

Gerin
The Wastelands

by Scott Walker

“It’s said they killed a Guardsman.”

Gerin snorted but remained focused on the figures far below, moving about the small village at the foot of a large cliff. The figures were cloaked in red and brandished swords and long arms of various shapes and sizes. Gerin and the other Swordsmen had lain at the edge of the cliff for over an hour, peering over the edge only enough to observe the aftermath of the slaughter. Soft but nervous laughter spread along the line of men.

“Sand Devils are capable of many things, but killing Guardsmen is not among them.”

“Many reports from the Wastelands have recounted the tale, sir.” Gerin looked left at Neylon, his First Sword and, by many people’s reckonings, practically a brother to Gerin. “It appears there may be truth to it. We’ve seen how the Devils’ ferocity has grown recently.” Others shifted positions and murmured soft agreement.

Gerin suspected there was a reason Neylon would openly disagree with him in front the others, and he guessed it was related to the scuffle earlier that day between two of his men. It was nothing serious – one man walked away with a bloody nose – but that kind of internal conflict was highly uncharacteristic for his men. While not formally recognized as a military unit, The Swordsmen possessed many of the traits of a close-knit, highly trained group of soldiers.

Grinning, Gerin stared back at Neylon and smiled. “I’m sorry, Neylon, I have forgotten: was it four Guardsmen or five that you struck down in your youth?”

“You exaggerate, sir, it was only three. But I was drunk at the time...” More laughter, this time less strained.

Gerin looked back down at the village. The Swordsmen had been tracking the Sand Devils for days and found them right after they had raided the village below. Smoke still rose from the remains of the buildings, but the fires had long since gone out. Corpses littered the area around the village, personal effects had been strewn all over without much apparent care. The Devils typically took only food, left valuables and few, if any, survivors.

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“You have all crossed blades with the Devils, and you know firsthand the skill they possess. I have faced but a single Guardsman, and it was six of us against just him. I alone survived the encounter, and even then only barely made away with my life. I’m convinced that in the end, the Guardsman took pity on me. As dangerous as the Devils are, I fear the Imperial Guardsmen far more.”



Below, the Sand Devils

began tying sacks and bags to their mounts, some already on horseback and circling the perimeter of the village. A few Devils were absentmindedly poking at the corpse of a young boy tied to a stake – the child had been tortured to death - waiting for some signal to move on.

Gerin’s failure to stop this attack weighed heavily on him. He had formed The Swordsmen to bring even the smallest hope of justice and civilization to what was left of the Southern coastlands. The Imperial Guardsmen had pulled out long ago, answering commands to report back to the Imperial Isle or wherever their master had sent them, and the local nobility swiftly followed suit. The ensuing power vacuum was quickly filled with those of less sterling values. The Sand Devils very nearly topped the list in that category.

Gerin addressed his men. “Ease back from the edge. We’ll mount up and test the speed of their horses. Their course puts them on track for the entrance to Sparrow’s Run. With luck, we’ll beat the Devils there and prepare a welcome as hospitable as the one they showed these villagers.”





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Illustration *Sand Devils* by Andy Underwood.

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