



Hellblazer: The Devil You Know

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This volume features some of Constantine's earliest adventures by writer Jamie Delano, including his first victory in the long war with the demon Nergal and an encounter with a strange woman who is the embodiment of the world's horrors, painted by V FOR VENDETTA co-creator David Lloyd.

Collects Hellblazer #10-13, Hellblazer Annual and The Horrorist #1-2.

Hellblazer: The Devil You Know Details

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From Reader Review Hellblazer: The Devil You Know for online ebook

Quentin Wallace says

In this volume we get to see a conclusion to the storyline started in the first volume with the two "cults" on Earth. More importantly, we get a flashback explaining the ghosts that haunt Constantine. There's an annual reprinted in this volume that I didn't care much for. Then we get to THE HORRORIST which was pretty good if a little confusing.

As usual, art fits the story very well. Overall another enjoyable volume.

Printable Tire says

This collection contains three flavors of nihilism for your self-hating pleasure, three tones of world-weary disgust for your cynical, comic-book reading mind.

The first selection is my least favorite. Even though it seems like forever since I finished the previous Hellblazer collection, the conclusion of the carrying-over storyline still seems abrupt. What really bothers me about this selection though is the art. It seems Richard Piers Rayner is hell-bent on depicting every stupid, awkward, obnoxious and just plain dumb facial expression the human body is capable of. It's gross and embarrassing in a way undeserving of the gross tastes of Hellblazer.

Bryan Talbot's art, however, which serves to illustrate the first Hellblazer Annual, is always satisfying in its putrid grotesqueness, and fits the rich coloring and accompanying story like a severed head to rusty pike. This is also, not coincidentally, my favorite story of the lot: though it is ugly and as mean-spirited as the others, there was something interesting in its portrayal of the fall of magic and rise of man. Also, the framing story involves 1980's British politics, which I had no interest in whatsoever before reading Hellblazer gave me an entertaining perspective on the various injustices and events.

The final piece to this triptych of a comic book collection is the first two issues of The Horrorist, a limited series on Constantine illustrated beautifully by David Lloyd, and my first introduction to John Constantine long, long before I knew who he was. The story here is an ugly one, essentially the ultimate white guilt fable, and even though it is self-reverentially one it is no less bleakly self-righteous or unappealing.

Somewhere around the middle of the Horrorist I thought to myself, "Why am I reading this? This is gross and mean-spirited and boring. I am not enjoying myself." I mean, Constantine is constantly prattling on in some purple-prosed manner why the world sucks and everybody sucks and the world is going to die because it sucks and etcetera. Why not throw in a joke issue every now and then? Even the darkest melancholic has mediocre days every once in a while. It's such a grim book it's grim to the point of devolving and devaluing all other possible perspectives. It is a book geared to put you in the ugliest frame of mind, with no chance of recovery. It is proselytizing on obvious uglies and evils of the world, things most of us move beyond because there are other things out there, but it does not show those other things. It even adds made-up carnage to stack the deck in its negative-nelly view further. In that way it is maudlin meaningless, and not worth my time.

I know I complain about smugness a lot on here, but smugness in literature is one thing I can't stand. Unless it is an obvious pulp story, I hate to see broadly defined characters that are good and evil, or opinions that are good or evil, especially when the story in question represents itself to be held up to a higher standard than pulp. This doesn't mean that I only like wishy-washy literature: but when a story has bad people, I like it to be at least admitted that these people (or opinions) are bad only because of the limited scope of the protagonist, who are (quite reasonably) indebted to their own views, and not the limited scope of the actual author's mind.

Hellblazer is relentlessly smug. Everybody's a nitwit or a mother-fucker or a hypocrite or a devil or a racist or a sniveling angel. Everybody is guilty of something. And Constantine is like Socrates, calling everybody else out while admitting he's the worst one of all. It's a cheap way to gain the reader's sympathy but it works, until the constant purple-prosed droning on the way life sucks and is shit becomes a pill. And like a pill, or a smart friend who is fun for a while until all his harping becomes a nagging annoyance, I think Hellblazer is a novelty only good in small doses.

Nathan says

"The Devil You Know" collects Hellblazer issues #10-13, plus the "Bloody Saint" from the Special, and both issues of The Horrorist.

Overall, this is a solid collection -- if for no other reason than it's great they're finally making an effort at collecting the earlier issues in a mostly complete way. It's only four issues, but it's a fairly important and interesting four issues, and it's padded with some good Hellblazer miscellany. The writing and storyline is good, and improves slightly from Book 1 (Hellblazer Original Sins). The art is still somewhat garishly colored (typical for the late 80s), but the art itself is improved as well.

The storyline mostly deals with Newcastle and its aftermath, as well as John's current troubles with the demon Nergal; this is the first three issues, #10, #11, and #12. #13 is a one-shot sort of filler story in which John has hallucinations or visions of a nuclear apocalypse while resting at the beach. The "Bloody Saint" annual is entirely about John's distant ancestor, the ruthless and cunning priest-king Con-Stan-Tyne, set probably in the 7th century or so, and it establishes a relationship with both Ravenscar and the Dragon. Finally the story of The Horrorist is the tale of a frigid winter and John's tracking of a destructively empowered African girl who recreates atrocities wherever she goes.

Honestly, though I'm glad it's out, it could have been pieced together a little better.

First of all, the inclusion of the Bloody Saint annual isn't terribly unfitting, but it would do better as a prelude to the next trade, Book 3 (Hellblazer The Fear Machine)... I say this because of the importance of the Dragon and the God/Goddess balancing elements in the Fear Machine storyline. I assume it was put here instead to act as padding for the mere four issues.

Secondly, the story of The Horrorist doesn't fit here, and should go somewhere else (it's been suggested it fits between issues #83 and #84). I assume it was just added as padding as well, but padding really isn't necessary -- other elements could have been added in.

For example: Since the Nergal storyline is the main focus, I think they should have included part of Brian Azzarello's "The First Time" story from "Hellblazer Secret Files", the bit where an 8-year-old John meets

Nergal while watching them dredge a dead body from the river. Make it the first part of the book and then go into the issues, or put it after, either way.

Also, with the nuclear omens theme in issue #13, Grant Morrison's issues #25 and #26 could be included here, since they aren't part of the TPB for Book 4 (Hellblazer Family Man). This would be a bit of a stretch, since they were written more than ten issues later, but it's less a stretch than the inclusion of The Horrorist, and it makes more sense. Plus the storyline of those two issues is deliberately vague in terms of timeline and continuity with the rest of the series, since it was a guest-writer spot.

Finally, putting the story about John's old heroine-addict girlfriend who gets addicted to Morpheus' sand (Sandman #3) might have been a nice inclusion for the end of the book, though there is some debate about when that storyline occurred within the Hellblazer timeline.

Any of these could have been included more sensibly, and filled the book out enough to keep it from being a skinny one. The Morrison issues and the Gaiman Sandman cameo issue may have legal or financial complications that would prevent inclusion, but the Azzarello "Secret Files" story is a no-brainer and definitely should have been included.

However, aside from these niggling concerns about how the book could have been filled out more fittingly, it's still a really good book overall. The "Bloody Saint" story from the Hellblazer Annual is really pretty hard to find, so it's great to have it included, and as I said it's wonderful that they're finally going back and trying to put Jamie Delano's series-originating work into TPBs.

Next: Book 3 (Hellblazer The Fear Machine)

William Thomas says

although the character of john constantine developed slowly into one of the richest and most fulfilling personas in comic book history under the direction of garth ennis, the initial books written by jamie delano are lacking. they are poorly scripted and the artwork/storyboards seem amateurish and muddled. not worth the time.

Shannon Appelcline says

Nergal & Newcastle (10-12). These three issues really form the conclusion of the major arc from volume 1, and so should have gone there, especially the Swamp Thing related issue. Ah well. 10 and 12 focus on the Resurrection Crusade and Nergal and are nice issues. There's a bit too much philosophical wankery in issue #10, of the sort that sometimes spoils Delano's writing. However in the end it offers some nice closure, and #12 does so even moreso. They're good plot-heavy issues [7/10]. On the other hand Newcastle is superb, not just for its revelation of Constantine's past, but also for the way that it shows the past of Constantine's crew, carefully lifted from both Swamp Thing and Delano's own initial issues. The story has a great kick to it and remains one of the landmark Constantine tales. Comparing it to the tales of Constatine's past in the New 52, and it's obvious how much the newer Constantine pales before his older self [9/10].

On the Beach (13). This is Delano's first full-length story that puts imagery and philosophy ahead of any

type of story. To my surprise I like it (and always have). It's beautiful and scary and freaky and memorable, even if it doesn't contribute to the overall *Hellblazer* story [8/10].

The Bloody Saint (Annual #1). This is a slow story, but it's an intriguing (first) look at the Constantine legacy, and also a nice translation of Constantine's own desires and goals into a different milieu. Overall, an interesting look at the character and also a great preview of the some of the themes that show up in *The Fear Machine* [7/10].

The Horrorist. This story is all evocation. It's got beautiful artwork and beautiful text, and if the story is a bit simple, you don't really notice, for all the beauty that's going by [7/10]. On the downside, it's badly placed in this volume of *Hellblazer* as it's clearly about an older, more world-weary Constantine. it should have been placed in a collection following Ennis' run, which is when it was written.

Overall, this is another very good volume of Delano's *Hellblazer* -- though I find his monthly issues better than his longer form work, which tends to get a bit slow and talky ... and the contents of this volume are poorly integrated (with the previous volume, with the next volume, and with their place in Constantine's chronology). Pity that DC couldn't have gotten this all arranged better when they redid the *Hellblazer* collections.

Sierra Dean says

That fever dream on the beach, yo....

I love this series something fierce. The art is pretty terrible (okay, not terrible, but very of an era and I don't love it). But I love Delano's writing so very much.

Irene says

Sex and Death

Sex and Death wrapped up the Resurrection Crusaders arc, but it still left many questions unanswered and left the readers feeling unfulfilled. The issue on itself felt rushed and awkward. I can't help but feel that the issue's only purpose was to act as a stepping stone for the next issue: Newcastle. Despite Delano's characteristic writing-style which I usually enjoy, Sex and Death was overly dramatized.

Newcastle

Finally, the readers are about to find out what *really* happened in Newcastle. And honestly, I was disappointed. As a story on itself, Newcastle was great but considering all the build-up, Newcastle was a huge let-down. What happened was terrible, but it's hardly the kind of thing John Constantine would go mad for. I like the nostalgic atmosphere Delano took on, but the rest was sloppy. The characters felt more complete in previous stories (despite only appearing as ghosts) and Norfulthing was just uninspired. The whole story felt as if Delano just thought it up at the last second.

The Devil You Know

This is probably the issue where Delano finally got the feel of things and started writing some solid plot. The pacing was great, the writing was engaging and the art was a big improvement over previous issues. The way the Nergal-arc ended was not the best, but it served its purpose. It was believable and wasn't over the top. Nergal had always been a bland, cliche character to me, so maybe that's why I never quite appreciated any story he's in.

The one thing I truly liked from The Devil You Know are the two new characters it introduces. Agony and Ecstasy. Beautifully designed and just plainly interesting. I hope we'll see more of them.

On the Beach

A story which could've been so much more than it had become. As always, Delano delivers with very charismatic and descriptive writing. His writing combined with the idea of the story had so much potential, but all it became was a sloppy mess. I like the idea of seeing a part of Constantine before he became the cynic, chain-smoker that he is. It's bittersweet.

On the Beach started out great, with Constantine visiting a beach he frequented in his childhood. But then it quickly got weird, and I mean even Hellblazer weird weird. Everything that happened after the nuclear blast served no purpose but just to disturb the readers unnecessarily. Disturbing does not always mean good, not even in Hellblazer comics.

The Bloody Saints

I liked the first part of the story. It's back to Constantine surviving in the urbanized London. I was actually interested in who the Goddess woman could be.

The second part just ruined everything. It was loosely written. And I never really knew what was going on. I'm not sure whether Constantine was dreaming or if the story really happened. Either way, the story with Merlin and Kon-Sten-Tyn was bad to put simply.

Venus of the Hardsell

Despite its irrelevance, I enjoyed this. If Constantine is a bastard now, then as a teen he was one very hardcore and angsty rebel.

The Horrorist

Now this was certainly different. Probably the best Hellblazer story I have read so far. I realize that Rayner's (and also Ridgway's) style is what labels these issues as something from the 80's, but Lloyd's art was just *perfect*. It matches Hellblazer so well, I can't figure out why they haven't used his art from the very beginning. The grimy black-and-white color scheme, and the occasional red for blood and fire (yes! blood and fire) effectively morph the atmosphere into a cold and indifferent nightmare world, *exactly* what Constantine is like.

The story was also among the best so far (probably only rivaled by Hunger in Hellblazer #1-2). It might be a little plain and cliche, but I thought it was still very good in its simplicity. For once, the supporting characters were developed and compelling. The ending was confusing, but I suppose it should do.

P.s. I think Dave McKean deserves a special mention, because his work on the covers were AWESOME.

Overall, *The Devil You Know* was an improvement over *Original Sins*, but it still never lived up to its potential. The Hellblazer universe and the cynical Constantine could make for very good stories. I'm holding out hope that the following stories would continue improving.

LemontreeLime says

I didn't read these when they originally came out, mostly backtracking right now. I think i finally understand what/who john constantine is now. What if a (mostly) immoral con man became a magician and suddenly had to deal with demons and giant celestial issues? The comic itself refer to him as the 'laughing magician', but his humor isn't that funny. Its more about cynicism and mockery. So why the hell am I reading these when I'm not very happy with them or the main character? I'm not sure. I'll read a few more.

Ma'Belle says

The varied stories and breathtaking art in this collection of Hellblazer were far more intense than I was prepared for. It's hard for me to digest the density and weight of each story found in a picture book just over a half inch thick, but it has confirmed my growing opinion that Jamie Delano's entire run of Hellblazer was the best, even considering my love and respect for Neil Gaiman, Warren Ellis, and Garth Ennis.

When I can afford to start collecting the trade paperbacks of my favourite comics, this will surely be one of the top volumes I'll pull out when I want to read aloud to somebody and make their jaws drop and their eyes water.

Brooke says

This 2nd Hellblazer collection is all over the place. The first three issues wrap up the story started in *Original Sins* quite well. The next two are just puzzling and completely lost my interest. Then it wraps up with a 2-parter that has beautiful art, but the story feels like a cliche.

Kinan Diraneyya says

One review I read about Jamie Delano described how he talks and talks but it feels like he is never getting to the point, or perhaps there isn't a point to begin with, and with this I mean the text boxes of Constantine's thoughts, this writing style exists since the first issue, but it continues to "grow", and while the second volume is still bearable, it definitely is harder to read than the first.

The stories of the second volume are generally just fine, zed's story concludes in the first issue, followed by 3 one shots, the only one that really matters is Newcastle (issue #11), a cannon issue to Constantine's background, and generally a good issue; then there is one issue that goes back to Ritchie, who is still trapped in the computer, that one is kinda fun; and finally there is disastrous hallucination issue that is nothing but

nonsense.

I never really understood the way the original Hellblazer was collected, but since the Horrorist was also collected in this volume, I went on and read it, it was pretty boring, and unnecessarily made into two issues instead of one, but its ending gave me certain satisfaction, the kind of satisfaction you expect from Constantine.

I recommend this volume mainly because of Newcastle and Zed's conclusion, but Jamie Delano's bad writing begins to shine here, and its shining becomes blinding soon after!

Steven Werber says

2 of the stories were good the rest seemed to be bleak for the sake of bleakness....

MkB says

Dear Vertigo: comics have little numbers on them. You'll note that they start at #1 continue on up to two hundred and something. When collecting them into graphic novels, start with number one, and go in sequential order.

In terms of content, this is a solid four or five stars. I've always had as much fondness for Delano's Constantine as for the more heralded Ennis and Ellis stories.

But oh lordy does this get deducted for continuing Vertigo's incredibly asinine decision to collect the Hellblazer back catalogue three random issues at a time (which, in all fairness, was made a long time ago, and they seem to have been trying to rectify since then). In this collection, we get issues #10-13, finally completing the storyline from Original Sins (collected FIVE years before this volume). Then there's Annual #1, which makes sense in that it was from the same time. And then there's the recent miniseries The Horrorist, published six years after the rest of the material in the book.

Even this incredibly goofy decision would be somewhat defensible if I'd ever seen a copy of Rake at the Gates of Hell for sale in an actual comic shop. But apparently, reprinting one of the most popular Hellblazer storylines ever is low priority.

(and don't even get me started on Hitman)

Steven Guitink says

Original Sins

So we pick up from where Original Sins left off and come to an end of Jamie Delano's first major storyline in the Hellblazer series. So let's go....

Sex and Death: John and Swamp Thing have come upon a way to fuck over both the Resurrection Crusade

and the Damnation Army. But that'll involve a trip to the Astral Plane for John and a bit of rumpy-pumpy for Swamp Thing. Now if only John can avoid the fallout. This is the first comic we see where there is a massive shift in the art style and personally, I'm on the fence about it. In some ways, it's expressive and varied but it skirts the uncanny valley so much it's kind of weird. That being said, the artwork for the Astral Plane and Delano's dreamlike writing make up for it.

Newcastle: The Crusade done and the Army routed, Nergal's lingering threats make John remember Newcastle and where all this crazy shit in his life first started. This is an interesting one for me, because before this we never really understood John's life before Hunger. Seeing how his early years turned him into such a bastard and the lingering guilt hanging over his head (especially considering the ghosts of his past) made him what he is, was definitely a good idea. Although I'm still 50/50 on the artwork.

The Devil you Know: Nergal's fucking with John, making the demon blood in his veins tear him up from the inside out. John's running out of time, except Ritchie Simpson is back in the picture, giving John an ace up his sleeve. So we have a return to proto-cyberspace and honestly I have to say the artwork really let me down here. It doesn't feel as expressive or creative as it was the first time through. There's a lot of empty space and rough linework. It feels sloppy and bland to look at. The writing is good though and the conclusion feels appropriate and suitable, tying all relevant loose ends, allowing John to move on to new pastures.

On the Beach: John's having a bit of a walk along the beach, all while a group of protestors stand against a nuclear power plant built in their town. And then the power plant explodes. This one feels like an odd duck in the volume. You could take John out of the equation and replace him with some other character and it would hardly skip a beat. You can clearly see Delano's personal politics on full display here and while its not a bad story, its a little too on the nose to be anything but a distribe, albeit a beautifully poetic one.

The Bloody Saint: Set back when John was still in and out of Ravenscar Asylum, the story tells of John's struggling to deal with a changing world, his place in it and his connection to one of his ancestors, colourfully dubbed The Bloody Saint. This story is an interesting little piece. A bit of Arthurian legend here, a slap of dark fantasy there, Delano's trademark poetic writing and what do you get? An interesting if a little disjointed story about how sometimes the apple doesn't fall far. If I can say anything specific, it's that sometimes the art style looks a little too detailed. It ends up looking grotty.

The story ends with a little glimpse into what Mucous Membrane (John's former band) were like and honestly, I didn't care much for it. The art was decent but it just felt like song lyrics in the vein of the Sex Pistols, something I don't have a lot of interest in. Chalk this one up to personal taste.

The Horrorist: Something bad has come into the world. Something that embodies all the hatred, violence and cruelty of the world. Every war, every conflict, every rape and pillaging. It's turning the world upside down. And John has to find it. This is a separate issue that was bunched in with this volume and it's probably one of the best pieces I've read. The horror is on point, building the tension to sudden horrifying events that the artwork captures beautifully. Delano's prose is on point, haunting and cruel and beautiful all at the same time.

So that's it. Nothing spectacular. Nothing horrendous. The Horrorist was the best of the bunch. On the Beach was probably the weak link. See ya soon for The Fear Machine.

Malum says

After reading volume 1 of *Hellblazer*, I decided to read Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* run before going any further because it fills in some of the blanks from Constantine's past that are otherwise a little confusing (such as why he has a group of ghosts following him around everywhere and how his girlfriend was killed).

Doing this also had another benefit, however, because I got to directly compare the two books back-to-back. While Moore's book was pretty trippy and revolutionary, it doesn't hold a candle to how *Hellblazer* screws with your head and subverts the traditional superhero comic. This series is REALLY out there, and it's really great because of that.

The highlight of this volume is the two part Horrorist story. It is totally bonkers in the best ways. Just imagine *Hellblazer* mixed with Marvel's adult MAX imprint and you will have a good idea of the kind of story they are going for here.
