

# **Infinite Genesis**

## **Bonus #9**

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### **Impact: Staying Airborne**

It was a clear day over Henry Raleigh's private airstrip, his private jet sitting several metres away, steps lowered to admit him and his family. He clutched his nine-year-old daughter's hand tight, smiling at her nervous face.

'It's okay, Jenny,' he said. 'Flying is one of the safest ways to travel. Besides, this is a top-of-the-line plane, and Derek is one of the best mechanics money can buy. Isn't that right?'

Behind them, the mechanic nods, grey overalls smudged with grease. As he methodically cleaned the wrench in his hands, a smile twisted the corner of his mouth. Silently, he watched as Henry's wife, Rebecca, climbed aboard the plane, waiting for his employer to join her.

'Are you sure we can't drive there?' Jenny asked. 'It's not that far.'

'But the plane is quicker,' Henry insisted, though his smile did not falter. 'The sooner we're there, the sooner you can visit that zoo.'

The trace of a smile formed on Jenny's face. That seemed to have done the trick. 'Okay. But I can sit next to you, right?'

'Of course,' Henry replied. He gave her hand a squeeze, and then they walked the rest of the way to the plane. As they ascended the short staircase, Henry turned to flash Derek a thumbs-up, but the mechanic had already returned to the hangar.

There, he set the wrench on his workbench before lifting a bolt and inspecting it. His smile spread as he heard the engines whir into life. 'Safe travels, sir,' he muttered.

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Tens of miles away, Dr Ami Nyang sat at the desk in her flat, laptop open in front of her. Restlessly, she stared at the screen, which showed a map of the south-east UK. Over the past months, since adopting her role as Impact, she has worked on a system to find out where help is needed. It tapped into emergency calls and the news, using an algorithm she developed – with help from some talented ethical hackers online – to identify real hazards.

It had, so far, directed her to fight a man in a robot suit, handle a hostage situation, and save people from unprecedented flooding. Those incidents, and many more besides. Without

super hearing or the like, it was the best way to get where she was needed. Unfortunately, there was no guarantee of incidents demanding her attention. Some days, in fact, were particularly uneventful.

Which, to an extent, was a good thing. She needed to rest every now and then; it was reassuring to see that people weren't *always* in danger. But when being a superhero had become something of an everyday job, it could get *dull*.

Sighing, Ami switched from her incident detector to her web browser, returning to a task she had been neglecting: finding a new job. Being a superhero was fine, but she couldn't let it consume her life. Musa was quickly becoming her only friend, and that didn't seem healthy.

And whilst the settlement money she received from KanTech was a great help, she missed being a part of scientific advancement. She just wondered whether she'd be able to balance the two sides of her life. It had been easy so far, simply because she'd not been truly living a life outside of superheroism.

Her cursor hovered over a job listing. A senior position at one of KanTech's competitors. She had the experience for it. She knew the work they did and had always been impressed. Perhaps...

A sudden beeping from her laptop prompted her to return to the incident detector. On the screen, a small red dot flashed. When she clicked on it, a summary of the incident appeared.

"Plane in trouble. Engines out. Two pilots, three passengers."

According to the map, the plane was currently above a populated area. If it went down, there was too great a risk that there would be more than five casualties – and even that was five casualties too many.

Hesitating only long enough to visualise her trajectory, Ami rushed from her desk and into her bedroom, where she kept her suit. With her enhanced speed, it took perhaps a second for her to change, emerging from her window not as Dr Ami Nyang but as Impact.

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Jenny whimpered, clutching at her dad's shirt as the plane lost altitude. Beyond the window, smoke spiralled from an engine bereft of life, leaving a toxic trail in their wake. On the other side of the plane, the other engine sputtered.

'It's okay,' Henry reassured her, though the wobble of his voice said otherwise. He wrapped an arm around her shoulders, reaching forward with his other to clasp his wife's hand. 'We're going to be okay, darling.'

'We should have taken the car,' Jenny sobbed.

'Next time we will,' Henry replied. He turned his eyes to the front of the plane, but pristine white walls blocked his view of the cockpit. 'These are good pilots, though. Best money can buy. They'll set us down safe.'

In the cockpit, the pilots wrestled with the controls, trying to keep the plane level. With one engine down, however, it was an unpredictable beast, and turbulence was wreaking havoc on their stability. To make matters worse...

'I'm not sure we can get her to a safe landing space,' one pilot commented. 'The area is too built-up. This is going to be a disaster!'

'There must be *somewhere*,' the other snapped. 'We can steer it to a field, surely.'

'We're going down too fast.'

It was fortunate that their panic could not be heard further back in the plane, though the speed of their descent was clear from how their bodies were pressed back in their seats. Outside, the world was fast becoming a blur, the smoke the only constant.

‘How did this happen?’ Rebecca asked, gripping Henry’s hand so tight her nails dug into his skin. ‘Didn’t Derek check the engines?’

‘I’m sure he did.’ Henry gritted his teeth against the pain of his wife’s grasp; he fought to suppress his own growing panic. ‘He’s a good man. He knows what he’s doing. He...’

*He wouldn’t have sent us up if he saw any sign of damage in the engines. He would have warned us. Wouldn’t he?*

A sudden tilting of the plane slammed Henry against the window, his vision blurred by the hit. He squeezed Jenny a little tighter, trying to reassure her, but fear was holding firm in his heart, and he knew she could feel it, too.

‘Daddy...I’m scared,’ she whimpered.

‘We’ll be okay,’ Henry lied. His eyes drifted back to the window, seeing the world – a blanket of grey – swirl below them, like a colourless whirlpool sucking them in. ‘Just hold onto me.’

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Impact surged through the sky, a purple blur that drew the eyes of the few who were looking up. In the town below, few were aware of the incoming threat, too busy with work or mundane worries.

But she could see that the plane was dropping fast, now entering a death spin as air resistance took its toll. Somehow, it was holding itself together, though the state of the smoking engine suggested that wouldn’t last much longer. And the orange glow within the other suggested it wasn’t far away from causing another problem.

She pushed herself hard to close the distance, considering how best to stop the inevitable crash. Stopping it too fast would risk the lives of everyone inside; too slow and the crash would be unavoidable. Whatever she did, the plane couldn’t remain airborne in this condition.

Her first step, she decided, would be to stabilise it. Whilst she hoped everyone was secure inside the aircraft, a death spin like this wouldn’t do anyone any good; she darted in close, reaching out with both hands to grip the plane’s fuselage. Quickly, she was dragged into the spin, but she took a deep breath and pressed herself against the plummeting plane.

Grunting with exertion, feeling the centripetal force close in, she forced the plane to stop its spin, metal bending under her. As the spin ceased, she pushed up, attempting to level the plane’s flight. As she did so, however, the still functioning engine resisted her efforts, stubbornly attempting to hold the plane aloft yet making Impact’s job more difficult.

Frustratingly, she would need to damage the plane further if she was going to save it.

With the aircraft stable enough, for the moment, she released it and flew to the stuttering engine. Clutching the wing with one hand, she pulled her other back into a fist before striking, slamming through the metal. Smoke belched out into her face, forcing her to drop away and behind the plane.

If anyone saw what she just did, she imagines they would be confused and frightened. In the chaos, would they know it was Impact come to save them, or some as-yet-unknown flying villain come to hasten their demise.

Clearing her lungs, Impact rocketed forward again, following the plane as it began a slightly more controlled descent, catching up. But it was still dropping too fast; it wouldn't clear the town in time.

She flew beneath the plane, resting its full bulk upon her shoulders, straining to hold it aloft, slowly lowering it.

Now, the people in the town saw what was happening above their heads, the plane, supported by Impact, coming into sight. Smoke continued to cough out behind them, but the danger of a fatal crash was averted. There was still, however, the question of landing.

At their new, lower altitude, however, and at a low speed, it was safe for the door to open. Steps lowered, forcing Impact to adjust her grip, and then a voice called to her.

'Hello. Are you...are you *under* the plane?' Henry Raleigh called.

'Yes,' Impact shouted back. 'Is everyone okay?'

'Thanks to you,' he replied. 'Can you take us back to the airstrip? We were only a few miles out when the engines failed.' A pause, and then, 'And I would quite like to talk to my mechanic.'

'Okay,' Impact says. 'Um...and which way would that be?'

A few directions from Henry later, and they were headed back to the origin point of the short-lived and terrifying trip.

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As Impact set down the plane, forced to place it tail-first before shuffling forward along its fuselage, gradually lowering it, the airstrip's crash team rushed to greet them. Quickly, Henry Raleigh emerged from the aircraft, holding a reddened handkerchief to his forehead. Beside him, Jenny emerged pale and shaken.

The sight of her made Impact's heart skip a beat. She hadn't realised one of the passengers was a child.

'Derek,' Henry called, and a man in grease-smearred grey overalls rushed to him. Sweat trickled down his brow, fist closed around a wrench.

He stuttered as he said, 'Are you okay?'

'How did this happen, Derek?' Henry asked, and Impact could hear the accusatory tone in his voice. 'You told me the plane was safe.'

'Well, yes.' Derek swallowed. Hard. 'It was. I don't...it shouldn't...'

'What did you do?' Impact asked, stepping close. She could see he was hiding something; his demeanour reminded her of the sleaze she witnessed at KanTech. She pointed at Jenny. 'There was a child on that plane.'

Derek took a step back, fiddling with the wrench. Through his panic, however, a glimmer of rage emerged. 'And what about my little girl?' he growled. 'You...you'll pay to take yours to any zoo she wants, but mine...you wouldn't pay me a little more so I could save her. And now she's gone, and you...you...you should be gone too!'

The mechanic swung with the wrench, aiming for Henry's skull. Fortunately, Impact was faster, blocking the strike and knocking the wrench to the ground.

'You tried to kill us?' Henry roared. 'I ought to...'

‘Enough,’ Impact interrupted. ‘There are enough witnesses here. Call the police.’ She reached out, placing a hand on Henry’s shoulder. ‘Your little girl is safe. Focus on that.’

Henry sighed. Nodded.

And then Impact flew away, torn between sympathy and rage. It was unacceptable for the little girl to be endangered like that...yet could it all have been avoided with a little more empathy? Sometimes, the world wasn’t as black and white as she’d have liked it to be.