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## Comics Pick of the Week: Hellblazer #234

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John Constantine began life as a supporting character in Alan Moore's successful and groundbreaking run on Swamp Thing. The story goes that Moore created the character at the behest of the book's artists, who wanted to draw a character that looked like the musician Sting. Constantine was envisioned as a streetwise master of magic, foregoing the wooden dialogue and cheesy mysticism of Marvel's Dr. Strange in favor of a much more contemporary, urban sensibility. The character proved so popular that DC soon spun him off into his own series, Hellblazer, which became one of the founding titles of the progressive Vertigo line (along with Swamp Thing, Neil Gaiman's Sandman and Grant Morrison's Animal Man and Doom Patrol) and is the only one to have enjoyed an uninterrupted publishing run to this day. The series' longevity is likely a result of the strong personality of its main character and his ability to consistently attract some of the top talent in comics, including writers Jamie Delano, Grant Morrison, Neil Gaiman, Garth Ennis, Eddie Campbell, Paul Jenkins, Warren Ellis and Brian Azzarello, and artists John Ridgeway, Dave McKean, Sean Phillips and Steve Dillon, among others. Each creative team has brought their own unique viewpoint to the character, but Constantine has remained consistent in his characterization throughout the 19-year run of the title. The current issue begins writer Andy Diggle's second story arc, and it sees a return to the dark urban horror of the Jamie Delano years. Diggle's bleak script follows a fairly standard formula for Hellblazer stories, but is no less effective for it: an already horrific situation is made only slightly worse through demonic interference as a group of teenaged hooligans begin a destructive rampage at the behest of the supernatural entity that is controlling their leader. Constantine arrives halfway through the story and, sensing that something is amiss, decides to investigate. Diggle has a good handle on Constantine's character, which is of course the most important element of any Hellblazer story. The dark artwork by Leonardo Manco and especially the muted color palette used by colorist Lee Loughridge complement the writing nicely and give the story the atmosphere of urban decay that always sets Hellblazer apart from DC's other supernatural fantasy titles. As the first part of a new story this is as good an issue as any for new readers. For a book with such a long history, Hellblazer has acquired little in the way of continuity baggage and is an easy series to jump into. And it is always a satisfying read.