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In 2045, as Islam has overrun Europe and the West openly shuns monotheism, the Vatican-funded CERN Laboratories 'discover' that time travel is possible. The Pope orders the creation of a private army and, led by a few handpicked Cardinals and the finest graduates of selected war colleges, they travel back in time to 312AD - the reign of the first Christian Emperor, Constantine. Upon arrival, conflicting agendas, ideological differences, and personal greed see grand plans unravel. *Pax Romana* is the tale of 5,000 men sent on an impossible mission to change the past and save the future. At the end of the world, will they succeed, or will they fail? This politically driven sci-fi epic comes from the creator of the hit *Nightly News*!

Collecting: *Pax Romana* 1-4

Pax Romana Details

Date : Published May 1st 2009 by Image Comics
ISBN : 9781582408736
Author : Jonathan Hickman (Writer, Artist)
Format : Paperback 144 pages
Genre : Sequential Art, Comics, Graphic Novels, Science Fiction, Fiction, Alternate History

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From Reader Review Pax Romana for online ebook

Seth says

I've been following Hickman since Nightly News blew up a few years ago, and of all of his ideas, this is probably my favorite. The premise is a potential 5 star concept, the execution however is a bit shallow. My feelings are a little mixed about the artwork as well. I can't help but feel despite the impeccable graphic design, the artwork falls back on too many shortcuts. There's a static quality to the actual pen and ink that doesn't transcend the overall presentation enough to let me give it a pass. Characters move in amorphous (though oftentimes evocative) spaces that ultimately point out the fact that the narrative is skipping through huge concepts without allowing us to grasp anything. Additionally, the characters are opaque, with only the General Chase character standing out as a tragic figure undone by his own heart.

I do feel the story is oftentimes brilliant with its insight on how the long, tumultuous arrow of human history could be "streamlined" if time travel were possible. If a specific group had the foreknowledge and the resources to go back in time at a pivotal point, one wonders if social engineering on such an elemental scale could happen, but I think the scenario given by Hickman is plausible. Additionally, making it a Catholic mission adds a religious critique that is pretty irresistible when it comes to asking WHO might do such a thing.

Despite all of it's great things, at the end of the day I felt like I was reading a cliff notes version of a longer narrative. I think this is especially true in the last 3 or so pages, where whole swaths of interesting conflict are summed up in single images. That said, the last line is a pretty nifty mindblower.

Dan says

This took a lot of effort to keep reading this, and at one point I wanted to DNF this. The whole layout is different from anything I have read before. The art was something I didn't care for either. But enough about that. This is a time travel story where soldiers think to correct the Timeline of the Roman Empire and to ensure that it survives and thrives because they thought this was the best point in history. I just thought this was okay, and I definitely don't think this is for everyone.

Damon says

Brill. Maybe could have been stretched out a bit. too short for me.

L. McCoy says

Wow, I'm very disappointed. I'm a big fan of Hickman's work. East of West is my favorite comic, his New Avengers is great, I also think that The Nightly News is ridiculously underrated... so what the hell was this?

What's it about?

Uhh... that's a bit hard to explain. Pretty much it's about a political thriller about the Catholic church and Rome with some sci-fi stuff... you'll understand why I can't give a better description later.

Pros:
The art is freaking amazing! I think it's a cool art style for sure.
This book is pretty unpredictable.
I know it sounds weird but I really like the panel layout. At first it's a bit annoying but once you're used to it it's actually really cool!
I like the ending.

Cons:
The story is a bit hard to follow.
The characters aren't interesting in this book.
I always have to say this sadly but... why do some authors mix comics and prose in the same book? Especially since, in the case of this book, it's stuff that would be perfectly fine (possibly even work better) as a comic book scene! I wish more authors would just pick a format for their book instead of trying to mix formats.
This book is pretty boring which is a most unpleasant surprise. Usually Hickman's books are exciting, this had a few brief action scenes but for the most part isn't exciting at all.

Overall:
Disappointing for sure. It's hard to believe it's Hickman, I usually love his work but this... no. It's not horrible but it's nothing I'd recommend and I would even say I dislike it. If you're a fan of Hickman's work don't expect this to be nearly as good as his other stuff and if you've never read Hickman you really shouldn't start here.

2/5

Caitlin says

Great concept, poor execution.

I love books that use an alternate take on historical events but this was just too much concept/treatise, not enough actual story. I never felt like Hickman took any of the characters beyond simple archetypes and combined with very text heavy panels, it really made me struggle to get through the book.

Full review here at Graphic Reviews

Roy says

High concept and a story only Hickman could pull off. The art is a little weak and at times it wasnt really needed. The dialgoue is where this story shines. Worth checking out if you havent read Hickmans works.

Zedsdead says

The Vatican invents time travel and sends an army back to 311AD Constantinople to civilize and Christianize the world, to prevent the Dark Ages, and to eliminate in advance competing world religions. All goes well at first but as time passes the leaders of the expedition find themselves at one another's throats.

Pax Romana is very text heavy for a graphic novel. The art (watercolors?) is pretty but virtually irrelevant. An afterthought, an accent.

The plot is highly intelligent, very dense, heavy on alternate history. It covers the first few decades after the Vatican incursion, focusing on the planning and then the enlistment of the first Christian emperor Constantine, then ends abruptly with a summary of the next thousand years or so. Perhaps the title was canceled and Hickman was given one issue to wrap up?

I had a lot of respect for Pax Romana, found it to be unexpectedly thick with theme and feasibility, but had a hard time getting into it. It's smart but not very engaging.

Martin says

An original comic book, in more ways than one, and also typical Hickman: crazy concepts, new twists on old ideas, and lots & lots of potential - and then it's over abruptly.

I feel like this 4-issue mini-series could have been a 12-issue *maxi*-series. It certainly has enough material for it. Good sci-fi, and philosophical food for thought.

Chad says

Great high concept, poor execution. The Catholic Church sends soldiers back in time to stop the Roman empire's fall. Honestly, this is almost a prose novel with some pictures. What art there is is so static and lifeless. This would have worked better had Hickman made this a fully fleshed out alt history novel along the likes of Phillip K. Dick's Man in the High Castle. As a comic, I was too often bored with it because it's just people standing around talking.

Aildiin says

Very early in Hickman's career but you can already see the seeds of greatness.
Highly recommended !

Nicolo Yu says

This was an appropriate purchase post-Popemania and for Holy Week. I planned to save it for the Holy

Weekend by I couldn't resist it. I've read the first issue from Comixology's gallery of freebies and I was so curious on how the story progressed from there.

Like all of Jonathan Hickman's work I've read, Pax Romana is an ambitious endeavor. It is eesentially a retelling of the history of the world, as how history turned out when modern day Vatican-backed mercenaries traveled to the past at a critical point in history to ensure the rise of Constantine I and the Catholic Church.

Hickman researched a lot of history for this project. So much inspiration did he drew from it that he had to utilize a lot of text on order to tell his story. I don't know how he was able to packed so much story in four issues; with the material he presented here, especially in the back matter, he had potted enough for an ongoing series of at least 30 issues. It still ended satisfactorily but he could have had a modern epic in his hands here.

Sud666 says

Johnathan Hickman can sure write a damn fine sci-fi story. I give him credit for the ability to craft a very interesting tale.

In Pax Romana, the Catholic Church decides to send back a team of soldiers/specialists to change the events of history. The idea is to send in the team during the time of Constantine and help to cement the power and influence of the Church into a monolithic religion. The ONLY religion.

The team that is recruited are all devout Roman Catholics. But once they are sent back into time-it turns out they may all have agendas of their own. What follows is an interesting look into how the past could be manipulated by a handful of people if they had the advantage of modern technology. While the concept has been done before by many authors, Hickman's story does a creditable job of keeping up the quality of such tales.

I enjoyed the different outcomes of the various "political systems" that were being tried out in order to build the perfect future society. A clever and intelligent story. The artwork is not much, but this is not really a comic book per se. It is more of a book with illustrations and the format is closer to that of a play than the traditional dialogue bubbles.

I am unsure if there is more to this story. I liked what I read but felt the end to be rather abrupt. If there are more volumes to this series than I am certainly willing to read it and that will also up the rating. If this is a stand alone book then the ending was too soon and abrupt, if it isn't then everything is fine and this will be a 4 star rating. For now, great story, but a 3 star rating for a somewhat abrupt ending.

Mike says

And then it just...ends. And far too early for my tastes.

I've finished this book days ago and haven't known how to capture the significance of this work. It simply

amazes me how much time and thought must have gone into planning the intricate interplay of historical confluences that play out here. I think this book is fantastic - and when I use the word fantastic here I mean it literally... The fantasy, the scope of imagination, and the sheer sense of wonder and surprise that the creators evoke gives new meaning to this tired, overused word.

I am absolutely impressed with Hickman's persistent adherence to his brand - the design sensibility in this book stays with the colourful, gritty-but-clearly sketched out and over-emphasised images that pervade his work - and I love the storytelling tools (asides, callouts, transcripts) that give me a sense I'm looking into secret, lost records of amazing things that no one would believe happened.

My greatest "complaint" is that I want to read so much more about this world, people, politics, wars and nuances of "what if you could change history?" that are woven so thoroughly throughout. It sure seems like Hickman was done, but there's so much potential for more. So glad I got to experience this.

Sean Gibson says

Reading a Jonathan Hickman book is like playing WhirlyBall – you have to gauge precisely just how drunk to be in order to get the most out of the experience. Drink too little and you risk being overwhelmed by what's going on; drink too much and you just end up hurting yourself.

Drink just the right amount, though, and you're treated to an experience that's pretty singular, even if you have a hard time describing it afterward.

I'd put Pax Romana up at the top of the Hickman books I've read—it's an intriguing high concept that's executed well, though I could take or leave the art. A good place to start with Hickman, or to wash the taste of his Avengers run out of your mouth (Scotch also helps with that).

(On a related note: if you've never played WhirlyBall, I'm sorry your life has been so boring and pointless.)

Evan says

To read *Pax Romana* is to watch a man masturbate. Jonathan Hickman has produced such a pure specimen of self-wank brain-spunk that it's a mystery that I enjoyed it at all.

Like all "written and illustrated by" comics, *Pax Romana* suffers most from not having an editor. It's top-heavy with words, the plot is unfocused, every character speaks with a singular voice, and it exists only to tweak the nipples of the author and the few others who share his daydreams. Plus, there are plenty of typos (Mediolanurn, caeser, gaurd).

The nucleus inside *Pax Romana* is a good one. The first act is fascinating and shows real promise, but it devolves almost immediately into a sub-literary sub-intellectual ham-fisted non-story. The whole comic is basically a poor man's sociology/anthropology/philosophy tract. Hickman doesn't even offer a resolution to his story; there is nothing connecting the last act with the first one. Hickman probably felt like a four-issue limited series seriously hampered his "creative vision", and doubtlessly it did, but he does nothing to address the problems of the abbreviated format. Instead, he gives us a thrown-together Cliff's Notes version of his

mountains of cum-sticky legal pads (on which he has written the phrase MEANINGFUL SOCIAL COMMENTARY over and over in underline and bold).

It has an interesting aesthetic, but maybe not a *good* one - the art is pretty but cumbersome during the more comic-booky action scenes. I opted for a non-zero star rating, I guess, because I liked the layout and premise.