



The Witch of the Sands

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A DARK FANTASY ADVENTURE

Shield Scyldmund captured his prize: the bloody head of a desert chieftain. But despite the promise of desperately needed coins, the aging swordsman is disturbed.

After two decades of hunting down deadly witches and warlocks for the Dhurman Empire, Shield and his ruthless band of mercenary Northmen have been reduced to common bounty hunters in the burning sands of Hopht.

Their coin is running out. His men are talking of deserting and returning North. Even worse, Shield can no longer pursue his consuming vengeance against the magic wielders who murdered his father.

On top of that, Shield is haunted by a vision of Birgid Wordswallow, the witch he once loved.

So when Shield and his sword brothers are called away from the chaotic pillaging of the last walled city to hunt down a witch, Shield thinks things might take a turn for the better.

But hunting a witch is never as simple as it seems...

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The Witch of the Sands Details

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From Reader Review The Witch of the Sands for online ebook

Angela says

I recieved this book courtesy of good reads first reads. This is a short 56 pages. It's an excellent start of a story based around a man on a mission to extinguish dark magic from the world. There are alot of loose ends that I assume can only mean we are going to see a sequel. I enjoyed the authors working style even if the dialog is fairly simple. It's short and to the point and good for anyone looking for a game of thrones esc Web comic kind of read. I could easily see this illustrated and set as a graphic novel set.

Emmy says

Medieval like mercenaries-for-hire for witches and warlocks. Gory in an entertaining tale (not gory for shock's sake)

The unraveling of his back story was good, just not believable, as the head honcho of the Hounds for their motivations.

Periklis says

A **Northmen** take on The Wild Bunch.

That was what I was thinking while I was reading this.

A band of violent men, witch-hunters and swordslingers extraordinaire, accept a "last" task that brings them facing their past.

It is a great pleasure to discover new works in the **Sword & Sorcery** genre, paying *homage* to the classics (Robert E. Howard and Karl Edward Wagner came to mind), bringing a fresh, new, voice to it at the same time.

All the fight scenes were incredibly vivid, "choreographed" with great research regarding the mechanics of close quarter combat:

"He stepped back twice, angling his feet as if along the circumference of a large circle, and, using his momentum, he flung the body of his first attacker into the path of the second one."

The sorcery part is sketched in an abstract but thoroughly mystifying manner:

"Then the moan fragmented into words, [...] the words that ate themselves as soon as they emerged, the song of the witch."

Although this serves as an appetizer for the " The Hounds of the North" series, it offers a complete yarn and a full understanding of its characters.

The author, generously offers it for free, upon registering to his newsletter.

More HotN yarns, please!

Ashe Armstrong says

This was a fairly fun story. Plenty of sword & sorcery imagery to fill your mind's eye with. I really like the use of song in magic. That said, it could use a little more polish. At worst, it's mostly just in need of some editing. Change of phrase here, word swap there, nothing major. Give it a look though.

Terence says

Shield Scyldmund and his men The Hounds for two decades were the warlock and witch hunters for the Dhurman Empire, but now they've been reduced to bounty hunters. The Hounds yearn to return North while Shield continues to honor his vow to rid the world of dark magic users. Shield gets his chance as once more the empire calls on The Hounds to hunt a witch.

The Witch of the Sands was a surprisingly solid short story. The description seemed solid and I'm glad I gave it a chance. There is nothing particularly special about the story yet it had its own personal touches. For instance warlocks and witches in this world use words of power to conjure their magic. These words can be taken and from time to time The Hounds have been asked to assist the empire in acquiring the words of power.

The characters didn't get enough page time to establish themselves. The story is told from Shield's point of view and he's the standard aging war leader, full of regrets while making hard decisions. The author did throw some interesting visuals such as Hawk who fights with a giant sword, Patch who lost an eye, and Night who blends into the shadows thanks to a warlock's cloak.

The Witch of the Sands was a strong start to The Hounds of the North series.

3.5 out of 5 stars

Richard says

There seems to be a new theme creeping up in S&S literature. The embittered, hard as nails, veterans who want nothing more than to enjoy their spoils and hang up the shields. Mr. Fugazzotto does a wonderful job here.

The story is mostly introspection of Shield, the leader of the Hounds of the North. He begins the story wanting nothing more than to fulfill a vow he made twenty-odd years ago. As we travel along with the Hounds we learn tidbits about Shield's motivations and the origin of his vow. We also glean a few tidbits about the others in the group.

My only complaint would be that as I read, completely immersed in the final battle, the words THE END hit me like a brick wall and I was left sullen like a small child. I will gladly look forward to checking out the rest of the series.

Recommended!

S.E. Lindberg says

Peter Fugazzotto's *The Witch of the Sands* is a solid novella.

Very much like Glen Cook's *The Black Company*, this features a band of hired warriors (Hounds) set on quests/errands that once aligned with Shield's personal goal (kill all warriors and witches since they, namely the Warlock King, killed his father).

Here the Celtic/Viking-like Hounds deal with a Roman-like leader named Cassius (a nod to the IX "lost" legion) to (a) murder a magic-less chieftain (reasons unknown) and then (b) seek out the titular witch of the sands. The author handles the group well, assigning simple but effective names: Shield, Harad, Hawk, Patch, the Brothers Bull, Night (my favorite stealthy fighter), etc.. It's a fun squad with decently involved backstory and tension. Fugazzotto's martial art experience influences the fights, with just the right amount of descriptive positioning and movement.

Plenty of sorcery and undead horror here, and the final battle is compelling--delivering a mix of betrayal, music-based magic, and bloody melee.

Without spoiling, not all is answered about Cassius's intentions. I would have enjoyed a clearer tie-in between missions. I suspect that may be answered in subsequent installments. The characters and writing style serve as a solid introduction to the Hounds of the North. Shield carries his team and the story... and the readers. You'll undoubtedly follow to book 2, *Black River*.

An obvious must-read for Grimdark readers and fans of Glen Cook.

Laird Bruce says

Step back into a time when Fantasy meant Sword & Sorcery and the the same vein as Fritz Lieber's *Fafred* and Glen Cook's *The Black Company*, comes Shield Scyldmund and the Hounds making their way way into a desert as the mercenary band hunts witches & warlocks. All is not well with the Hounds, out of coin, far from home they no longer believe in the mission.

This is the type of book I love!, imagine a mercenary band with Conan, Kull, Fafred and every other giant northman, age them 20 years on a campaign and yearning to be back on the snow covered steppes? A fast paced easy to follow novella that provides good characterizations and plenty of action. A must read for fans of REH, Lieber, Moorcock and the other masters of sword action!

Dann Todd says

3 stars on my scale was an enjoyable book, but not one that I would want to read again. A more accurate estimate of my experience would be 2.5 stars.

Received as a free ebook via the author's website.

This book appeared to be the skeleton of a good story. It had enough sinew and tendons to hold it together,

but lacked in flesh. Forgive the grim/dark approach in the preceding.

The characters seemed a bit wooden; as if they were pieces to be moved on a board game instead of living people represented on a page. It read like the transcription of a good Dungeon & Dragons session; which is a fine thing, but it isn't a book. IIRC, the author actually uses the phrase "hack & slash" which is (or used to be back in the day) a term for a D&D session that focuses on simply killing all of the monsters that come along.

There were a couple of areas where the story could use a little help.

Ahem - Spoilers!!

Character motivation - We never get very deep into the characters, their history, or their motivations. These are glossed over in favor of making room for good fight scenes.

Show don't tell - The cardinal rule is that the author should demonstrate thing via interactions with other characters instead of simply telling the reader about things via extensive exposition. A little exposition is a good thing, but it can be over utilized. There isn't enough "show" and more than enough "tell".

Logic - The "party" is comprised of individuals that follow a main leader. That leader (Shield) is sworn to kill all of the witches and warlocks in the world. As far as the story indicates, the party follows Shield because they follow Shield. Shield wants to kill witches and warlocks because his mom told him to on her death bed. She told him to kill them because one evil warlock had killed Shield's father.

Why was Shield's father killed? It was never adequately explained.

Good witches and wizards are known and accepted in Shield's culture. He almost married one. His mother died from a malady that a witch or wizard could have easily cured. She refused that cure in a way that seemed illogical to me. Even Shield implied as much at the time of her death.

Shield's oath hinges solely on his loyalty to his mother's wishes. Wishes that he told her were not logical/reasonable. Those wishes are motivated by one event that no one in their right mind would use as a rational justification for the oath.

One area where the story does well is the presentation of combat, gore, grit, and associated nastiness. The set up for each conflict location was pretty good as was the description of the action. Where it lacks is in the development of the characters.

Zac says

Nice little literary morsel

It's a short read-- can probably be finished in one sitting. I appreciated that it was unadulterated grimdark fantasy with all the violence and evil magic boiled down into a palatable...novelette (is that what it's called? IDK).

My only criticism is that the characters weren't fleshed out enough to discern who's who clearly, but I imagine that will develop with the next in the series. I'm looking forward to Black River and Five Bloody Heads.

Lana says

A good sword and sorcery novel, the first in the series the Hounds of the North which deals with a group of mercenaries from the North fighting in the desert and selling their skills to any ready to pay them to kill witches and sorcerers! However, at the time of the story the few of the group who are left are all disgruntled and all of them are fighting their own internal battles it seems. They have seen their friends being killed off and are now pining to return to their own homeland. They also feel that their are no more witches and sorcerers to be killed and that they are stooping too low when killing women and children, however this was before they came upon the witch of the sands. Though the book took a while to get exciting, when it caught on it really did and we saw very good battle scenes, magic and witch hunting, courage and loyalty amongst the North-men! I think this augers to be a great start to a very good sword and sorcery saga!

Charles says

Sword and Sorcery written in the Howard tradition, with a nod or two toward Robert E. Howard. I believe I also saw some Glen Cook influence, particularly from his Black Company books. This is a novella length work.

I liked this quite a bit. I thought the beginning started out a little slow. It was mostly dialogue from characters that we hadn't yet gotten to know well. Once the story got going, though, it rolled right along. The magic/sorcery concept here is a good one, involving words/songs of power. The writing is muscular and suited to sword and sorcery. The climax to the story is compelling.

The basic concept is of a band of Northmen mercenaries employed primarily by a semi-Roman type of empire. The mercenaries are getting older and have fallen on hard times. It's apparent that each member of the band has some issues and backstory, but we don't get to learn much about these in this book, except for the leader, who is known as Shield. I understand that this is the first in a series, so we may see more of other characters' stories in other books. The second book is called "Black River," which would seem to be a clear nod to Robert E. Howard's Conan stories. I certainly liked this one enough to read more, and I have "Black River" on my kindle.
