familiar of his adapted works to film, and as a consistent Fantastic Four fan he appeared in my reading list at least once. But I am a sucker for time travel stories and of course I like action movies in general, so why not check out his latest comicbook that combines the two-- Chrononauts #1. I usually jump right into the critique, but this time I'll add a bit of summary as preface: Two white male scientists are interested in time travel, make a time machine to great public acclaim, then attempt to travel in time, and something goes horribly wrong. That middle part of all of that is actually quite intriguing. I can't think of a time travel story that includes such a public spectacle of the event. The characters themselves remark how they are basically rock stars, and many of the panels are devoted to public reaction to the various events. It's reminiscent of how jet pilots and astronauts had similarly captured the public's imagination in the past, and it makes sense that if such technology existed, it would be so exciting as to make such efforts full of spectacle and celebrity. The choices of these panels range from being interesting to funny to uncomfortable. Some can be quite telling, as one features a patient prepped for surgery in the foreground, but the doctors are huddled around the television in the background. Strangely, a similar situation is repeated in a strip club. I understand the incongruity but it's effect doesn't add anything the doctors' situation already does, and so it's just a strange, arbitrary, forced, choice, perhaps there so we can have a gratuitous butt-shot for one of the lady strippers. My favorite one would have to be the scene of a robbery, in which it's the old grandma holding up a convenience store but is distracted by the news, but by and large all the choices are strange. The vaguely Asian one is full of stereotype, the one with nuns is there so they can look shocked at the main characters' attitude about sex. So basically it's all a good idea done quite superficially. It's intriguing to present time travel as a global event, but it's not really an event if it's just to show that everyone is, simply, impressed. The religious people show up as visual gag, and in blue humor to boot, but it would be automatically a deeper look if we could get at least one panel depicting a protest, a public debate, or a preacher reading a book about free will, instead. Certainly "spectacle" is the aim for this book, with most panels stretching lengthwise to mimic a widescreen lens. Many key set pieces are whole or half page splashes, and the ending of the book features a dynamic double-page splash of a rushing army and the full-page portrait of the main character being shot. The art overall is quite impressive, with characters emotive and the settings impressive. The backgrounds are fully realized, even in more incidental/supplemental panels, and the technology is nicely rendered. Unfortunately, most of the characters, in particular the heroes, all share the similar body types and facial structure. At times, it's easier to tell the characters apart by their hairstyles, for example, than in their faces or body language, although it's not a consistent problem. Storywise, the characters are also pretty basic. One guy is the flashy womanizer, the other is the brooding methodical one. The latter has daddy issues and pines for his woman because he made a "mistake" by working too hard. Wow. Such machismo. Very dude. There are also many key points that are quite important to the story but aren't fleshed out or set up very well. Why, for example, is there so many anachronistic artifacts around the world, especially when they have nothing to do with how the heroes time travel at all? Why is there a security guy with a gun holding back Bro 1 from saving Bro 2? Why set your company, if it is a company, in Texas with your launch bay in Nevada? At least in a movie, lapses of story logic only last for two hours. In series form these issues might bother me months at a time. Best to just enjoy the spectacle.

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