

The Rainbow Kid: The Legend Begins

By Stephen L. Harris

The Abduction

An 18-wheel tractor-trailer truck rolls into a rural, dusty Mexican village somewhere just south of the Texas border. The 18-wheeler follows a pick-up truck with a half-dozen armed men sitting in its bed. Surrounding both trucks, forming an escort, six tough-looking hombres ride on motorized dirt bikes, the same bikes used for motocross. A cloud of desert dust hangs over the menacing motorcade as frightened villagers duck for cover in doorways and alleyways. Mothers try to hide their children. A pretty teenage girl, a guitar slung over her shoulder, tries to hustle young kids into a house. But it's too late. The bikers barrel through town like vaqueros rounding up cattle, herding people into the town square. The men in the pick-up truck jump out, rifles at the ready. The villagers are lined up like targets for a firing squad. No one is spared, from the littlest child to the oldest man.

A gringo steps out of the cab of the pick-up truck, the toughest hombre of all. He walks up and down the trembling line, his greedy eyes inspecting each and everyone. He sorts out the teenagers—boys and girls, 13, 14, 15 and 16 years old. He points out the fittest among them, and then his armed thugs shove them into the back of the tractor-trailer at rifle point while mothers fall on their knees, begging him to let their children go. The gringo ignores their pitiful pleas. The door rattles shut and is locked. The motorcade roars out of the village. Families left behind wail out their heartbreak.

During the roundup, it's clear that one of the teenagers shoved into the tractor-trailer loves one of the girls, also picked out by the gringo. The teenager is Juan Mendoza, called Johnny by the villagers in honor of his revered grandfather who'd come to this place a half-century earlier from north of the border, where he'd been a Texas Ranger of mixed blood—part white, part Mexican, part Comanche—

and was known as Redhawk after the tribe's sacred bird. Johnny's a born dreamer, always looking on the sunny side of life in this dirt-poor village. "When will you see things as they really are?" scold the village elders. "Not as you wish them to be?" The girl is Maria Gomez, the one with the guitar, who likes Johnny even though her parents warn her that he'll never be like his grandfather, the old Texas Ranger, but will end up a ne'er-do-well like his father, who died a miserable failure when Johnny was three years old. Maria can have the pick of anyone in the village, but it's Johnny she wants. There's something wonderfully different about him, yet she can't figure out what it is. Maybe it's because he *is* a dreamer.

Now, trapped inside the darkened tractor-trailer, hot as an oven, and amid the woeful whimpering prisoners, they seek each other out.

The motorcade rumbles north toward the border. The outriders on their dirt motorbikes watch for Federales by flying high off sand dunes like the daredevils they are to see far off into the desert. The gringo is Cactus Charlie Ryder. He's the foreman of a ranch called *The Flying Scorpion*, a 1,000-square mile kingdom of cotton and cattle, mustangs and slave labor in the hills of West Texas.

Judge Joshua Jewell and Colonel Jacob Jewell, twin brothers, own *The Flying Scorpion*. The Judge runs the county. The Colonel runs the ranch. Both are ruthless. In fact, Joshua is known as the "Hangin' Judge." Cactus Charlie runs everything in between, and if anything or anybody stands in the way he clears them out with his own brand of ruthless justice. Every so often, when his workforce is depleted, he makes a run into Mexico to abduct young teenagers—strong boys to pick cotton, brand steers and muck out stables; strong girls to serve as housemaids and cooks; and, for the strongest, to work side by side with the boys in the fields. When the teenagers get worn out the Jewells sell them off to other ranchers and businessmen throughout the bigger towns of the county and beyond, as far west as El Paso. For the twin brothers, slave trade is a booming business, almost as big as cotton and cattle.

Because they run the county, no one dares to stand in their way. Frankly, no one gives a hoot about Mexicans kidnapped from south of the border.

The dirt road the motorcade follows winds and dips and rises through this desolate country, leading to the Rio Grande River. Near the Rio Grande it drops underground, into a concrete tunnel put in years ago by the Jewells. The tunnel burrows beneath the river and re-emerges far enough on the U.S. side in a tangle of sagebrush so Border Patrol agents can't see it from the air in their search for illegal aliens. The southern boundary of *The Flying Scorpion* doesn't begin for another 100 miles. About ten miles past the tunnel, the motorcade halts. Cactus Charlie allows his prisoners a chance to breathe fresh air and drink a few sips of water before moving on through the intolerable heat. He has them closely guarded. Cactus Charlie eyes Maria. There's something feisty about her and because of it Cactus Charlie is pretty sure she'll bring a bonus from the Judge the moment he sees her.

Off in the distance, the Texas sky clouds up. Rain falls miles away. The sun glints into the clouds and a rainbow arcs across the desert. Johnny points it out to Maria.

"Look," he says, hoping to comfort her, "a beautiful rainbow! It's a good-luck sign!"

"Oh, Johnny," Maria cries. "How can you think such a thing now? These horrible men are the same ones that kidnapped my cousin, Yolla, and the others in her village. We have no luck. All is lost!"

"No, no! We must have hope! The rainbow's our hope!"

Cactus Charlie watches Johnny and Maria. If they're in love the young boy could cause him trouble by protecting the pretty dark-haired girl. He kicks Johnny, sending him sprawling into the sand. "You think that rainbow's good luck?" he laughs harshly. "I bet you even think there's a pot of gold at the end?" He kicks him again as Johnny staggers to his feet. "Then go find it yerself, you miserable greaser, or die of thirst tryin'! And if a Leprechaun is guarding the gold, tell 'em Cactus Charlie sent you!"

The tractor-trailer is loaded up, and the motorcade motors away. The watchful outriders once again fly off sand dunes on their dirt bikes. A dispirited Johnny is left alone in the desert, miles from nowhere while the dust kicked up by the tractor-trailer coats his body. "Maria's right," he mutters to himself. "All is lost. There is no luck." Watching the motorcade disappear, he wipes the dust from his eyes and turns away and starts to trudge toward the rainbow.

Rainbow's End

Johnny walks for miles. The heat of the afternoon sun bears down on him like a blowtorch. Sweat soaks his body from head to foot. His lips are dry as dirt and his throat parched. He can smell the rain, though, still far off. Sweet as honey. The rainbow nears. Yet the closer he gets the harder it is to see the end of the rainbow. He squeezes between jagged boulders. Mesquite thorns tear into his arms and legs and rip his shirt and pants until he is clad only in rags. He stumbles down ravines and claws up sandy hillocks. His fingers bleed. Although the rainbow bends over him, its end is nowhere in sight. Is it a myth, he wonders—this pot of gold at the end of a rainbow, guarded by a Leprechaun?

In utter despair, Johnny's almost ready to give up. Then, standing on the crest of a dune is an old man. He looks familiar; his stance, his dark eyes and white hair. Is it an apparition, Johnny wonders?

In a hoarse voice, Johnny cries out, "Abuelo! Grandfather!"

At that moment, the old man turns into a red hawk and lifts off the dune. It slowly circles in the sky and heads toward the end of the rainbow. Johnny, his heart pounding, trudges after the great raptor.

At last, following the red hawk's flight, Johnny climbs atop a strange boulder of colorful stripes, like sandstone from the Painted Desert. On the other side of the boulder he finds the rainbow's end, he's sure of it—a shaft of colors coming down from the sky. Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Johnny shields his eyes from the powerful light it emits. Uncontrollably drawn to it, he bounds off the

boulder into the rainbow itself. Colors engulf him as he tumbles downward as if in a waterfall. He falls and spins and lands in a chamber of stone, its sheer walls hundreds of feet high. Above him the rainbow forms a shimmering ceiling of colors so vivid and bright the entire chamber is lit. The shimmering colors reflect off the chamber's walls as well as the sand floor—a magnificent mosaic created by Mother Nature herself. Johnny falls to his knees, trembling. The air inside is refreshingly cool. After a bit, he stands and looks about him.

A voice startles him. "I have been waiting for you." Johnny spins around. Sitting way atop a golden pot that's as large as a room is a small man, perhaps no more than three-feet tall. His hair is as orange as a harvest moon. Red whiskers cover his chin. He's dressed in green. Seeing how Johnny stares at him, he smiles. "Me name's Liam Malarkey. I'm a Leprechaun. We Leprechauns stand guard at the end of every rainbow just in case someone drops in from out of the blue." The Leprechaun looks up through the hole in the rocky chamber. "I've been waiting for someone like you ever since Saint Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland. And now here you are."

"Malarkey?" Johnny stutters. "Is this a dream? Malarkey? You're pulling my leg, aren't you?"

"This is the real deal, Johnny! For the past year or so I've been waiting for you because you're very like your grandfather, the stout-hearted Redhawk."

"You knew my grandfather?"

"Indeed I did."

"Tell me about my grandfather, Mr. Leprechaun."

"In time, Johnny, in time. But first we've got work to do."

Liam leaps off the golden pot. "Legend has it that whoever reaches the end of the rainbow will find a pot of gold. Well, here it is."

Johnny's eyes feast on the pot, piled high with glittering gold bars and bullion, coins and doubloons, nuggets of all sizes, shiny ducats and pieces of eight. "But there's a catch. Always a catch, me lad." The little Leprechaun tugs at his fringe of beard and gives Johnny the once over. "You can't spend this treasure willy-nilly. You must use it to do good." Johnny's speechless. His heart races, each beat

pounding in his ears. “And the first thing you can do,” continues Liam, “is free the boys and girls from your village and take them home”

Johnny finds his voice. “But how? I’m just a poor boy.”

“No longer are you poor.” The Leprechaun nods toward the pot of gold. “But first you must do good. And I will help you, for all this is entrusted to me. I’m its guardian, and have been for centuries.” He tugs at his beard again. “It’s crucial we start now. Time is of the essence—if we want to save Maria Gomez and the others in your village.”

The Colonel and the Judge

The motorcade crosses into the land of *The Flying Scorpion*. It presses on across cotton fields, where brown-skinned teenagers toil, cotton bags slung over their shoulders. Off in the distant, a great herd of cattle feeds off the land. Soon outbuildings appear, bunkhouses for the slave labor. Boys in one bunkhouse, girls in the other. Men with rifles loosely guard the bunkhouses, lounging in the shade, smoking, playing cards. There is little concern for escapees. The miles and miles of dry land is too vast and too forbidding and certainly no youngsters could ever make it out of *The Flying Scorpion* and survive. And if they did who would believe their tale of enslavement. Or care! They’d be dismissed as more lying illegal aliens and sent back to Mexico.

The main hacienda sits on a small rise offering a commanding view of the Jewell Empire. Made of adobe, it’s a hacienda of many rooms, two stories high with a “widow’s walk” on top that provides an even more commanding view. A wide veranda stretches along the front of the hacienda. Groves of white aspens are in the yard, front and back.

The motorcade wheels up in front of the hacienda. Judge Joshua and his twin, Colonel Jacob Jewell, come out onto the veranda along with a large woman, her well-muscled arms folded across her chest. The Jewells are both big men, in their mid-40s. The Judge is clean-shaven. He has on a black suit, white shirt and a turquoise bolo tie. The Colonel, sporting a luxurious moustache, wears jeans and a white shirt

adorned with sequins. The woman, whose name is Pilar, is nearly as big as the Jewells. Her face is as hard as stone. Of Mexican descent, she's been working on *The Flying Scorpion* for as long as the Jewells have owned it. Her job is to turn the teenage girls into compliant housemaids and who'll do everything their told unquestioningly, and do it so well that when the time comes they can be sold for good money.

Cactus Charlie jumps out of the pick-up truck.

"We got a good crop this time 'round," he says. "Wait'll you see one of the señoritas. I've saved her for you Judge. She's a real wildcat, but once you tame her I bet she'll be the best housemaid you ever had."

Cactus Charlie orders the back of the tractor-trailer opened and the latest crop tumbles out, blinking in the sunlight. He grabs Maria by the arm and drags her to the steps of the veranda so that she's kneeling in front of the Judge. Her guitar clatters to the ground.

With a cruel smile, the Judge looks down at the guitar. "Can you play that thing and sing, too?"

"Yes," she says, but her mind is on Johnny—alone in the desert.

The Judge grabs her chin, jerking her head up so she looks at him. "What's your name?"

"Maria Gomez," she spits at him.

The Making of the Rainbow Kid

Inside the rainbow's chamber, Liam, the Leprechaun, paces back and forth, every now and then, casting a thoughtful look Johnny's way.

"Must hurry! Must hurry!" he mutters. He stops. "For years I've watched the goings on at the Flying Scorpion. The gang there uses motorized dirt bikes. I've just the bike for you." He wheels out a magnificent bike. He describes the special parts, all made of gold. How these parts are so finely honed that the bike will go faster, launch itself higher and farther than any other bike in the entire southwest.

Johnny shivers. "In my village there are no bikes," he confesses. "I've never ridden bike. I wouldn't know how to ride one."

The little Leprechaun tosses a bundle of clothes Johnny's way. "Put these on. Once you've donned these clothes you'll ride this bike like a champion. Another thing. These clothes are bulletproof."

A moment later, Johnny's dressed in the outfit of a motocross rider—helmet, goggles, gloves and boots. The jersey is bright green with a brilliant rainbow emblazoned across the chest. The sleeves are a shining yellow. The pants are a swirl of the colors of the prism, curling down his legs like barbershop pole, tucked into buckled boots. The helmet he discovers is especially equipped with a communications system that allows him not only to talk to Liam, but at the touch of a button the upper right-hand corner of the tinted visor turns into a computer-like screen that allows him to see the ranch and the men outside, on guard. It's called Visor Vision, Liam explains, and is connected to an Eye-in-the-Sky satellite now in use on the war on terror. He tells Johnny that he can change what Visor Vision sees just by moving his eyes, left, right, up or down. The helmet also comes equipped with a Sky Phone so he can communicate with anyone, anywhere. It can change the sound of his voice, too. He also tells him that once the strap is buckled in place no person can pull the helmet off. Because the visor's tinted, his identity will always remain a secret. And, like his new clothes, it's bulletproof

"You mean Maria won't know who I am?"

"That's correct, me lad. Instead, you'll be known as the Rainbow Kid! But there's another catch. You can't reveal your identity to anyone—not even Maria! If you do you'll never find your way back to the end of this rainbow. You'll just be as you were, Johnny the dreamer."

Although the thought that Maria will never know that he's the Rainbow Kid upsets him, the very fact that he's now somebody special excites him—kind of like a Texas Ranger, like his grandfather. He looks through the Visor Vision. To his dismay, he sees Maria on her knees in front of a man dressed in black. "Oh, no!" he says.

"Maria's in trouble? Then go to her now! But wait. All superheroes must wear a cape." Liam attaches a cape embossed with a rainbow symbol to his shoulders. "There," he says. "Now go!"

Still uncertain about his ability to ride the bike, Johnny leaps aboard, revs up its golden engine as if he'd been a rider all his life. He takes off down a hidden passage among the painted rocks and, with a great yell, blasts into the desert. He soars off a sand dune higher and farther than any rider ever went, his body flying off the saddle like a red hawk way up in the sky, the cape flared out behind him like a wing. A surge of newfound strength courses through his body.

"I'm the Rainbow Kid!" he shouts, his voice echoing across the desert.

The Deal

The Judge, meanwhile, turns toward Pilar. "You can start training this Maria Gomez right away. I think she'll bring top dollar, guitar and all."

The Judge must go to Gulch City, the county seat, on important business. Cactus Charlie accompanies him in a large, black, super-charged SUV, a henchman driving it.

The moment they leave, the Colonel, after checking out the other teenage girls, is not overly impressed with their potential. But he finds that he can't keep his eyes off Maria. He's never seen a beauty like her before, especially one with such fire in her eyes. His brother's right—she'll make them a lot of money. He decides to keep an eye on her and to make sure Pilar trains her right.

The SUV carrying the Judge and Cactus Charlie drives down the main street of Gulch City, a dusty town of 50,000, and pulls up in front of the county courthouse, which houses other governmental offices. A railhead for the blue chip freight line *Pecos, Sweetwater & Gotham*, Gulch City has grown in size and importance, in spite of its name. Judge Jewell's business involves a major deal with the State of Texas that if signed will give *The Flying Scorpion* a monopoly on all the cotton in the county, making sure it passes through his town and into his bank account. He realizes that the slave business can't go on forever, and so he's been negotiating to get this lucrative contract for five years. It's worth millions. The time to close the deal is now. He has to persuade one more legislator, a state senator, the last hold out—the

chairman of the State Commerce Committee. If he fails he knows the deal will never be approved.

Big Ben Thompson, a legendary cattle rancher and oilman with a large spread north of Gulch City, is among the most powerful men in Texas. Big Ben is fifty years old, graying hair and a thin moustache. Because of his chairmanship of the Commerce Committee, he decides how and to whom the state does business. He rules his committee with an iron fist, doling out favors here and there and bending the law to his advantage. Ambitious, he has big plans of his own—to run for governor in the next election. He could use the support of men like the Jewells.

Negotiations between Judge Jewell and Big Ben Thompson go on for almost an hour. The Judge is confident he's about to sew up the deal. Big Ben tells him he's satisfied with what they've worked out and he'll guarantee the necessary votes in his committee to give *The Flying Scorpion* the cotton monopoly for the county. But first, before there's a handshake to close the deal, Big Ben asks for a favor.

"Word up at the capital has it that you supply most of the field workers to the ranches in this part of the state, Mexicans as young as 15 and 16," he says, lighting a fat cigar. "That true?"

The Judge wants to deny it at first. Then, seeing a twinkle in Big Ben's eyes, admits that he's got connections with a few businesses.

"If you're in the supply end of the business I'm bettin' you can git your hands on a bunch of hard workers that ain't yet worn out. I need about a half dozen of 'em and I bet you got a new crop hidden away at your ranch right now. Ain't that a fact, Judge?"

"Can't deny it, Senator."

"Well then, I want the best you got."

The Judge wants this crop for himself, especially the beautiful Maria, but he wants the cotton monopoly more. He sucks in his breath. There'll be others. "Then it's a deal all around?" he asks.

Big Ben sticks out his hand. "They better be as strong as Texas mustangs."

They shake hands. The Judge is about to be one of the wealthiest men along the entire Rio Grande.

Maria and the Colonel

Almost as soon as the Judge had left for Gulch City to meet with Big Ben Thompson, his twin, the Colonel, orders Cesar Montero, the man who runs the ranch when Cactus Charlie is away, to take the newly enslaved laborers down to the bunkhouse and get them settled in. He'll look after Pilar and the girls. Montero, another tough hombre, herds the young men away from the hacienda. Another of the ranch's henchmen stays with the Colonel, a rodent-faced runt nicknamed Little Weasel. He helps the Colonel and Pilar push the women into the hacienda and down a long, steep staircase to a dank, dungeon-like cellar with rooms like cells that serve as living quarters. Several are occupied. Forlorn faces stare out from barred windows.

Maria Gomez recognizes one of the faces. It's her cousin, Yolla! She breaks from the group.

"Yolla! Yolla!" she cries, rushing to the barred window.

Yolla, in a hoarse whisper, her eyes dried red of tears, answers, "Maria!" Maria is frightened at first and then angry at Yolla's condition. How could men do this to her? The Colonel pulls Maria away from the cell. She spins quickly around and slaps him hard across the mouth.

"Swine!" she hisses.

Behind her she hears Yolla's hoarse warning. "Save yourself, Maria!"

The Colonel leans Maria's guitar against the wall. Then, grabbing a fistful of Maria's hair, he pulls her along. The sharp pain is like daggers piercing her skull, yet Maria forbids herself to cry out. The Colonel orders Little Weasel to lock up the others. He'll take this one upstairs and deal with her in his own way.

"I have special cell for wildcats like you," the Colonel snaps, shoving her along the passageway. A wicked grin slashes across Little Weasel's face.

Pilar snaps at the Colonel. "The Judge ordered me to take special charge of this one!" she says, pointing at Maria. "Leave her be!"

On the Way

In a cloud of dust, the Rainbow Kid wheels into the vast land of *The Flying Scorpion*. He stops at the top of a small rise. Off in the distance, he sees the hacienda. Using Visor Vision, he spots people on the veranda. He can't make out if one of them is Maria. He starts down the rise. The wheels of his bike strike something hard. Looking down, he's startled to see a bone in the sand, bleached white by the sun. He jumps off his bike and picks it up. The bone looks human. He digs around and uncovers a skull. Digging deeper, he finds more bones, more skulls. Fear grips his heart for he knows he's standing in the middle of a mass grave. He realizes with a shudder that when the laborers can no longer work and die of exhaustion they're buried behind the rise in unmarked graves.

Riding low in the saddle, the Kid eases his bike down the rise. He knows there are two guards sitting on the veranda, their chairs tilted back on either side of the large front door. Double-barreled shotguns lean against the wall. He sees that the rear of the house has been left unattended. What he doesn't know is how many guards are in the house. He turns off the motor and hides the bike in a thick grove of aspens. Quietly, he sneaks up to the back door.

Inside the Hacienda

The backdoor is unlocked. The Rainbow Kid slips in. Visor Vision is no good inside the hacienda. The surroundings being unfamiliar, he cocks his head and listens for any noise. He hears a metallic ping and running water. He moves toward the sound. He reaches a large kitchen where a black-haired girl of about seventeen washes dishes. She sees him, and her hand springs to her throat as she muffles a cry. He puts a finger to his visor for quiet.

Pilar drags Maria up a wide staircase and pushes her down a hall. Even though she's in pain she refuses to cry out.

The girl washing dishes points up. Then she shows the Kid a back staircase, and points up again. It's obvious to him that she'd been kidnapped a few years back and holds no warmth for the Jewells. He nods and softly steals up the stairs.

Pilar shoves Maria into a small, dark room with one window. When Colonel Jewett enters, Pilar slams the door. She then flings Maria into a chair equipped with arm and leg shackles. Maria jumps up as quickly as cat and claws her face. A bloody gash runs down Pilar's cheek. She swipes at it and shoves Maria back on the chair.

"Wildcat is right!" she laughs. "But we'll break your spirit soon enough!"

The Colonel leans against the wall, watching.

On the highway leading back to *The Flying Scorpion*, the Judge's SUV speeds along.

"How do you find so many of these strong boys and pretty girls?" asks Big Ben Thompson, his teeth clenched around a cigar.

"We make forays across the border every now and then to replenish our stock. Mexicans are a dime a dozen and nobody cares. Not even the Mexicans themselves."

"My wife of 25 years is a Mexican. I like Mexicans. The prettier the better!"

The Judge shifts uneasily, thinking of Maria. Maybe he ought to keep his mouth shut.

Pilar clamps a shackle over Maria's right wrist and locks it with loud clank. It's tight, but Maria refuses to cry out. Instead, she spits in her attacker's face. Pilar wipes the spittle off and leers down at her. It's obvious this Mexican wildcat must be broken.

The bedroom door bangs open with a splintering crash. The Kid is silhouetted in the frame of the door for a moment, dumbfounding for a split second, Pilar, the Colonel and even Maria. A strange apparition of colors. Before the Colonel can act, the Kid grabs him by the throat, startled by his newfound power. The Colonel cries for help, but the Kid's strong grip shuts down his vocal chords. Pilar starts to bolt across the room, but Maria sticks out her free foot and trips her.

The SUV barrels up to the main house. Cactus Charlie, always on alert, routinely checks all the front windows of the hacienda every time he returns to the ranch. Movement in Pilar's room catches his eye. Through the window, he sees a strange person.

"Looks like trouble, Judge," he says.

Cactus Charlie orders the driver to stop, to alert the two guards on the veranda and then to go around one side of the hacienda and he'll take the other side. He tells the Judge to stay in the SUV with Thompson—no sense getting Big Ben in an embarrassing situation. He'll take care of the intruder. He reaches under the seat of the SUV and comes up with a .45 automatic and an eight-round clip. He shoves the clip into the heel of the grip, pulls back the slide and quickly sends a bullet into the chamber.

"He's a gone man, Judge," he says.

Big Ben puffs calmly on his cigar. He says, "No sense knockin' off a man on my account, Judge."

Cactus Charlie slides out of the SUV. As he disappears behind the hacienda, the Judge says threateningly to Big Ben, "The deal's still on no matter what happens next. This little circumstance seals it even more!"

Big Ben looks at him with no expression and blows out a thick cloud of smoke.

The Kid has the Colonel on his knees. His one-handed grip tightens around the Colonel's throat while he uses the other hand to search for the key to the shackles. He motions for Maria to be brave, he'll get her out of this frightening jam in no time.

Who is he, Maria wonders—this strange person in a suit of many colors? With her heart beating wildly, she watches him in rapt fascination as he keeps his chokehold on the Colonel. The Colonel's face is beet red.

Pilar gets up. "Watch out for her!" Maria yells.

The Kid can't find the keys.

"The woman has the keys," Maria tells him.

Cactus Charlie appears in the doorway, the .45 aimed at the Kid. Maria cries out. The Kid spins around, hauling the Colonel to his feet to use as a human shield. In doing so, he releases his grip on the Colonel's throat. The Colonel sucks in air and croaks out, "Shoot him! Shoot the color-coated creep!" But Cactus Charlie can't get off a clean shot without hitting his boss or Pilar or maybe the highly prized Maria.

The only escape for the Kid is to leap out the window. But first he puts his mouth close to the Colonel's ear.

"Keep your night light burning, amigo. I shall return!"

He shoves the Colonel into Cactus Charlie as the .45 goes off and a bullet slams into the wall behind the Kid. He crashes through the window. He darts into the aspen grove and jumps on his bike. Cactus Charlie sprints down the stairs and out the front door and springs into the front seat of the super-charged SUV. He barks at Big Ben to get out.

"I ain't movin'," Big Ben says.

"Suit yerself, Senator," Cactus Charlie says. He looks at the Judge through the rearview mirror. The Judge shrugs. Big Ben bites down on his cigar. Cactus Charlie guns the engine and the SUV takes off after the Kid, who's got a slim head start. The SUV flies over a sand dune, all four wheels off the ground. At that moment, Cactus Charlie sees the Kid up ahead and aims straight for him.

"Who is he?" the Judge hollers over the roar of the engine.

"No clue!" Cactus Charlie hollers back. "He had the Colonel in a choke hold up in Pilar's room. I think he knows that senorita, the one I picked out fer you. He came to rescue her."

The Judge looks over at Big Ben while the SUV gains speed. Big Ben leans back and, while the SUV careens along at a mad clip, puffs on his cigar—cool as a cucumber.

Like a spinning top, the Kid twirls a three-sixty high off a dune—daring Cactus Charlie to catch him. For a moment he faces the SUV and calculates its distance from him. The motorbike continues its spin and hits the ground and speeds on. Of a sudden, he reins in at the top of another dune. The SUV closes in. Cactus Charlie rolls down the window, shoves out the .45. "Got him!" he growls.

The Kid starts down the dune, heading right for the SUV. He hits a small knoll and the motorbike vaults over the SUV, completing one spectacular loop. Cactus Charlie pops off a wild shot. The bullet whines past the Rainbow Kid's head. For the next half hour the Rainbow Kid taunts a furiously frustrated Cactus Charlie until he finally fades off into the endless desert.

Night Visitor

Night settles over the land. *The Flying Scorpion* turns into an armed camp. The henchmen are on alert, patrolling the perimeter of the hacienda. Shotguns loaded and cocked. Around the big dining room table, a tense Judge and Colonel hunch over a cold meal along with Big Ben, Pilar, Cactus Charlie, who is armed to the teeth, and a defiant Maria.

"Well, Judge, you wanted a wildcat and you sure got one!" Cactus Charlie says. "But she won't be so fiery when we get this hot-shot biker. And we'll get him."

"Who is he," the Judge asks Maria, a hard edge to his voice. "This guy who's outfitted like a rainbow and who rides a bike better than any man I ever saw? What is he some kinda Rainbow Kid?"

Maria has no idea, and even if she did she'd never tell. She sits straight, her eyes dark and angry.

Big Ben, still enjoying himself, puffs on his ever-present cigar. He admires Maria's beauty, understanding why the strange rider will do anything to save her. "Helen of Troy had a face that launched a thousand ships," he muses. "And you, pretty senorita, only launched a single dirt bike. Helen's odds were a lot better than yours and it took ten years to rescue her."

Maria looks at him in contempt. Everyone sees it.

"We'll git him!" quips the Judge. "Like Cactus Charlie says, we'll git him!"

On a dune splashed in moonlight the Rainbow Kid looks down on the hacienda. Through Visor Vision he spots red embers of lit cigarettes. The place is heavily guarded. He revs his engine and comes down off the dune, gathering speed. Instead

of the hacienda, he aims toward the outbuildings where the boys and girls from his village are locked up.

Inside the hacienda the distant roar of the motorbike fills the dining room with foreboding. Cactus Charlie jumps from his chair.

“Here comes that crazy fool!” he yells. “Little Weasel get in here!”

Little Weasel comes through the door.

“You and Pilar take this gal upstairs and stay with her!”

“I think I’ll go up there, too,” butts in Big Ben. “You don’t mind, do you, Judge?”

Pacing, a mad twitch suddenly on his cheek, the Judge nods.

As Maria, Pilar, Little Weasel and Big Ben exit the dining room for the stairs, the roar of the motorbike grows faint.

“Where’s that bum going?” Cactus Charlie mutters.

The Kid weaves among the dunes to the first outbuilding. It’s lightly guarded because Cactus Charlie figured Maria would draw this stranger to her so that he’d not be bothered with the latest crop of workers. The only guard there is taken by surprise. In a series of swift assaults on the outbuildings, the Rainbow Kid frees the young Mexican captives and they take shelter in the desert. He tells them to stay there until he returns. Then he faces the hacienda.

It dawns on Cactus Charlie what’s happening. “The peons!” he shouts. “That bum’s freeing the peons!” He sprints from the hacienda, signaling his men to follow him. The Judge and the Colonel stay put, checking their revolvers.

Upstairs in the Judge’s room, Big Ben takes charge. He sets Maria on the bed and then turns to Pilar and Little Weasel. “Git outa here!”

“No, Senor,” Pilar says. “I have my orders.”

“I said git out!”

“I take my orders from Cactus Charlie and the Judge. No one else!”

“Have it yer way then.” In a flash Big Ben grabs Pilar’s arm. He bends it behind her back so that there’s a sharp cry of pain. “In Texas I give the orders!” Big Ben says. “Not some two-bit judge!” He shoves Pilar and Little Weasel out of the room and closes the door! “Always have. Always will!” He turns toward Maria.

Outside, the Kid guns his bike and swings back toward the hacienda. He bears down on Cactus Charlie. His unexpected attack freezes everyone. He bowls over several henchmen. The bike mounts the steps of the veranda and crashes through the door and into the hacienda. It wheels into the dining room. Startled, the Judge and Colonel dive for cover before they can get off a shot. The Rainbow Kid spots the stairs. He steers his bike up them just as the Colonel pulls off a round. The bullet pings off the Kid’s shoulder. The motorbike rears up, almost tipping over. The Kid regains control. He slams through the door.

Big Ben is next to Maria on the bed. He leaps up, holding out both hands as if surrendering. The Kid rams into Big Ben. The impact slams the senator across the floor and off the wall.

The Judge and the Colonel reach the top of the stairs while Cactus Charlie bounds into the hacienda, pistol drawn.

“Maria!” the Kid hollers. He knows he can’t save her. Not this time. “Stay strong, Maria. I’ll be back to carry you off.” He guns the bike and flies through the window. The bike strikes the ground and, with bullets whistling past his head, the Kid speeds off.

Devil On A Motorcycle

The Judge calls a council of war in his office. Before they meet they lock Maria in one of the cell-like rooms in the dank basement. In the office are the Colonel, Cactus Charlie, Cesar Montero and Pilar, rubbing her aching arm and leering hatefully at Big Ben. In fact, *The Flying Scorpion* men are wary about Big Ben ever since he hurt Pilar. For the moment they overlook what he did to one of their own. Besides,

they're worried about his immense power that stretches across all Texas. But Big Ben's one of them now, caught in a deadly game of cat and mouse; and they know it and he knows they know it.

Cactus Charlie points out that the mysterious rider is too good for his henchmen. For them to catch him they need the world's best rider, one who's ruthless and cold-blooded. Cactus Charlie's got just the guy. Jumpin' Jack Dugan, ex-world champ who'd been stripped of his title because of steroid use and has since been traveling down the road of crime as the leader of a motorcycle gang called the "Devil's Own." Cactus Charlie says they don't need the gang, just Jumpin' Jack. Helicopter him in with his powerful motorcycle, twice the size of a dirt motorbike, and within 24 hours the mystery man will be history. The motorcycle, he explains, is armed with dual Gatlin machine guns with exploding bullets that'll annihilate anything within 500 yards. He's seen it in action when, as one of Jumpin' Jack's gang, they smuggled drugs across the border.

"When can you git him here?" the Judge urgently asks.

"With our helicopter? This afternoon."

"Then do it!"

The helicopter, tattooed with *The Flying Scorpion* logo, swirls up clouds of desert sand as it puts down next to the hacienda. A relieved Cactus Charlie greets Jumpin' Jack with a bear hug. The monster motorcycle rolls out the back of the throbbing helicopter. Its size and armaments draw impressive looks from everyone.

In the cells below the hacienda, Maria, her guitar in hand, is able to look across the stone passageway into the cell opposite her. That cell holds her cousin, Yolla.

"Oh, Maria, Maria," Yolla cries. "What will become of us?"

"We will find a way out of here," Maria assures her. She strums her guitar.

"Someone's trying to help me."

"A man?"

"Si! Like a wondrous rainbow of a man riding on a motorcycle. He's protected me twice already, and told me to stay strong. I pray I'll have the strength

and courage to hold on until he comes back for me. I know he'll come for us both, Yolla. You'll see."

"But one against so many?"

"Si," Maria says. She begins to sing a plaintive Mexican love song, her mind on Johnny, lost in the desert.

"Oh, Maria," cries Yolla softly in her cell

From afar, the Rainbow Kid watches the hacienda. He sees the helicopter and the flashy motorcycle aglitter in the sun.

Jumpin' Jack Dugan is a formidable hombre, the evil in him oozing from every pore of his steroid-muscled body. After introductions, he's ready to track down the Kid. The Judge orders him to use everything at his disposal.

"Use the helicopter! Use my riders! Use anything! Ten grand to the man who catches that creep and brings him here to me! I want to treat him to my style of West Texas justice!"

The Chase

The helicopter lifts off and in ever-widening circles searches the vast, empty desert around *The Flying Scorpion*. Jumpin' Jack straddles his motorcycle and watches the helicopter. Arrayed behind him, revving their dirt bikes, are six henchmen, the best riders under Cactus Charlie's command—each one now eager to catch the Rainbow Kid and collect the ten grand. It doesn't take the helicopter pilot long to spot him. He signals to the ranch, and Jumpin' Jack explodes over the rolling sand dunes like the ex-world champ he is. The henchmen trail after him.

What follows is a series of hair-raising, acrobatic chases with the Rainbow Kid barely escaping time after time, machine-gun bullets smashing so close to him that it seems a miracle he survives, while Jumpin' Jack's anger boils and boils until he starts to take dangerous chances. Meanwhile, seeing how the chase plays out, Cactus Charlie picks a strategic place for an ambush, hiding under a rock

outcropping that's concealed below a dune that he's sure the Rainbow Kid will sooner or later fly off. He uncoils a leather lariat and waits.

Not one to waste a good opportunity, Big Ben goes down to the cell to see Maria, the girl he compared to Helen of Troy. Pilar goes with him. She's ready for anything this time.

The Judge and Colonel sit on the front veranda, shotguns across their laps. In the widow's walk, Cesar Montero watches the spectacular chase. He hollers down to the twins a running account of the duel between the Kid and Jumpin' Jack Dugan. The Judge grows impatient.

As the chase goes on, Jumpin' Jack's had it with the Kid. He knows his reputation diminishes each time the strange rider eludes him. It's now or never. The Kid senses Jumpin' Jack's mood change. Silhouetted atop a dune he taunts him into recklessness. Jumpin' Jack tears after him, the henchmen follow as best they can. The Kid leads them toward a hidden canyon, his dust trail as clear as a jet's vapor in the sky. Jumpin' Jack gains, his machine guns spitting their exploding bullets across the desert. The Kid suddenly soars off the hidden canyon's rim, sailing safely across to the other side. Jumpin' Jack tries to match this feat. Halfway through his leap terror grips his face. He's not going to make it. A punk on a dirt bike has bested him. Behind him, like lemmings, the henchmen unwittingly jump off the rim. All crash into a raging river at the bottom of the canyon. The rapids carry Jumpin' Jack's big bike down river, bashing it over rocks and boulders. The only part of Jumpin' Jack that's bruised is his ego. He vows to take revenge on this mysterious person. After watching Jumpin' Jack and the henchmen splash into the river, the Kid slowly circles back toward *The Flying Scorpion*.

Cesar narrates the end of the chase. The Judge and Colonel rise from their chairs and cock their shotguns.

Meanwhile, Big Ben, standing in the shadows of the hacienda's basement, listens and watches Maria, in her cell, sing to Yolla. He is visibly moved by her voice. He then tries to coax her to come near the bars of the cell where he can talk to her in hushed tones. She refuses to budge. He casts an eye at Pilar. Then to Maria, he says, "I'll see ya later. I've got a proposition for you that I know you'll jump at."

As he goes upstairs to the veranda he sees keys to the cells hanging on a hook by the doorway. He takes the keys off the hook and heads back to the cell, whistling.

Beneath the rock outcropping, Cactus Charlie readies his lariat.

The Kid keeps coming toward the ranch. He flies off the rock outcropping and at that second Cactus Charlie lassoes him as if he were a stampeding steer. The lariat is pulled tight. A stunned Kid is snatched off his bike. Scrambling to his feet, he whirls around and stares into the barrel of Cactus Charlie's shotgun, its hammers cocked for action.

"Welcome to *The Flying Scorpion!*" cracks a smiling Cactus Charlie, still astride his own dirt bike "The Judge's been expectin' you!"

Then he revs up his dirt bike and takes off toward the ranch at a fast clip, dragging the Rainbow Kid behind him.

Hangman's Noose

Cesar informs the Judge and Colonel of the chase's latest twist, and the twins seem to relax a bit. He comes down from the widow's walk in time to see Cactus Charlie drag the Rainbow Kid up to the veranda. The Rainbow Kid staggers to his feet. Cactus Charlie tries to rip off the helmet. He can't do it. He viciously tugs at the stubborn strap. It still won't budge.

"Forget the helmet," growls the Judge. "We'll hang him from the stable rafter until he rots. Cesar, git the rope!"

Big Ben gets behind Pilar. Before she can react, he grabs her in a headlock. Using his free hand, he unlocks the cell door, shoves Pilar inside and grabs Maria by the wrist and hauls her out. He quickly shuts the cell door and locks it.

“Sorry, Pilar,” he says. Then he faces Maria. Maria backs away from him. Yolla screams.

Cactus Charlie and Cesar Montero push the Kid toward the stable. The Judge walks behind them, tying the rope into a hangman’s noose. A thick beam juts out from the stable loft. The Kid eyes it.

Cesar hisses, “We don’t call him the Hangin’ Judge fer nuthin’!”

The Kid struggles in vain. His heart pounds wildly as Cesar tosses the rope over the beam. The noose dangles in front of the Rainbow Kid.

“If you got any last words to say, I ain’t interested in hearin’ ‘em,” the Judge growls, anxious to get the job over with. “All I wanna hear is your last gasp!”

Inside the helmet a soothing voice says, “Stay calm, Johnny me lad. We Leprechauns always got a trick or two up our little green sleeves.”

Big Ben steps out on the veranda, pulling Maria with him. Clutching her guitar for all its worth, Maria tries to pull away from him, until she sees the noose as it closes around the Kid’s neck. She struggles as hard as she can, hoping that in some way she can stop the hanging. But it’s useless. Big Ben drags her off the veranda and shoves her into one of the SUVs parked nearby—one with the key in the ignition. No one pays any attention to Big Ben until the SUV roars away. The Judge turns quickly and, watching Big Ben take off, tells everyone to let the politician go. “It’s best he not witness this!” he says. He turns back and says to Cesar, “Hang him!”

An ominous crack of thunder startles everyone. They look up and see no dark clouds, only a red hawk in a slow circle, screeching out a warning. Yet they’re pelted by rain. Then, arcing over *The Flying Scorpion*, shines a rainbow. Transfixed by what they’re witnessing overhead, no one moves. Except the Kid. He slips out of the noose, the rope falling to the ground. One punch floors Cesar. Cactus Charlie swings

into action. He conks the Kid on the head. The helmet softens the blow and splits open Cactus Charlie's knuckles. He grimaces, shaking his hand. But only for a moment. He and the Kid now grapple in a desperate struggle. While they battle, the freed Mexicans come storming over a sand dune, yelling and hurling *Opuntia* cacti, shaped like dinner plates, but bristling with long, razor-sharp needles. One of the *Opuntia* strikes the Colonel in the cheek and sticks there. He howls in pain.

The Judge picks up a shotgun. He swings it toward the charging Mexicans.

"I'll blast you where you stand!" he yells. As he takes a step back, his left foot lands inside the hangman's noose, coiled on the ground like a rattlesnake.

A punch from Cactus Charlie sends the Kid sprawling at the Judge's feet. He sees the noose. With jackrabbit lightning he leaps up, grabs one end of the rope and hauls it down with a powerful jerk. The Judge tumbles backward, frantically pulling the shotgun's trigger. The blast from the shotgun bellows harmlessly. The noose is jerked so hard the Judge is lifted off the ground so that he dangles upside down. In a flash, the Kid secures his end of the rope to the barn door just as Cactus Charlie pounces on his back.

All around the two fighters, the teenagers battle the ranch hands. The melee turns one-sided.

Rumbling through the front gate of *The Flying Scorpion*, the SUV heads for Gulch City. Inside, Big Ben yells into a cell phone while Maria glares at him.

"I'm tellin' you Sheriff Pickens there's been a hangin', an outright murder, at Judge Jewel's ranch." Big Ben looks over at Maria. "Round up your men and get the heck out there. No, no, no! It's the Judge and his brother who done the hangin'! Just git yerself out there."

Maria tries to keep tears from flooding her eyes. First Johnny and now the Rainbow Kid—hanged! The image of him swinging from a rope is too much.

But the Kid is very much alive. He flips Cactus Charlie over his back. Looking at the Judge, bobbing upside down like a yo-yo, his face red, his breathing labored, the Kid laughs. "Is that your last gasp I hear, Judge?"

A thunderous karate kick to the solar plexus finishes off Cactus Charlie.

Liam's voice sounds inside the Kid's helmet. "Nice going. For someone who's never fought before you remind me of a young Muhammad Ali—float like a butterfly, sting like a bee."

The fight is over. The rain has stopped. Sirens wail in the distance as County Sheriff Paul Pickens and his deputies come storming toward the hacienda. Coming down off one of the sand dunes, a freed, but happy teenager pushes the Kid's motorbike.

"Now you must save Maria," Liam tells the Kid.

As the sheriff's car skids to a halt, the Kid jumps on his bike from behind, salutes the sheriff and, with a daring wheelie, speeds away.

The Train

With his Visor Vision, the Kid spots the SUV as it rolls down Gulch City's main street. It stops in front of the *Pecos, Sweetwater & Gotham* freight depot and rail yard. A long freight train, made up of fifty cars, stands ready to roll east. What the Kid doesn't know is that Big Ben is an influential stockholder in the *Pecos, Sweetwater & Gotham* as well as its chief director, has cronies up and down the line and on this particular train a wily engineer by the name of Stewie, who answers to his every beck and call, and Bull Dog McCoy, a lug of a railroad cop with a gruesome way of handling hobos.

By the time the Kid careens into Gulch City, Big Ben has put Maria and her guitar on the train. He orders Stewie and Bull Dog to make sure she gets to New York where his son, Ben Junior, who co-owns *Baja Joe's*, Manhattan's famous Mexican restaurant and nightclub known for its gorgeous waitresses, will pick her up. In fact, Big Ben's sent a number of dark-haired beauties to *Baja Joe's*. No wonder it's his favorite place to dine when he goes east on business or to see his son. Meanwhile, Big Ben has no idea that the Kid is after him. And the Kid has no idea Maria's on the train.

The train picks up speed on its way out of Gulch City. Maria, clutching her guitar, sits up front in the cab of the lead locomotive next to Stewie while Bull Dog patrols the freight cars, knocking off any hobos he finds. Maria's not shackled, as you might expect. There's no way she can jump out of the cab. She knows she's being taken to New York, and that news excites her in a strange way. Big Ben had been rough, but hadn't harmed her. All he said was that in New York she'd have a better life as a waitress and singer in *Baja Joe's*. He'll see her there on occasion to make sure she's all right. And so will his son, a young lad, he tells her, that she'll come to like very much. The thought frightens her. Then in her mind's eye she again sees the Rainbow Kid at the end of a hangman's rope. Her eyes well up with tears. She turns away from Stewie and watches the brown West Texas landscape glide by.

The Kid brings his bike to a sudden stop in front of the freight depot. At that moment, Big Ben steps through the depot's front door. In surprise, Big Ben drops his cigar.

"I thought you'd been hanged!"

"Hardly."

"Then I saved yer life by sending Sheriff Pickens to the rescue."

"Where's Maria?"

"Off to a better life. Why you so het up to save her? I suspect you musta known her down in old Mexico."

"Where you got her hidden?"

"I don't."

A train whistle reaches them from afar. Big Ben looks toward the sound.

"She's on that freight train!" the Kid says. He springs on to his bike. "I'll see you later!"

"It'll have to be on my turf!" Big Ben hollers after him. To himself he mutters, "Looks like I'll hafta take care of that flashy bike rider one of these days. He could become an annoyance to my plans."

Chasing after the train is a whole lot different than riding over sand dunes. On either side of the steel tracks there's no place for the Kid's bike to go. He rides between the rails. Every few feet he rocks over cross ties, jarring his teeth and snapping his head back and forth. The going's slow—too slow—and the distance between him and the train grows farther and farther.

From inside the helmet, Liam's voice tells him to ride the rail. "Like a tightrope walker, Johnny me lad."

As he clatters across a trestle, a river raging one hundred feet below him, the Kid jumps the bike onto a single, shining steel rail. The tires are the same width as the rail. Any mishap and it'll be curtains for the Kid. The bike wobbles for a split second, almost tossing the Kid over the side. Regaining his balance, he twists the gas levers on his handlebars. The bike bucks ahead, rising into a wheelie, and tears after the train.

Inside the cab, Maria wipes a tear from her eye. She shakes from her mind the vision of the Rainbow Kid dangling from the rope.

Stewie pats her on the knee. "Don't worry, honey," he says. "I've transported many a senorita to New York. Once they get used to the lifestyle there—you know, rich gentlemen and great tips, they forget about their drab life down in old Mexico. You will, too. Happens all the time, believe me. And you're sure to take a shine to Ben Junior. You'll see." Then he swears. In the cab's rearview mirror he spies the Kid bearing down on him. "Holy Moses, some nut on a motorcycle is trying to catch up to us. All dolled up in a colorful suit, he is."

A jolt of happiness sweeps through Maria. "He's not been hanged after all," she says to herself! She looks into the mirror and sees him. Her heart pounds happily.

Stewie gets on the horn to Bull Dog, yelling into a walkie-talkie. "Someone's chasin' us on a motorcycle. Better take care of him! You know how Big Ben gets if we screw up!" To Maria, "Honey, you know this character?" She doesn't answer him. "I bet you do," he says.

The Kid closes the gap between himself and the train. He pulls up within a few feet of the caboose. He springs from his bike, grasping the top of the metal railing. As he tries to swing aboard, the door to the caboose flies open. Bull Dog stands inside the frame, a baseball bat in his meaty paws. He looks at the Kid and with a ghoulish grin at the Kid's hands holding tightly to the railing. He brings the bat down hard, aiming to crush one of the Kid's hands. But the Kid lets go of the railing and grabs one of its metal uprights. In a single motion he vaults over the railing. His left foot sharply catches Bull Dog behind the knee and the big brute falls against the caboose door. Without stopping the Kid leaps atop the caboose and sprints toward the engine. Behind him he can hear Bull Dog's roar of anger and soon his heavy footsteps thundering after him!

Stewie yells into the walkie-talkie. "What in tarnation's goin' on?" No reply. Maria's heart pounds wildly. She again fears for the Kid. Stewie cranes his head out the window, looking for Bull Dog or the Kid.

The first car the Kid reaches is an oiler. Its rounded shape almost throws him off. He balances himself and makes it across to a freight car. The side door is open. He jackknives through the door, looking for Maria. It's empty. Above, he hears Bull Dog. The moment Bull Dog drops down, he bounds back up on the roof. For the next fifteen minutes the chase continues in this frenzied pattern—the Kid just barely out of the reach of Bull Dog and his menacing bat. Maria's not inside a single freight car. The Kid is frantic. Where can she be? Maybe she's not on the train after all!

Stewie keeps looking out the window, yelling into his walkie-talkie. Bull Dog doesn't have time to answer. His pursuit of the Kid is wearing him down.

A few cars from the engine, the Kid dances across a rounded oiler. He slips. His right foot gets wedged into the rung of a metal ladder welded to the oiler's side. He can't free it. A heavily panting Bull Dog yells into his walkie-talkie. "I got him on the Number 4 Oiler. I'm gonna crack open his skull!"

Maria gasps!

Bull Dog towers over the Kid, who's struggling to free his foot. Changing tactics, the Kid hooks his free leg around Bull Dog's ankle. With all his might he yanks Bull Dog's ankle toward him. Bull Dog's legs go out from under him. He bounces once on the oiler and then his body slowly slides off. He reaches for the Kid, misses him and vanishes over the side.

Stewie senses that something's gone awry. He snatches a pistol from under his seat. "I'll be right back, honey. Don't go nowhere." He opens the cab door and as he begins to climb out Maria sees her chance. She jumps up and shoves him all the way out. As he falls away, she says, "Adios, *Honey!*"

Without Stewie in control of the engine, the freight train rolls past a switch that should have been thrown and it's now barreling down the wrong track.

After freeing his foot, the Kid sneaks toward the engine—expecting more trouble. He's stunned to see Maria looking out the window. Still, he maintains caution, reasoning that she's not alone, that someone must be running the train.

Maria, meanwhile, is not sure if the Kid is on the train. Perhaps Bull Dog knocked him off—or worse.

The Kid slips quietly on to the roof of the engine. He leans over and looks through the window opposite Maria. He's stunned again. No one else is in the cab. They're on a run-away train! He swings down into the cab, just as she turns around. Maria wants to give him a huge hug, but isn't sure if that's the right the thing to do. And he wants to hug her, but refrains. So they stand there awkwardly.

Finally, Maria says, "Who are you?"

"I'm the Rainbow Kid," he says.

"The Rainbow Kid," she repeats. She suddenly remembers when she and Johnny had been kidnapped and they saw off in the distance a beautiful rainbow. "We must have hope!" Johnny had said. "The rainbow's our hope!"

“Johnny?”

“No. The Rainbow Kid.”

“Oh, it doesn’t matter.” And with that Maria runs into his arms.

The Leprechaun’s voice breaks their embrace. Of course, only the Rainbow Kid can hear it. “Johnny, you’re on a run-away train! A westbound freight is heading your way! There’s not much time! Take Maria and get off the train! Right now!”

The Kid steps back from Maria. “We’ve got to get out of here!” He grabs her hand and pushes open the cab’s door. The landscape sweeps by them. There’s no safe place to jump. “Up on the roof,” he says. He helps Maria to the top of the engine. They start running toward the back of the train, as quickly as they can. In the distance, the westbound freight blows its whistle in warning.

When they reach the caboose, the train rattles over a wooden trestle. In that instant, the Kid picks up Maria in his arms and leaps off the caboose. They fall a long way before plunging into a river. The Kid carries a drenched Maria to the riverbank. Moments later the two freights collide in an explosion that shakes the ground. Liam lets the Kid know that the engineers on the other freight both got off safely.

The Kid and Maria climb up on the tracks and begin the long hike back to his motorbike. They walk holding hands.

“I lost my guitar in the train wreck,” she says. Then she asks, “Are we going back to our village?”

“If you mean *your* village, yes you are.”

“Maybe I’d like to stay here. Get a job as a waitress. I could, you, know. The big man with the cigar told me I could. He wanted me to work in New York, but said if it didn’t workout there’s always work in Gulch City.” She feels the Kid’s hand tighten, as if he doesn’t trust the big man.

Now resting her head against his shoulder, Maria looks up and tries to see through his tinted visor, but can’t. “Who are you, really?” she asks. She truly hopes he’s Johnny.

At that exact moment a perfect rainbow arcs across the sky. “I’m the Rainbow Kid. Really.”