

Final Crisis

By Greg Cox

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Editorial Review

About the Author
GREG COX is *The New York Times* bestselling author of numerous books and short stories. Besides the novelizations of *52* and *INFINITE CRISIS*, he has also written books and stories based on such popular series as *ALIAS, BATMAN, BUFFY, DAREDEVIL, FARSCAPE, GHOST RIDER, IRON MAN, ROSWELL, SPIDER-MAN, STAR TREK, UNDERWORLD, XENA, X-MEN*, and *ZORRO*.

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Chapter Two

Metropolis.
Now.

Dan Turpin struck a match.

As the stocky ex–cop lit his cigarette and tossed the match aside, it struck him that fire was probably mankind's first big mistake. *Like everything else the sad, stinking human race ever thought of, we take a good idea and use it kill ourselves.*

A balding bruiser of a man way past retirement, Turpin took a drag on the cancer stick as he ambled along the docks down by the waterfront. A rumpled tan trench coat was draped over his burly frame. His weathered features wore a chronically sour expression. Towering steel cranes perched over dilapidated wharves, while busy stevedores unloaded the freighters anchored along the piers. Seagulls circled and cawed overhead. A salty breeze, blowing off the harbor, did little to improve his disposition.

Formerly a member of Metropolis's elite Special Crimes Unit, Turpin no longer carried a badge, but that didn't stop him from pounding the pavement as a private eye these days. He was three weeks out on the trail of six missing children. Bright kids, gifted kids, who went out one day and never came home. At this late date, Turpin had little hope of finding the kids alive, but who knew? There was still a chance that one or more of the children might still be kicking. And if not, then whoever was responsible needed to get what was coming to them.

His investigation led him to a deserted wharf adjacent to a rundown warehouse. Chain–link fences guarded wooden pallets piled high with miscellaneous crates, bales, and bags. Smoke rose from one of the timber crates. A look of disgust came over Turpin's bulldog face as he recognized the stomach–turning stench of burning flesh.

Oh hell…

He squeezed through a ragged tear in the fence, the rusty metal tines snagging on his coat, and headed toward the crate for a closer look. The top of the crate was smashed clean through, as though it had been struck by a falling meteor. The nauseating odor, which raised unpleasant memories of his wartime experiences as a Boy Commando, grew stronger and more oppressive with every step. Bracing himself for the sight of a child's torched remains, he stepped up onto the edge of a pallet and peered down into the

splintered crate.

“What the hell?”

There was a smoking body lying inside the box all right, but it didn’t belong to one of the missing kids. Instead, to his surprise and relief, Turpin found a battered figure sprawled atop boxes and boxes of cheap toy ray–guns from China. The man’s bright red uniform, which was fashioned from a strange unearthly fabric, was torn and scorched, like he’d come through some sort of fiery accident. Fresh cuts and third–degree burns scarred his exposed face and skin. Broken limbs jutted at unnatural angles. A high-tech computer gadget, strapped to the victim’s left shoulder, was now just a charred mass of fused crystals and burning circuitry, and a futuristic silver helmet rested next to the body. Bright arterial blood soaked the crushed cardboard boxes beneath the figure, who appeared tall and muscular enough to give Superman a run for his money. Not that his brawny physique seemed to have done him much good. From the look of things, the vic had crashed to earth after getting walloped somewhere up above the clouds. For all Turpin knew, the guy had fallen straight from orbit.

Just my luck, he thought sourly. *I go looking for some stolen kids and I find a super muk–muk lying in the garbage*.

He’d had his fair share of run–ins with costumed heroes and villains during his stint with the S.C.U. As far he as he was concerned, most of them were nothing but trouble. It took him a moment to place a name to the demolished face before him.

Orion, he recalled. *One of those so–called New Gods from outer space.*

Was the injured spaceman still alive? Turpin leaned over the edge of the crate and reached down to check for a pulse. His meaty fingers brushed Orion’s throat—and he yanked them back in pain. “Oww!” Flesh sizzled and smoke rose from his reddened fingertips, which suddenly stung like the blazes. Touching the god’s blistered flesh had been like grabbing onto a red–hot coal, and Turpin sucked on the injured fingers in a futile attempt to ease the pain. He would’ve killed for a bucket of ice to plunge his hand into.

His startled exclamation roused Orion, who startled Turpin by sitting up abruptly. Bloodshot brown eyes glared fiercely. “Heaven…cracked and broken…” he snarled through cracked, busted lips. His short red hair was singed and disheveled. Ugly burns and bruises marred his rugged features, and blood leaked from a broken nose. He seized Turpin’s lapels with both hands, dragging the ex–cop toward him until their faces were only inches apart. Smoke rose where his fingers clung to the trench coat, and crimson spittle sprayed Turpin’s face. “*You*!”

Turpin tried to pull away, but Orion’s grip was too strong. “Get your hands offa me!”

“*They did not die*!” the spaceman shouted urgently. Bulging veins throbbed upon his brow and throat. The heat from his body felt like a blast furnace. Rage contorted his ravaged countenance. He spit out a mouthful of broken teeth. “*He is in you all* …!”

The outburst (warning?(exhausted the last of Orion’s strength. His fingers let go of Turpin’s coat and he toppled backward into the pulverized plastic ray–guns. Swollen eyelids closed for good as he sagged limply atop the bloodstained cargo. His raspy voice faltered, so that Turpin could barely hear the war god’s final cryptic utterance:

"Fight…"

A grotesque death rattle punctuated the word and Orion's body fell still. His chest stopped heaving as his labored breathing surrendered to silence. Turpin didn't need to risk scorching his fingers again to know that Orion had gone wherever New Gods went when they kicked the bucket. He had a dead space alien on his hands.

What the hell was talking about? the surly detective wondered. He patted down his smoking lapels before they set the whole coat on fire. *Who is in who again?*

Turpin had seen plenty of stiffs before, but a chill ran along his spine as he stared down at Orion's smoldering corpse. A sudden wind whipped up the litter around his feet, and a shadow passed over the grisly scene. Turpin glanced up to see what was blocking the sun. Just for a second, he thought he glimpsed an ominous figure hovering in the air high above the wharf: a black knight, in gleaming ebony armor, standing astride a pair of…floating black skis?

"Huh?" He rubbed his eyes, convinced that he must seeing things. When he looked again a heartbeat later, the surreal image had vanished along with the mysterious shadow. Turpin scratched his hairless dome in confusion. He wiped Orion's bloody spit from his face. Was it just his imagination, or had there really been an armored bozo skiing through the sky like some sort of alpine Angel of Death?

Like this crazy world wasn't already screwy enough.

Detroit.

Scarlet lightning slashed through crimson skies as roiling black clouds churned violently above the city. Although it had been bright and sunny only minutes before, a sudden storm transformed afternoon into twilight. Howling winds whipped through the high-rise buildings overlooking the Riverfront. The sky was the color of freshly spilled blood.

"Hey, John! You have to check this out!"

The tenth–floor windows of Shining Light Architecture offered a spectacular view of the tempest raging outside. John Stewart looked up from his drafting table, where he had been designing a new state–of–the–art homeless shelter, to see his co–workers standing at the windows, gaping at the storm. "The weather's gone nuts!" Howie Bernstein exclaimed. Sheets of rain lashed the reinforced glass windows.

"Hold on a second," John replied. A trim black man in his late thirties, dressed in casual office wear, he was distracted by a vibration on his right ring finger. There didn't appear to be a ring there, but appearances could be deceptive. He got up from the table and headed for a supply closet nearby. "I have a message coming in."

He stepped into the closet and closed the door behind him. An emerald glow emanated from the power ring on his finger as it flashed into visibility. Answering its hail, he willed it to report.

"LANTERN STEWART 2814.2," the ring addressed him. Its voice was sexless and robotic. "1011 IN PROGRESS."

"1011?" John had never heard that code number before. "What the hell's a 1011?"

Whatever it meant, it clearly demanded his attention. He turned the ring's light on himself, erasing his civilian attire to reveal the skintight green and black uniform underneath. Emblazoned on his chest was the insignia of the Green Lantern Corps, an interstellar police force composed of the bravest beings from thousands of different worlds and civilizations. John was one of two Earthmen assigned to this particular sector of space. He assumed his partner had just gotten the same call.

Better get on the way, he thought. One of the advantages of being the head of his own firm was that nobody could complain if he took long breaks and business trips without warning. A glowing emerald aura surrounded his uniformed body as he silently phased through the walls of the skyscraper and took off into the stormy sky outside. The driving rain vaporized against his protective force field. His ring informed him that he was needed in Metropolis, so he flew east at supersonic speed. Emerald light suffused his dark brown eyes as the ring converted his willpower into energy. His power ring, which matched the insignia on this chest, glowed brightly upon his finger.

"My backup on the way yet?"

"LANTERN JORDAN 2814.1 HAS BEEN ALERTED," the ring assured him. "HIS RING IS NOT RESPONDING AT THIS TIME."

John wondered what was keeping Hal. He hoped his partner wouldn't be long. He had a bad feeling about this call, starting with the incarnadine elemental fury all around him. As he soared through the turbulent winds and lightning, he was troubled to discover that the freak storm, which was getting worse by the moment, seemed to extend all the way from Detroit to the East Coast. The unnatural red tint of the atmosphere worried him; he hadn't seen the sky this color since the last Crisis. As he understood it, crimson storms like this often meant that the interdimensional barriers between parallel universes were breaking down, causing the raw energy of the Multiverse to bleed into separate realities.

That was *never* good…

Metropolis.

A multilane suspension bridge overlooked the waterfront. Turpin peered down at the wharf from the bridge's pedestrian walkway. The huge steel girders and cables stretching above him provided only meager protection from the fierce wind and rain. Jagged bolts of lightning slashed across the sky. Traffic across the bridge had halted as commuters parked their cars and got out to watch the spectacular electrical display from the elevated vantage point. Tugging his soaked trench coat closed against the weather, Turpin knew he ought to find someplace warm and dry. *Let the space cops handle this,* he told himself. *This is outta my league.*

Sure enough, an emerald glow heralded the arrival of a Green Lantern, who came swooping down from the stormy sky toward the crime scene below. Spectators on the bridge shouted in excitement at the hero's arrival. Digital cameras and cell phones captured his descent for posterity. Turpin squinted, but couldn't make out which Green Lantern it was. There had been at least five of them over the years, and that was just counting the humans. He couldn't keep track of them all.

"We used to fight in the alleys," he muttered. "Guys these days fight in the clouds."

A woman wearing a fedora and a black leather jacket joined him on the walkway. She leaned against the painted metal guardrail. Long black hair spilled from beneath her hat, and the brim of the fedora shadowed her face. The rugged jacket looked like something a biker might wear.

“Progress?” she asked.

“You tell me.” He turned to look at her. “Wait—didn’t the Question used to be a guy?”

A flash of lightning momentarily dispelled the shadows, revealing that the woman before him was conspicuously missing a face. A blank expanse of smooth bronze skin stretched from her forehead to her chin, and only a pair of indentations and one small bump hinted at where her eyes and nose should have been. She had no mouth or lips at all.

“Lung cancer,” she replied. Her husky voice held a slight Spanish accent. She nodded at the burning cigarette in Turpin’s hand. “From smoking.”

“Lightweight,” he cracked, then regretted it right away. The Question’s body stiffened, and he could practically feel her glaring at him from somewhere behind her featureless visage. He wouldn’t have thought it was possible to scowl without a face, but somehow this dame was pulling it off. He tossed the cigarette onto the pavement and ground it out beneath his heel. “Sorry! I’m sorry!”

He wondered how the faceless woman was related to the previous Question, a vigilante–slash–detective who used to work out of Hub City. He’d had the same creepy No–Face thing going on, but he’d also fed Turpin some good leads back in the day. So far this new chick was turning out to be a reasonably useful informant too. She was the one who had tipped him off that there was something fishy going on down by the docks, even if he still wasn’t sure what the connection was between a dead super hero and some missing kids. *Hope I didn’t piss her off too much with that “lightweight” crack.*

“What you got for me?” he asked.

“A question, you ignorant old fart.” She sounded distinctly annoyed, but at least she was still speaking to him. “What did your six have in common, apart from being poor and smart? Any evidence of meta–gene activity, for instance?”

Meta–gene? Turpin was no scientist, but he knew that was supposed to be the genetic marker responsible for giving certain people superpowers under the right circumstances, like when they were exposed to weird chemicals or radioactive meteors or whatever. At least, that was the theory. Turpin had no idea if there anything to it, or if it was just scientific gobbledegook some egghead had dreamed up to land a hefty pile of grant money. As far as he knew, though, none of the missing kids were future candidates for the Teen Titans or Infinity Inc. They were bright kids, sure, maybe even prodigies, but they didn’t fly or walk through walls or anything like that.

He shook his head.

“Somebody’s targeting meta–humans,” the Question insisted. “I keep turning up links to this place.” She fished a postcard out of her jacket pocket and handed it to Turpin. Thunder boomed overhead as she edged away from him. “You be careful in the shadows, Danny boy.”

She looked like she was making an exit, but Turpin still had plenty of questions. “Why are you helping me

anyway?"

The Question didn't answer him. Instead she vaulted over the guardrail. "Hey!" Turpin exclaimed. "*Hey*!" He leaned over the rail, fearing that she had jumped to her death, only to see her land nimbly on the roof of a warehouse several feet below. She darted across the rooftop, then dropped out of sight. Turpin scanned the docks, but didn't catch another glimpse of her. She was gone.

"Damn super muk–muks."

Grumbling, he examined the card she'd given him. It turned out to be an ad for some sort of trendy nightspot called the "Dark Side Club." The name of the club was printed in ornate Gothic type against a stark black background. An address in Manhattan was listed on the flip side of the card, along with the admonition "Members Only." *Guess I'm heading to the Big Apple*.

Right after he got out of the rain.

A dome of emerald energy protected the crime scene from the elements. News–copters hovered overhead, braving the inclement weather, as John Stewart gave the site a preliminary once–over. Broken windows in the warehouse adjacent to the docks suggested that this was hardly the most salubrious stretch of the waterfront. An enormous poster, plastered on one side of the building, provided a welcome splash of color in the squalid locale. The faded poster depicted a man in a garishly colored circus costume breaking free from countless chains, locks, and handcuffs. Huge block letters identified the performer as Mister Miracle! The World's Greatest Escape Artist!

That would be the second Mister Miracle, John realized. *Shilo Norman, not Scott Free*. John had caught the original Mister Miracle's show at The Palace years ago, and this new guy was supposed to be even more impressive. *Didn't he escape from a black hole awhile back?*

A bright green flare, burning its way through the seething clouds overhead, brought John's attention back to the matter at hand. He peered up through the dome to see his partner, Hal Jordan, descending from the sky. His uniform was similar to John's, although Hal sported a green domino mask over his face and white gloves over his hands. He was a handsome, cocky white guy, with wavy brown hair, who liked to risk his life as a test pilot when he wasn't defending the cosmos as a Green Lantern. He and John had watched each other's backs through plenty of rough scrapes over the years. John trusted Hal with his life.

"What kept you, flyboy?" John ragged him. "Blonde or redhead?"

"Deep and dreamless," Hal insisted, despite his well–deserved reputation as a ladies' man. He phased through the energy dome to join John on the wharf. "What's the story?"

"Cooling rapidly." He scanned the battle–scarred body lying amidst the ruins of a shattered crate, but his ring detected no signs of life. "You ever hear of a 1011 before? Apparently, it doesn't happen often."

"1011?" Hal's brown eyes widened behind his mask. A small scar cut diagonally across his left temple. "Deicide?"

John was impressed that Hal recognized the code number. Then again, his partner had a few years seniority on him. “That’s right. Somebody just murdered a *god* on our watch.” He stepped aside to give Hal a better view of the corpse. “Recognize him?”

“Orion!” Hal looked over at John in surprise. “The warrior god of New Genesis,” he said, referring to the distant homeworld of the more benevolent New Gods. He shook his head in amazement. “A–number one cosmic hard-ass.”

“Yup,” John confirmed. He and Hal had fought beside—and against—the New Gods on several occasions, most notably during that “Cosmic Odyssey” a few years back. John winced at the memory. That had been a bad one. A rookie mistake on his part had cost them an entire world. He *still* had nightmares about it. *I don’t want to think about what could have done this to somebody like Orion.*

Unfortunately, that was their job.

A grave expression came over Hal’s face. He was obviously taking this just as seriously as John was. “I’ll report to the Guardians on Oa,” he said, raising his ring to his lips. “You alert the Justice League.”

The Guardians of Universe, the founders of the Green Lantern Corps, were a race of incredibly ancient, immortal beings who watched over the cosmos from their citadel on the planet Oa, located at the very center of the universe. John stood by as Hal’s ring projected holographic images of three of the Guardians into the air above them. Possibly the oldest intelligent beings in the galaxy, the Guardians were dwarfish blue humanoids whose diminutive stature belied their incalculable power. Manes of snow–white hair added to the magisterial dignity of two of the male Guardians, while another boasted a smooth, hairless cranium. A stylized image of a Green Lantern adorned the front of their flowing scarlet robes. Their characteristically solemn faces grew even more somber upon news of Orion’s death. Concern furrowed their imposing brows.

“Seal the crime scene to the planet’s Lagrange point,” the first Guardian instructed. “No one must enter or leave the gravity well.”

“Dust for radiation prints,” the third added. “Interrogate all potential suspects.”

“1011 requires a vast energy expenditure,” the second Guardian noted. “Locate the weapon.”

John was impressed, and troubled, at how hands–on the Guardians were being regarding this incident. Usually, they trusted their Green Lanterns to use their own discretion when it came to policing their respective sectors. The Guardians preferred to concentrate on the Big Picture instead. *So how big is this?*

“This is a matter of utmost concern. Lantern Jordan 2814.1,” the first Guardian stressed. “The gods of New Genesis and Apokolips have long been locked in a stalemate. The death of Orion suggests that the balance of power may have shifted toward evil. A special operations Alpha Lantern Unit is on its way. Prepare to receive them.”

“Special operations?” John echoed. The Alpha Lanterns were something new in the millennia–long history of the Corps: an elite squad of cybernetically enhanced Green Lanterns whose powers and authority outstripped ordinary Green Lanterns like him and Hal. The Guardians had instituted the Alpha Lanterns only a few months ago, in the wake of a devastating interstellar war that had almost destroyed the entire Corps. This was the first time they had ever been dispatched to Earth.

John wasn’t sure how he felt about that.

The Guardians’ images blinked out of existence as they terminated the transmission. He and Hal shared a worried look. If even the Guardians were going into crisis mode, just how hairy was this going to get?

A worrisome thought occurred to John. “You know,” he reminded his partner, “these New Gods? They come with bad gods too.”

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Eric Bass:

Spent a free the perfect time to be fun activity to perform! A lot of people spent their sparetime with their family, or their own friends. Usually they accomplishing activity like watching television, likely to beach, or picnic from the park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Do you wish to something different to fill your free time/ holiday? Could be reading a book might be option to fill your free time/ holiday. The first thing that you'll ask may be what kinds of e-book that you should read. If you want to test look for book, may be the reserve untitled Final Crisis can be very good book to read. May be it is usually best activity to you.

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