

Excerpt from:

The Indestructibles

by Matthew Phillion

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Praise:

"It's refreshing to have the book's one truly indestructible hero be female..."

But there's plenty that you haven't seen before... Phillion ramps up the action often enough to keep things moving...in the end, it's the heroes' well-drawn personalities that make The Indestructibles fly... And [he] doesn't give the villains short shrift either...It's the rare young superhero fan who won't find him -- or herself plowing through The Indestructibles in as few sittings as possible -- and the rare older fan who won't want to scoop it up as soon as junior finishes."

- Peter Chianca *Gatehouse Media*

"Three cheers for Solar, Dancer, Fury, Straylight, and Entropy: the five brightest stars in the sky...a young woman with Supergirl-like strength and abilities; Kate Miller, who wasn't really a superhero at all; a teenage werewolf; a kid with an alien super symbiote living in his brain; and a girl who could control gravity...In other words, the superteam was filled with a disparate mix of monsters and freaks. Or, we suppose, they could simply be called Dr. Strange and the Furious Five... [an] indefatigably entertaining novel."

- Eric Searleman - *Superheronovels.com*

Prologue:

Once, on a farm

Doc Silence touched down in the cornfields behind the farm, dropping from the sky like a falling star. Dressed in street clothes, a long black coat, old boots, and a college tee shirt, he looked nothing like a hero, which suited him fine. Doc never wanted to be a hero in the first place.

He walked slowly through the cornstalks, pushed his rose-tinted glasses to rest better on the bridge of his nose, and surveyed the burned out ruin of a storage shed behind the sun-bleached red farmhouse. It had been extinguished hurriedly and ungracefully, and still bore the blackened scars of a recent fire.

I waited too long, Doc thought. He had been mourning his lost friends, and this was never meant to be his responsibility. This wasn't his role. But Doc was the only one left, and someone had to take responsibility.

Doc always stood by his obligations.

Old John Hawkins waited for him on the back steps, thick farmer's arms folded across his chest like a pair of rawhide bones. He nodded when he reached the foot of the stairs.

"Been a while."

"I know. Sorry."

John shook his head. "No need to apologize. Hell, was hoping this day would never come. Doris and I started to think — "

" — That she might stay forever?"

"She's a good kid. A wonderful girl."

I'm sure she is, Doc thought. A child can't help but turn out right, raised by John and Doris Hawkins. But nothing good lasts forever.

He followed John into the living room, where Doris sat primly on the sofa, wearing an apron. Who still wears aprons? He'd been away too long from here, spent too much time in dark places. It weighs on you after a while, and you start forgetting that places still exist where good people live ordinary lives.

Next to Doris sat a teenage girl. Her hair the color of late afternoon sunlight. She wasn't much to look at, a slender little thing, sun-burned, hair falling in her eyes.

"Doris," Doc said.

The older woman smiled, stood up, kissed him on the cheek.

"Jane, this is an old friend of ours," John said. The girl didn't look up. "He's come to talk to you about what happened in the barn."

Jane locked eyes with Doc for just a split second before returning her gaze to the floor. He sat down across from her on an ottoman, resting his elbows on his knees. Then nodded to the Hawkins, and the couple left quietly.

"I don't know what happened," she said.

This broke Doc's heart; her earnestness, her honest confusion.

"Of course you don't," he said. "Have your . . . Have the Hawkins ever told you how you came to live here?"

"They adopted me."

"True," Doc said.

He wished Annie were here. She was better at this than he was. But Annie was gone and the only one left who could help this girl was Doc Silence. How unfortunate for Jane, he thought.

He exhaled.

"When you were an infant, there was a plane crash."

She raised her eyes again, trying to stare through his colored lenses. He wished he could take them off, but now was not the time to scare her.

"There was a crash. Every person on the flight died, including your birth parents. A terrible, terrible accident."

Doc ran a hand through his hair. He felt old and insensitive, awkward and strange.

"Every person on that flight died, except one. A little baby girl. When we found you, you didn't have a scratch."

She studied him then. Smart kid, looking for clues. She waited.

"We knew you were special. Knew that you'd only become more special the older you got, and that if the wrong people found you, they'd want to take you away. So my friends and I hid you here."

She shook her head, almost imperceptibly. Her eyebrows drew together tightly.

"You've come to take me away."

"I have," Doc said. There wasn't much use in lying. Annie, why'd you have to leave this all up to me? He thought. What am I going to do with this kid?

"I don't want to go."

Doc smiled.

"I don't blame you. But your powers have started growing, and you might not be safe here anymore."

"Mom and Dad might not be safe from me anymore is what you mean."

"That too," he said. "But I'm going to try to help you learn how to make sure you don't have to worry about that."

Doc reflected on the file they'd created for her. She was a little solar-powered energy cell, impervious to most injuries. Probably never had a broken bone or a scratch in her life. There was potential for unassisted flight. Strange heat signatures — that's where the problems arose. According to John, the girl set the barn on fire when her hands burst into flames as she tried to lift a crate.

Jane had the potential to be a huge handful. Except that she was raised by John and Doris Hawkins. They raised good kids. Some of Doc's best friends had grown up in this house.

No wonder they looked so sad when he arrived. All those children, now dead or returned to the stars.

Doc extended his hand.

Jane hesitated, then took it in her own.

"I bet you didn't know you could fly," he said.

Chapter 1:

The girl in the clouds

She looks like a corpse," the cyborg said, glaring down at the girl in the glass jar. All color had gone out of her, eyes gummed shut, wires and tubes in her arms disappearing under the covers of the hospital bed she lay on inside the clear coffin. The cyborg, who went by the name Agent Black and who had not been called by his birth name for so long he barely remembered it, found himself vaguely uncomfortable with what he was witnessing.

Black wasn't particularly sympathetic to the girl, but, the science he was being made privy to gave him pause.

"She's a vegetable," said the woman with an eye patch who stood next to him.

The woman, Rose, also gave the cyborg pause, and for entirely different reasons. She was, and always had been, the most ruthless person he'd ever worked with in all of his years of mercenary villainy. In this line of work, there were paid professionals, there were maniacs, and then, there were the utterly merciless. Rose fell into the latter category. Agent Black used to think that the maniacs were the ones who were the scariest, because you never knew what a truly insane villain would do. But the older he got, the more the merciless ones made him nervous. Madmen could be counted on to do something stupid or self-destructive. The merciless ones were too smart for that.

"Where'd you get her?"

"We paid off a physician in Florida to sign her death certificate," Rose said. "Her family thinks her organs were donated, her body cremated. Instead, they scattered someone's golden retriever in the Gulf."

That's awful, the cyborg thought. But he kept it to himself. Nobody benefits from empathy in this line of work.

"What happens next?" he asked. He'd been briefed on what was actually being done, but no one had fully explained exactly how they planned to accomplish the science fiction lunacy his employers had been talking about.

Rose stepped up to a computer terminal beside the girl. She tapped a few keys, and the wall behind the bed opened up like venetian blinds. Behind it was a massive pane of something clear, not quite bulletproof glass but similar, a pane of clarity. Beyond that, sat a large chamber, clearly reinforced, lit by red emergency lights. The room was empty except for a thin gray mist.

After a few seconds, sparks of lightning crisscrossed the mist, like a distant storm. It reminded Agent Black of a huge thunderstorm hovering on the horizon of a Midwestern plain.

The sparks flashed in increasing succession. And then, the mist charged the glass like an animal unleashed.

The cyborg jumped back.

Rose laughed.

"We captured her off the coast of Norway," Rose said.

"Her?"

"An adolescent sentient storm. Her mother was responsible for the flooding in Southeast Asia last year."

"Her?" Black asked again.

"It's female."

The cyborg stared at Rose, half-expecting her to tell him she was joking.

She fixed her remaining eye on his own red-lensed artificial one. Dead serious.

"A sentient storm."

"Weather agencies say they name them for historical purposes, but the truth is, some storms have thoughts. They're feral things, though. Sources of chaos. They truly know not what they do."

"How do you capture weather?" Black asked.

"I don't fully understand the science behind it myself," Rose said. As she spoke, the sliding doors behind her opened. Two anonymous guards — masked and armored, chosen by Black himself because they were so similar as to be unidentifiable from any of the other guards on the premises — led a little man in front of them. He sported a hippy's ponytail, a receding hairline, small glasses, and wore a blue chambray shirt under his white lab coat.

"What's he doing here?" the little man asked.

Black looked at Rose, raised an eyebrow, silently asking the same question.

"Agent Black is here to slit your throat if the next step doesn't work, Doctor Wegener," Rose said. She laughed again, and Black smiled with her, but he knew there was no joke there. He didn't particularly want to kill the scientist, but money was money. His job was compliance. Stand there, be scary, force the scientist to do what Rose asked.

"You realize there is no guarantee this will work," Wegener said. "The process is entirely untested."

"It's your one shot, Doctor," Rose said. "The likelihood that we'll capture another sentient weather pattern is nil. So there's really no reason to keep you alive if this doesn't work."

Wegener attempted to stare her down.

Black gave the scientist credit — he lasted almost three seconds before turning away. It was better than most could handle when looking into Rose's dead eye.

Wegener pulled a wheeled stool to sit on, then took Rose's place at the terminal. He tapped commands. Inside the chamber, the sentient storm tested its boundaries, touching corners and hinges with fingers of lightning. The light inside the chamber changed from red to blue. Wegener glanced over at the girl in the glass jar, her bed looked — for all intents and purposes — like a colossal syringe. The scientist caressed the glass lightly.

"I'm sorry," he said, softly. He turned away, entered one last command, and the glass jar began to move forward.

Black hadn't realized it before, but the coffin-like hospital bed was embedded in the wall, the same wall as the cage holding the storm in. The girl was, bed and all, injected into the chamber with the brewing storm. Black moved closer, looking through the glass, and saw that the comatose girl was no longer surrounded by glass, but exposed to the storm, silently suspended in mid-air. The

blankets of the bed fluttered in silent wind.

And then lightning struck.

A blue bolt of light lanced into the girl's comatose body with such power that Black was positive he saw the outline of her skeleton, and before he could finish his thought: *I swear I thought that only happened in the cartoons* — lightning lashed out again and the girl woke, moving, her arms pushing up off the bed, head thrown back, mouth open in a silent scream.

"What the hell's happening?" Black said.

"We're trying to force the storm into the girl's body," Wegener said.

"Why?"

"Because it's a lot easier to control an alien sentience when you can shoot it in the head," Rose said. She was watching the process intently, one hand pressed against the glass.

More lightning lashed out, this time from the girl's eyes, striking the walls, dancing across the giant windowpane. And then she was in the air, drifting, hospital gown fluttering in the wind, her hair flowing all around her, changing color, bleaching out from dark brown to pale, silvery blue. Her skin was changing, too, first to an even more deathly white, and then darkening, turning gray, the color of a storm cloud.

The girl looked Agent Black right in the eyes.

His stomach clenched and he reached for the high-tech sidearm strapped to his thigh, knowing full well he couldn't kill a storm with it. Reflex. Fight or flight. A life spent battling and killing, and now he stood staring into the eyes of a teenage girl with a thunderstorm invading her veins.

The girl, the storm, the combination of the two slammed into the glass, palms outstretched, streams of electric light lashed out in all directions, her eyes filled with it, her body surrounded by fog. It began to rain in the chamber then, really rain, a pounding, unyielding downpour.

"Looks like your lucky day, Doctor. You get to live," Rose said.

Then the lights went out.

Black dropped into a crouch, the millions of dollars of combat cybernetics in his body taking over, finding safe cover, looking for an enemy, the targeting systems in his one fake eye kicking in, compensating for the darkness. Wegener had ducked beneath the terminal; the two guards had their weapons raised, while Rose stood, legs akimbo, waiting patiently.

The glass shattered. Not simply shattering, but, exploding, a storm of broken glass and rainwater crashed over them like a flood. One of the guards screamed. He heard Wegener praying. Cold air — the storm, Black realized, it, the living sentient storm — washed over them, pounding at walls, finding an exit, and, with the bending and creaking of metal, making a way out when one couldn't be found. Black, knocked off his feet, tumbled across the broken glass, thankful it was designed to break like safety glass — rounded edges instead of a million skin-tearing points.

Light returned, dim at first, and Black wondered if the emergency lights had kicked on, until he saw the opening in the ceiling. The storm, the girl, tore a gaping hole in the roof. Rain filtered in. He couldn't tell if it came from the creature or from nature.

It didn't seem to much matter.

He looked around. The guard who screamed lay dead on the floor, blood running thin in the puddling water. The other one nursed a broken arm, rifle beside him. The doctor was a soaking

mess, hair plastered to his face, one lens of his eyeglasses cracked.

Rose remained standing, gazing up through the hole, appearing for all the world as if nothing had happened.

"Are we supposed to go after her?" Agent Black asked. He had no idea how they could, but it was the only question he could reasonably think of at that moment.

"No," Rose said. "No, this just changes the game a little."

And then she smiled at him again.

The cyborg felt his blood run cold. Professionals, maniacs, and the merciless.

Thinking of a sentient storm in the body of a comatose girl flying across the night sky, Agent Black began to wonder which of the three were the ones he and Rose were working for.

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from *The Indestructibles*, first in series

Other titles include:

The Indestructibles: Breakout

The Entropy of Everything: The Indestructibles Book 3