

Infinite Genesis

Bonus #6

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Hellblade: Simply Business

It's a simple mission, but a paycheque's a paycheque. As the sparkling sapphire waves roll far below, the mercenary known as Hellblade secures his rope to the rocks of his vantage point and waits.

He knows this must be a test of some kind. A simple job before his employer sends him after someone with more protection – a politician or a general, most likely. Comparatively, this drug lord is small fry. Successful enough to own a yacht, legitimate enough not to draw attention to himself, but not so big that he's on a most-wanted list or filling his country with hippopotami.

Truthfully, Hellblade had been disappointed to discover that Mr Ramirez only owns two houses.

Still, he isn't going to turn down an easy job if it's still high profile. Mercenaries like himself have been bidding for a contract on this man's life for months; Hellblade is just the first to be hired by Nathaniel Saker, an even more powerful drug lord who isn't willing to let Ramirez muscle in on his business.

And safeguarding his trade means he's willing to pay a pretty penny.

There's only been one caveat on this contract: "Don't harm his family". And that means Hellblade has to do things differently.

"All lives expendable" missions are the simplest. Set a bomb, fire a missile, shoot out a car tyre, job done, but something like this calls for finesse. Whilst simple is always good, Hellblade has to admit that he likes a challenge.

The yacht drifts into sight beneath him, and he trains his eyes on its deck. Over one eye he wears a targeting lens, its built-in computer scanning, picking out details. It identifies five people in sight: a woman and two children playing, and two men in polo shirts and chinos.

Body language says the family are relaxed; the two men are watchful, alert, hands always close to their waists. Armed guards.

Hellblade isn't at all surprised.

Making a final check that his line is secure, the mercenary begins his descent, sliding down the rope, gloves saving him from rope burn. On his back, his sword rattles in its scabbard – an archaic weapon, perhaps, but one he has mastered. Still, he carries a pair of guns in his belt, back-up knives in each boot – he is a master of his trade and has carefully selected his loadout for this mission.

Though the sword with which he earned his name is always with him.

The yacht continues its steady passage, slow enough that he has plenty of time to reach it. One of the guards patrols to the rear of the vessel as Hellblade reaches the terminus of his rope. Now it's just a short drop – he could land in the sea, but the splash might alert them. He had planned to catch himself on a railing and haul himself aboard.

Now, he has another option.

Dangling from the rope with one hand, he reaches for his boot, withdrawing one of the knives, gripping it tight. Then, as the movement of the yacht brings the guard below him, the mercenary drops.

He lands on the man's shoulders, forcing him down to the deck, plunging the knife into his neck in the same moment. Guards aren't family, after all, so they're fair game if it gets him closer to Ramirez.

The landing wasn't silent, but the crashing of waves in the yacht's wake muffled the sound. Before anyone can investigate, however, and before too much blood spreads, Hellblade lifts the body and lowers it into the water to be food for the sharks – no splashing except what the boat produces.

Then he's moving again, following the deck, looking for a window or door through which he can access the interior of the ship. He taps the side of his targeting lens, setting it to infrared, picking up on heat signatures beyond the walls; there's a door ahead, two bodies on the other side, both with the same body language as the guards on deck.

He readies his knife, approaches the door – it's open. One of the bodies inside is looking out, straight at him. Hellblade cuts his throat before he can react; pushing him aside, he steps up behind the other. There is a moment where the guard is about to turn around, sensing his presence, but then Hellblade's hand is over his mouth, the knife in his neck, and two bodies have slumped to the floor.

The mercenary keeps moving, glancing over his shoulder to make sure the target's family are still out on the deck. There's another door, beyond it four heat signatures. One is seated, the others forming a ring around it.

He'll have to be quick. Take them all out before they can react. No time to be quiet: make the kill and run, hope the family dive for cover. He doesn't care if they see the aftermath of his work, only that he doesn't harm them and risk his pay.

Tucking the knife away, he readies a pistol, draws his sword. Then, he kicks open the door. Guns are raised to greet him but he's already moving, firing one shot at the standing body furthest from the door, swinging his sword into the throat of the one standing closest. Blood spurts, another gun fires – it's an automatic, bullets spraying the wall, but Hellblade doesn't stay in one spot for more than a moment, avoiding the barrage, lining up his own shot.

The gunman goes down with a hole through his head.

Only the seated figure left now, but something's wrong. It's Ramirez, sure enough, but he's tied to the chair, a gag in his mouth. On the desk, a phone – it starts ringing.

Scowling, Hellblade picks it up.

'Congratulations,' says the suave voice of Nathaniel Saker. 'I must say, that was very well done. You would have been quite the asset...but you're also a threat. But after the world discovers I eliminated the infamous Sandro Lombardi, no one will dare to mess with me.'

'A trap,' Hellblade growls. 'You son of a bitch!'

'Yes, a trap. Should have done your research – Ramirez only has one child. Arrivederci, Mr Lombardi. Enjoy the fireworks.'

The phone clicks; Hellblade glares at Ramirez. No point saving him, he's scum, but the people on deck – sounds like they're innocents in this game. He sighs. He's a killer, but today he'll try to save a few lives, just this once.

He sprints out on deck, fires a shot into the other guard's head – evidently also in Saker's employ – and approaches the "family".

'Ship's about to blow.' He points over the side. 'Jump and swim with me.'

None of them know what's happening, but when a man with a sword and guns tells you to do something after killing the people who employed you, you do as they say. The four of them dive off the boat, Hellblade shouting for them to stay underwater and follow him.

The children struggle – he grabs them, dragging them along with him, the woman close behind. The ship explodes, heat hitting them even underwater, but Hellblade keeps his cool, gets them out, to the beach.

A quick call arranges help for them, and then Hellblade makes another call. To the office of Nathaniel Saker. 'Sorry to disappoint, Saker, but I'm still breathing, and you just made things *personal*. I'll be seeing you soon.'