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Peter Clines

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#96583 in Books Peter Clines 2016-02-02 2016-02-02Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.00 x .80 x 5.20l, .81 #File Name: 0553418319400 pagesEx Isle A Novel Ex Heroes | File size: 31.Mb

Peter Clines : Ex-Isle: A Novel (Ex-Heroes) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ex-Isle: A Novel (Ex-Heroes):

16 of 17 people found the following review helpful. A good entry into an amazingly fun seriesBy CTThe Ex-Heroes novels by Peter Clines are one of the best high concept books which are presently out there. The concept is a simple X meets Y sort of setting. "What would happen if the zombie apocalypse happened in a world with superheroes?" I've also seen it described as "Land of the Dead meets The Avengers" and that's not a bad description. A bunch of low-

powered heroes based loosely on popular archetypes are in the midst of the zombie apocalypse and do their best to save as many people as they can by creating a safe haven in a Los Angeles movie studio. I've enjoyed all of the books and I'm in good company as Nathan Fillon has given them his recommendation too but the last volume, Ex-Purgatory, showed there was a bit of wheel spinning going around. Now that the superheroes have successfully secured their homeland, it doesn't appear there's much else to do. I also felt the relationships among the characters were rather stalled as we saw Saint George and Stealth get together a couple of books ago but what they're doing is left ambiguous. Likewise, I was surprised by some of the relationships mentioned in this book but mostly handwaved. Still, I was interested in seeing what Peter Clines would come up with. Ex-Isle follows Zzzap finding an artificial island created from a dozen cruise ships and tankers fused together. Eager to get involved with another group of survivors, Saint George, Zzzap, and Corpse Girl journey there to make contact. Unfortunately, the locals are not only suspicious of outsiders but have a half-insane superhero ruler. Meanwhile, Cerberus is coping with PTSD even as she struggles to rebuild her armor. The Mount's survivors are opening a new farm for themselves so they can keep ahead of their rising population and it seems very likely someone may want to take it over as their own private kingdom. This is pretty much a popcorn adventure in the grand scheme of things, making no big significant changes to the status quo and just introducing some more minor characters. I confess, I find this a little disappointing as I was hoping the introduction of Nautilus, basically the setting's Aquaman, would have resulted in another member of the team joining them. Unfortunately, Nautilus appears to be just another petty dictator and a foe for our heroes to face rather than a potential rival or ally. I liked the depiction of the Islanders and their society as well as how everything functioned. Peter Clines has rectified some of the earlier accusations against him by expanding the diversity of the cast considerably. We also get an Arab superhuman named Marduk referenced who I hope will make an appearance in future books. I don't know if the island will continue to be a location in the series or if it'll be a one-off location. The big stand-out of the book is Madelyne a.k.a Corpse Girl who gets a chance to shine in the book by showing off her regenerative powers as well as the tragedies of her condition. For those who don't remember, Corpse Girl can only remember the previous day clearly and facts beyond that. It's a bit like a less severe version of Memento. Watching her cope with a life and death situation without the help of the other heroes is very entertaining. I also liked the handling of Cerberus. We've seen some great character development from her and there's some hints about her at the end which I really want to see followed up on. Cerberus is suffering from understandable trauma at having nearly been killed multiple times by Exes and confronting this issue without therapists is a tough one. I also liked the subversion of the "evil military" which is a prevalent trope in zombie fiction. One area I'm going to complain about is the handling of Saint George and Stealth. After they hooked up in Ex-Communication, I was expecting some more information in how things are working out between them. Sadly, there's no hint as to what's going on there and it would have been nice to continue analyzing the differences between them. After all, it is a romance between the equivalents of Superman and Batman. Ex-Isle drops some hints for upcoming books about threats from other survivors as well as potential non-zombie related threats. We also had it confirmed there are also groups of survivors out there other than the Mount and Island. I look forward to meetings between them and how the non-insane, non-dictatorial communities interact. Unfortunately, we don't get enough of that to really make things shine. In conclusion, this is a decent entry into the series but not a "can't miss" episode in their adventures. The character development for some overlooked members of the team is appreciated as is the introduction of some new villains. Sadly, there's not enough attention paid to the series mainstays of Stealth and Saint George. I still recommend the Ex-Heroes series to anyone who loves both superheroes and zombie fiction as they're two great tastes which go great together. 8.5/100 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Superheros vs Zombies with a little taste of Waterworld Thrown in. By Robin Snyder Peter Clines is on my Underrated Authors List His books tend to be a great blend of pop culture humor, suspense, action and just flat out weirdness at times. I've said this before and I'll say it again he really gives me a J.J. Abrams kind of vibe and I love it. The Ex-Heroes series is a really cool Superheroes meets Zombies mash up and I totally love it. I'm not even a huge fan of superhero or zombie books but these totally speak to me. Probably because they remind me a little of the feelings I used to have when I watched LOST or Fringe. Imagine a world where there is an event that created superheroes and then later there is a zombie apocalypse. It is like a summer blockbuster in book form. I enjoy the flashbacks to before the zombies came getting glimpses of the characters lives before everything became a bit screwed up. Most improved character goes to Barry a.k.a. Zapp. He got all the best lines in this and I loved the little trio of adventurers that went to meet the newly discovered colony of people. ***Whats it like, this island? Is it a lot of boats or rafts or what? Barry set down his bowl, swept up a legal pad and a pen, and began to sketch quick outlines. Boats, he said. Its kind of like Waterworld. But, yknow, believable. Or maybe the Drexel colony. *** Barry, St. George and Corpse Girl go off to try and talk to the people on the waterworldesk contraptions and it seems like not everything is great on the good ship lollipop. The people seem a little off somehow and soon our trio of superheroes is in the middle of a colossal mess. The banter with the trio is great. Between Barrys pop culture one liners and Corpse girls semi morbid sense of humor mixed with teenage enthusiasm they were the story line I enjoyed the most. ***Actually, said Barry, tossing the dried meat to the Corpse Girl, did anyone ever check out the Playboy Mansion? Its in LA, right? Yeah, said St. George. But I dont know where. Im pretty sure Ive never been there, though. Its got the big pool.

The Grotto. And a lot of zombie Playmates. You'd know. You know what, said Madelyn, tearing off a chunk of jerky, you two guys just go right along talking about the Playboy Mansion in front of the teenage girl. There's nothing skeevey about it at all.***Meanwhile back on the main land the colony in Los Angeles is getting ready to make a move to an area that is easier to grow food and leave the L.A. movie studio lot they've been living in behind. But there is still some work to do and so Danielle is forced out of her comfort zone and has to face her issues with agoraphobia to go into the great outdoors to prepare things. Except it seems that the super soldiers they brought with them are acting a little strange too and with the mix of people that came along there might be a little tension happening in the group that could lead to things going horribly wrong. I mean a farm area surrounded by a chain-link fence to keep the zombies out what could possibly happen. Overall: This series is just a lot of fun and pretty different than anything else out there I'm reading currently. So if you are looking for something that is a bit fun and maybe a little different from everything else you are reading right now I say give Clines a shot. Audio Note THE AUDIO IS FANTASTIC most of it is done with a compilation cast and it has a few of my favorites. Jay Snyder sounds like the announcer in a summer blockbuster trailer. Khristine Hvam who I have loved since listening to Daughter of Smoke and Bone and Mark Boyett just to round out the great cast. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Another fun installment in the world's most fun zombie-fighting superhero team By Robert Moore I really don't believe in rating one book in a series as better or worse unless there is a marked decline in the overall quality. As an example, I read the first several books in the Anita Blake series, sorta liking them and hoping that they would start getting better, and then they suddenly got absolutely godawful, and then I read one additional book in the series to confirm it. At that point giving any one Anita Blake novel a one star review was less a reflection of the novel than the overall series. Well, here I'm not concerned about whether this is better or worse than the last book, but merely whether it maintained the overall quality of the series. It did, so I'm delighted that I can still give this series a solid five star rating. There was a fairly significant gap between the publication of the fourth and fifth novels in the series. I don't know if this was due to contract negotiations or writing other books, but I do know that he has signed a contract for a few more books in the series. I could be wrong, but I think we are guaranteed at least three more books after this one (though I am open to correction). I liked this series from the very first book, but I like that Peter Clines - who has written some very nice books outside the Ex-series and that anyone liking these should check out - has continued to shake things up a bit with each book. He continues to introduce new characters and new "heroes. The book deals primarily with two alternating stories, the investigation by St. George, Zzzap, and Madelyn aka Corpse Girl of a mysterious floating island that Barry (Zzzap) accidentally discovered while flying to and from Japan (for those unfamiliar with the stories, Barry is an paraplegic 30-year-old African-American geek - his conversation is littered with references to Buffy and Marvel comics and successful and less-than-successful SF movies - who can literally transform himself into pure energy, enabling, among other things, supersonic flight). As Captain Mal Reynolds may or may not have said, "Hijinks ensued." The other story is concerned with the complications of a group of the Hollywood survivors whose story we have been following in the first four books occupying a large garden some distance from the walled movie studio where they have lived following a zombie apocalypse that has nearly destroyed the earth's population. This garden, Eden, which used to be a community garden back before zombies, is crucial for the survivors having an adequate food supply. Multiple subplots intertwine here, not least Danielle's first trip out of her workshop since the destruction of her Cerberus suit of armor. These novels have been so much fun for so many reasons. One is that in a world that is increasingly NOT typified by white males, the group of heroes are almost entirely made up of either women or people of color. Stealth, of indeterminate ethnicity (she is dark skinned, but seems to be Mediterranean rather than African-American) is the strategic leader of the superheroes, who have increasingly allowed themselves to come under civilian government. A major character in the first four novels, she barely appears in this one. Neither does Captain Freedom, essentially a black version of Captain America, like Steve Rogers a super soldier created in a laboratory. While he is easily the most powerful super soldier, he heads up a group of former soldiers who while not as powerful as Freedom, far surpass normal humans and are known as the Unbreakables. In the Eden segment of this novel, something is amiss with them, but what? Many of the others in this part of the story are former members of a competing gang of scavengers who have since become part of the survivors. The most important of these is Cesar, a young Hispanic male who has his own super power, the ability to meld completely with any vehicle. But the central part of this segment of the novel is Danielle's terror of the external world. Prior to the zombie apocalypse, she was a robotics engineer, and was in the process of handing a prototype of a massive suit of body armor ordered by the military known as Cerberus. Though not a trained soldier, as the only person capable of operating the suit, she enters the almost 9 foot tall suit of armor, thereby becoming Cerberus, and though she does not possess powers, she becomes one of the most powerful weapons in fighting the zombies. Though seemingly without fear in fighting zombies as Cerberus, in reality she developed a terror of not being inside the suit, something she has had to face since the end of the fourth novel, when the original suit was destroyed. EX-ISLE marks the partial debut of Cerberus Mark II, but since it is unfinished Danielle has to learn to face her fears. The main part of the novel, however, follows the three other major characters in the series, St. George, Zzzap, and Madelyn, as they investigate the strange island in the Pacific. In some ways, St. George, the only white male superhero, is the character whose perspective we are meant to see things. This is only very loosely,

however, since Clines shifts the point of view from one character to another. St. George was an underachieving college drop out working as a janitor who suddenly developed super powers just before the zombie apocalypse (Clines does not use that expression, but uses a neologism I refuse to acknowledge exists). One of the most interesting question in the series, which has been hinted at but not fully explained, is why superheroes began to emerge immediately before zombies took over the world - I assume that in the forthcoming novels the answers will be gradually revealed). Initially he possessed only super strength and invulnerability, along with the ability to glide for a bit after leaping into the air, but his additional super power of being able to breath fire occasioned his adoption of the moniker The Mighty Dragon. But after the zombie outbreak he has gained the ability to fly, though not at the speed of Superman or Captain Marvel (think more Jessica Jones if she practiced more) and now calls himself St. George. In many ways, St. George is, despite his origin story as a college janitor, a traditional superhero. He maintains a very high moral standard, won't kill any human being who is still alive, like Peter Parker never gives up on anyone at anytime, and serves as the moral center of the superhero team. While Stealth is the most intelligent and Captain Freedom the most single-minded, St. George is the most compassionate. Barry aka Zzzap is equally compassionate and is just as high minded, but his super power distances him from others, since in his energy form he is unable to touch any living creature without killing them. My favorite character in the series is, however, Madelyn aka Corpse Girl. To look at her she looks remarkably like the zombies, having chalk colored eyes like them and possessing a grayish pallor. Her introduction in the series is probably the most entertaining, because every morning when she wakes up, she remembers only bits and pieces of what has happened since the moment in 2009 when her body was ripped to pieces by zombies. I won't spoil precisely what she is, though I will say that she often repeats that her superpower is being dead. None of the zombies can see her and even if she bumps into them they are barely aware of her presence. Since she is "dead" she cannot be killed. She is the most poignant character in the book, since every time she sleeps she resets to 2009. To help give herself some continuity in life, she religiously keeps journals, telling herself what she does each day. If she is unable to read the previous day's journal entry, her life makes less and less sense to her, though she has reached the point where she does have a solid memory of her fellow heroes. Someone said that these books are essentially THE WALKING DEAD meets THE AVENGERS and that isn't a bad description. I am not a fan of zombie books or films (though I do love iZOMBIE, which is pertinent since it was created by Rob Thomas, who also created VERONICA MARS, on which Peter Clines worked, though not as a writer). But I do love superhero comics and I love reading these books the same way I love reading an omnibus edition of a superhero team I don't normally follow. If you haven't read any of these books, and you love either zombies or superheroes or just fun adventure stories, you should do yourself a fan and read these. Start at the beginning and just read them all. Odds are that like me you'll be waiting anxiously for the sixth novel in the series.

It is an easy thing to rule by fear. Its been years since the tidal wave of ex-humans washed over the world. Since then, thanks to St George and his fellow heroes, the community known as the Mount has been the last known outpost of safety, sanity, and freedom left to humanity. But even for the Mount, survival still balances on a razors edge and after a disaster decimates the towns food supply, the heroes must make a risky gamble to keep its citizens from starving. And then the news arrives of a strange, man-made island in the middle of the Pacific. An island populated not just by survivors, but by people who seem to be farming, raising children, living people who, like the heroes, have somehow managed to keep the spark of civilization alive. Paying this place a visit should be a simple goodwill mission, but as the island reveals itself to be a sinister mirror-image of what the heroes have built at the Mount, the cost of their good intentions becomes dangerously high.

Riveting a zombies-versus-superheroes franchise that seems destined for the big screen. LA Weekly The Avengers meets The Walking Dead with a large order of epic served on the side. Ernest Cline, New York Times bestselling author of Ready Player One. About the Author PETER CLINES has published several pieces of short fiction and countless articles on the film and television industries, as well as the novels The Fold, Ex-Heroes, Ex-Patriots, Ex-Communication, Ex-Purgatory, and 14. He lives and writes in southern California. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Prologue NOW Pretty much everything St. George could see was on fire at this point, including most of the zombies. The fire had started a block south of the Big Wall about four hours earlier, just before sundown. Nobody was sure how. The flames crawled north across a dozen overgrown lawns that hadnt been watered in five years or rained on in five months. Then they climbed a few trees, and a light wind had pushed embers into the houses. Now three city blocks of inferno lit up the night. The blaze reached for the Big Wall as it looked for more to consume, and the people of the Mount fought back as best they could. Half of them ferried buckets of water out to the flames or beat down the lawns with damp blankets. The other half and St. George pulled guard duty, keeping the firefighters safe from the exes. The zombie the ex-humans had first appeared years ago. The undead had overrun cities, then countries, then whole continents. In the space of a year, the population of Earth dropped by more than ninety percent. The living population, anyway. Now millions of exes walked the streets of Los Angeles, and hundreds of them stumbled through the flames around the Mount. The click-click-click of their teeth meshed with the pop and crackle of burning wood.

Sound and movement attracted them. Sound and movement and food. The one St. George held by the throat pawed at him and clicked its teeth. It flailed at his face and scraped against the black leather of his jacket. The dead thing had a better chance of getting through the leather than through St. Georges stone-like skin. Two of the exs gaunt fingers hooked in his long hair but slid free as fast as theyd gotten tangled. Yellow-orange flames raced across its body, burning away clothes and hair. It couldve been a woman once, or a slim man with long hair. Too much of its body had burned for him to be sure. Ex-flesh didnt catch fire easily, dried out from years in the sun, but their hair and clothes could burn. Sometimes, when it did, what little fat they had left became fuel, just like a candle. St. George flicked his wrist and the ex sailed across the street, its spine wrapping around a parking signs squared-off steel pole. Off to his left, two teams of people slapped at the fire with quilted blankets. Others kept the fabric soaked with water from buckets. They smothered the flames a few inches at a time. It was a slow, steady process, perfected after four or five similar fires over the years. Two more exes lurched toward one of the firefighting teams and a figure loomed out of the smoke to meet them. Captain John Carter Freedom, leader of the 456th Unbreakables super-solider platoon, stood just shy of seven feet tall and almost half that wide. The flickering firelight gleamed across his dark scalp. He reached out and grabbed one of them with a gloved hand that covered the zombies shoulder. A flex of his tree-trunk arm sent the dead woman sprawling. His massive fist came around and shattered the other exs skull. St. George grabbed a zombie and flung it back the way it came. He tossed another one after it. The second one ended up draped in the branches of a burning tree, biting at the air. A sound brushed against his ears. Hed almost missed it under the crackle of the burning lawns and bushes. He focused on a spot between his shoulder blades, felt an itch, and pushed himself up into the air. His boots went up a foot, then a yard, and then he was twenty feet over the pavement, looking out at the burning buildings and trees. A mob of ex-humans stumbled and staggered up the street. At least another two hundred of them. Men and women and children, all reduced to dead things with endless appetites. St. George had been expecting the sounds of the fire and shouting humans to attract the dead. There were probably similar groups closing in from the east and west. Hed expected them much sooner, truth to be told. He went higher. A few hundred feet up the smoke thinned out and he could see for a few miles in every direction. The city of Los Angeles had been dark for almost five years now, even more so on moonless nights like this one. Downtown was a shadowy hand stretching up toward the starry sky. To the west he could see the black expanse of the Pacific. The only real light came from below him. The Mount, formerly just a re-fortified film studio, had expanded out from the studios original boundries. Now it was a huge square that stretched over a good chunk of Hollywood. Surrounding it was the Big Wall, shining lights out into the surrounding streets. The undead filled those streets. Hordes like concert crowds shuffled through the shadows. There were always a few hundred around the wall, but now four or five times that were closing in, drawn by the flickering firelight and the noises that came with it. St. George tapped his radio. Captain? Companys coming. Time to go. Freedom to St. George. Copy that, sir. What direction? All of them. Pull everyone back inside the Wall. Weve got maybe five minutes. St. George, shouted a voice behind him. Drops ready. He flew back to the triple-stacked cars of the Big Wall. People dashed back and forth across the series of platforms that topped the structure. A dozen of them prepped water drops for him. Trashcans and tall recycling bins, all doubled up so they wouldnt burst when he lifted them. Usually rainwater filled them, but that went fast in a big fire like this one. The crew had hoses and filled the containers as fast as they could from the weak streams. The rest of the wall-walkers, armed with rifles and pistols, watched for exes. Many of them also carried baseball bats, golf clubs, and other blunt instruments. If an ex slipped past the firefighters, the guards made sure the dead didnt get any closer. St. George dropped down next to a plastic trash barrel. A man with scruffy blond hair yanked his hose away and stuck it into the next container. Should have another one ready in about two minutes, he told the superhero, gesturing at one of the other barrels. St. George nodded and worked his fingers underneath the trash barrel. He grabbed the rim with his other hand and heaved. His feet lifted up off the Big Wall and he soared back to the flames, water sloshing out as he went. A nearby lawn with a medium-sized apple tree burned. He swooped down through the air and shook water out of the barrel. It splattered through the leaves of the tree and smothered most of the fire. He made another pass and dumped the rest of his water across the tall grass. The lawn wasnt out, but it was enough for one of the firefighting teams to leap in with their blankets and pound out the last licks of flame. A blackened, steaming ex lumbered toward the team. St. George dropped down and slammed it with the barrel. The impact knocked the dead thing back into a gaunt zombie in a charred, bloody business suit. Both of them tumbled to the ground. He flew back to the wall and swapped his water barrel for a full one. He could empty all twelve faster than the teams could fill them back up, so hed drop a few hundred gallons, then keep the exes away from the firefighters until the water team got three or four more refilled. Then the whole cycle would begin again. He dumped the water across the fire lines right flank. Fifteen gallons crashed down onto an ex, a scrawny teenaged girl with a mangled shoulder, and slammed it to the ground. He emptied the next two barrels over the roof of one of the burning houses and heard the flames hiss as they fell back. Another fifty gallons of water spread across the houses yard. The last one he sloshed across the left flank, soaking a pair of burning grapefruit trees and the lawn behind them. The fire retreated for a moment, then lunged forward again. Below him, he saw a pair of firefighters swing a wet blanket down on a patch of flames with a thump. Air and dirt blasted out from either side as the fabric struck the ground. They dragged the fabric back into the air and brought it down again. Their feet stomped out the last

few licks of fire. A gust of wind cleared the smoke and St. George saw a trio of exes heading toward the firefighters. The weathered thing in front wore denim shorts and a T-shirt blackened with old blood. He was pretty sure it had been a woman at some point. When he could, he still tried to identify them. It was important to remember them as victims, not just as a threat. He knew it wasn't a popular view. He dropped down to smash the exes with the water barrel. As he did, a slim form raced out from behind the fire line and tackled the dead woman, driving it back into the smoke and knocking down the pair of zombies behind it. The ex clawed at the air, unable to comprehend what was happening. The two figures stumbled back a dozen feet before plowing into a shrub. The attacker stepped back and left the ex tangled in the branches. Hey, yelled St. George. You're not supposed to be out here. The pale-skinned girl looked at him with chalk eyes. You're not my dad, she called back with mock anger. I'm serious. There's a ton of smoke out here. Madelyn Sorensen, the Corpse Girl, shrugged and looked around at the black and gray clouds. It's not like I need to breathe or anything. He landed next to her, stomping on a small tongue of flame as he did. I'm not talking about breathing, he said. I'm talking about you getting shot because someone thinks they saw an ex moving in the smoke. Her lips pressed together. She glared at him. The undead woman dragged itself out of the shrub. Its sightless gaze swiveled past Madelyn to lock onto St. George. Teeth clacked together four times before he slammed the heel of his palm against its forehead. Its skull caved in and the woman's body toppled back into the shrub. I'm not an ex, the Corpse Girl muttered. He stepped past her to stomp on one of the fallen zombies. Its skull collapsed under his heel. Everyone knows that. But right now there's a lot of noise and a lot of yelling and someone might take a shot before they realize it's you. Since you're not supposed to be out here. St. George, yelled a voice behind him. One minute to barrels. He glanced over his shoulder at the Big Wall, then back at the pale teenager. Come on. I can help! He held out his hand. Now, Madelyn. Or you can go explain to Captain Freedom why you're outside the Wall. She sighed and wrapped her cold fingers around his wrist. He returned the grip and launched himself back into the air. She threw her other arm up and held his wrist with both hands. They flew up to the wall of cars and he let her drop onto the platform before he landed. Two of the crew members saw chalk skin and flinched back. Water from one of the hoses splashed over the plywood. Hey, St. George said. We can't waste that. Right, said the man with another glance at the Corpse Girl. He shoved the hose back in the barrel. Sorry. Didn't realize it was her. You. Whatever, said Madelyn. She looked at St. George as he hefted the next barrel. Can I at least help up here? St. George turned his head to the man with the hose. Yeah, sure, said the man. We can use another body. Person. Sorry. St. George nodded and pushed himself back into the air. He soared over the houses and soaked another rooftop on the far side of the fire. They still had a chance of containing it. Last year one had scorched its way through a large chunk of the Sunset Strip, almost sixty buildings, before burning itself out. He circled back to the Big Wall and saw Freedom punch his way through a quartet of exes that threatened the retreating firefighters. The giant officer turned, grabbed a pair of outstretched hands, and hurled another dead man back. A fifth stepped forward and Freedom brought one of his huge fists down on its skull like a hammer. He crushed its skull and turned to a sixth. St. George dropped the barrel off at the wall and soared back to the center of the fire line. Time to go, he said to Sally T. How are we doing? The woman wore a yellow helmet with a red rag tied over her mouth and nose. She'd been a firefighter before the Zombocalypse and ended up in charge of the volunteer fire department for the southern half of the Mount. Nobody knew what the T stood for, only that she insisted on it. It sucks, she said, raising her voice over the crackle of fire and teeth, but I think we beat the worst of it. She pointed at a few houses. We're going to lose those four, and all the trees around them. Don't waste any more water there. But other than that were looking good. Her eyes flitted past his shoulder and went wide. He turned and backhanded an ex, shattering its jaw and hurling it back. What about the grove? She shook her head. Not a chance. Dammit. He bit his lip. What else I can do? Sally T shook her head. Just keep doing what you're doing. St. George nodded. Get back to the wall, he told her and leaped back into the air. A handful of exes stumbled toward what was left of the fire lines left flank. One of them, a woman, had a burnt scalp and wore a smoldering tweed jacket. Another one, he noted with a grim half-smile, had a fireman's coat and helmet. Its face was hidden behind a mask of grime-smearred glass. He arced down and lashed out with his foot. The kick caught the dead fireman just under the edge of its helmet, lifted it off its feet, and slammed it into a phone pole. The others stopped their advance and turned to him. The click of their teeth was almost a hiss against the noise of the fire. St. George landed between them and drove his fist into a bearded face coated with dried blood. The face collapsed, then the ex. Another punch put down the dead woman in the tweed coat. A dead man grabbed his arm and he drove his elbow into the ex's chest, feeling the ribs splinter apart. The zombie wobbled for a moment and folded over on itself. The last one got its mouth on his wrist. It bit down again and again. Each time knocked a few more teeth free of its withered gums when they failed to go through his stone-like skin. Or even scratch it. He raised his arm and the ex rose up with it, still gnawing on his wrist. He brought his other hand around like an axe and smashed through the spine and the cords of muscle around it. The body dropped. The head managed one more bite before it slipped off his wrist and fell. It looked up at him from the ground, its jaws still gnashing away. St. George looked around and spotted a trio of exes closing in on a pair of firefighters as they fell back toward the Big Wall. He grabbed the headless body at his feet, pulled back, and hurled it at the three dead people. It spun twice in the air and knocked them to the ground. One fell headfirst into a patch of fire, and the stench of burning hair washed across the street before being overwhelmed by the smoke. He marched over to the fallen trio and

twisted their skulls around until their necks snapped. The teeth kept clicking, but the bodies went limp. He wiped his hands on his jeans, heard a scream, and moved toward it. Before St. George got there another figure leaped forward. Specialist Kurt Taylor, one of Freedom's men. The one with the shaved head and the mouth. He was another super-soldier from Project Krypton, but an earlier version, not even half as powerful as the captain. A retreating firefighter had tripped over his equipment, and his two companions were trying to untangle him before a pair of exes closed in on them. Taylor shoved both of the exes hard, and as he did something across the back of his hands gleamed in the flickering orange light. A vicious roundhouse punch exploded one zombie's skull. Taylor's other arm swung around, spraying teeth and bone from the other ex across the road. He glanced back at St. George and grinned. Like most things Taylor did, it didn't seem very nice. He held up his hand and revealed the thick bands of metal across his fingers. Fucking awesome or what? he said. Grade-A zombie dusters, that's what these are. St. George bit back a frown at the man's glee. Can't you hit them hard enough already? Taylor's face shifted, flitting between three or four emotions before St. George could identify them, and then settling back into a sneer. You can never hit those fuckers too hard. To emphasize the point, he turned, batted aside the grasping hands of a dead Latina, and drove a punch into its exposed shoulder. The bones sagged and the arm flopped to its side. He crippled the other arm and threw an uppercut that sent a swarm of teeth into the air. His last punch slammed into the ex's forehead and caved in the skull. Taylor lifted his brass-knuckled fists to the sky and howled. St. George sighed and watched the firefighters stumble away. Make sure everyone's falling back, he told Taylor, then pushed himself back into the air. He spotted a small pack of exes shambling toward a last group of firefighters and landed in front of them. He spread his arms wide and walked. A teenaged girl with a trio of arrows in her torso bumped into his shoulder, snapped her teeth at his face, and then staggered back as he kept walking forward. A man in a scorched Yummy Donuts uniform was next, then a brown and black figure that had been burned beyond any kind of identification. St. George kept walking and gathered an elderly woman with an empty eye socket, a half-charred little boy in a baseball shirt, and another blackened corpse. They all stumbled and tripped as he pushed them back, then collapsed in a heap on top of each other. He bent down and twisted their skulls around one by one, listening to the click of teeth and the crack of spinal bones. Another call for a drop. He flew back to the Big Wall and grabbed a tall blue recycling bin swollen with over fifty gallons of water. He caught a glimpse of Madelyn switching her hose to a new barrel before soaring back into the smoke. He remembered Sally T's instructions and poured his water over a burning grapefruit tree. The branches spat and hissed and sputtered, but the flames vanished. So did some on the ground around the tree. His next drop went onto the roof of one of the salvageable houses, and the third went down its chimney to soak the first floor. The next barrel traced a thick line across the fire's west flank and knocked down two exes, extinguishing one of them. He carried each of the last two barrels back over to the south side of the fire, soaking trees and rooftops and lawns. A yell echoed behind him, the air clear. Everyone was back inside the Wall with what sounded like zero casualties. St. George landed and stamped out a few small embers before they could grow on a dry patch of grass. He backhanded an ex as it reached for him. Its jaw crumbled against his knuckles, the skull collapsed, and the dead thing crumbled to the ground. The flames didn't light up as much of the night as they had half an hour ago. The air didn't smell quite as smoky. He didn't know much about fighting fires, but it seemed like they might have this one under control. Contained, that's how Sally T would put it. He hoped contained was going to be enough, but he was pretty sure it was too late. St. George launched himself back into the air.