

The Fifth Horseman

The Apocalypse Trilogy
Book Three

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1 – The Cabin

The green lizards watched the approaching rider from a hole in the ancient sandstone foundation of what used to be a settler's cabin. They had just scampered in ahead of the sun's first rays. With luck the cool dry shade would keep them alive for another day. A long night of hunting had scared up little for the hungry pair—a white-ringed moth, a mouthful of fly larvae. Moments before, they had quarreled over and devoured a shiny brown scorpion. The desert kept them close to starvation and they were always on the watch for food, so their quick yellow eyes were instantly drawn to the distant motion. The thin black line leapt out at them, a twitchy needle of shadow against the shimmering orange dawn. One of the lizards chirruped, raised its tail. The other chased an ant.

A man rode up the rocky shelf that sloped toward the cabin. The coating of dust and fine patina of salt from endless days in the arid Savagelands obscured the true color of both horse and rider. Reigning in his mount, the man paused a moment bent forward in his saddle to study the ground. He raised his hat brim quizzically with a thumb then jerked back into motion, angling his horse toward a crumbled stone wall that circled an old well. Dust rose from each weary hoof.

With a snap of the reins the rider halted. Something—a sound: a sudden burst of air had traveled through the cabin's pine door. A cough perhaps, severe—exploding from lungs painful and tubercular. He dismounted slowly, drawing one of his guns and sliding the hammer back. His spurs clinked as he walked toward the structure. The rider set a gloved hand

against the pine planking, and pushed the door aside. Sheltering his heart with the doorjamb he peered into the darkness.

The cabin's poor construction allowed many thin lines of light to burn through cracks in its walls. The effect dazzled his vision and obscured the room within. A dangerous millisecond passed as his eyes adjusted. The rider stepped in, gun level.

A man was propped in the far corner. The silhouette pushed itself upright, wheezing.

"Are you the man?" The voice was husky and dry. An oily crackle in the lungs foretold his death.

"Some say," the rider rasped, features clouded. His eyes squinted against the glare, flared in recognition. "I know you..."

"Horseman..." Another voice as brittle and dead as bleached bone rattled behind the door.

The first gunshot drove the green lizards from the relative coolness beneath the cabin. Reckless with terror, one was snatched up in the talons of a starving hawk. The other got away.