

Infinite Genesis

Bonus #7

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Impact: Draw Their Fire

A few months ago, it would have made a lot of sense for the hostage-takers to hole up in the penthouse of the tallest building in the area. No vantage points for snipers, open skies for a helicopter, and lots of floors between them and the authorities – especially once they cut the elevator cables.

A few months ago, however, they didn't have to deal with flying heroes.

That being said, Impact knew it wasn't as simple as flying in and smashing her way through the criminals. There were lives on the line, after all, and as soon as she swept in, they'd be pulling the triggers.

She needed to save them – that was why she was doing this job. It wasn't just about stopping the bad guys; she wanted to make sure no one got hurt. A part of her wanted to back off and let the police handle this. They were trained professionals who knew what they were doing when hostages were involved.

But there were also no guarantees in a situation like this. They could fumble it just as easily as she could, and then she'd always wonder if it would have been any different if she'd helped.

The entire top floor was taken up by the penthouse, which resembled a fancy bungalow complete with gardens, just tens of metres above the streets. Railings at the edges of turf-coated ground and wooden decking were all that separated it from the sky. This did mean that the interior was smaller than other floors of the building, but the apartment was still at least three times the size of those below.

Apparently, it belonged to the CEO of VykEngine, a company with ties to the Armed Forces. Mathias Laustsen wasn't in residence today, fortunately for him, but plenty of other people were. And now half the building had been squeezed into that apartment with guns aimed at their heads.

Whether Mathias had been a target or not was unclear. Nor did it matter.

There was a job to do, here, and Impact was going to do it. She had speed and strength on her side. It was just a question of whether she could keep the people safe in the process.

Circling the building, she tried to see what was going on. Right about now, she wished she'd been given a few additional abilities. Super sight would have been a nice one; something to help her zoom in or see through the walls. Assuming she hadn't been noticed already, flying closer would risk giving away her presence.

And that could cost lives.

Her short recon flight did reveal some interesting things, however. A glass wall made up one side of the penthouse; the hostages all seemed to be clustered in one room, with one gunman for every ten or so – it was hard to be sure. Three more gunmen were posted outside, peering over the railings from time to time, though they didn't appear to have sniper rifles.

Maybe she could lure people out. Pick off the outside sentries, prompting the others to investigate.

But what if they took a loss of contact as a sign to start sending a message of their own?

Too much was uncertain about this. And the more she hesitated, the more likely it was that the gunmen would start delivering on their threats to hurry the police up. Helicopter or bodies, that kind of thing.

I could really do with more people like me right about now...

But, even though she knew she wasn't alone, she didn't have the luxury of hoping another superhero magically showed up. No, it was time to act. The plan she had would have to suffice.

Flying low, Impact flew to one of the points manned by the sentries, keeping a close eye on his movements. Fortunately, his attention was fixed on what was on the other side; she swept up to him, wrapped an arm around his throat, and lifted him over the railing. For a moment, he struggled, but he quickly went limp as they flew away. Placing him on a nearby rooftop, she checked him for communications equipment or explosives – she got rid of the former and found none of the latter.

Then she flew back to the penthouse floor. Carefully, quietly, she flew to the other sentries, repeating her previous actions, silencing them before they could cry out. It was a precise operation – too rough and she could cause irreparable damage, too gentle and they could raise the alarm.

But she did it, and had to admit to a sense of pride at that.

It wasn't over yet, however. There were still more gunmen to handle. Now was the moment of truth: would they investigate or start killing the hostages? If it came to the latter, she could likely save most of them, but she wanted to protect them all.

Impact waited. She watched. Hovering in the sky, she glared at the penthouse window.

One of the gunmen within raised a hand to his ear, mouth moving, though she couldn't hear his words. Body language instantly suggested rising concern – words were shouted over the heads of the hostages, followed by hand gestures.

Five bodies emerged from the penthouse apartment, each armed, one more heavily than the others. This one wore thick armour, too – more than his companions. All five began a slow patrol of the building's edge, seeking the sentries, looking over the sides for any sign that they had fallen.

Flying closer to the building, Impact peered into the apartment: two gunmen remained inside, covering the hostages with their guns. With one on either side of the room, it wouldn't

be easy, but if she could take them out then it would just be a matter of keeping the other five away.

Now or never.

She dived towards the ceiling of the building, aiming above the nearest gunman. Mathias could bill her for the damage – she smashed through, dust spreading as she knocked the first hostage-taker to the ground. The thud was drowned out by the collapsing ceiling.

Before the dust could clear, she surged forward, over the heads of the cowering hostages, slamming into the second criminal, carrying him through the wall, across the gap between buildings, dropping him on another rooftop.

Quickly, she performed an aerial U-turn, returning to the penthouse and the hostages.

Already, the other gunmen were reacting, sprinting for the apartment – she had to stop them.

This time, though, they were together, and they saw her coming. Feet dug into the ground, guns were aimed, and triggers were pulled. Bullets pelted her, momentum lost as they struck her resilient skin, pattering to the ground; still the gunmen fired.

She rocketed towards them, no time to fly them away now. Instead, she swung punches, holding back on speed and strength to keep from killing them. Unfortunately, that meant they had time – albeit short – to dodge. And, a few times, that's what they did.

Whilst four of the gunmen hesitated to fire on her in close quarters, the armoured one showed no such compunctions. He took aim with rifle, shotgun, pistols, alternating in hopes of breaking through her skin – though the shots stung, he couldn't succeed.

Instead, glancing blows took down the men Impact didn't, until it was just her and him left standing.

'Why won't you just die?' the armoured man growled.

'Because I need to save these people from you.'

The man laughed, which made Impact hesitate. 'They don't matter. It was Mathias I wanted – we just jumped straight to the escape plan.' He raised a pistol at her, squinting. 'Now smile for Captain Slaughter – I wonder if your eyes are as invulnerable as the rest of you.'

He pulled the trigger; Impact flew forward, reaching out with one hand, catching the bullet mid-flight. There was time enough before she hit him for all arrogance to leave Captain Slaughter's face, replaced by a mingling of rage and fear.

Then he hit the deck, eyes rolled into the back of his head.

Gathering the five gunmen together, she constrained them with their own weapons – a simple matter of bending them around their arms – then headed to the hostages. Everyone was bound with zip-ties; she made quick work of releasing them.

'Is anyone hurt?' she asked.

Voices proclaimed that no, no one was hurt. Scared, aching from kneeling, but otherwise unharmed. Even after her dramatic entrance. People thanked her, some hugging her or shaking her hand, and when the police finally appeared at the penthouse, the rescued hostages called her a hero.

'You're safe now,' she told them, before flying away to retrieve the other gunmen and deliver them to their cells.