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**NOW TURN TO PAGE 2.**

*Another Great  
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*There's someone riding the trails, in the name of the Rio Kid, looting, holding-up, shooting, and generally making the Gunsight district an unhealthy place in which to ride. Who this unknown raider is the real Rio Kid sets out to discover!*

# The **KID** on the **TRAIL!** by **RALPH REDWAY**



**A ROUSING LONG COMPLETE TALE OF THE WILD WEST, STARRING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!**

**THE FIRST CHAPTER.**

**At the Poindexter Ranch!**

**"SHO!** I guess that hombre sure is raising the dust!"

Tex Clew, foreman of the Poindexter ranch at Gunsight, stood at the door of the bunkhouse and stared across the plain, shading his eyes with his hand.

A horseman was coming towards the ranch, spurring on at frantic speed.

He was not one of the ranch outfit, for he was dressed in "storo" clothes, and he rode clumsily, like a man unused to the saddle, sitting his horse like a sack of alfalfa, as Tex said to himself.

He was evidently in a hurry. With whip and spur he urged on the big-boned "American" horse he rode. Once he almost tumbled from the saddle in an effort to look back over his shoulder, like a man in fear of pursuit.

The foreman stared at him, puzzled. He could see the sun-scorched plain for a great distance beyond the rider, and there was no sign of any pursuer—nothing moving on the prairie save a bunch or two of grazing cattle.

The horseman rode bareheaded, his hat having apparently fallen off in his wild haste. Perspiration streamed down his fat face.

A puncher lounged along from the corral and joined Tex, staring at the newcomer.

"That's Lawyer Dunk, of Truce," he remarked. "I guess he's raising the dust some."

"Asking for sunstroke, I reckon," said the foreman, with a grunt. "I opine it wouldn't be a gold-darned loss to the Rio Claro country if he got it, too! I reckon I know what he's hitting

this ranch for, though why he's in such a pesky hurry beats me."

And the foreman scowled at the new arrival. All the Poindexter outfit—and all Gunsight, for that matter—knew that every foot of land, and every longhorn on the ranch was mortgaged to Lawyer Dunk, of Truce. The common opinion in the cow-town was that ere long the ranch would be taken over by Mr. Dunk; and Tex Clew did not look forward to that prospect with any pleasure.

With a clatter of hoofs and a cloud of dust Mr. Dunk came to a halt before the bunkhouse. He almost fell from the saddle.

The horse stood trembling, lathered with foam. The lawyer mopped his streaming brow and stared back the way he had come.

"Some galoot arter you, Mr. Dunk?" inquired Tex.

The lawyer gasped.

"The Rio Kid!"

"Shucks! Is that firebug cavorting around here agin?" exclaimed the foreman.

Dunk reeled against the bunkhouse. He leaned on the wooden wall, spluttering for breath.

"He's not in sight!" he panted. "You can't see him?"

Tex grinned.

"I guess even that all-fired fire-cater wouldn't foller you up to the ranch, Mr. Dunk. There's too many galoots around Gunsight to draw a bead on him. He ain't in sight."

"I was held up—on the trail through the chaparral, coming here from Truce!" gasped Mr. Dunk. "I've had a narrow

escape. I—I thought perhaps he was after me—"

"You sure didn't stop to make sartin!" remarked the Poindexter foreman sarcastically.

The lawyer from Truce did not heed the sarcasm, if he noticed it at all. He stared back across the sunlit plains, as if he feared that every tuft of grass might hide the Rio Kid. Far in the distance the line of the rolling prairie was broken by a dark belt of chaparral. Lawyer Dunk was satisfied at last that the outlaw had not left the chaparral to follow him across the plain. He had ridden those hot and perspiring miles unpursued.

"I'll say you was lucky to get clear if the Rio Kid held you up," said Tex, "I guess he cleaned you out first, sure?"

Dunk shook his head.

"Some galoot fired on him in the chaparral, and that gave me a chance to vamoose," he said.

"Sho! Who was it?" asked Tex, with keen interest.

"Search me!" grunted the lawyer. "Do you fancy that I stopped to see who it was?"

"You sure wouldn't!" said the ranch foreman. "You sure would light out and leave him to it, Mr. Dunk. How long ago was it?"

"As long as it's taken me to ride here as fast as my horse could jump," growled Dunk.

"I sure might have guessed that, too," assented Tex. "I reckon I'd like to know what galoot it was that's tried to round up the Rio Kid. Might be on time yet."

And Tex, leaving the lawyer where he stood, strode into the corral, and in less than a minute was mounted on a broncho and riding away towards the chaparral as fast as Lawyer Dunk had ridden away from it.

He vanished in a cloud of dust, while the lawyer from Truce still leaned on the bunkhouse wall and panted for breath.

Mr. Dunk recovered his breath at last, and some of his nerve, and detached himself from the bunkhouse. The horse-wrangler had already taken his steed away to give it attention, and one or two punchers who were hanging about were regarding the fat man with curious, and by no means friendly looks. They were quite aware that Mr. Dunk had called for over-due interest on the mortgage, and equally well aware that he was not likely to be paid. Dunk called to one of them.

"Mr. Poindexter's at home, I suppose, Mohave?"

The lawyer was a little surprised that the rancher had not come out to greet him. In the circumstances of the case it behoved the young master of Poindexter ranch to be civil to his creditor.

"He sure ain't," answered Mohave.

"Not at home?" exclaimed Dunk.

"Nix."

Dunk compressed his lips.

"He must have been expecting me this afternoon!" he exclaimed. "Did he leave word when he would be back?"

"He sure left word he'd be to home by the time you called, Mr. Dunk," said Mohave. "If he wasn't, you was to wait."

Dunk opened his lips for an angry answer—and closed them again. He walked away towards the ranch-house.

There he was admitted by a half-breed peon, who showed him into the living-room of the ranch-house.

Mr. Dunk sat down to wait, and wiped his perspiring forehead again. His fat face showed deep annoyance. He had not expected "Poker" Poindexter to have eight hundred dollars ready for him, but he had expected the rancher to be there full of apologies and excuses. And the rancher was not there. He was absent; possibly making some desperate effort at the eleventh hour to raise or borrow the money that was required. The lawyer from Truce waited with growing impatience, more and more irritated with every passing minute, as the rancher did not come.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Face to Face!

"HANDS up!" The Rio Kid's revolver gleamed to a level as he rapped out the words.

He was just in time. The horseman, upon whom he had come suddenly, in the shadowy trail of the chaparral, was reaching for a gun at the sight of him. But his hand stopped short of the butt as the Kid's revolver looked him in the eye.

On the open prairie it was still sunny, but in the deep chaparral the shadows were darkening.

The rider did not touch his gun, but he hesitated to lift his hands at the Kid's order; and the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande repeated it sharply.

"Put 'em up, feller! Pronto!"

Slowly the horseman's hands went over his head, his dark eyes gleaming at the Kid as he raised them. The horse halted in its tracks; the Kid, standing his horse directly in the way, covering the rider with his gun.

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The Rio Kid scanned the horseman curiously.

He saw a young man, with a boyish frame, a handsome sun-tanned face—though its good looks were considerably marred by the signs of dissipation. The Kid figured at a glance that this hombre was accustomed to sitting up late of nights watching the run of the cards. But for the lines that late hours and dissipation had brought into the face, the rider looked but little older than the boy outlaw himself.

His lip curved in an angry sneer as he put his hands over his head.

"I guess you've held up the wrong man, hombre," he said bitterly. "I'm sure down to bedrock. And if you're aiming to steal my cayuse, I'll tell you you won't get him out of this Rio Claro country easily, he's known to every galoot for a score of miles."

The Kid frowned.

"You don't want to shoot off your mouth so much, feller!" he said. "I reckon this hyer gun may go off if you call me a hoss-thief."

The young horseman shrugged his shoulders.

"You're holding me up!" he said. "I guess you ain't doing it because you want to chew the rag with me."

"Sure not!" assented the Kid. "I'm looking for a man in this chaparral—and if you're that man you're my mutton, with the wool on! You get me?"

"Who tho thunder are you?"

"I guess they call me the Rio Kid when I'm to home in the Frio country."

The horseman started violently.

"The Rio Kid!" he exclaimed.

"Yep!"

The Kid smiled.

"Keep 'em up!" he said. "I sure don't want to spill your juice, but I ain't taking chances. I reckon I wasn't too sudden getting this gun out. You seem fairly quick on the draw yourself, feller. I want to know who you are."

"Every man in this country knows Jim Poindexter!" snapped the horseman.

"Sho! The rancher they call Poker Poindexter?" exclaimed the Kid, gazing at the young man with keenest interest.

"They call me that," granted Poindexter. "If you're the Rio Kid you're the fire-bug my foreman dropped on a week ago, and that he let get away, the pesky moshhead!"

"You don't want to call him names for that," smiled the Kid. "You've sure dropped on me yourself, Poindexter; and I guess you're going to let me get away. Ain't you?"

"Quit chewing the rag!" snapped Poindexter. "You've stopped me. What do you want, if this ain't a hold-up?"

"Just a little pow-wow with you," said the Kid. "I'm hunting for a man in this chaparral. I reckon I'd have cinched him easy if I'd had my cayuse with me; but I'd left him to home. The galoot I want is about your heft, Mr. Poindexter, and he calls himself the Rio Kid. I shot the gun out of his hand; but he got away, being well-mounted and no afoot. I've been beating the chaparral for him, and I've found you."

"I guess you might find anybody on this trail," said Poindexter. "Plenty galoots ride this way."

"Sure!" agreed the Kid. "I ain't saying you're the man I want; I'm only asking a few questions. There's a galoot riding the trails in the Rio Claro country calling himself the Rio Kid, and that's the galoot I want; and I'm going to have him, if I have to trail him all over Texas. He sports a black mask on his face, and paints a black muzzle on his hoss to look like mine. He calls

himself by my name to keep his own dark, I reckon."

"That's the yarn you spun my foreman, Tex Clew. He told me," said Poindexter, with a sneer.

"I ain't asking you to believe me, any more'n he did," said the Kid, unmoved. "But it's the frozen truth. And I'm sure death on that fire-bug who's raising Cain in the Gunsight country, and hiding himself behind my name. I ain't looking for a chance of being strung up on account of a pesky bulldozer who's borrowed my name to skulk behind. No, sir!"

"Well, I know nothing of him, if you're giving me the straight goods—which I don't believe!" snapped Poindexter. "I guess I've no time for chewing the rag, either; there's a man waiting to see me at my ranch."

"Lawyer Dunk, I reckon," grinned the Kid.

The rancher started again, more violently than before.

"How do you know?"

"I guess I saw him held up by the galoot that calls himself by my name," answered the Kid. "He's lit out like he was sent for; and I'm beating the chaparral for that fire-bug. That's a sure handsome cayuse you're riding, Mr. Poindexter."

The Kid eyed the grey mustang keenly. It was very like his own horse, save that it was all grey; and the Kid's mustang was distinguished by a black mark on its left shoulder.

There was suspicion in the Kid's look.

The rancher's eyes glittered at him.

"You ain't stopped me to admire my cayuse, I reckon," he said. "And if you're aiming to steal it, I reckon I'll try my chance of pulling a gun, though you've got the drop on me."

"Forget it!" said the Kid, the revolver steady as a rock in his hand. "If you ain't the man I want I ain't honing for trouble with you; but if you touch a gun, feller, you gets yours mighty sudden!"

"What do you mean—the man you want?" demanded the rancher. "Any galoot in this country can tell you that I'm the owner of the Poindexter ranch. According to your say-so, you're looking for a trail bandit. What do you mean?"

"I guess I'll make it clear," said the Kid quietly. "The ornery thief I'm looking for uses my name to hide behind; and I reckon that that means that he's got another name when he's to home and goes around among folks who don't savvy that he robs and shoots on the trails at times. He rides a grey hoss, with the muzzle painted black to look like my cayuse—that's known all over Texas. I guess he's got some lay-out hidden in this chaparral where he disguises his hoss and fixes himself up with a mask when he's going on the trails; and I guess he leaves those fixings behind him when he rides home. He may be any man in the Gunsight country—and you as likely as another, Mr. Poindexter."

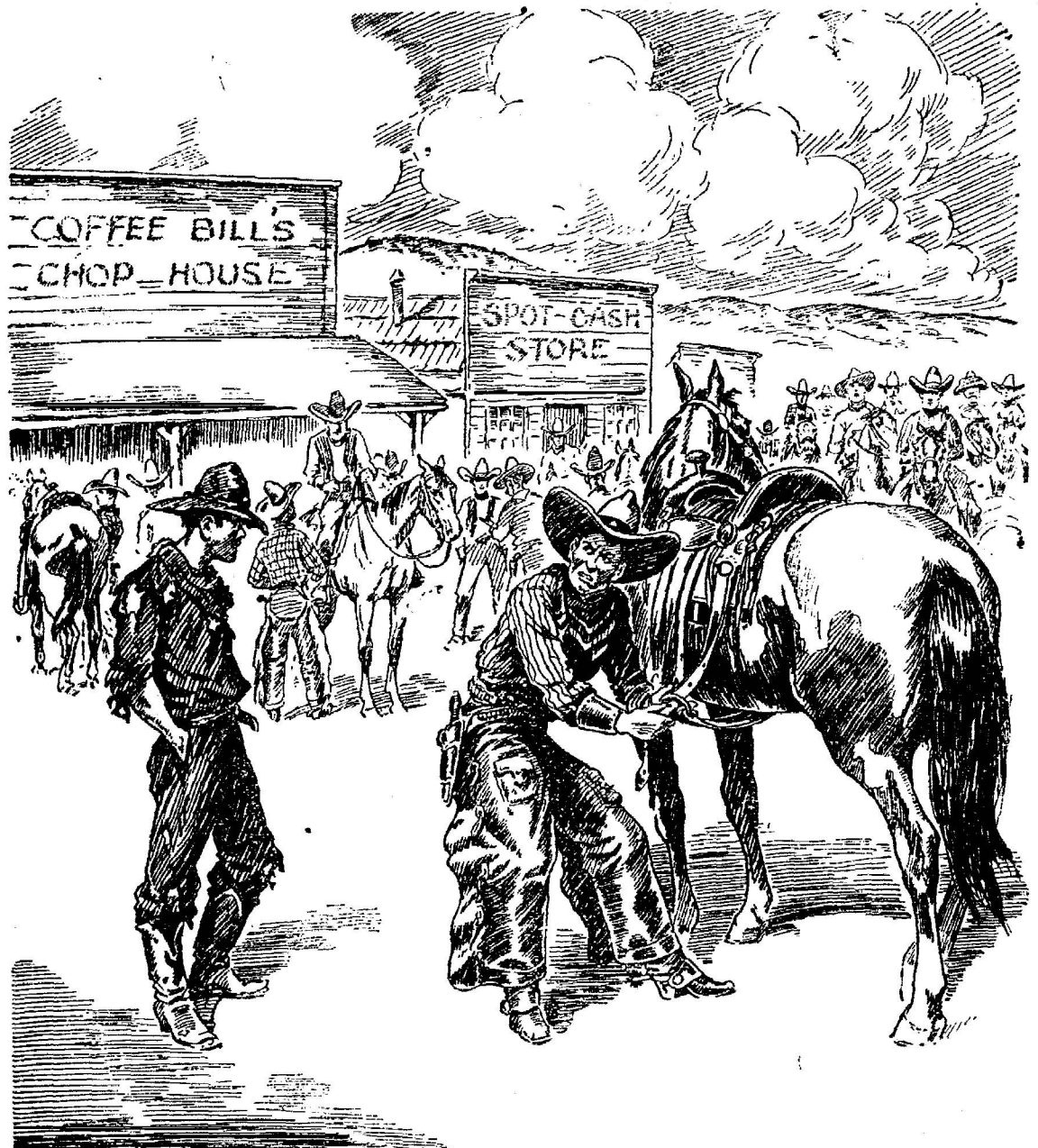
The rancher laughed.

"You're asking me if I'm in this chaparral, hitting for home after holding up Lawyer Dunk?" he said.

"Jest that!" said the Kid, watching him keenly. "You're about the build of the galoot, and I've found you in the chaparral hunting for him. You ride a grey mustang—easy enough to fix up with a black muzzle. I ain't saying you're the galoot, but I'll tell the world that I'm going to make sure."

"And if you can't take my word, how are you going to make sure?" sneered the rancher.

"Where's your gun?" snapped the Kid,



**SEEKING NEWS!** Tex claw was bending by his broncho tightening his cinch, when the Rio Kid, in his tattered disguise, stopped beside him and spoke. "Say, feller, there's sure some rookus in this hyer burg this morning," he said. "Put a galoot wise," Tex glanced around. "We're out after that cuss, the Rio Kid!" he growled. (See Chapter 4.)

"In my holster! Can't you see?"  
 "You wear two holsters; you're a two gun man," said the Kid. "I guess I can see only one gun. Where's the other?"

Poindexter shrugged his shoulders.  
 "I guess I wouldn't answer you if you hadn't a gun in your hand," he said. "I left one gun to home this afternoon—forgot it."

"A two gun man don't often forget his shooting iron," said the Kid, shaking his head. "And I sure shot a gun out of the hand of that galoot who held up Lawyer Dunk, and he lit out so sudden he never thought of picking it up. Keep them paws in the air!"

The Kid moved closer and with his left hand jerked away the single gun from the belt of the rancher. He tossed

it into the thickets of pecans and mesquite by the dim trail.

Poindexter's eyes glittered, but he made no movement.

With his left hand the Kid took the horse's bridle and drew the animal towards him. He was cauning the grey hair for a sign of paint; but in the failing light it was not easy to discover the traces he sought, if they were there.

Poindexter breathed hard.

Whether it was fear that the Rio Kid would make the discovery he was seeking, or whether his long-suppressed anger broke out of his control, he suddenly dashed his long Mexican spurs into the horse's flanks.

The mustang reared and trampled wildly, and the Kid swung his mustang back barely in time to avoid being struck by the lashing hoofs.

Bang!  
 The Kid's revolver roared.

But Poindexter, with the activity of an Apache, swung down the horse's side, only his leg over the saddle—an old Indian trick, which saved him from the shot.

At the same moment the horse dashed away down the tangled trail at a frantic gallop, and disappeared from sight. The sound of hoofs died away. It had all happened so quickly that the Kid had been taken wholly off his guard. It was useless to chase after the quarry in this light, anyway.

"Dog-gone the galoot!" exclaimed the Kid, exasperated. "I guess I'm sure plumb loco to let a god-darned cow-man beat me to it that-a-way. That galoot sure is mighty spry—and so was  
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the galoot in the mask that held up the lawyer pilgrim, I reckon. But whether 's the same galoot—"

The Kid growled his discontent.

He suspected the rancher, but he could not be sure.

But the Kid meant to be sure. If Poker Poindexter was the man in the Gunsight country who had been borrowing his name, the Kid meant to know—and to call him to account. But his mood was angry and disappointed, as he rode away through the tangled chaparral towards the hidden dug-out where he had lain in hiding.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER. Up Against It!

"HALLO, boss!"  
Tex Clew shouted and waved his Stetson, as a galloping horseman loomed up in the falling twilight.

The rider drew in his horse.

"Hallo, Tex! What are you doing off the ranch?" asked Poindexter.

"I figured it was you. I reckoned I knowed that cayuse," said the foreman. "Lawyer Dunk's at the ranch, boss. He allowed that that pesky fire-bug, the Rio Kid, had held him up in the chaparral, and I was aiming to look for sign of the galoot. I've sure got a grouch agin him for the way he handled me a week ago; and if he's in the chaparral, I'm the man that wants to see him!"

"He's in the chaparral. He held me up, and got my gun away!" growled Poindexter. "I ran into the scoundrel coming back from Post Oak. You don't want to go trailing him on your lonesome, Tex. I guess he's too mighty quick with his gun. Ride into Gunsight and tell the boys he's around, and get a dozen galoots to back you!"

"Sure!" assented the foreman. And he rode away towards the cow-town, leaving Poker Poindexter to ride on to the ranch.

Poindexter galloped on, his brow dark and moody under his Stetson hat.

The interview that awaited him at the ranch was not inviting. But he was not thinking wholly of the coming interview with the legal pilgrim from Truce. His thoughts dwelt on the happenings in the chaparral, and several times he looked back, with a gleam of rage and hatred in his eyes.

"The Rio Kid!" he muttered. "The Rio Kid! What ill-fortune brought him into this country? By the great horned toad, I'll raise all the ranches round Gunsight, and hunt him down! I'll hunt him out of that chaparral like a coyote!"

And the rancher gritted his teeth savagely.

He rode up to the ranch at last, threw his reins to a peon, and strode into the house. In the light of the swinging lamp in the living-room, Lawyer Dunk rose to his feet, and eyed Poindexter unpleasantly, as he came in with clinking spurs.

"Not my fault, Mr. Dunk," said Poindexter, before the lawyer could speak. "I've been over to Post Oaks, and was held up on the trail back, by that fire-bug who's haunting the country."

"The Rio Kid?" exclaimed Dunk.

"That's what he calls himself."

The man from Truce gave a snarl.

"It's time that rustler was rounded up!" he snapped. "What is the sheriff doing? I've had the narrowest escape in my life. The outlaw held me up in the chaparral, and was going to plug

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me for keeps, only someone fired from a cottonwood, and I got clear."

"You sure had luck," said Poindexter, flinging himself into a chair, and his eyes gleamed at the lawyer as he spoke.

"Well, to come to business," said Mr. Dunk acidly. "I've waited for you, Jim Poindexter, and you know why I'm here."

"I guess so," said the rancher moodily.

"I'm here to collect eight hundred dollars," said Dunk, cycling him.

"I reckon you'll have to give me time."

The lawyer's face hardened.

"I've heard that before," he said. "The money's over-due, and your message said that if I waited till to-day, you'd get it sure."

"I reckoned it was a cinch," said Poindexter. "But it's failed. I was counting on it as a certainty."

"A game of poker," asked the lawyer sarcastically, "and you came out at the little end of the horn? Is that it?"

"I've raised the money every time, so far," said the rancher sullenly.

Dunk nodded.

"Sure," he agreed, "and how you've done it beats me, Poindexter. Your ranch is run the worst of any in the Gunsight country. You let your outfit do as they choose. You spend all your time playing poker at the ranches, or gambling at the Four Aces in Gunsight. Any man in Rio Claro county could tell that your ranch has been run at a loss for a year past. You don't win the money at poker—you're the unluckiest gambler in Texas. I guess I've often wondered how you met the interest on the mortgage, even late."

"No business of yours, so long as I do meet it!" growled the rancher.

"Sure. But this time you're not meeting it," said Dunk unpleasantly. "The man I'm acting for can't wait any longer; and if you don't pony up to-day, the mortgage forecloses."

"You riding back to Truce this evening?" asked Poindexter.

Dunk shivered.

"Not likely, after what's happened this afternoon. I shall stop over the night at Gunsight, and go by the hack to Claro in the morning. I'm not riding the chaparral trail again, till the Rio Kid is roped in and strung up."

"Stay here to-night, then?" said Poindexter. "I guess I'm seeing a friend in Gunsight to-night, who'll lend me eight hundred dollars. I missed him at Post Oaks to-day. You'll leave the ranch to-morrow morning with the dollars in your grip-sack."

Dunk eyed him suspiciously.

"I guess that goes," he agreed. "That's O.K., if you're on the square."

"Square as a die," said Poindexter, rising from his chair. "I tell you it's a cinch!"

"Leave it at that, then," said the lawyer from Truce.

Late that night, when the man from Truce was in bed and asleep, Poker Poindexter was pacing the room below, his brows knitted and dark, his teeth set on an unlighted Mexican cheroot.

It was past midnight when Poindexter let himself silently out of the ranch-house.

There was no light in the bunkhouse. The outfit were asleep, save for the men out on the plains with the cattle.

Softly the rancher led a grey mustang from the corral.

He led the horse out of the gateway and for some distance along the trail before he mounted.

When he mounted at last, and dashed

away into the gloom, he did not take the direction of Gunsight. Whatever business it was that had called the rancher abroad at night, it did not lead him to the cow-town on the Rio Claro.

### THE FOURTH CHAPTER. In the Enemy's Camp!

THE desert rat who limped into Gunsight in the sunny morning found that little cow-town in a state of unusual excitement.

Gunsight, a central point in the cow country along the Rio Claro, generally had a few punchers lounging in its dusty street, along the plank side-walk, and a bunch of cow-ponies tied up outside the Four Aces Saloon and the Gunsight Hotel.

But on this particular morning the cow-town swarmed with them. Men from all the ranches within a dozen miles of the town crowded Gunsight, and there was an incessant clattering of hoofs and buzzing of excited voices.

The desert rat who came in from the prairie trail attracted no attention. "Desert rats" were not uncommon in the Rio Claro country. If this specimen differed from the usual run, it was in looking a little more ragged and dusty and dilapidated. His age it would have been hard to tell, so thickly was his face grimed with the desert dust; but that he was in bad luck was clear at a glance.

A rag of a Stetson was on his tousled head, his old red shirt was a tatter, his moleskin trousers split and rent, his boots would have disgraced any of the numerous dust-heaps round Gunsight.

Nobody heeded him: but had anybody heeded him, no one would have dreamed of recognising the handsome Rio Kid in that disadipated guise.

The desert rat did not even pack a gun, so far as could be seen, though probably there was a gun hidden somewhere in his rags. Even in that impenetrable disguise the Kid was not likely to venture among a swarm of enemies without one.

Men of the Poindexter ranch were among the others, and the desert rat recognised Tex Clew in the crowd outside the Gunsight Hotel. He drifted among the buzzing throng, listening to the excited utterances of the punchers, catching continually the one name constantly repeated—the Rio Kid!

Under his dust and grime the desert rat smiled grimly. He had horned into Gunsight in time to hear fresh news of the doings of the unknown who had borrowed the Kid's name.

Tex was bending by his broncho, tightening his cinch, when the desert rat stopped beside him, and spoke.

"Say feller, there's sure some rookus in this hyer burg this morning," he said. "Put a galoot wise."

Tex glanced round at him, and grunted. Desert rats were not popular with the ranchmen. Horses were only too likely to be missing after a desert rat had been around.

"Is it a necktie party, pard?" asked the desert rat, as the Poindexter foreman did not answer.

"It sure will be if we get holt of the Rio Kid!" said Tex savagely.

"I've sure heard a heap about that pesky fire-bug," said the desert rat amiably. "What's he done now?"

"What ain't he done?" growled Tex. "Last week he shot up the marshal of this here cow-town; and last night he shot up the boss of Blue Grass ranch."

"You don't tell!" ejaculated the stranger.

"We'll get him, sure, this time!" said the Poindexter foreman. "I guess that

Kid will 'arn that Gunsight don't stand for it. He shot up a rancher, I'm telling you, last night, in his own ranch-house, right under his own roof, and hit the trail with a thousand dollars in greenbacks. That's what I'm telling you!"

"Oh, sho!" said the desert rat.

He moved away from the impatient foreman, loafing among the excited punchers who were gathering to take the trail of the Rio Kid.

From the incessant, excited talk, it was easy for a listener to piece together what had happened the night before at the Blue Grass ranch.

The boss of Blue Grass had sold a bunch of cattle to a Claro dealer the day before, which was known to other ranchers about Gunsight; though how it became known to the outlaw was a mystery to the cow-town. But this was not the first time that the outlaw had shown an uncanny knowledge of local affairs.

That he must have known was clear, for the money that was locked up in Rancher Topham's safe, at the Blue Grass ranch, would have been sent to the bank in the morning; and the outlaw had horned in during the night and cinched it.

The rancher had been called out of bed at midnight by a horseman who gave the alarm of fire on the range; and immediately he opened his door he was covered by a gun in the hand of a masked man. The rancher had pulled a gun; and had been shot down in his tracks by the outlaw. Now he lay badly wounded at his ranch, and the thousand dollars he had packed in his safe were gone.

The outlaw knew the money was there, knew where to look for the safe; and he was mounted and gone before any of the Blue Grass outfit arrived on the scene.

The desert rat, as he pieced together that story, did not wonder that Gunsight was enraged, and that word had been sent round to all the ranches to gather men for a hot pursuit.

More than a hundred men were gathered in the dusty street, waiting, apparently, for their leader to arrive.

A horseman dashed in from the prairie, and there was a shout. This was the leader for whom they waited; and the desert rat smiled grimly under his dust as he saw that it was Poker Poindexter.

Leaning against a post outside the Four Aces he watched the crowd gather, mounted and armed, round the young rancher.

Poindexter spoke a few words before he gave the signal to ride. To judge by appearance, he shared the feelings of the men around him. The desert rat wondered.

"Boys, this has got to come to a finish!" exclaimed Poindexter. "We've got to show that fire-bug from Frio that he can't cavort around the Rio Claro country this-a-way. Yesterday he held up Lawyer Dunk in the chaparral, last night he shot up Rancher Topham—and he's got clear with the goods. I guess he's hiding in the chaparral; and we're going to root him out and boost him up to a branch!"

There was a roar.

"The galoot cavorts around with a mask on his face," went on Poindexter. "But there's men here who know him by sight, and I'm one of them—Tex hyer is another. You that don't know him get busy with a gun if you find a stranger in the chaparral; rope in any man you light on, and drop him in his tracks if he raises trouble. We ain't

taking chances on letting that fire-bug get away with the goods!"

There was another roar, and, with a clatter of hoofs and a cracking of revolvers fired in the air, the crowd of horsemen rode out of Gunsight—to hunt the chaparral for the Rio Kid.

"I'll tell the world!" murmured the desert rat, as he leaned idly on the post and watched them go. "I sure reckon they won't cinch the Rio Kid in the chaparral, and they won't cinch the galoot that's borrowed his name, so long as Poker Poindexter's riding with them, now! I sure do suspect that hombre a whole heap!"

The horsemen were gone, the dust settled down behind them, and the desert rat still lounged idly. It was an hour later that the hack came round to the front of the Gunsight Hotel, to start on the daily trip to Claro. From the direction of the Poindexter ranch a fat man rode into the cow-town—Lawyer Dunk, of Truce, in his store clothes and a borrowed Stetson.

The desert rat eyed him curiously.

The lawyer left his horse at the lumber hotel, and took a seat in the hack. It was a roundabout way back to Truce, by Claro; but Dunk evidently did not intend to ride back the direct way through the chaparral. One meeting with the outlaw was enough for him; he did not want another, especially as Lawyer Dunk now had the sum of eight hundred dollars in his "grip." For that morning Poindexter had paid him the amount of his claim, in fulfillment of his promise; and the Truce lawyer could only wonder who had lent the rancher the money.

The hack rolled away on the road to Claro, the desert rat's eyes following it till it was out of sight.

During that day the desert rat loafed about Gunsight. He staked himself a meal of frijoles at a cheap Mexican posada, where he talked with the greasy proprietor in his own language, picking up the local news of Gunsight.

He was dozing in the shade of a cotton-wood, with the lazy look of the true desert rat, when a bunch of horsemen came riding in, weary and dusty, at sundown.

## A Story of Endless Thrills

appears in this week's issue of



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The hunters were returning; and their looks showed that the hunt had been unsuccessful. They had beaten the chaparral far and wide for the Rio Kid, finding no trace of that elusive galoot. Many of the men had dispersed to their ranches; but a score or more rode back into the cow-town, among them Poker Poindexter.

The desert rat's half-closed eyes watched Poindexter, as he hitched his horse to the rail outside the Four Aces and strode into the saloon.

When the desert rat loafed across the street and looked in at the door of the Four Aces, Poindexter was seated at a game of poker with two or three other ranchers.

Several men were standing round watching the game. Poindexter was the most desperate and reckless gambler in the section; his play was always high, and generally unlucky; and men in Gunsight wondered how long his ranch would stand the strain. It was already mortgaged up to the hilt; and it was a mystery to his friends how he met the heavy interest on the mortgage.

So much, and more, the desert rat had learned from the Mexican at the posada. And the desert rat wondered whether he knew the answer to the question.

Having looked into the saloon, the desert rat lounged to the hitching-rail, where Poindexter's horse was tied with a half-dozen others. He had a way with horses; the grey mustang yielded to his touch meekly as he stroked the glossy muzzle. And while he stroked it he scanned it keenly, searchingly, in the flare of the naphtha lamp that blazed outside the Four Aces.

There was a step beside him, and a rough hand pushed him back from the horse.

The desert rat glanced round.

Poindexter had come out of the saloon with a black, frowning brow. He did not look like a winner at the game of poker.

"Let that cayuse alone, confound you, you loafer!" snapped the rancher savagely.

"A rip-snorter of a cayuse, sir!" said the desert rat mildly. "You've sure got a good critter, sir."

"No business of yours!" snapped Poindexter, unhitching the horse. He was not in a pleasant mood.

"Sure it ain't, sir," said the desert rat. "But I reckon you want to tell your wrangler to keep an eye on that cayuse, sir. He's been getting his nose rubbing up against some paint, I guess." Poindexter swung on him with a startled oath.

"What? What do you mean, you boozy loafer?"

"No offence, sir!" said the tattered desert rat. "I jest reckoned it'd tell you, sir, seeing as he's a good boss. I reckon if you'll look you'll sure see that there's been paint on his shoulder, sir—black paint. Looks as if it's been washed off, too—but you'll find a trace of it—and I reckon you want to tell your wrangler about it."

With a curse Poindexter swung the horse out into the street, mounted, and dashed away with a clatter of hoofs.

The desert rat looked after him grimly. What the Rio Kid had suspected before, he knew now: the suspicion had become a certainty.

THE END.

(Will the Rio Kid succeed in running down Poindexter in the very act of holding up the trail? See next week's roaring Western yarn!)

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