

MODERN BOY'S ANNUAL—the Best Christmas Present for You!

The **MODERN BOY**

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*Many Other
Stories and
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Fifty Thousand Dollar Prisoner

Mr. Fank Is Mad!

THE telephone-bell in Cyrus Fank's office at Gorgous Pictures, Hollywood, went off suddenly, like a rattling alarm. The Rio Kid was used to six-guns, and they would not have made him turn a hair. But he was not used to telephones, and that sudden raucous buzz at his elbow made him start.

Cyrus Fank, director of Gorgous Pictures, span round on his swivel chair, grabbed off the receiver, and jammed it to a fat ear.

"Hallo!" he bawled.

In Mr. Fank's highly polished office, on the Gorgous lot, on Magnolia Boulevard, at Hollywood, the Rio Kid was far from his accustomed stamping-ground, and he was feeling queerly out of place. Any guy looking into the office would have supposed that the Kid was a member of the film company, got up in theatrical gadgets for a part in a Western film. Probably it was the first time that a genuine Texas preacher, in high-heeled riding-boots, gaiter chaps, gaudy and six-guns complete, with a stetson hat under his arm, had stood in that office. But the Kid was the genuine article from top to toe.

"Hallo?" The Kid, standing close by the Gorgous director, heard the voice that came through. "That Cyrus Fank?"

"You said it!"

"Second time of asking—you buying Brian Bennett?"

Mr. Fank, holding the receiver in one hand, transcribed the other, stretched in the air. His fat face was contorted with fury. The Kid admitted that he had come to be mad. Brian Bennett was the star of Gorgous Films, and was due to carry on with a big picture in the Gorgous studio. Bennett had been roped in by a gang of kidnapers, and this was the chief of the kidnaping bunch phoning up the exasperated film director. It was more than enough to make a guy blow off steam!

The Rio Kid had heard of Hollywood as a place where they made pictures, but it was not till he learned the film town that he learned of another industry that was run there

on a large scale—kidnaping for ransom.

"Say! You spilling anything?" came the voice over the wire, as Mr. Fank, instead of answering, only brandished a fat fist and spluttered.

"Yep! I'm telling you to let up on Bennett! We're due to go on location, and—"

"You'll sure miss that guy on location, Cyrus, if you don't cough up fifty thousand bucks—"

"I guess I get all the police in Los Angeles after that guy, and they sure will get him back. Then it's you for the can!" roared Mr. Fank.

"Forget it, Cyrus!" came the voice.

"I'll mention that Brian was put in a car that did sixty, and he's in Mexican territory now. I'm confiding in you, Mr. Fank, that if you don't cough up fifty thousand bucks for that pot of yours, he's going to live the rest of his life among the grasses in Lower California. Of course, if you reckon that you can get along O.K. without him, go ahead and keep your dough. I guess it's up to you!"

Mr. Fank slammed back the receiver with a slam that made the instrument rattle, whirled round on the swivel chair, and glared at the Kid.

"You heard that?" he bawled.

"Sure!" assented the Kid.

"They got him over the border in Mexican territory, they allow!" growled Mr. Fank. "They'd do it easy in a quick car! I got to buy him back! Fifty thousand dollars—great snakes! I guess it's Spanish John's gang—though there ain't no proving it. And you come here telling a guy that you know something about it—and can help to get Bennett back."

"I sure do know a whole heap," assented the Kid.

"Spill it, then!" roared Mr. Fank. "Don't I keep on telling you to spill it? What you know about them fellows who kidnaped Bennett?"

Mr. Fank. I never knowed it was a film stunt when I harned in at your bangular up in the hills, thinking a Mexican was handing the rough stuff to a young lady. When you put me wise, and I hit the trail, I reckoned I wasn't going to fall for it again that-a-way. When I saw them guys circling Bennett I reckoned it was another film stunt, and just looked on and laughed."

"What?" shrieked Mr. Fank.

"That's just what I figured, and I don't no-way see that I was to blame, after what had happened," said the Kid. "It wasn't till after I met up with Miss Ober, at Diego's joint, where I'm bedding down in Hollywood, that I was put wise that Bennett had been kidnaped. Then I just harned the wind here to tell you."

Mr. Fank gazed at the Kid. He seemed unable to speak. He made incoherent, inarticulate noises.

"If I'd knowed it was a real kidnaping," went on the Kid, "I'd have waded in, pronto, and them two guys, what called one another Mick and Shooter, would never have knowed what hit them. That guy Bennett sure did you a few for help, but I figured that it was the talkie game."

"You hushhead!" shrieked Mr. Fank, fusing his voice. "You big stiff! Aw, there ain't a name for you! First you harn in on a film scene, thinking it's real, then you sit and snicker at a kidnaping, thinking it's a film scene! What sort of a loused jasper do you call yourself, anyhow?"

"Forget it, Mr. Fank," said the Kid cheerfully. "I'm here to help, if you want me! Maybe I make mistakes, but I'll tell all California I can pick up a trail as well as the next guy!"

"A trail!" yelled Mr. Fank.

"Sure!"

"Aw, for me! You figure on following the trail of an axle down to Lower California, over the border?" shrieked Mr. Fank.

"Sure not!" grinned the Kid.

"But I got a hunch that that guy Bennett ain't so far off as Mexican territory, feller. From what these jaspers was saying, they had a burro enrolled in the timber, to stick Mr. Bennett on. I guess if they'd been aiming to harn the wind for Mexican

them to do it," answered the Kid.

Mr. Fank bounded from his chair.

"You saw them?" he bawled.

"I sure did!"

"And that was six hours ago, and you ain't spilled a word! And you let them get on with it without taking a hand? What you giving me?"

"I allow I wasn't wise to it," confessed the Kid, colouring a little. "I ain't wise to the ways of this here film town yet."

***** By *****
RALPH REDWAY

territory in an auto, they would have had the auto around. But they sure had a burro, and I reckon they stuck Mr. Bennett on its back and toted him off, and I'm mentioning that I'm the baby to pick up the trail of that burro, if you want."

Mr. Peck breathed hard and deep. He did not wholly believe the kidnapper's statement that Brian Bennett had been taken hundreds of miles from Hollywood. It was, as likely as not, a false statement, to throw dust in the eyes of the searchers for the film star. But he had no means of knowing—and the Kid told what he knew.

"Great snakes!" said Mr. Peck, at last. "Puncher, if you got Bennett back, you can ask me for all the dollars you can carry in three chaps of yours!"

"You can keep your dollars in your pants, feller!" answered the Kid. "I ain't after dollars—though maybe I'm the only guy in Hollywood that ain't. I sure am sorry for that galsot Bennett, letting them jaspers get away with him—and I'm hating to set it right. I just hopped in here to put you wise, and now I reckon it's me for the trail." He turned to the door.

"Hold on!" yapped Mr. Peck. "You allow you heard them kidnapers use the names of Mick and Shooter? I know the names! They're side-kickers in Spanish John's gang. You sure, and I'll put it through to the police depot!"

"Sweet thing you know, Mr. Peck!"

"Chew on this, too!" said the film director. "We don't pack guns in Hollywood, like you do on your ranch in Texas, puncher—but Spanish John and his gang would shoot you up as soon's look at you! You want to watch out, if you got anywhere near them kidnapers."

The Kid chuckled.

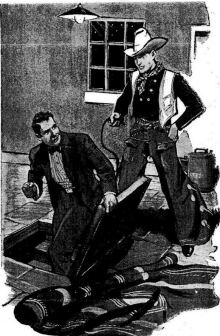
"Feller," he said, "if it comes to shooting, them jaspers will learn that this baby can burn powder a few! I don't give a red cent for all the gangsters in Los Angeles, Mr. Peck!"

And, leaving Cyrus Peck at the telephone again, the Kid hit Dingo's joint in quick time, saddled up Side-Kicker, and rode out of Hollywood.

One Mighty Punch!

SPANISH JOHN lowered the long glass that was half-way to his lips, replaced it on the table in the veranda, and sat staring. Seldom or never had the plump, dusky Californian been so surprised. John Valdes—descendant, as he claimed, of the ancient Valdes whose wide ranch-lands covered the ground in the old Mexican days, where Hollywood now stood—was a "native" Californian. His father, and his father's father, had become brigands in the mountains, after the American conquest; but brigandage in the mountains was a hack number these days—and John carried on the family business as a gangster. And in that line no gangster in Chicago or San Francisco had anything on John.

Kidnaping was John's special line—and, to judge by his excellent



"You first!" ordered the Kid, and the raging gangster led the way down into the cellar.

clothes, his handsome horse on the hill, and the jewels that sparkled on his fingers, he did remarkably well out of that peculiar profession.

Sitting in his veranda, with the full, round moon gleaming down on the well-kept gardens in front of him, and on the hillside sloping down to the film town, John was smoking a Mexican cheroot and sipping from a long glass when a strange and unexpected sight started him.

Up the steep road to the gate came a puncher in stetson, chaps, and spurs, with the reins of a Texas mustang looped over his arm. Gun-buttle jutted from the leather holsters slung low to his gambrel. The puncher pushed open the gate, led his horse in, and walked the mustang up the path to the bluff.

The Rio Kid glanced up at the plump, dusky man in the veranda, and politely raised his stetson in salute. Then, leaving his mustang standing, he came tramping up the steps with jangling spurs.

"Say!" gasped John. "You jumped

out of a film, ho?—You better jump back."

"Nops!" said the Kid. "I ain't jumped out of any film, sir! I'm the real article, from Texas. I guess, from what I've picked up, that you'll be Mister Valdes, boss of this here shakedown?"

"You said it!" agreed Spanish John. "And what do you want here, get up for one of Peck's Westerns?"

The Kid smiled.

"I'm sure sorry to trouble you, sir!" he answered. "I ain't come hunting trouble, if you don't want! I've just called for Mister Bennett!"

Spanish John sat bolt upright. His dark eyes narrowed almost to pin-points, and his hand slid, as it were carelessly, towards the back of his trousers. The Kid laughed.

"Don't, Mr. Valdes!" he said. "I could sure shoot you into small pieces before you could get the hardware out. No, I'm a peaceable guy, and I ain't no kunch for trouble. I just want Mister Bennett."

"Loco?" gasped Spanish John.

Fifty Thousand Dollar Prisoner

"Not now, you'd notice it, feller?" said the Kid cheerfully.

"Is this a hold-up, or what?"

"Sort of," said the Kid thoughtfully. "Maybe it would clear the air if I put you wise a few. I've been three hours on a trail of three miles, which is slow work for a guy of my belt—but I guess the sign don't lie here like it was a prairie in Texas. Early this afternoon, feller, I saw two roughnecks climb that film guy Bennett. But not being wise to it that it was a kidnaping stunt, I let them get on with it. Maybe you know the names of 'Dick and the Shooter'?"

"Never heard them!" said Spanish John.

"Now, ain't that curious, and Mr. Frank figuring that they was side-kickers of yours?" smiled the Kid. "Maybe you'll remember them names when I put you wise a little piece more. These jaspers had a burro corralled in the timber, and they got Bennett away on it."

Spanish John smiled.

"I've sure heard that that guy has been got by some kidnapers," he agreed. "It's said that they had an auto, and ran him off in it."

"You got another guess coming?" said the Kid. "No, I've known how to pick up sign since I was a small kid no higher'n my stirrup-iron. I picked up the trail of that burro in the timber, Mr. Valdez. That critter took flight, I reckon, when he was led into that timber to wait till he was wanted—but he trod heavy when he was led out. I guess he had something on his back, Mr. Valdez, and I figure that it was a galoot about Bennett's size."

Spanish John leathed harder. He did not speak, but set with his black eyes glinting at the Texas puncher.

"I followed the trail of that burro," went on the Kid. "Those roughnecks sure did pick the quiet spots. Like they was shy, but they didn't tote that burro up to your front gate, neither, Mr. Valdez—they hit this stretch by a gate at the back, where there's a path over the hill with trees to cover it."

The gangster laughed.

"You want me to believe that you picked up a burro's track like that?" he asked. "You tell that story in Los and it's you for the big laugh."

"But I ain't telling it in Los!" explained the Kid patiently. "I'm telling it to you, Mr. Valdez, private like on your own veranda."

"Heat it down to the police depot in Los, and tell the chief that a man was carried three miles, tied on a mule, in sight of Hollywood, and nobody noticing. They sure will pack you in the can for giving them that dope."

"I guess," said the Kid quietly, "that I've knowed a guy to be hid up in a big sack like he was a load of alfalfa, and carried off on a burro's back that-a-way. I could sure tell you about an outlaw, back in Texas, who got by under a sheriff's nose just

"You got a hide-out here!"

in that way, Mr. Spanish John." The Kid grinned, partly at the reminiscence of a wild escape in Texas, partly at the start that the gangster inadvertently gave. "Do I get it, homie?" chuckled the Kid. "Did them guys lead up Mr. Bennett on that burro's back, humped up in a sack, like he was a load of fodder?"

The gangster's black eyes glittered. The Kid knew that he had guessed it, and he laughed.

"I'm telling you that that trail don't lie," went on the Kid, "and when I picked up from a homie that this was Spanish John's shchange, I guess I didn't want the trail to tell me any more. If you're interested, I'll take you round to your back fence and show you the sign where that burro was led in with a load on his back."

"I'm not interested," drawled Spanish John, "and I guess I've had more'n enough of your tall tales, puncher. Here's my shchange, open to all the cops in Los, if they come to search it. I'll mention that it's been searched more'n once, and no guy ever got the goods on me."

"Meaning," said the Kid thoughtfully, "that you got a hide-out here where you corral a prisoner, too deep for the cops to get on to."

"Meaning," said Spanish John, rising from his chair, "that if you don't heat it pronto, puncher, I'm going to look you as far as that side."

"I guess you better get on with it, John," grinned the Kid.

The gangster threw away the stump of his cigar, and pushed back his cuffs. He came at the Kid with clenched hands, squared jaw, and glowing eyes.

The gangster was less alarmed than enraged by the Kid's discovery, and he was going to show this simple puncher from Texas that it was no safe game to burn into Spanish John's professional affairs. He came at the Kid like a tiger.

In more than one desperate affray John had proved himself a dangerous man. He had beaten up strong men in his time, and beaten them up badly.

But he did not heat up the key outlaw of the Rio Grande. Two swift blows, both of them hefty, hit the Kid. Then something that seemed like a lump of solid lead jolted on Spanish John's jaw, and he went over backwards as if a mule had kicked him.

He sat up dizzily, holding both hands to his aching jaw, and blinking with dazed eyes at the Rio Kid.

"I guess," remarked the Kid, "that it's sure getting late, Mr. Spanish John, and I've mentioned that I've called for Mr. Bennett! You want to get a move on, and I've got a quiz here what says the same!"

The Kid's Way!

THE dusky face of a startled peon looked out of the french windows into the veranda. He stared at the growling gangster and at the smiling Kid, who gave him a cherry nod.

"You Felipe," Spanish John panted

harshly, "phone up a cop! It's a hold-up—phone up the cops!"

"Stop right there, feller!" drawled the Kid, and the gangster's servant almost jumped into the air as a six-gam looked him in the face. "Put up your jaws, dago! I guess this baby ain't got no use for cops! Sticking 'em up?"

"Si, senor!" stammered Felipe. His dusky hands went up promptly over his dark, well-oiled head.

"Keep 'em up!" said the Kid. "I ain't going to spill any guy's juice, but I guess I've called for that galoot Bennett, and I sure ain't hitting the trial without him."

Spanish John staggered to his feet and leaned against the veranda rail, his dark face convulsed with rage in the white gleam of the bright, clear moonlight. His right hand slid behind him. The Kid was watching him like a cat. He did not need telling that a guy of Spanish John's belt packed a gun, nor did he need to know that John was the homie to use it.

That Brian Bennett, the kidnaped film star, was hidden somewhere in this place, the Kid knew; but he knew, too, that the hide-out was too deep to be found in a search. Otherwise the "goods" would have been on Spanish John before this. So, on the matter stood, the law was all against the Kid; John Valdez was a house-holder pulling a gun on a hold-up man, if he pulled. And the law would see him through in self-defense. The Kid knew all that, and it did not worry him a lot. In his own country of Texas, he had been driven on the wrong side of the law; and he figured that he was going to carry on this game his own way. If the Los Angeles cops could not deal with this kidnaper, the Kid reckoned that he could; and it was fixed in his mind that he was not going without the man he had come for.

Felipe stood spluttering with terror, with his dusky hands up. The corner of the Kid's eye was on him. But he was watching Spanish John—and it was well that he was. The gangster rested his hand behind him on the rail, as if for support—and suddenly, swiftly, he whipped a revolver from his hip-pocket and threw it up to fire.

Swift as he was, he was not as swift as the Kid.

The gun that was covering Felipe swung round to the gangster and roared before Spanish John got his revolver to a level.

A wild yell pealed from the gangster.

His revolver went with a crash to the planks, exploding as it crashed, the bullet whizzing away, shattering the french window. Yelling, Spanish John clapped his right hand with his left, the blood streaming through the chapping fingers.

The Rio Kid smiled at him grimly over the smoking gun.

"Aw, pack it up, feller!" said the Kid. "You ain't hurt—not so's you'd notice it! I guess your hardware had the worst of it, and if you've lost a strip of skin that ain't enough to make a guy howl like he was being scalped. Pack it up, big boy."

The gangster suppressed his yell. His first impression was that his hand had been shot to pieces, but he found that the Kid's hand had only taken off a strip of skin. He drew a handkerchief round his wounded hand to stop the flow of blood from the scratch—for it was little more. The Kid kicked the revolver of the veranda into a bed of magnolias below.

"I guess you're safer without your hardware!" he remarked. "You, Felipe, you the only guy around this here shbang!"

"Si, señor!" gasped Felipe. "I guess you're sitting it out while I talk to your boss!" said the Kid. "Put your pants to that rail there, that-a-way!"

"Si, señor!" stammered the peon. The Kid bound the two dusky hands to the veranda rail, with a length of cord from the pocket of his chaps.

"I don't rightly know," he remarked, "whether any guy would hear you if you howled, but I guess I shall hear you, and I'll give you something to keep you quiet! You got me?"

"Si, señor!" gurgled Felipe. "Chew on it, and don't spill anything!" said the Kid. "Now, Mr. Gangster, if you've finished tying up that little scratch that seems to worry you such a lot, I'm ready to be introduced to Mr. Bennett."

Spanish John blazed like a snake in his rage.

"Feed that you are! Go to the police, I tell you, and spill all you fancy you know! Bring them here as soon as you like—and I'll have you run into the can for this hold-up!"

"I guess the cops won't call it a hold-up when I prove that Mister Bennett was here, packed in a hide-out," grinned the Kid.

"Find him, then!"

"I guess that's what I'm going to do, feller, with your help," agreed the Kid. "I don't reckon that without your help, John, I'd ever get wise to that hide-out of yours, where you corral your guys till the ransom's paid. After tonight, I reckon, all Lee is going to know about it, but just at present I want your help to put my finger on it. I'm asking you, John, to take me to Mister Bennett, and I ain't taking no for an answer."

The gangster stood glaring with rage.

The Kid had his quilt under his arm. He holstered his gun, and took the quilt in hand. The gangster backed away as the Kid advanced on him.

"You putting me wise to that hide-out?" asked the Kid quietly. "I guess it's up to me to get that guy Bennett, seeing that I let them rough-necks get away with him. You got that guy, John, but you ain't getting fifty thousand dollars ransom for him like you figured. All you're getting is my quilt if you don't jump to it."

Spanish John made a bound to escape, and the Kid's grasp dragged him back. He went down on the veranda floor, and the Kid stood over him, whirling the quilt.

"Top or nope?" he snapped.

A curse was the only answer. The gangster seemed unable to believe that the Kid was in deadly earnest. Cops he did not fear—detectives made him smile, but methods like this were new to him.

"I ain't waiting," said the Kid amiably.

Another curse was his answer. Then the quilt came down, hard and heavy. The Kid reckoned that he was not standing on ceremony with a crook who was holding a prisoner for ransom. A dozen lashes crashed on the yelling gangster before Spanish John gave in.

"Let up!" he yelled. "Goldarn you, you loosed Hube—let up! I guess you got by! Let up!"

The Kid slipped the quilt under his arm.

"Get to it!" he said cheerfully. "There's more to come if you want—heaps more, John!"

Spanish John staggered up. "Follow me!" he breathed in a voice husky with rage.

The gangster led the Kid through the extensive garden that surrounded his home and stopped at a little summer-house surrounded by pepper-trees. He tramped in and switched on electric light, and the Kid, following him in, stared round the empty building. Then his eyes glittered at the gangster.

"You don't want to waste time, John," he said. "I guess—"

The quilt slipped into his hand again.

The gangster, scowling, rolled a rush mat from the floor. A solid paving of stone was revealed. It looked so solid as the earth itself, but as Spanish John pressed with his foot in a certain spot, one of the blocks of stone rose like a trapdoor, revealing a dark stair below. The Kid laughed.

"I'll say that's some hide-out, feller," he said. "I allow that all the cops from San Antonio to Frisco would never have got wise to it—but sure all Lee will be rubbering on it to-morrow."

"Go down, and you will find the man you want!" bawled the gangster.

The Kid chuckled.

"I guess I'm too polite to walk in front of you, and this your shbang, feller," he answered. "I wouldn't put it past you to shut this trap and pack me up along with Mr. Bennett! You first, John!"

And the gangster, breathing hate and rage, led the way down the narrow stair to the hidden cellar under the summer-house.

Bennett Baku!

BRIAN BENNETT coasted quick, sharp glances to right and left as he walked down the hill by the side of the Rio Kid. There was no danger from Spanish John—the Kid had left him tied to the veranda rail along with Felipe, not likely to get loose under no hour. It seemed to the Kid that Bennett was fancying a gangster peering out of every shadow.

Half-way down to Hollywood, at a bend of the winding road, the sound

of coming footsteps echoed. Bennett gave a sharp start.

"Who's on the road at this hour?" he muttered.

"Maybe some of Spanish John's side-kickers," said the Kid. "You don't want to worry, Mister Bennett! I sure pack two guns, and I reckon you know how to handle a Colt."

The Kid passed one of his guns to Bennett, grasped the other, and pushed his Mustang to the side of the road, out of the way of shooting.

Two dark figures came swinging in sight round the bend of the hill road. Bennett caught his breath as he recognized Mick and the Shooter—the two roughnecks who had kidnaped him.

The Kid knew them at the same moment, and his finger crooked on a trigger. Surprised by the sudden meeting on the lonely road, Shooter gave a roar:

"It's the film guy! Clash him!"

There was a clatter as the air-gun dropped from Bennett's hand, and he sprang on the Kid's Mustang and drove the horse into a sudden rash. So swift was his action that Mick, springing at him, was hurled back by the horse's shoulder and went spinning, and Bennett swept down the road at a gallop.

"Doo-gone!" gasped the Kid, as a shot from the Shooter ripped his steatosis. The Kid fired back before the gangster could pull the trigger again. There was a yell as the thing rolled over with a smashed leg.

Mick, half-risen, resting on a knee, was whipping out a gun. But the Rio Kid's shot came first. The gangster's arm sagged to his side, smashed at the elbow.

"I guess," said the Kid, "that you guys can't back a Texas pancher a heap about shooting!" He stopped and picked up the gun that Bennett had dropped. The clatter of the Mustang's hoofs rang back from the distance—the hero of Gorgonzola Films was in full flight. "I guess Cyrus Post would surprise the film fans if he got this here scene on his dogged pictures."

Leaving the gangsters groaning and cursing, the Kid hurried down the road, grinning as he went.

YOUR horse, air!" said the gate-keeper on the Gorgonzola lot.

"Sure!" said the Kid. "Mr. Bennett leave him here for me!"

The Gorgonzola custodian peered curiously at the Kid.

"Mr. Bennett allowed that you lent him the loan, and asked me to hold him here till you blew in, pancher."

"He ain't here!" asked the Kid.

"Nops! He's hit for home in Mr. Post's auto."

"I guess I'll hit for home, too, now I got my eyegs," said the Kid; and he mounted Side-Kicker and rode away down the boulevard.

Next Thursday, the Rio Kid becomes a talkie star. He's actually signed to incorporate himself—to play the part of a two-gun confidant on the films!