

Special inside—"The FIGHT for the SCHNEIDER TROPHY!"

# The POPULAR

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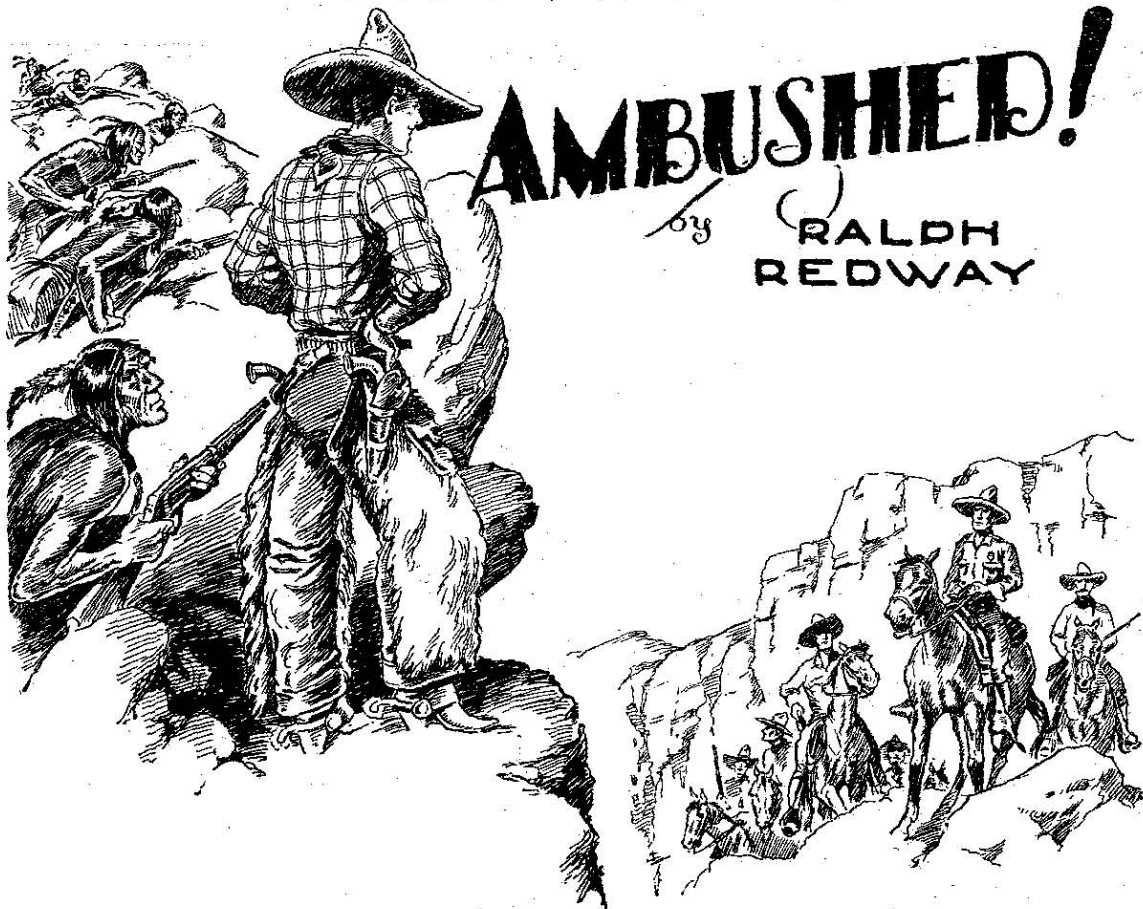


COOL AS A CUCUMBER  
IN THE FACE OF DEATH!

See this week's Rousing Tale of the RIO KID, boy outlaw!



ROARING TALE OF THE WILD WEST, FEATURING THE RIO KID, 'BOY OUTLAW'!



By ravine and rocky canyon, in blazing heat, the Texas Rangers trail the Rio Kid, drawing closer and closer to the fugitive boy outlaw. But the Kid's a bad man to crowd—which the Rangers find out when they are led into an ambush of Redskins!

#### THE FIRST CHAPTER. Hunted!

**T**HE Rio Kid rode into the Mal Pais for many reasons, all of them good; but with a clouded brow and a discontented heart. It was an uninviting region of rock and pine and scrubby thicket, with black barrancas and stony arroyos, waterless for the most part; haunted in its savage recesses by the coyote and the cougar and the rattlesnake—fully deserving its name of the "evil country."

But the Kid had little choice. He was trailing with Chief Many Ponies, the outcast Apache, and it was in the Mal Pais that the dingy remnant of the Apache tribe had their headquarters, out of reach of the Rangers who would have rounded them up into the reservation. And in the Mal Pais, uninviting as the "Evil Country" was, there was at least security. And the hunt was hot now at the heels of the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande.

The Kid had sojourned long across the border, in Mexico; and he had figured that when he came back to his own country he would find himself, if not forgotten, at least overlooked, and left to ride his own trail in peace. But he had found his memory green, on the banks of the Rio Grande.

The name and fame of the Rio Kid  
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were not likely to be forgotten; and the news had spread from ranch to ranch, from cow-town to cow-town, that the Kid was on the trail again. And the Kid, who hated trouble, though it so often came his way, and who would willingly have harmed no man, found himself hunted with even more than the old zest.

He had narrowly escaped the sheriff's posse from Blue Pine, before he had been three days back in Texas; and to the very edge of the Mal Pais he had been hunted by the Texas Rangers.

Since it was known that the Kid was in his own country again, every hold-up and shooting within a radius of two hundred miles was laid to his charge, as of old.

It was sufficient for the deed to be unknown, for the deed to be laid to the Kid. His name had become a legend along the Rio Grande and the Pecos; he was like Ishmael of old—his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him!

There were men who knew the Kid better—the old bunch on the Double-Bar Ranch in the Frio country never believed the worst of him. But they were few. The Kid's reputation was a desperate one, from the Staked Plain to the shores of the Mexican Gulf; and his good deeds, which were many, were unknown or forgotten, while his wild

ways were the talk of every cow-town, and topic at every round-up and rodeo.

At Trail End, on the edge of the Mal Pais, the Kid had ridden into the town to buy cartridges. He had bought them—and paid for them at the store, like any other puncher, and might have cantered out of the town unnoticed. But on the wall of the store was a notice, setting forth that a reward of a thousand dollars was offered for the Rio Kid.

The Kid could not resist the temptation to spatter it with bullets, and he found it entertaining to blot out the print with a shower of lead, under the staring eyes of a gathering crowd.

The alarm went up immediately that the Rio Kid was shooting up the town; there was a rush for horses and guns, and only the speed of Side-Kicker saved the Kid from paying dearly for his reckless entertainment.

After which, the Kid rode into the Mal Pais with Chief Many Ponies, realising that it would be healthy for him to lie doggo for a time.

Under a blazing sun the Kid rode along the bottom of a wide canyon, Chief Many Ponies at his side on a broncho. Where the chief had obtained that cayuse, the Kid thought it better not to ask. Chief Many Ponies had been afoot when the Kid fell in with him; now he was mounted, and it was

a cinch that he had not bought the horse. It had come into his possession while the Kid was "shooting up" Trail End.

The Kid, like every other cow-puncher, hated a horse-thief like poison. But Chief Many Ponies had been a good friend to him, and at the present time was the only friend he had; and he reflected rather bitterly that a hunted outlaw could not afford to be too particular.

The outcast Apache was a horse-thief, and a cow-thief, and every other kind of thief, so far as the white men were concerned. He would have died before he would have robbed one of his own race.

The Kid could see the distinction, and the excuse for the chief, who looked on all the goods of the pale-faces as the just plunder of war. But to ride in cahoots with a Redskin, to whom all other white men were foes, was bitter enough to the Kid, especially with the Redskin riding a stolen horse. But it was the Mal Pais and the den of the outcast Apache, or the steel handcuffs that Captain Hall of the Rangers had ready for him—and the Kid's choice was made.

But the Kid's handsome, sunburnt face was clouded under the shadow of his Stetson hat. He would have liked nothing better than to ride back to the Frio country and punch cows. But the Frio country was closed to him; and punching cows on a peaceful ranch was finished for the Kid.

Even in the Mal Pais he knew that he would have to be wary. On the edge of that barren, pathless tract the most determined sheriff was accustomed to turn back and give up the trail. But the Kid was not dealing with a sheriff's posse now. The men on his trail were a bunch of Rangers, men who cared nothing for hardship and danger, nothing for the reward on the Kid's head; nothing for any consideration but getting their man.

The Kid knew that they would follow him into the Evil Country, and his eyes glistened and his brows darkened at the thought. Amid those wild rocks and canyons and tangled pines the Kid had no fear even of a score of determined Rangers. In the Mal Pais he could hit back; and it was in the Kid's mind to hit back, and hit hard. They were after him for his scalp. If they lost their own in that rocky wilderness it was their own funeral.

The Kid, as his keen ear caught the ring of a distant hoof, and knew that pursuers were close behind, said to himself grimly that they might ride into the Mal Pais but that they should not find it so easy to ride out again. The Kid had resolved to turn on his hunters, and for once to live up to the desperate reputation that all Texas had given him. If twenty Texas Rangers vanished from the knowledge of men, on the trail of the Rio Kid, it would put the whole country wise to it that the Kid was a bad man to crowd.

At the distant echo of a ringing hoof on rock, Chief Many Ponies glanced at the Kid, with a glitter in his black eyes.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "Paleface follow!"

The Kid made a grimace. He hated to hear the Redskin speak of the Rangers as pale-faces—as if Many Ponies counted him, the Kid, as a Redskin—and that made the Kid more savagely exasperated against the hunters who were driving him into the recesses of the Mal Pais, into the dingy

tepees of the thief-Apaches who skulked there.

He glanced back, his hand dropping to the walnut butt of a gun.

Chief Many Ponies drew in his stolen broncho, and touched his finger to his lips. The Kid relinquished the gun.

"It's your say-so, chief!" he muttered. "This is your country. What's the game?"

With a sign the Indian told him, without words. Chief Many Ponies was a man of few words.

"The two horsemen dismounted and led their mounts into the cover of a mass of boulders. Leaving the animals there, they crept back, and from the cover of the rocks watched the open canyon.

Again came the ring of a hoof, closer now. A horseman was following the canyon, no doubt a scout of the Rangers, and there was still less doubt that he did not know how close he was upon the hunted outlaw.

The Indian listened, and held up one finger, and the Kid nodded. Only one man was coming—a detached scout looking for sign. In the black eyes of the Indian there was a glare of ferocity. His bronze hand touched the knife in his girdle.

The Kid set his teeth. The Ranger scout, if he found sign in the canyon, would not carry the news of it back to his comrades.

The hoof-beats ceased. The Kid, peering from cover, saw the Ranger dismounted, scanning the ground for sign. There was little sign to be picked up on the hard, stony, sun-baked earth; but the Ranger's eyes were keen. He walked his horse forward, still scanning the ground, occasionally shooting a sharp, searching glance round him at the walls of rugged rock and belts of scraggy pine. But keen as his eyes were, no did not see the Kid and the Apache.

Leading his horse, he came on slowly, scanning for sign, till he was passing the heap of boulders, within six feet of where a white man and a Red crouched out of sight.

The spring of a hungry jaguar was not so sudden as the spring of Chief Many Ponies. It seemed in the same instant that he was crouching at the Kid's side, and that he was upon the Texas Ranger, bearing him to the ground, so suddenly and swiftly that he had no chance to draw a weapon.

The Ranger crashed down, the Indian above him. The man's face went white as he glared up at a coppery visage with blazing eyes, and a knife thrown up, to be buried to the hilt in his throat.

The Rio Kid looked on with stony eyes.

The Ranger was his enemy, hunting him to death. He was a white man, about to die under the knife of a Redskin. The savage resolve of the Rio Kid melted away in that instant. Swift as Many Ponies himself the Kid leaped forward, caught the descending arm, and arrested the stroke even as it reached the throat of the fallen man.

**THE SECOND CHAPTER.**

**The Kid's Warning!**

**C**HIEF MANY PONIES gave a grunt of surprise and rage.

He tore his arm free of the Kid's grip, his black eyes ablaze, and threw up the knife again for a blow at the fallen Ranger. But the Kid shoved him back with such force

that the Redskin reeled and fell against the boulders.

The next instant the Kid's riding-boot kicked at the revolver the Ranger in the same second had grabbed from his belt. The gun went flying from the Ranger's hand, exploding as it fell, the bullet whistling away across the rocky canyon.

A six-gun in the Kid's grip looked the Ranger full in his bronzed face.

"Let up on that!" snapped the Kid.

Chief Many Ponies, grunting, righted himself and stood looking on, with lowering brow, knife in hand. But he stood back, leaving the matter in the hands of the Kid.

"You damned git!" growled the Kid, his eyes gleaming at the Ranger. "You reckoned you'd pull a gun on me, and me standing between you and the Injun's knife, you dog-goned cuss!"

"I guess I was pulling on the Injun," said the fallen man, staring up at the Kid's gun. "Say, you're the Kid?"

"You've said it."

"I reckon I know you, though I ain't seen you before," said the Ranger. "Well, you got me by the short hairs, Kid. Pull trigger and get it over!"

"You was trailing me!" said the Kid bitterly. "Well, hyer I am. You've found me, you damned git!"

"You've got the drop," said the Ranger coolly. "If I'd knowed you was so near I'd have had a gun in my paw, and that Injun wouldn't have got me so easy. But I ain't got no kick coming. Burn powder and get done."

The Kid gazed at him over the gun.

The man—lean, brown, muscular, cool as ice in the presence of death—was not the man that the Kid desired to send over the range if he could help it. He was the kind of man the Kid would have liked at his side on any hard and dangerous trail. The Kid watched him for a long moment, and then slipped the gun back into his belt.

"What'd you call yourself?" he asked abruptly.

"Pecos Pete."

"Well, Pecos Pete, you want to beat it—and beat it pronto!" said the Kid. "And I reckon if you're wise you won't stop this side of the Rio Pecos. The valley of the Pecos is a safe place for you, Pete."

The man from the Pecos grinned.

"You talking turkey?" he asked.

"Sure! Hit the trail!"

"Look here, Kid, I ain't no more tired of life than the next man," said Pecos Pete, raising himself on his elbow and staring up at the Kid curiously. "But I ain't double-crossing you, outlaw and fire-bug as you are. If I beat it outer here I got to hump it back to Captain Hall and report."

Mule-Kick Hall is on your trail, and I guess you know what that means. So if you ain't satisfied, use your gun while you got the chance. I ain't letting up on you a Continental red cent if you let me skip. Chew on that, Kid."

The Kid laughed.

"I ain't banking on your letting up," he said. "I got a message for your big chief. You're going to take it to him."

"I guess I'll do that pronto."

"You want to tell Mule-Kick Hall that I'm here in the Mal Pais, and ready for any guy that comes after me," said the Kid slowly. "Tell him I ain't honing for trouble with the Rangers. I'd give half my roll to ride clear of them and save trouble. I know they call your captain Mule-Kick Hall because he's got a hefty punch, an' they say he never lets up on a trail. Well,

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I reckon he's going to let up on this one. Tell him to leave me alone in the Mal Pais. I guess if he wants to get busy there's boss-thieves and hold-up men a-plenty along the Rio Grande waiting to be rounded up."

"I'll sure tell him," said Pecos Pete, with a grin.

"You figure that it won't make any difference to him?"

"It sure won't."

"Tell him," said the Kid quietly, "that now I'm back in Texas I ain't honing to give any man trouble. I jest want to be left alone. And tell him that if he rides into the Mal Pais after me not a man in his outfit will ever ride back to the plains. I'm sure wanting to save trouble; but if I'm crowded after this, you're the last guy that will get away alive after I've pulled a gun. Now beat it back to your outfit."

"I'll sure tell him," Pecos Pete picked himself up and stood looking at the Kid scrutinisingly, not unsympathetically. "But it won't cut no ice, Kid, and I'm telling you fair and square. The Rangers will get you afore sundown, if they have to hook you out of the deepest hole in the Bad Country."

The Kid shrugged his shoulders.

"I've told you to put him wise," he said. "After this it's his own funeral if he crowds me. Now git!"

Pecos Pete walked across to his horse. The Kid had spared his life, and the Ranger did not deign to glance at the tattered Redskin. Chief Many Ponies. But the eyes of the Apache gleamed and glittered at him, and he broke into a gaitural muster and gripped his knife almost convulsively.

"Can it, Red!" said the Rio Kid unceremoniously. "You ain't carving that galoot, nohow. I guess I'd rather the Rangers rode wide of us."

"My white brother talks like a squaw," said Chief Many Ponies. "Heap good kill paleface!"

The Kid smiled bitterly. The Indian was right—he talked like a squaw. He had sent a warning to Mule-Kick Hall, knowing well enough in his heart of hearts that Hall was the last man in Texas to listen to it or heed it. He knew, as the Indian knew, that he had desired to spare the Ranger's life, to the peril of his own. Pecos Pete dead under the Redskin's knife, there was a chance of blinding the trail and escaping the hunt; but with Pecos Pete gone to call the Rangers to the trail, escape was more difficult, if not impossible. In a quarter of an hour or less the Kid knew a score of Rangers would be on this very spot hunting for a sign of him. All Texas called him a desperate gunman, and he had resolved to live up to it; yet, with his gun aimed at Pecos Pete's heart, he had holstered it again unrued.

Yes, the Redskin was right—he was talking and thinking like a squaw; not like a warrior whose life was in his own hands, and likely to pay for an impulse of mercy. Why should he hesitate to pull trigger on the men who were hunting him to his death?

"Heap good kill!" growled Chief Many Ponies discontentedly.

The Kid laughed rather harshly.

"You heard my message, chief," he said. "Well, dog-gone you, if they follow us deeper into the Mal Pais, I guess the whole outfit is going to the happy hunting grounds. I'm telling you, Red, that they're going to find the Rio Kid a bad man to crowd. Let them follow our trail—and not a man of them will ride home to tell how they found us!"

The Indian's eyes glistened.

"Now my brother talks like a warrior and a chief," he said. His coppery face glowed at the vision of the massacre of the whole Ranger outfit in the dreary recesses of the Mal Pais.

They remounted and rode on into the barren lands. From the canyon the Apache turned into a rocky arroyo, where there was only room between rugged walls of rock for a single horseman to ride. The Indian led the way, well acquainted with every foot of the Mal Pais, and the Rio Kid rode after him, the sure-footed mustang picking his steps on loose stones and slippery ridges.

It was a steep ascent, slow and hard going. Long before they reached the top of the narrow arroyo horses' hoofs were heard in the canyon below. The Indian glanced back.

"Rangers come!" he said.

The Kid grinned. "I guess they're welcome. I'd sure make the grade if all Texas was following us up a path like this yer. Beat it, Injun, and leave me to hold them back."

"Ugh! It is good."

The Apache pushed on, leading the broncho by the bridle now. The Kid dismounted and sent on Side-Kicker after the Indian. He turned in the narrow arroyo, dropped on his knees behind a rugged boulder, and gripped a six-gun in his hand.

He waited.

The Rangers knew the way they had gone; they had heard the horses clattering in the arroyo, and loose stones rolling back and rattling down the steep declivity, even if they had not picked up sign. The Kid knew they were coming, and he waited for them.

Round a bend of the winding arroyo came a man on foot, gun in hand, eagle-eyes searching as he came. He was not ten feet from the Kid when the boy puncher rose behind the boulder with levelled revolver.

A mocking smile was on the Kid's face as he looked over the gun.

The Ranger started convulsively.

"The Kid!" he breathed.

He swung up his gun swiftly. But he was not swift enough; it was seldom that any guy was swift enough when it came to gunplay with the Rio Kid.

Bang!

The Ranger gave a yell of anguish as his right arm dropped to his side, broken by a bullet, and his gun clanged on the stones.

The man went staggering back, to collapse groaning on the rocks. There was a rush of feet as four or five men, guns in hand, came rushing round the bend in the rocky wall.

Bang! Bang!

They leaped back for cover faster than they had come.

Loud and mocking rang the laughter of the boy outlaw.

"Say, you ginks, you a-honing to see the Rio Kid! Well, here I am, you guys! I'm your antelope, with the wool on. You gotta come and take me!"

He laughed again, with derisive mockery.

A Stetson hat showed round the rocks, and the Kid fired, and the hat sailed away, torn from its wearer's head by the bullet.

"We'll git you, Kid!" shouted a hoarse voice.

"I'm sure at home if you want me!" shouted back the Kid. "Say, you gecks, don't you like the smell of burning powder?"

But his taunts failed to draw the wary Rangers under his fire. Only in his view

lay the wounded man, groaning—expecting every moment a bullet from the boy outlaw to finish him. But that bullet did not come.

The Kid waited, standing the enemy off, till a signal from Chief Many Ponies told that the Apache and the horses were clear of the ravine at its summit. Then he followed his Indian comrade, coolly, leaving the way open to the Rangers if they chose. But it was long before the bunch were satisfied that he was gone, and emerged from cover.

Meanwhile, the Kid was mounted again on a high upland to which the steep arroyo led, and he rode on with Chief Many Ponies into the heart of the Mal Pais. They rode by wild and barren ways, where it seemed impossible that human eye could pick up sign and follow. But Mule-Kick Hall was well known for his skill and tenacity on the trail; and the Kid knew that he would not be shaken off. Harder and grimmer the Kid's face was growing, as black and bitter thoughts coursed through his mind. A second time he had spared a foe. He had put his bullet through an arm instead of through a head; but the enemy was not thinking of sparing him in turn. The Kid swore that that should be his last act of merciful folly, and that the resolute hunters who were trailing him should find their death in the shadows of the Mal Pais.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Trapped!

"**T**HUNDER!" growled Mule-Kick Hall.

He sat in his saddle and stared round him with glinting eyes and lowering brows.

Eighteen men rode with Captain Hall, of the Texas Rangers. A wounded man had been sent back in charge of a sound man to Trail End, to spread the news there, and thence to all the cow-towns, that the Rangers were crowding the Rio Kid, and that the chances were that the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande would be roped in at last. Eighteen lean, brown, hard-bitten men, Hall himself the leanest, brownest, hardest-bitten of all.

A little man, tough as steel, bow-legged from constant riding, with eyes like flints—a man hard as iron, hard and rapid as the kick of a mule—that was Jim Hall, the man who was hunting the Kid. There was no more mercy in him towards the law-breaker than in a wolf or a grizzly bear. His own life he counted as nothing in comparison with getting his man. Getting his man was Jim Hall's one article of faith, and as a rule he got his man. The most desperate gunman in the cow camps lowered his eyes and walked softly when Jim Hall was on hand. More than once the Ranger had taken the trail of the Rio Kid—and this time he swore that he would be successful.

The Kid was cornered in the trackless Mal Pais; men were on the watch for him on all sides if he sought to make a break from the fastnesses of the "Evil Country." There were many trackless miles within the limits of the Mal Pais; but Mule-Kick Hall swore that he would comb them all with a fine comb till he cinched the elusive Kid. Yet for three days he had ridden, with his hard-bitten bunch, by ravine and rocky canyon, in blazing heat, and camped on rocky uplands by night; and still the Kid was at large.

Again and again had the Ranger scouts found track of him; again and again had they flattered themselves that they were at his heels. Once, from a



high cliff, he had waved his Stetson to them and laughed aloud, and vaulted again before a bullet could reach him. Once, in the dark night, a rattling of rapid bullets had startled the Ranger camp, and they volleyed into the darkness, the volleying only answered by a mocking laugh that died away in the night.

Savage and bitter Hall's temper was growing, more savage and bitter with each passing hour of searching, of fatigue, of disappointment. But never for one moment did he dream of hitting the back trail. He had laughed when he had received the Kid's message, sent by Pecks Pete. Now he did not laugh; but his resolution grew harder and harder.

In the Mal Pais was the refuge of many a law-breaker—horse-thief and cow-thief, hold-up man and gunman, outcast Indian and Mexican bandit. But they had fled before the coming of the Rangers. Hall and his men, combing the Mal Pais, found many a deserted hut or wattle jacal. And in a desolate, lonely canyon they found abandoned Indian tepees, where the remnant of the tribe of Chief Many Ponies had been wont to gather. Signs of fugitives they found many, but fugitives they found none. They cared for none, save only the Rio Kid. The Kid was still in the Mal Pais, and day by day they hunted him harder.

In the glare of hot sunshine Hall and his lean bunch rode into a rocky gulch high up in the Mal Pais. It was then that Mule-Kick Hall growled "Thunder!" as he stared round him. Many a sign had led the Rangers to that remote hollow in the barren uplands. Hall was sure, at last, that he was close behind the Kid. A hot and dusty and thirsty trail had aoured the best temper in the bunch, and savagest and fourest of all was Mule-Kick Hall.

He stared round at rocky, inaccessible walls that shut in the gulch pine-trees and straggling juniper growing here and there in the rugged clefts. There was ample cover there for a hundred men. If the Kid had chosen to turn at bay he could have sold his life dearly before the Rangers roped him in. But that was a risk the Rangers took as a matter of course. At every step of a broncho a bullet might have come whistling, to empty a saddle in the bunch. More than once the Rangers had wondered that the Kid, well known to be the deadliest shot in Texas, had not picked off some of the outfit from cover, at a distance. But the Kid, desperately

hunted as he was, seemed to be holding his hand.

"Thunder!" repeated Jim Hall savagely. He pushed back his Stetson and wiped his perspiring brow. "That dog-goned firebug is leading us a pesky dance, you 'uns! He sure is! But we'll get him!"

"Forget it, feller!" drawled a cool voice.

Jim Hall started, and almost spun round in his saddle.

It was the voice of the Rio Kid that answered him.

"Dog-gone my cats!" gasped the Ranger. "What—"

"Look up, you gink!" came the Kid's voice. "Look up, you gol-darned man-hunter, and see what's coming to you!"

Jim Hall looked up.

High up the rocky wall of the gulch the Rio Kid stood in full view, on a

narrow ledge. The halted bunch of Rangers stared up at him. Every hand was on a gun, but no gun was lifted for the moment. They sat in their saddles and stared up at the Kid. He was twenty feet above their heads, and below the ledge where he stood the wall of rock was almost perpendicular. A bullet might have reached him—but never a man.

"You!" said Mule-Kick Hall between his teeth, staring up, his grasp almost convulsive on the butt of a six-gun.

"You've said it, feller," drawled the Kid. "I guess I've got you where I want you now! And if any guy in that bunch lifts a gun it will be the last thing he'll do this side of Jordan."

Hall laughed savagely.

"You dog-goned firebug, you figura that you can hold up this bunch?"

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THE KID AT BAY! The Kid's gun spoke and the Ranger gave a yell of anguish. His right arm dropped to his side, his gun clanging to the stones, and he staggered back, holding his injured arm. There was a rush of feet, and four other Rangers appeared. (See Chapter 2.)

"I sure do," said the Kid coolly. "Get away with it, if you can," said Mule-Kick Hall. "Why, dog-gone you, if you wipe out half the bunch the rest will take you where you belong. You're my mutton, Kid!"

"Forget it," said the Kid. "Ain't I telling you that I've got you where I want you? You locoed bonehead, there's thirty rifles aimed on you now, and if I give the word it's you for the coyotes and the buzzards!"

Mule-Kick Hall set his teeth. There was no sign of enemies to be seen; but the Kid's words carried conviction. The Rangers stared about them uneasily. They were bottled up in the narrow gulch between high, rocky walls, and if the Kid had anything like the force he mentioned at hand their goose was cooked, and they knew it.

"Show yourself!" called out the Kid. There was a stirring in the silent, lifeless walls of the gulch. From rock and crevice and pine-clump, dark, coppery faces looked out, and every coppery face looked over the barrel of a rifle. Thirty Apaches, the savage and ruthless outcasts of the Mal Pais, were there, lining the rocks with rifles aimed at the bunch below. Chief Many Ponies grinned down at the Rangers. It was the Kid who had planned that ambush; the Kid who had carefully left sign to lead his hunters into it; the Kid who had carried out the plan, and trapped Mule-Kick Hall and his men. Now, Chief Many Ponies was ready to do his part with rifle and knife and tomahawk. And every copper-faced savage in the outcast gang was ready and eager to follow his lead.

Jim Hall's face set like iron. He knew that he had ridden to the end of his trail; that his life was the Kid's to take, and the life of every man in his bunch. One volley from the rifles above, and hardly a man would remain in his saddle, for there was no time to hunt cover. The whole bunch was full in the line of fire as soon as the Kid chose to give the signal.

Another call from the Kid and the Apaches sank back into cover. But though they were no longer to be seen rifle-muzzles were looking out from cover, as the horsemen below well knew. Faces were pale and hard set in the Ranger bunch. They had hunted down the Rio Kid—to their own death!

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### The Way of the Kid!

THE Rio Kid looked down on the silent, grim-faced bunch of riders, a mocking smile on his face.

He had them, as he had said, where he wanted them. They had followed him into the heart of the Mal Pais, mocking his warning, and now he had only to utter a word to see the whole outfit wiped out. It was the hour of the Kid's triumph—the hour of the defeat of Jim Hall, who had never acknowledged defeat before. Grim and fierce the Kid's resolution had been, and yet now that he had the bunch where he wanted them, he did not give the word to burn powder. The gang of thief-Apaches waited impatiently for the word, and already guttural murmurs reached the Kid's ears as he stood on the ledge looking down on his foes. A gesture from the Kid silenced the murmurs; but fierce, black eyes were scintillating; nimble, bronze fingers caressed ready triggers. It could not last long.

"You've got us, Kid!" Jim Hall's

voice floated up, husky with rage. "Dog-gone you, it's your game! You durned lobo-wolf, in cahoots with Redskins—"

A flush stole over the Kid's mocking face.

"Aw, can it!" he rapped. "I guess a guy with twenty galoots on his trail has to find friends wherever he can. I guess shooting off your mouth won't buy you anything, Jim Hall."

"You ain't wiped us out yet," snarled Hall. "I reckon we'll get some of you when the rookies begins, darn you!"

He made a motion with his pistol hand.

From the Kid's hip came a spurt of smoke and fire, and the six-gun spun from the Ranger's hand, crashing to the rocks. Jim Hall gave a yell of pain, and sucked at a hand that was wet with blood.

There was a stirring among the ambushed Indians, as if they took the shot for a signal. The Kid's angry voice roared:

"Lie low, you Injun ginks! Lie low, dog-gone you!"

There was a grunting and a growling from the Apaches; but the voice of Chief Many Ponies enforced the Kid's order, and the Redskins held their hands. But suppressed ferocity was growing fiercer and fiercer.

"What you waiting for?" came Jim Hall's husky, enraged voice. "You got us, Kid. We'll die kicking; but you got us. Burn powder, you fire-bug, unless you've learned from your Injun friends to torture your prisoners."

The Kid's face twitched.

"Can it, Hall, you gink!" he said bitterly. "I got you where I want you. It's your own funeral, dog-gone you! But a white man can't stand for it. I guess these Injuns is ready to back me up in wiping out your bunch; but they won't be ready to take orders to let up on you. You savvy that, I guess. Give me your word to ride back to Trail End without drawing rein—"

Hall interrupted him with a curse.

"I'll ride out of range of them rifles, and not a cayuse's length farther," he snarled. "Shoot if you want, dog-gone you!"

"You're a hard man, Jim Hall, and a hard man to save," said the Kid quietly. "I guess it won't be easy for me to make these Reds hold their fire. But I don't stand for it, and I guess I'll do my durndest. Hit the trail, you-uns, as fast as you know how, and take your chance."

He turned his back on the Rangers, facing the hillside where a score and a half of Redskins lurked in cover with ready rifles.

"Hold your fire!" he snapped, as fierce eyes glared on him from the rocks. "I guess I'm giving orders here, you Reds. Down with them rifles, pronto."

Chief Many Ponies' glittering, black eyes met the Kid's fiercely for the moment. But the Kid's steady gaze never faltered, and the Indian chief lowered his rifle, and his action was followed by the rest.

There was a clatter of swift hoofbeats in the gulch below. The trapped Rangers had not lost the chance. If the Kid succeeded in holding off the Indian attack, it could only be for moments. But those moments were enough to save Mule-Kick Hall and his bunch.

In hot haste the horsemen swung round and spurred wildly, and galloped down the rocky gulch, the way they had come.

Clatter, clatter, clatter! Jim Hall,

with one backward, bitter look at the handsome figure on the ledge, rode as hard as any of his bunch. Out of that death-trap the Texas Rangers spurred madly; and a few moments were enough for them. But from three or four of the Apaches, in spite of the Kid's angry roar, came whistling bullets. Then, with a yell of ferocity, heedless of the Kid, the whole gang of copper-skinned outcasts leaped from cover, and blazed away with their rifles after the hard-riding bunch.

But the few moments had been enough. Two or three of the Rangers were rocking in their saddles; but the whole bunch swept out of range behind a spur of cliff at the lower end of the gulch. They were saved, and the Rio Kid had saved them. The Redskins knew better than to pursue Texas Rangers and come to close quarters with them. Round the Kid, on the rocky ledge, the thief-Apaches crowded with burning eyes and threatening scowls and lifted tomahawks. And the Kid stared at them coolly and disdainfully. Chief Many Ponies drove back the threatening crowd, and stood before the Kid, his dark face working with rage.

"What does my brother mean?" asked Chief Many Ponies, in a choking voice. "Has his heart turned to water at the sight of his enemies? Is he a coward who fears the sight of blood? He called the Apache braves from their lodges to lie in wait for his enemies, and then—"

"And then he didn't stand for it, Injun," said the Kid. "I guess you won't understand if I talk to you for a month of Sundays, so I guess I ain't chewing the rag. Them guys was after me, and I guess they'll be after me still; and I've let up on them. If you ain't satisfied, Injun, I guess you've got a kick coming. I've sure let you down bad." The Kid took the revolvers from his holsters, and laid them on the rocks. "You've lost that bunch, Injun, and that's a cinch. But if you ain't satisfied, you've got me, and I ain't kicking none. It's your say-so."

The eyes of Chief Many Ponies glittered at him, and the bronze hand was hard on the handle of the long knife.

Slowly the Indian's grasp relaxed on the weapon.

"My brother has followed many trails with Chief Many Ponies," he said. "He has saved Many Ponies from death at the hands of his enemies, and the chief does not forget. Let my brother live. But with Many Ponies he will never follow a trail again."

The Apache made a sign to his men, and they followed him into a cleft of the hillside, obedient, but casting back many a black, savage look at the Kid as they went. The last stealthy fall of a moccasin died away—the Rio Kid was left alone. Slowly he picked up his guns and thrust them back into the holsters.

In a few hours, at the most, the hunt would be hot at his heels again, and the Kid alone to face the music.

Yet, though he smiled in bitter self-mockery, there were no regrets in his heart as he rode the grey mustang by a solitary trail into the barren depths of the Mal Pais.

THE END.

(The Rio Kid has escaped the Texas Rangers for the time being, but they are hot on his trail. And in next week's gripping yarn, "CORNERING THE KID!" he finds himself surrounded. Don't miss this story, boys!)



**THRILLS GALORE** *in every Tale in this issue*

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A GRIPPING TALE OF THE RIO KID'S BRUSH WITH TEXAS RANGERS!

# CORNERING THE KID!

RALPH  
REDWAY



The Rio Kid, hunted by Texas Rangers in the "Evil Country," the last retreat of law-breakers, and with the guns of cow-punchers and sheriffs turned against him should he attempt to make a break for the plainlands, is at last cornered. Is it the end for the boy outlaw of Frio?

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Circled by Foes!

**H**OPELESS, from the viewpoint of men who were hunting him, was the situation of the Rio Kid. Closer and closer the net had been drawn, and even to those who knew by bitter experience the Kid's elusive ways, it seemed that the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande was to be cinched at last.

To the Kid himself, in these long, hot days and black nights amid the rocks and pines of the Mal Pais, it seemed sometimes that his enemies were right—that they had him at last, and that his long, wild trail was drawing to its end.

In the Mal Pais—the "Evil Country"—there were perhaps twenty or thirty square miles of rugged rock, boulder piled on boulder, precipitous hillsides rived with canyons and arroyos and split by deep barrancas; belts of scrubby pine, patches of deep, tangled chaparral, stretches of waterless sand and stone, and here and there torrents that leaped foaming from rock to rock. It was an ideal country for any hombre who sought to hide himself—and it had hidden many a fugitive horse-thief and gunman and outcast Apache and Yaqui.

The Rio Kid had counted on safety when he plunged into that arid waste, where no man entered unless driven. But the hunt was up, and it was hot at his heels. For days and weeks the Kid had ridden perilous paths in the Bad Country, but the pursuit never slackened; rather, it grew hotter and hotter, closer and closer. All through the cow-towns along the Rio Grande and the Pecos the news had spread that the Kid was cornered in the Mal Pais, and from all sides came eager riders to join in the hunt, now that there was a chance at last of getting the elusive Kid in a cinch. Round the Mal Pais,

on all sides, horsemen rode or copped and watched. Through and through the bad lands, Captain Hall and his detachment of Texas Rangers rode, combing the Mal Pais with a fine comb in search of the Kid.

A score of times, at least, he had almost fallen into their hands; but always his phenomenal luck had befriended him. A dozen times the Kid had been sighted by watchers on some edge of the Mal Pais, looking for a chance to make a break for the open plains; and every time he had found foes in his path and had hunted cover again among the rocks.

The Mal Pais, generally tenanted by lurking fugitives from justice and Indians escaped from the reservations, was deserted now, save by the Rio Kid and his hunters. Lurking malefactors had fled from the hunt that was going on, giving rangers and sheriff's men a wide berth. The outcast Apaches who had their den in the heart of the arid tract had gone. For these, for gunmen and "bad" men generally, the hunters had no heed—their net was spread for the Rio Kid.

Long had the boy outlaw defied them, snapped his fingers at sheriffs and Rangers alike, and ridden his wild trail as if he bore a charmed life. Now he was almost at the end of his rope; and this time it was to be the finish. In every cow-town and cattle camp for a hundred miles there was only one topic—the Rio Kid and his last desperate fight against overwhelming odds—his last struggle against the net that was closing round him slowly but surely.

Hopeless it looked for the Kid, hunted from canyon to canyon, from arroyo to arroyo, from thicket to thicket. Friendless and alone in the Mal Pais, his horse and his guns all that he had to rely upon, the circle of determined hunters closing in on him, daily closer,

it looked even to the Kid as if the game was up.

But hope was a part of the Kid's nature—the last thing he was likely to part with. His swift mustang, his un-failing gun, his own skill on the trail, stood him in good stead. Where the Kid moved no sign was left for the keenest eye. Many times he had lain in cover, with eager foes passing within a few yards of him, unknowing; many times a desperate ride up some seemingly inaccessible cliff, a wild leap over some wide and yawning barranca, had saved him when all seemed lost. Days, many days, had passed, and the Kid was still free; though with every passing day the limits of his freedom were more and more circumscribed.

Making a break out of the Mal Pais he had found to be impossible. Lurking fugitives in the bad lands had fled—some had been allowed to escape un-regarded, others had been roped in; but for the Kid there was no chance of making a get-away. He was wise to that now, and he had made up his mind to it. There was a chance of wearing out his hunters—many of them, at least; ranchers and cow-punchers, who had joined in largely for the excitement of the hunt, sheriffs who had business elsewhere. No chance of tiring out Mule-Kick Hall and his Rangers—the Kid knew that. There was only one thing that could have stopped Mule-Kick Hall and that was a bullet through the heart.

But in these days the Kid's eyes often sought the sky—cloudless, burning blue that stretched pitiless with heat over the Mal Pais. Long had that blazing heat lasted; and the Kid did not need to learn anything about weather signs.

Likely enough, he knew, it would be followed by a cloud-burst, and if that came it came with salvation for the Kid. When the Mal Pais became an inferno of falling rocks and raging



torrents, when every arroyo and canyon, now baking dry in torrid heat, foamed with rushing water, it would be a different proposition for the hunters. The Kid had seen the Mal Pais under a cloudburst, and knew what it was like. And that hope was always at the back of his mind, as burning day followed day.

But if hope had not left the Kid now as he lay behind a rock looking along the barrel of his rifle, grounds of hope certainly seemed to be gone. They had hunted the elusive Kid to his last refuge, high up in the heart of the Mal Pais. There, on a high plateau, the chapparal grew thick and tangled, haunted by cougar and creeping snake. On three sides the high mesa was inaccessible, save to the hardest climber. On the fourth side rugged slopes led up to it, but across the way lay a deep wide barranca, which had to be crossed before the last refuge of the Kid could be reached. Wide and deep yawned that black gulf, with a murmur of flowing water at the bottom of it thirty yards down. Only in one spot the two sides approached close, and the barranca became a mere rift, six or seven feet across. There it was easy to pass—if the Rio Kid was not in the way.

Behind a rock a dozen yards from the edge of the barranca his keen eyes on that narrow rift, lay the Kid—waiting. He knew that the Rangers were coming. Every now and then a Stetson hat glimpsed into sight—every few moments the ring of a stirrup or a bridle reached his ears. They knew where he was; they knew that he was at the end of his trail. To flee further he would have had to scramble down one of the steep sides of the mesa—into the hands of enemies who waited and watched below. There was no further flight for the Rio Kid. The high mesa, tangled with chapparal, was surrounded, and on the only accessible side the enemy were advancing. All that remained to the boy outlaw was to sell his life dearly—unless a miracle came to his aid.

But his face was cool, even smiling, as he looked along the rifle-barrel, watching through a chink in the rocks. They were coming, but they would not get him easily. Back in the chapparal the Kid's mustang was in cover, safe from stray bullets. It was characteristic of the Kid that he looked to his horse's safety before his own. Before long bullets would be flying thick over the mesa. The Kid's rifle was ready to join in the chorus.

Many times during that long and deadly hunt the crack of the Kid's guns had been heard; and every time it was heard it meant that one fewer foe trailed the boy outlaw. Many a wounded man had gone back to the camps thanking his lucky stars that the boy outlaw had not burned powder to kill. The Kid could plant his lead exactly where he liked. And for some whim, difficult for his hunters to understand, he chose to plant it where it would disable and not kill. It was not with any thought of propitiating his foes; for the Kid knew that he had no mercy to expect. It was one of the Kid's ways, and that was all.

A Stetson hat bobbed into the Kid's view across the barranca. A Ranger pushed out from behind a rocky ridge. The Kid grinned as he pulled trigger.

The Stetson spun from the Ranger's head, taking a lock of hair and a strip of skin with it.

With a yell the Ranger hunted cover again.

The Kid laughed.

A burst of firing followed. Bullets

whistled over the high mesa and tore leaf and branch in the chapparal behind the Kid.

He lay in cover and waited.

Among the rugged ridges and stacked, jagged boulders on the slope up to the mesa, the Rangers had plenty of cover, and they were freezing to it, since the Kid's shot had warned them that he was there and watching.

The Kid could not see them; but his thoughts followed their movements, as easily as his eye could have done.

They had left their horses below now—riding at the Kid's rifle was too foolhardy, even for Texas Rangers. On foot they came up the slope, stealing from rock to rock, from hollow to hollow, from straggling bush to bush. The Kid reckoned that there were twenty-five to thirty Rangers in the bunch, and a dozen of them were keeping up the fire from behind, while the rest advanced under cover to closer quarters. The Kid waited coolly. When they had to pass the barranca, they had to show themselves for the leap across; and the Kid figured that they would not make the grade.

Within a dozen feet of the barranca, on the lower side, was a mass of rugged boulders, the last cover for the Rangers. The Kid watched it. By sound, if not by sight, he was aware that his foes had reached it, and lay there in cover, gathering force for the final rush.

The firing from farther back died away at a signal, and a voice hailed the Rio Kid from behind the boulders:

"Say, you fire-bug!"

It was the voice of Mule-Kick Hall.

"Say, you coyote!" retorted the Kid. "If you want to talk, come out into the open, Jim Hall, and don't chew the rag, hiding like a dog-goned prairie-wolf! Say, you scared to show yourself?"

An angry curse was the answer.

"I guess swearing won't buy you anything, Jim Hall!" chuckled the Kid. "Do you figure that I'd draw a bead on you while you was talking turkey?"

"I guess I wouldn't put it past you!" growled Hall.

"Forget it, feller!" said the Kid. "If you want a pow-wow instead of gun-play, I ain't got any kick coming! Tell your guys to keep their triggers down; and I'll sure hop out of cover, pronto!"

"You can take my word for that, and you know it!" growled Hall.

"Sure!" said the Kid.

And, with careless coolness, he rose from cover, and stood in full view, his rifle resting lightly in the hollow of his arm. On the other side of the barranca Jim Hall stepped from behind the rocks—and the outlaw and the captain of the Rangers stood looking at one another across the yawning gulf, under the blaze of the burning sunshine.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### At Bay!

THE Rio Kid, with graceful politeness, swept off his Stetson in salute to the Ranger captain. That a dozen rifles or more looked at him, from clefts and chinks in the mass of boulders, he well knew, but cared nothing.

Hall stared at him, not acknowledging the salute, his hard-bitten face sour.

Jim Hall, slight in build, though with iron muscles, wiry, active, bow-

legged from incessant riding, hard of feature and ruthless of eye, made a grim figure as he stood there, thick with the dust of weary trails, savage and sour.

Weary of the toiling trail, enraged by constant defeat, embittered by endless disappointments, there was something like personal hatred in the stare of the Ranger.

No outlaw or gunman had ever given him a tenth of the trouble the Rio Kid had given; and it was a bitter memory to Mule-Kick Hall that once, in this long hunt, he had ridden into a trap, and that the lives of his bunch had been at the mercy of the Kid and a gang of outcast Apaches. The Kid had spared them, and parted from his Redskin allies; and the knowledge that he had been spared by the outlaw whom he hunted for his life, was gall and wormwood to Jim Hall.

"Say, you sure look as if you'd got a grouch, Jim!" said the Kid amiably. "Mean to say you ain't enjoying this hyer lecture pappar in the Mal Pais?"

There was a chuckle from behind the boulders where the Rangers lay in cover.

"That Kid is sure a cool cuss!" said the voice of Pecos Pete.

Mule-Kick Hall glared round, and the chuckling died away. He turned his keen, bitter eyes under the beetling brows, on the Kid again.

"Your jig's up, Kid!" he said abruptly.

"That your idea?" asked the Kid pleasantly.

"We've got you cinched!" growled Hall. "You're wise to it, as well as I am, that you can't get off that meson. It's surrounded—watched on all sides. Make a break on any side, and you'll see that your goose is cooked!"

"It's sure kind of you to put me wise to it," said the Kid gravely. "You're the friend I want in this hyer fix, Jim Hall."

Hall scowled.

"You always was a guy for shooting off your mouth!" he growled. "Smart cracks won't buy you anything! I allow you can give us some trouble cinching you; but you can't get away, and you know it! What's the good of burning powder, Kid?"

"I ain't honing to burn powder, feller," said the Kid. "All I'm asking for is an open trail. I've sure got business in other parts of Texas, and I'd give a whole heap of dollars, I sure would, to go and see to it."

There was another chuckle, stilled by another scowl from Hall.

"Talk sense, Kid!" said the Ranger captain. "You're our mutton! Give us your guns, and we'll ride you to town, and you'll take your chance with a fair trial. Ain't that better than being shot up in the Mal Pais?"

"I guess not." The Kid shook his head. "I ain't shot up yet, Jim Hall, and I guess when the time comes I'm going out kicking. That for your fair trial at the county town!" He snapped his fingers. "I guess the guys would be in such a hurry to string up the Rio Kid, that they wouldn't worry a whole lot about finding him guilty first. Why, the hold-up at Sasafra, and shooting the marshal there, would be enough to hang a man—and I never heard of it till a week after it had happened. But if I told the judge that how much would he bank on it?"

"Come off!" growled Hall. "You're wanted for that, as well as for a hundred other things!"

"You've said it!" agreed the Kid.

"But I guess I'd rather take my chance in the Mal Pais."

Hall gave him a bitter look. "You'll be shot up, Kid. I'm offering you as good a chance as an outlaw has a right to. But if we burn powder you're a gone soon. I ain't saying that you won't shoot up a few of my bunch first. But we'll get you sure, and you're a dead man!"

"Likely enough!" said the Kid coolly. "I sure take it as a big compliment that you've brought all your bunch after me, Jim Hall. I guess you've got the whole family there, playing possum behind them rocks. It

the boulders. Every man in the bunch was eager to come on, in the face of death. But Jim Hall's word was law; his resolution like iron.

Through weary hour after hour he kept his men in cover, in spite of heat and impatience, and angry growling and growling. And the Kid, while he was annoyed, admired Hall for his patience and strategy. Mule-Kick Hall was waiting for sundown. The Kid could not get away from the surrounded mesa—that was impossible. There was time to be patient. And when darkness fell on the Mal Pais the passage of the barranca would not be

grew too dim for discernment, and darkness brooded over the evil country—that seemed more evil and forbidding than ever under the black mask of night!

Unwinking, the Kid's eyes watched; but now he depended more on his ears than his eyes. Darkness, and two hours before the moon came up over the valley of the Rio Grande—darkness and dire danger for the beleaguered Kid.

From the darkness sounds of foes in motion—the long wait was over, the weary watching at an end. Slight sounds, cautious sounds—but enough for the ears of the Kid, keen as those of a hiding coyote—sounds of men who crept from cover, who crept over barren, baked earth, jostled against rocks, muttered in the night; crept ever closer and closer to the narrowest section of the great barranca, the six-foot rift that lay in front of the kid. And still the Kid held his fire. Waiting had in the gloom at random was not in the kid's line, especially



**HELPING AN ENEMY!** The Rio Kid leaned forward from his saddle and grasped the collar of the Texas Ranger as he floated by. Though it meant risking his own life in the flood in helping an enemy, the Kid could not see a white man drown if it was possible to save him. (See Chapter 4.)

sure shows that you think a lot of me!"

"Is it a cinch?" demanded Hall.

"Nope."

The Kid laughed lightly.

"You don't get me as easy as all that, Jim. Not by a jugful! I guess you'd rather talk turkey than jump over that barranca with my rifle talking to you. But you don't get home with it."

Hall gritted his teeth.

"Wait, then!" he said tersely.

He dropped into cover again, and simultaneously the Rio Kid hunted cover behind his rock. There was a crackling of rifle fire in the hot afternoon. The Kid did not reply to it. The Kid had to count his cartridges now, and he was not disposed to waste a shot. He waited for the Rangers to come out into the open.

But they did not come out.

From time to time the Kid heard grumbling voices and angry curses, as the Rangers sweated in heat behind

one of such fearful peril. In the dark the Kid's guns were not likely to take so terrible a toll.

"Dog-gone him!" growled the Kid.

It was weary waiting for the Kid, as well as for the Rangers. He could not venture to leave the barranca unwatched. Once the enemy were across that chain the odds at close quarters would be too much for the Kid to hope for even a fighting chance. He was at the end of his rope; and he was chained to the one spot where his foes could get at him.

The Kid, cursing the iron patience of Jim Hall, exercised his own patience and waited and watched.

The sun went down in a blaze of purple and gold behind the Mal Pais. Shadows lengthened in canyon and gulch. Dimmer and dimmer grew the mesa, and the tangled chaparral that clothed it, the rugged slopes, and the heaped boulders where the Rangers lay sweating.

Dimmer and dimmer—till shapes

with cartridges running short. When the Kid burned powder it would be to some effect.

The grinding of heavy boots as they landed—a man had leaped the barranca. From the Kid's rifle streamed flame and smoke, and a black shadow that loomed in the night was blotted out. High and piercing, a cry arose, as that black shadow toppled over the edge of the barranca, and hurtled down into space. From the Texas Rangers came a roar of fury and a burst of fire, drowning the last yell of the man who had gone down to his death.

**THE THIRD CHAPTER.**  
Across the Barranca!

**M**ULE-KICK HALL spat out curses.

The taunting laugh of the Rio Kid replied.

Crack! Crack!

The shots followed the laugh of the boy outlaw. A yelling Ranger dropped.



back from the edge of the barranca and crawled away, and another clapped a hand to his head, where half an ear had been torn away.

It seemed as if the Kid could see in the dark; and, indeed, he could, for the faintest shadow that stirred was enough for the Kid. And when he pulled trigger he knew where the lead would go.

Long rang the reckless laugh of the boy outlaw.

"Say you 'uns! You don't seem in a dog-goned hurry!" he called out. "I'll say you're sure taking your time! Say, Jim Hall, you're the guy that always gets his man! Your man's here, and by the great horned toad he's ready and waiting. Why ain't you getting him?"

Hall swore furiously.

But when his angry voice ceased the Kid was doubly watchful. The darkness that wrapped the Rangers wrapped also the Kid, and he had crept closer to the barranca—so close that even in the deep murk no man could leap it without the Kid's eye spotting him. And eye and finger-trigger were as one. Only at that spot could a man on foot cross; and the Kid held all the cards so long as his cartridges lasted.

Silence from the Rangers, and a mutter of a deep, low voice—too low for the Kid to hope to catch the words. But it was Hall's voice—and the Kid would have given much to hear what order he was giving his men. For he knew that Hall was as wily as an Apache, as full of unexpected tricks as an unbroken cayuse. That rush across the rift in the darkness had been stopped. Hall had counted on the cover of the night, but its friendly cloak had not served him. What was the next move? The Kid boned to know.

But he did not know till a sudden clatter of hoofbeats from the night enlightened him.

"Geo!" breathed the Kid.

There was a sudden burst of fire from the Rangers, searching the rocks across the barranca.

The Kid, lying low, cared nothing for the whizzing lead.

But for that rush of hoofbeats he cared much; he knew what it meant.

While the Rangers held him pinned to the narrow rift, chained there to guard it against their crossing, one bold horseman, a distance farther along the barranca, was going to leap.

In the daylight the Kid's rifle would have picked him off like a wild turkey in the chapparal. In the darkness, at the distance, he was invisible. No shot from the Kid could stop him; and if the barranca itself could not stop him he would cross.

The Kid gave a low whistle—of admiration more than anything else.

For the leap in the darkness, across a gulf of great width and fatal depth, was the deed of a man who recked nothing of life. The chances of making the jump in safety were one in a thousand.

He knew who the reckless horseman was. In all Texas, the Kid figured, there were two men who would have taken such a desperate chance. One of them was the Rio Kid, the other was Mule-Kick Hall, captain of the Texas Rangers. It was Jim Hall who, fifty yards further along the barranca, out of the Kid's fire, was galloping to the mad leap.

It was a mad leap—a leap to death. The Kid waited to hear the crash of horse and rider into the depths of the barranca. Only a wonderful turn of

fortune could have made such a leap a success—all the chances were against making the grade.

There was a dog's chance—and that was all. But if that dog's chance materialised the Kid had an enemy behind him—a determined enemy in his last refuge—at close quarters. Stalking off the bunch of Rangers was a thing of the past. If Jim Hall made the grade the Kid's game was up—bullets from behind his cover would soon be humming about his ears. For that chance Mule-Kick Hall was taking his life in his hands, leaping the barranca in the dark, in the shadow of the wings of the Angel of Death.

"Geo!" repeated the Kid. "Some cuss! I'll say he's got sand!"

The Rangers ceased fire again. They were listening, as anxiously as the Kid, to the crashing hoofbeats that approached an edge that the rider could barely see in the gloom, to leap towards another edge that was wholly invisible. Only a man of iron could have essayed the feat—and not one in a thousand could have got away with it. Was Jim Hall getting away with it?

On the answer to that question depended the outcome of the Rio Kid's last struggle for life and liberty.

Clatter, clatter!

A second of silence.

No eye could follow the horseman in the clinging darkness; but in that breathless second of silence the Kid and his foes knew that the horseman had taken off for the leap; that the madly-driven broncho was springing across the gulf, suspended for the instant in space.

Crash!

It was a din of landing hoofs.

Hoofs that rang and crashed and clattered on the near side of the barranca—the Kid's side. Clatter, clatter! of hoofs vainly striving to make good a precarious landing, then the long-drawn terrified squeal of a horse that fell helplessly back and crashed down through space.

Crash! far on the rocks at the bottom of the barranca—and silence! The horse had gone down—but the rider?

Had Mule-Kick Hall gone down with the falling horse? It was all Texas to a silver dollar that he had.

And yet—

Sounds came through the night, and they came on the Kid's side of the barranca—sounds of shuffling and scuffling—of a man who dragged himself from the edge of death.

The Rangers heard those sounds as well as the Kid. The excited voice of Pecos Pete yelled frantically.

"Say, you 'uns! He's sure made the grade!"

There was a shout of triumph from the Rangers.

Mule-Kick Hall had made the grade. With a thousand chances to one against success the thousandth chance had materialised. The horse had gone down to death; the rider had flung himself over the neck and head of the falling broncho, catching at rocks and dragging himself to life. Mule-Kick Hall was across the barranca.

"Jumpin' gophers!" murmured the Kid. "I guess that guy's got sand—he sure has! I'll tell the world he's some cuss!"

But the Kid had no time to expend in admiring the feat performed by his enemy. For Mule-Kick Hall was on the wrong side of his defences now, and coming at him in the darkness. And the Kid crept back from cover, back from the barranca that was no longer a defence, into the tangled chapparal where he had left his mustang. And as

he went a rifle spat fire in the darkness, lighting it with rapid flashes, and spattering lead scattered out the rocks where the Kid had been a minute before. Mule-Kick Hall had lost no time in getting to close quarters.

He did not, it was probable, figure on finding the Kid still there. He cared little either way. If the Kid was there it was man to man—while the Rangers were coming across the rift. If he was not there the morrow would see him hunted out of the deepest recesses of that patch of chapparal, his last hiding-place, from which there was no further retreat. Either way, Mule-Kick Hall had triumphed—the Kid was at the end of his rope—and the Ranger who boasted that he never failed to get his man would make his words good.

The Kid was not there—darkness and the chapparal had swallowed him.

Hall shouted across to his men:

"Hump it, you 'uns!"

One by one the Rangers came across the narrow rift and joined their leader. Twenty-five men were gathered there, ready for the last hunt that was to begin when the morning sun lighted the gloom of the chapparal. The end was in sight now. Mule-Kick Hall had made the grade; and the sun that was soon to rise on the Mal Pais would light the last day of the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

From the Jaws of Death!

**T**HE Rio Kid looked at the red dawn over the Mal Pais and thought of the sunset that he was never to see, and his lip curled with reckless disdain.

Now that the cinch had come, the Kid was ready to face it. He had had a long run, and if his luck had petered out he was not the galoot to complain. Fortune had stood his friend for a long time, and he had no kick coming.

The Kid did not deceive himself—he knew that the jig was up. But never would the Kid be taken to judgment bound on the back of a broncho, with gyves on his wrists—never that while his finger could press a trigger, or his hand grip a bowie-knife. That burning morning was to see the Kid's last fight—a fight to the death!

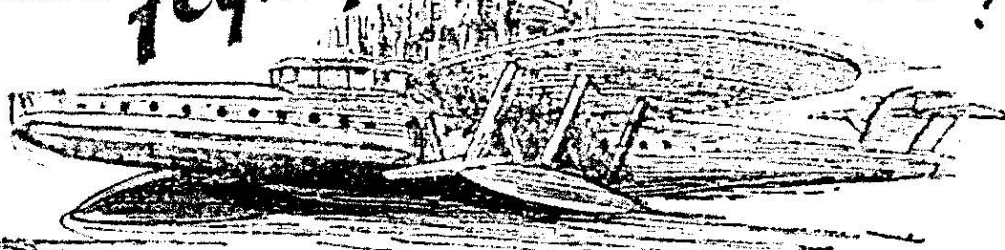
His only solace—if solace it was—was that he would go on the long trail in goodly company. Mule-Kick Hall first, if he could get him, then as many of the bunch as Fate allowed; and the Kid reckoned that it would be a good number. When they talked in the cow-towns of the Rio Kid's last fight, he vowed that they should have something worth chewing the rag about.

The sky that for weeks had been burning blue, without a cloud, shedding merciless heat on the Mal Pais, was that morning leaden, but hotter than ever. Away to the south, on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, black clouds were banked, inky battalions that shadowed the burning sunlight. Slowly, imperceptibly, those black masses were edging towards the Mal Pais. But the Kid did not heed them or notice them; he had other matters to occupy his mind. For the dawn was followed by the crack of firearms—the hunt was up.

In the thick chapparal the heat was intense; the flies buzzed in uncounted myriads. Never for a moment was the Kid—clusive as ever—out of sound of his enemies. Through and through that patch of chapparal, not half a square mile in extent, that covered the

*(Continued at foot of next page.)*

# The BIGGEST Flying Boat in the WORLD!



The Dox, the new monster flying boat, weighing seventy-nine tons when fully laden, and capable of lifting from and landing on the ocean like a seagull, has startled the world by its magnitude. In this article, our contributor tells you all about this leviathan of the skies!

**A** FEW years ago—twenty-four, to be exact—people who were interested in aeroplanes were awfully excited because someone had more or less successfully made some tests with a simple glider which could float upon the water and rise therefrom into the air.

This wonderful biplane glider was fitted with hollow wooden pontoons, or floats, and a motor-boat had to tow it along the water until the glider got up sufficient speed to mount into the air. It wasn't a very posh affair. In fact, it was rather funny when you think of it in comparison with the enormous seaplanes, or flying-boats that we have to-day. But it was the forerunner of the mighty Dox!

Haven't you heard of the Dox? They built it in Germany, and tested it a very short while ago. It came through the tests with great honours, and in doing so pretty well upset most of the prevailing notions concerning the construction of such vessels.

It is the biggest flying-boat in the world, made of grey steel, 150 feet long, and weighs 34 tons. When the great air-boat is loaded to capacity they reckon it will be able to carry in the air forty-five tons of people and baggage.

There are a couple of enormous wings to this monster—wings 150 feet from tip to tip, and ten feet thick. The wings have a passage-way through them, so that the mechanics can walk from turret to turret as necessary. There are six of these turrets projecting from the two colossal wings, and each turret is equipped with two 500 horse-power engines.

All told, that means that the Dox has twelve engines, with a total horse-power of 6,000. Some "kick" to this amazing leviathan of the air! All the engines are controlled by two pilots,

under the orders of the captain and the flying-boat's navigating officer in the chart-room.

### The Trial Flight!

Two engineers control the engine-room dials, and the way the Dox answers to its helm is simply marvellous. Two levers only to command all that horse-power, and yet the tremendous vessel is as docile as a well-trained horse—with the power of 6,000 horses in its "innards"!

Inside the body of the flying-boat are the captain's bridge, a luxurious and spacious saloon for one hundred passengers, and accommodation for all their luggage, in addition to space for other cargo. So you see the Dox isn't simply a gigantic toy or experiment. It is going to enter into serious competition with ordinary air-craft, and when it first rose from the water, in July, it at once took its place at the very front of the world's big flying-boats.

For two and a half years the Dox had been guarded in her gigantic shed at Friedrichshafen. For two and a half years the strictest secrecy had been maintained on every point concerning the marvellous flying-boat that was slowly growing up as an army of expert mechanics laboured to carry out the ideas of its inventor and designer. You can imagine the pride of Dr. Dornier, who designed it all, when, on that morning last July, the very last finishing touch having been given to his giant, the child of his skill slid slowly and stately down to the water's edge.

The tremendous gates of the shed that had hidden the Dox through thirty strenuous months slid open as Dr. Dornier pressed a button. The captive was free to take to the water and then the air, at last!

A second button was pressed, and the Dox moved out—to the trial flight that was to be witnessed by air experts gathered from all the ends of the earth. The twelve engines roared, the picked crew of twenty men settled in their appointed places. Forty eager hands were ready to do their bit, and then the Dox was racing full-pace across the waters of the great lake where it was to show its paces.

### A Sheer Success!

And show them it did. For a matter of two hours its captain kept the enormous flying-boat racing on the water, twisting, dodging, carrying out with the greatest readiness every demand of the skipper.

The leviathan wings stood the strain, and then, after a final run of 500 yards, at a speed of sixty miles an hour, the Dox, with her thirty-four tons dead weight, mounted up from the churning water and soared like a monster bird. Up, up it went, and then came the testing descent. Gracefully the flying-boat landed on the water again.

Three times the test was repeated, and this first of a projected fleet of tremendous flying-boats had proved itself a sheer success. And it is less than twenty-six years ago that Orville Wright managed his historic flight of twelve seconds—a flight which he describes, in his own words, as "the first in which a machine carrying a man had raised itself into the air by its own power in free flight, had sailed forward on a level course without reduction of speed, and had finally landed without being wrecked!"

And now the Dox has arrived, to astound the world by its magnitude!

(Next week: "THE GREATEST LINERS!")

(Continued from previous page.)

summit of the mesa, the Rangers hunted him, quartering the ground like hunting-dogs for their prey.

But the Kid, it had been said of old, was a bad man to crowd.

More than one Ranger, hunting hard, found what he sought and did not live to repent it.

For the Kid was desperate now, and he gave as was given to him. It was a fight to the death; and death stalked abroad under the burning heat that morning on the chaparral high up in the Mal Pais.

And at the burning noontide the hunt was still hot, and the Kid was not yet cinched.

Mule-Kick Hall was grinding his

teeth with rage; and his weary and infuriated men muttering curses, save those who had come too close to their quarry and would never speak again.

Without a pause, unrelenting, the hunt went on, ever closer and closer till a ring of savage men, maddened and merciless, surrounded the clump of thicket where the Kid lay beside his mustang, a six-gun in either hand, weary desperation in his face, and the rustle of the death angel's wings audible in his ears.

One more rush, one desperate hand-to-hand grapple, and the hunt was over—the thing was done. Then the name of the boy outlaw would be only a memory on the banks of the Rio Grande.

And then, like a roar of sudden artillery, it came! The cloud burst, the child of the burning heat, for which the Kid had hoped for long days, and which had ever disappointed him—and which he had now forgotten in his last desperate hour. It came to remind him that while there was life there was hope—even a few minutes of life. With a roar and a crash, with sudden torrents of rain like a spilt ocean, it came.

Blackness over the leaden sky—blackness and raging water. The Mal Pais, dry as bone under days of drought, sucked up the water in seas. But still it came—pouring, splashing, raging. Every arroyo, where the sand and stones had baked dry, burning to the

(Continued on next page.)



**CORNERING THE KID!**

*(Continued from page 21.)*

rough, was a foaming torrent; every canyon a river; every hollow a tossing lake. The deep barranca at the foot of the mesa swelled and roared with foaming waters.

On the plain, men who had watched the Mal Pais to cut off the escape of the Kid were riding frantically for shelter. In the canyons and ravines, horsemen rode wildly to escape the rush of the foaming waters—which they did not always escape. Fodies of horses, bodies of men, dashed among uprooted trees and torn branches in the whirling floods.

Beaten on by heavy rains, as by blows of a giant's hands, dashed to the skin in two seconds, the Rio Kid grinned gleefully.

His last hope—which he had forgotten—had come in time. Rained from the charcoal was landing, growing, falling under a smog that was like a smelter's chimney in its form. Trees crashed and split, branches were torn away.

Little cared the Kid. Five more minutes, and that final rush of the Rangers would have overwhelped him, and he would have gone down under slavering bolts, his guns spitting fire to the last.

Where were the Rangers now?

Bluffed and beaten, buffeted and bewildered, the sport of the mighty wind that rocked the Mal Pais to its rocky foundations.

Through falling rain that was like thick sheets of water, the Kid had glimpses of staggering figures, of men lying prone, of men pinned under fallen trees, of men who rode or ran. One man plunged past the Kid within a foot of him, unseeing.

In that mad battle of unchained elements human conflict was impossible, the thought of it impossible. The Kid was not thinking of it. His guns were jammed in his holsters, his hand was on the bridle of the grey Mustang. He fought a way through landing bushes and crashing trees, and if he had glimpses of his enemies he did not heed them any more than they heeded him.

Water by the thousand tons was falling. He reached the barranca on the lower side of the mesa and found it a raging torrent, roaring over the brain. The slope up which the Rangers had come to reach him was flooded now. Water flowed and rushed and reared among the boulders where they had crept in cover.

A thousand perils lay that way. But that was the way of the Rio Kid—the way out of the Mal Pais—the way to the plains and freedom.

He leaped the foaming barranca and rode down the slope, with raging water swirling up to his girths. The dark rain was almost that of night, lighted for guttering sparks by the blaze of lightning that rived the black masses overhead like a flashing knife.

Dusty coal, logs, struggling horses, floating carcasses, splashing fragments accompanied the Kid in his wild ride—wild as he entered into the narrow canyon that led down to the plains on the edge of the Mal Pais. For here, in narrower limits, the flood deepened, dashing and roaring against steep, rocky walls; and at times the grey Mustang was swimming.

More than once from the lightning-riven gloom a body whirled into the Kid's sight and vanished again. And when a swirl of water dashed another against his horse the Kid would have shoved it aside; but hands clung to

him, and a hoarse voice panted for help. And the Kid realized that this was not a dead man, but a living one at his last gasp.

Who he was the Kid did not know; only he knew that he must be a fool, for in the Mal Pais all were his foes. And with all his strength, all his nerve—needed to save his own life in that mad onslaught of elemental fury—the Kid grasped the dithering man and held him fast. With a stroke of his slinky arm he dragged the man across the grey Mustang, and Side-Kicker fought gallantly on with a double burden.

Swimming at intervals, finding precarious foothold at other times, the grey Mustang fought on, amid whirling logs and uprooted trees, dashed again and again upon rocky walls by the swirling flood.

How the Kid kept the saddle, how the Mustang kept his feet, the boy outlaw never knew; but he knew that both of them were paying every ounce into the fight for life, and that courage and iron resolve won through at last.

From the roaring flood that rushed down the canyon the Rio Kid emerged at last, dazed and dizzy, more dead than alive—but alive.

Still with the helpless man sprawled across the horse before him, the Kid leaped hither on the plain, his horse spitting foam deep in rushing water, but safe at last.

Still the rain torrents lashed and roared, and the fierce wind beat and clutched; but he was out of the Mal Pais, out of the foaming freshets and falling rocks and rending trees.

And the Kid pushed on to a ridge of high ground above the flood, halted his weary horse, dismounted, and lifted down the man he had saved, and laid him tenderly enough in the grass.

"I guess you'll be O.K. there, feller," said the Kid. "This hyer rookus won't last a heap long. I'll say that your friends will find you—and if I don't lift the horizon mighty quick they'll sure find me at the same time! And I guess I don't want any more Mule-Kick Hail in mine!"

And then, as he peered at the man he had saved, the Rio Kid ejaculated:

"Jumping gophers!"

And Mule-Kick Hall—disabled, spent, defenseless—stared up with bitter eyes at the man who had saved him.

"You!" said the Kid thoughtfully; then he laughed.

"Don't-gone it, if I'd knowed it was you I'd have hooked you out of that hell all the same! Any man in Texas will tell you that the Rio Kid is a gold-darned gink! I guess if I wasn't plumb loco, Jim Hall, you'd get yours now, right where you live!"

"Shoot!" said the Ranger.

The Kid shook his head.

"Not any!" he answered. "It's me for the trail; and you, I reckon, can lie here till your guys find you and pick you up. Then you can sure beat it back to the town and tell the world that the Rio Kid never figured that you was worth his lead. So-long, Jim Hall! And next time you tell Texas that you always get your man, remember the Mal Pais and the Rio Kid!"

And, with the Ranger's bitter eyes following him, the Rio Kid mounted the Mustang again, cracked his quirs, and disappeared in the dimness of swamping rain.

THE END.

*(Back once again on the trail, the Rio Kid seeks adventure. He finds it, sure enough, and of the most thrilling variety. Look out for: "FIVE HUNDRED DOLLAR SMITH," a roaring tale of Western adventure.)*

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