Gerin

The Wastelands, Part 2

by James Welch

"Sir. We spotted a Sand Devil scout approaching the canyon."

Gerin groaned at the news. The Swordsmen had raced to reach Sparrow's Run before the Sand Devils, but now the lone scout could jeopardize their attack strategy.

"Is it a lizardmount?" Gerin asked.

The Swordsmen lookout nodded his head in answer to the captain's question. Captain Gerin, First Sword Neylon, and the squad commanders stared at each other for a moment as the new information sunk in. The acknowledgment that the Sand Devils possessed a lizardmount tore through the leaders' collective confidence. Their hastily developed plan was unraveling. When the Swordsmen had reached the village, they discovered that the Sand Devils had already raided it and murdered the villagers. Gerin quickly devised a plan to ambush the Sand Devils as they left the area through the canyon. In their haste, the Swordsmen had not noticed the lizardmount scout.

The captain looked to his First Sword for advice.

"Sir, we have to let the scout pass through the canyon. If we ambush the scout, we'll lose our advantage against the main contingent," Neylon stated.

"Tell the forward squads to pull back and take position with the archers. I don't want anyone near the path when the scout comes through. And tell everyone not to move – not even scratch their noses." Gerin commanded.

"Yes, sir."

None of the Swordsmen knew how the Sand Devils adapted the giant lizards for mounts, and none understood how they controlled such a beast. The lizards had an insatiable hunger for horses, even Sand Devil horses. It would be impossible to keep the two mounts in the same camp. The lizards were more commonplace in the southern Wastelands, which could explain why this group had only one lizardmount traveling with them. The claws of a lizardmount could slice through most armor, and its bite could practically sever a man's torso in half.

"Drier, get the horses as far back as you can and put muzzles on them. I don't want any sounds, smells, or movement out of them."

"Yes, sir."

Nothing's ever easy in the Wastelands, Gerin thought. He knew his attack strategy

needed adjustment, but Sparrow's Run was their best chance at repaying the Sand Devils for their attack on the village.

"Edmond, arm five of your best men with the longspears. Have them take position at the end of the canyon in case the lizardmount turns back when we attack the main party. I don't want that lizard to get back into the canyon with our men. After it's clear, tie up a horse as bait near the canyon exit. That might buy us a few more minutes if it does come back." Gerin shook his head at the idea of his men trapped in the confined space with the lizardmount. It was a gruesome thought.

"Sir, it's here."

The lizard and its rider slowly stalked through the canyon as the Swordsmen held their breaths. The beast was well suited for the Wastelands. An untamed lizard, if you could call a Sand Devil lizardmount tamed, was one of the most efficient predators of the region. The giant lizard could easily scale rocks and surfaces were horses could not. Its senses were honed for killing and hunting.

Gerin sat with his back against a rock alongside Neylon, waiting for the lizardmount to pass. It felt like an hour until his lookout gave the signal that it was leaving the canyon. Edmond's five men armed with longspears and the sacrificial horse headed towards the canyon exit after the lizardmount. Meanwhile, the forward squads returned to their positions within the canyon.

The Sand Devil raiders weren't far behind their scout. When the last of the Devils entered the canyon, Neylon signaled the archers. From behind dozens of rocks and high above on the cliffs overlooking the canyon, a squad of archers stood up and sent a volley of arrows into the canyon. The Swordsmen knew that the archers wouldn't do much damage to the raiders, but this was part of Gerin's plan. When the arrows hit the raiders and their horses, the horses began sprinting through the canyon. The last raiders managed to control their mounts, turn them around, and exit the canyon's entrance.

The panicked horses drove the Sand Devil raiders into the ambush. A group of the strongest Swordsmen pulled at the end of a rope across the canyon to raise it head high. The raiders galloped into the rope and were thrown off their horses, some crushed beneath the hooves and others pinned under the weight of their mounts. The forward squads of Swordsmen leaped in and thrust spears into the piles of bodies to kill more Sand Devil raiders before they

could get back to their feet. The Swordsmen had been outnumbered, but their ambush had given them a slight advantage.

The Sand Devils that escaped the ambush were circling back towards Gerin's archers just as Gerin expected. The archers notched one last arrow and took aim at the only path that led to their location. Meanwhile, Gerin and Neylon climbed atop one of the boulders above the path and crouched low. When the devils turned the corner, they were greeted with a flurry of arrows. Just as the last arrow flew, Gerin and Neylon leaped from their positions to tackle two Sand Devil riders, knocking them to the ground.

The attack resulted in several Sand Devils trapped under their horses giving the Swordsmen easy targets for their longspears. A few of the Devils lay dead on the floor of the canyon as the rest regained their footing to square off against the Swordsmen.

As long as the lizardmount scout didn't return to the canyon, Gerin felt they stood a chance at defeating the remaining Sand Devils.

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"Sand Devils", "Swordsmen", "Gerin", and "Neylon" created by Scott Walker in *Gerin: The Wastelands*.

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