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Constantine raises 'Hell' in new DC Comics graphic novel

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John Constantine isn't just some character Keanu Reeves is playing in the upcoming Constantine film from Warner Bros.

He is a comic character who has been around for nearly 20 years, starring in a monthly comic series that's just passed its 200th issue, as well as numerous guest-star appearances throughout various comic series from publisher DC Comics.

All His Engines is an "original graphic novel" (the content appears here for the first time and is not a reprint of previously published material) that takes its title from a line in Milton's Paradise Lost, setting Constantine against a demon that is attempting to build a literal hell-on-earth.

This hardback book contains the equivalent of six months' worth of the regular Hellblazer comic and is a product of the regular creative team responsible for the monthly Hellblazer comic from Vertigo.

This story is very much a traditional Hellblazer story, containing several characters and situations that are no strangers to Constantine's story. Even the familiar takes on a much larger scale, though, due to the format of this project.



Before you see Keanu Reeves in Constantine, read Hellblazer.

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The title character, Constantine, is a dabbler in magic and the occult. Though generally coming across as a self-serving jerk, Constantine — despite plenty of other character flaws — still winds up doing what good he can for the world. In this case, he faces a situation of apocalyptic proportions as he attempts to prevent a demon from claiming Los Angeles as a new addition to Hell.

The main plot of this story revolves around a sickness that spreads worldwide, leaving its victims in comas, with all medical experts stumped as to the cause. When a friend's granddaughter winds up sick, Constantine gets pulled in to investigate the possibility of a supernatural cause. The search leads Constantine and his friend to Los Angeles where they confront the demon responsible, as well as a second demon who is displeased at the first's intrusion onto its territory.

By its overall tone, as well as being done by the same creative team on the monthly series, this story fits right in with the continuing Hellblazer saga. On one hand, this is good: The story isn't a shocking departure from what regular readers are used to with the character and makes for an interesting introduction for new readers, who get to sample in one large dose what the creative team is capable of.

On the other hand, because it doesn't stand out from the regular title, it's rather questionable why the book was released in this format, beyond a desire to have it available for interested readers who decide to seek out the source material for the Constantine film.

Ultimately, while it may be a treat for long-time fans to finally have a Hellblazer story in hardback, the price alone makes this book a "wait-for-the-paperback version" volume for anyone but die-hard fans of the series. Story-wise, this is an excellent volume, with the feel and tone I've come to expect from Hellblazer stories.

If you are just interested in discovering more about the John Constantine character, I would recommend Constantine: The Hellblazer Collection, which contains the comic book adaptation of the film, plus three other relevant Hellblazer comics. Another volume, Hellblazer: Dangerous Habits, is also available and contains the original story that part of the movie is based on.

The Hellblazer volumes should be available at the larger book chains (generally in the non-manga graphic novels section) as well as in comic shops. Diamond Comic Distributors, Inc., a national comics distributor, has a comic shop locator service available online at csls.diamondcomics.com and by phone at 1-888-COMIC-BOOK.

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