

'The Gamble'

by Cian O'Farrell

Derrin and Aradesh strolled into the small village, a cool and gentle breeze at their backs. *"You know, we don't have to do this, Watcher. They aren't our responsibility."* Aradesh sighed at his partners words; why did he always have to be so averse to helping people? *"Yes, we don't have to help them but if we don't the Eclipans will surely destroy them all. And we don't want that do we Sentinel?"* Derrin sighed beneath his helmet; his partner was right. They continued forward through what appeared to be a deserted village, however when Derrin switched to his thermal vision he saw that the people were merely hiding. *"They're in the buildings... probably think we're here to hurt 'em."* Aradesh laughed light-heartedly. *"I suppose we are here to hurt them in a sense, just not the way they think."* Moments later four men emerged from one of the run-down wooden cabins, brandishing shotguns, all aimed at the duo.

"State yer biness, and then get lost." The lead one spoke, pointing the shotgun right at Derrin's helmed-face as they approached. *"Hear you had a close encounter with the Eclipans?"* Aradesh's voice was calm even with the guns pointed at them; after all it wasn't anything they weren't used too at this stage.

"Yeah we did, why? Looking for easy plunder?!" The lead man accused, pumping the shotgun menacingly with a satisfying click. But Derrin knew the sound all too well. *"Get that unloaded piece of junk out of my goddamn face before I put you in the dirt..."* Derrin growled as the lead man's mouth opened. Too late. Derrin drew the auto-mag from his hip and pointed it right at the man's face. *"Yours is bigger, but mine works."* With fear in their eyes, the shotguns all hit the ground. *"Now, now, calm down Sentinel."* Aradesh said, using Derrin's moniker hoping to calm the situation. *"As a matter of fact, we aren't here to plunder or enslave*

people, believe it or not, we are here to help you,” Aradesh began to explain, before one of the men spoke up; *“You two; you’re the watcher and the sentinel! The banes of War-Chief Mercury.”* Both Aradesh and Derrin nodded. *“And we want to help you, train you, that sort of thing,”* Derrin said as he holstered his pistol.

“We are so, so sorry we d’int know t’were you.” Aradesh and Derrin nodded once more.

“How many people are left?” Aradesh asked as Derrin motioned for the men to pick up their shotguns. *“There’s about twenty adults, and thirty children, half of em’r over twelve.”* Aradesh and Derrin nodded to each other, they both knew it would be a gamble training these people. But they were already part way down this path, may as well see where it led. After all, helping village after village, tribe after tribe and even some towns defend themselves against the ruthless Eclipans had it perks. The booze flowed freely and they got to help people; it was certainly a win-win situation. *“Gather everyone old enough to hold a weapon, we are gonna teach you a couple tricks for dealing with the moon boys next time they rock up,”* Aradesh exclaimed as the men ran off to gather their fellow villagers. Derrin smiled beneath his helmet. *“How long do you think it’ll take to train this lot eh?”* Aradesh thought for a few moments before responding.

“Given the fact they’ve already been hit pretty bad I’d say around two weeks.” Derrin nodded unslinging his rifle. *“I’m going to check out the area and scavenge a little, start the drills. I should return shortly.”* Aradesh didn’t respond he just watch as Derrin turned and walked away. *“Happy hunting Sentinel.”*