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Vampires of the Apocalypse

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★ **The Passage** Justin Cronin. Ballantine, \$26 (784p) ISBN 978-0-345-50496-8

Fans of vampire fiction who are bored by the endless hordes of sensitive, misunderstood Byronesque bloodsuckers will revel in Cronin's engrossingly horrific account of a post-apocalyptic America overrun by the gruesome reality behind the wish-fulfillment fantasies. When a secret project to create a super-soldier backfires, a virus leads to a plague of vampiric revenants that wipes out most of the population. One of the few bands of survivors is the Colony, a FEMA-established island of safety bunkered behind massive banks of lights that repel the "virals," or "dracs"--but a small group realizes that the aging technological defenses will soon fail. When members of the Colony find a young girl, Amy, living outside their enclave, they realize that Amy shares the virals' agelessness, but not the virals' mindless hunger, and they embark on a search to find answers to her condition. PEN/Hemingway Award--winner Cronin (*The Summer Guest*) uses a number of tropes that may be overly familiar to genre fans, but he manages to engage the reader with a sweeping epic style. The first of a proposed trilogy, it's already under development by director Ripley Scott and the subject of much publicity buzz (Retail Nation, Mar. 15). (June)

