



# Hell's Hundred

*By Hal Leslie*

*Glenn Rogers, a sturdy fellow, not over twenty, faced almost impossible odds. Unarmed, outnumbered, cornered, his plight was desperate. But there was a smoldering fire of vengeance in his heart and a mountain of strength in his body. He had no scruples about killing these murderous snakes who rode him; he needed only a break. . . .*

**B**IG Mac Slade—better known throughout the Red Canyon country as “Black Mac”—shoved the ugly muzzle of his forty-five hard against young Glenn Rogers’ flat midriff.

“I ain’t foolin’ whatever!” he snarled wolfishly. “Out with it, now—and come clean!”

Under the high moon the one street of Los Astros town was a still river of silver sand. But beneath the roofed porch of the Oxbow Saloon, where four men stood,

darkness lay like a faintly luminous smear of deep purple.

Inside the Oxbow there was light, rough hilarity, and the hard clack of poker chips on wooden tables. But the street was deserted. Only the score of saddled horses drowsing at the big boon’s long hitch-rail were dumb witness to the drama of hot greed and cool defiance going forward on the shadowed porch.

A wash of light from a nearby window struck faintly upon Black Mac’s swarthy,

bearded face. His beady eyes were glittering like the eyes of a snake.

“Out with it!” he repeated savagely. “Come clean, or I’ll bust you wide open!”

Glenn Rogers, a shade under nineteen but built sturdy as a young oak, knew that he was in a tight fix. His back was hard against the rough ’dobe wall of the saloon, and his hands were high. But he didn’t crack. His level gaze locked with Black Mac’s, disregarding the two other men flanking Black Mac with eager hands hovering at their gun butts.

“Go ahead and bust me,” he said gamely. “You’ll never get what you want from me!”

Anger swept like the shadow of a buzzard’s wing across Black Mac’s face.

“All right, then—keep yore mouth shut, if that’s the way you want it! But keep it shut good and tight! One yip outa you and I’m thumbin’ th’ hammer.... Clem,” he snapped curtly to one of his hard-bitten henchmen, “you snag this jasper’s irons. We’ll take him out on th’ mesa and make him talk!”

“*Seguro*,” grunted Clem.

But before he could move to carry out Black Mac’s order, the door of the Oxbow opened from within and a finger of yellow light stabbed out across the porch. A gaunt man with a grizzled beard and rugged physique was for a moment silhouetted against the smoky glow as he emerged from the doorway.

“Dad!”

Glenn’s cry was sharp and clear. It brought the gaunt man to an abrupt halt. His head swung and his searching gaze picked out the group in the shadows. With three long strides he was among them.

Black Mac’s lip twisted, and with a quick, furtive move he threw his iron home in its holster. His two companions gave back an uneasy pace.

Glenn’s arms dropped, and the right

hand swept hotly toward his gun. Rand Rogers stayed the move with a quiet word.

“Easy, boy.... Keep yore shirt on.” He swung to the three men. “What’s going on here?” he demanded evenly.

“We was only funnin’,” muttered Black Mac. “Just throwin’ a little scare into him.”

“Yeah!” said Glenn icily. “Throwing a gun into my belly! If you call that funnin’, you polecat—”

Black Mac’s snarl cut him short. He surged close with fist doubled. Rebellion at the epithet overrode for the moment his innate cowardice.

But whatever he meant to do wasn’t accomplished. With a backhand sweep of his long arm, Rand Rogers caught him flush on the mouth with the heel of his gaunt hand and sent him reeling backward a pace. And it was mute testimony to the well-known prowess of old Rand Rogers’ gun hand that neither Black Mac nor his two henchmen made any move to draw an iron.

Muttering sullenly, like the ominous whispering of thunder over far hills, Black Mac stalked down off the porch, unhitched his blaze-faced sorrel, and climbed leather. His two companions followed suit. Then the three rode briskly out of town.

Side by side, Glenn and his father watched them go....

“What was that sidewinder’s play, son?” asked old Rand curiously. “He looked considerable like a coyote what’s been drove away from fresh meat.”

“And I reckon he feels like one, too,” said Glenn grimly.... And after a moment: “He saw you paying off for our grub and stuff with that dust, over to the store. I saw him watching you tilt your poke—and I had sort of a hunch that meant trouble in the wind. It come quicker’n I expected. Him and his two sidewinders was waiting here in the shadows for me. They backed me ’gainst the wall

before I had a chance to draw.”

“So,” observed old Rand thoughtfully. “Figgered yuh also had a poke on yuh. That what they was after?”

“No. They figgered we’d made a strike, somewhere. Black Mac aimed to find out where. Aimed to wangle it outa me.”

“Hell!” exclaimed old Rand sharply. “Yuh didn’t—”

“You bet I didn’t,” interrupted Glenn. “Black Mac coulda salivated me and I’d never yipped!”

Old Rand nodded with grim satisfaction. “I needn’t have asked yuh that question, son,” he said gently. “Yuh feelin’ th’ need of a little drink afore we hit leather?”

Glenn shook his head. “Not whatever. But I’m taking a pasear down to the store after a few more forty-fours for my rifle. They might come in handy.”

Old Rand shrugged. “I don’t reckon Black Mac an’ his gang will press us any,” he said quietly. “He’s yellower’n a skunk’s belly.”

“Give a skunk the smell of an aig and he’ll try to suck it,” said Glenn soberly. “I’m getting them cartridges.”

Old Rand thoughtfully curled a cigarette and watched the sturdy youngster swing off down the street toward the general store. The flare of the match as Rand lit his smoke revealed a gleam of pride in his steady, steel-blue eyes—eyes that he could have swapped for his son’s eyes and no man would have been able to tell the difference.

Glenn, a grim set to his lips, shortly returned from the store with his pockets heavy with cartridges. His paint pony and old Rand’s roan were at the Oxbow hitch-rail, saddle bags bulging with provisions. Rand snapped away the butt of his cigarette and joined Glenn there. And the two mounted and rode out of town.

Once clear, they swung westward

across the treeless mesa. They rode in silence under the high moon toward the far-lying Hell’s Hundred that was their destination.

THE sun rose, red as blood and as the breath of a dragon. Glenn and Rand were weaving steadily out into Hell’s Hundred—a vast domain of crag and canyon, butte and pinnacle, sand, lava outcrop, and salt flats that gleamed and shimmered until the eye ached from looking at them. A grim and forbidding land, and a man would have had to ride three days to circle it.

It was old Rand’s eye that happened to catch, at mid-forenoon, the thin bloom of dust rising far back on the trail. He directed Glenn’s attention that way and the two drew rein and considered.

“Comin’ along at a right smart jog, figgerin’ the heat,” observed old Rand calmly.

“Black Mac!” exclaimed Glenn impulsively. “I’ll bet!”

“Maybe so,” agreed Rand soberly. “But no three hawsses are makin’ that smoke. If’n it’s Black Mac, he’s shore ridin’ with plenty company.”

“Plenty company is about his size of guts,” commented Glenn sourly. “Anyways near an even game to buck, and his tail goes up like a scared antelope’s. Like last night.”

Old Rand nodded in grim confirmation of Glenn’s terse appraisal of Black Mac’s brand of courage. His eyes wrinkled against the distance.

“Shore looks like they’re a-trailin’ us—whoever they be,” he said. “Shouldn’t wonder but what yuh called th’ turn last night, at that.”

“I’ll find out,” said Glenn promptly. And he slid off his pinto and scrambled to the crest of a nearby hogback. And there he stood like a figure in bronze, immobile, watching while the dust bloom advanced and grew.

Old Rand curled a cigarette and

waited.... Glenn came down off his perch with hard lines about his mouth.

"It's him," he said laconically. "I made out his blaze-face in the lead. There's a dozen or so riders with him."

"Looks like he done collected his whole gang for th' party," grunted old Rand.

"He'll run into a party he ain't expecting," said Glenn savagely, pulling at his rifle in the saddle sheath. "We'll hunt a likely rock and smoke 'em a few!"

"No," said old Rand quickly. "That don't sound."

"Why not?" demanded Glenn. "If he aims to jump our prospect, he's shore got lead coming to him!"

"He's got to find it afore he can jump it," said old Rand quietly. "That's what he likely aims to do—track us down. Or else get hold of us an' try to wangle it outa us. If we put our backs up now, all he'd do is surround us with his gang an' maybe throw a little long lead to keep our heads down. He'd dry us out until we rattle.... No, son, we cain't afford to hole up for him."

The logic of this argument cooled Glenn's hot blood a bit. "What we going to do?" he asked.

"Well—I ain't one to dodge trouble when it comes up an' spits in my eye. But this is one time I figger it's best not to let it get within spittin' distance."

"You mean we'd better try to outfox 'em? Try to lose 'em?"

"Sounds reasonable, don't it, son?"

Glenn nodded and let his half-drawn rifle slide back into its sheath. "We'd better be moving," he said tersely.

They struck off at a tangent in the broken country. Threading arroyos, skirting outcrops and hogbacks, winding and twisting, taking advantage of every bit of ground that seemed likely not to take the hoof prints of their horses, they worked a wide curve back and away from their previous trail.

At the end of two hours of steady riding, Glenn climbed a pinnacle and scanned the back trail. There was no dust, but his keen vision detected a sun-flash that he suspected came from a bridle's silver trim. And a few moments later he spotted a rider or two.

"They're a-coming," he said grimly as he rejoined his father. "Evident they've fanned out, and they're smelling us out like a pack of hounds."

Rock-jawed old Rand led off at another tangent, driving deeper into the grim heart of Hell's Hundred. Glenn guessed, and rightly, that his father's object was to prevent any of the spread-out gang from heading them.

The game went on.... Occasionally Glenn climbed to some vantage point and surveyed the surrounding terrain. Sometimes he caught a fleeting glimpse of some moving object in the distance. More often he saw nothing.

The sun swung low. Sweat began to dry and cake on the two tired horses. For a long time there had been not the slightest sign of pursuit along the back trail.

Rand was ahead, Glenn riding a few paces behind. They were headed toward the mouth of a draw, some three hundred yards away, where aspens grew thickly and where there was a tiny spring that would freshen their tired horses.

Rand drew rein, turned in the saddle and scanned the back trail. Glenn looked that way, too.

"No sign, Dad," he said. "I reckon we've—"

He was interrupted by a queer, coughing grunt from Rand's roan—quickly followed by the echoing crack of a rifle.

Glenn jerked his head around sharply, saw the roan crumpling. Old Rand made a valiant effort to clear himself; but the spryness of youth was no longer in him, and he was caught fairly under the fall of his horse, one

long leg twisted beneath.

Glenn was off his pinto like a cat, tugging at his father's shoulders. He pulled him clear just as a bunch of wild riders came barging out from the mouth of the distant draw.

Old Rand tried to get up—fell back with a repressed groan. "My ankle— plumb twisted outa shape, son," he said quietly.

"We'll ride double!" cried Glenn, and stooped to lift the stricken man. "Damn their hearts!"

But old Rand reached up a long arm and shoved him away, almost savagely. "We'd never make it, son. Not double. Fork yore hawss an' drift— pronto!"

"I ain't leaving you, Dad!"

"Got to!" asserted old Rand tersely. "They'd get us both if we burden yore pinto thataway!"

"I'm staying!" declared Glenn. He lunged for his sheathed rifle, jerked the weapon free, turned—and found himself looking down into the unwavering round muzzle of his father's six-gun....

"Dad!"

"Hit leather!" Old Rand's voice was hard and brittle. "Get yoreself away alive and you'll have a chance at Black Mac.... What are yuh waitin' for! ... Damn yuh! get goin' —or I'll shore salivate yuh!"

Glenn choked. He looked at the rapidly approaching riders; looked at his father. Old Rand's face was like granite, but he couldn't keep his eyes like that. Yet, there was no mistaking his determination....

Glenn knew that his father was right, knew that the only chance to get Black Mac was to try to make a getaway now. He realized, too, that his father was sending him away because he loved him.... He stooped swiftly. Their hands met in a fierce, hard grip. Then, with blurred eyes, he leaped into his leather and gave the pinto steel.

Looking back, he saw his father, belly down, coolly throwing lead at the oncoming riders. A horse reared; a man fell. Glenn twisted in the saddle and began to work the lever of his rifle.

A horse went down, its rider somersaulting. Another man sagged in the saddle. And the rifles of Black Mac's gang began to bark. Lead whined around Glenn's ears.

Cursing, he bent low and roweled the pinto. Over his shoulder he saw four riders coming after him, hotfoot. The others had piled off where lay Rand Rogers and his dead roan.

The pinto crashed through a mesquite thicket and a moment later was throwing sand along a wide arroyo.... Glenn drew rein after rounding a bend and listened. He heard no hoof-beats following.

He dismounted, left his horse blowing, spread-legged, with trailed reins. He scrambled up the slope of the arroyo to the crest of a low ridge. He saw smoke, back there where his father had fallen, and a dark huddle of men around a newly-kindled fire. He knew full well what that portended. A hot cinch ring, or a rustler's running iron....

Half-blind with rage, he ran back to his horse, flung himself savagely into saddle, and rode pounding back down the arroyo. He had no thought of anything except to reach his father....

Snorting, blowing, wild-eyed, the pinto crashed through the mesquite. And just as it came clear, Glenn felt himself jerked violently from the saddle. He hit the ground at the end of thirty feet of taut rawhide with a thud that all but knocked him senseless.

Before he could make a move, three men were on him. They disarmed him and hauled him roughly to his feet, then tied his hands behind him with an end of the riata.

His pinto had halted when he fell.

They boosted him into his own saddle. With one leading the horse, another riding alongside with a dally of the riata around his saddle horn, and the third bringing up the rear with a drawn six-gun at Glenn's back, they herded him along to the spot where he had begun his fight.

Glenn went white when he saw what was going forward there. He mouthed an inarticulate cry and tried to throw himself from the saddle. But two men held him with iron hands, and the third jabbed the muzzle of his gun sharply between his shoulder blades.

Black Mac was hunkered down at the fire, where a running iron was heating. Nearby, four men were holding old Rand, spread-eagled on his back. They had torn his vest and shirt away. And across his bare chest showed long red welts. His gaunt face was contorted with agony, but his jaw was clamped tight as a steel trap.

Big Mac looked up. His face was an ugly mask.

"Yank that young squirt off his horse, Clem, and lay him out!" he ordered with a snarl. "I reckon he'll talk!"

Glenn's captors hauled him roughly off his horse. He started to curse Black Mac, but a savage blow from Clem's knotted fist drove the words back between his teeth and sent him crashing backward, dazed and limp.

Black Mac plucked the running iron from the fire. It glowed red and angry in the thickening dusk. Black Mac lunged to his feet and started menacingly for Glenn.

"Stop!" Old Rand's voice rang out sharp and clear. "Lay off that boy, Slade! I'm talkin'."

Black Mac wheeled, evil triumph on his face. "Talk, then!" he snapped. "And talk straight!"

"Don't you do it, Dad!" cried Glenn thickly through bruised lips. "Don't you tell him! Let the yellow-bellied skunk do his damndest—I'll never squeal!"

Old Rand twisted his head and looked

over at Glenn. In Rand's eyes appeared the same expression that they had held when he'd ordered Glenn to flee. Glenn was all he had. For ten years he'd been mother and father to the boy. Had watched him grow into the edge of manhood, strong and clean as a die, and afraid of no man that walked. Ever since Glenn had been big enough to fork a horse, they'd ridden trail together. Hard years and better ones. Punching cows. Putting horn on their palms from the handles of picks and shovels. Sharing beans and flapjacks beside many a lonely campfire. Until, just a month ago, they'd found their first real prospect... And now—

"It's all right, son," he said quietly. "Gold don't matter whatever .... Slade, I'm givin' yuh my location—on one condition."

"Name it," snapped Black Mac.

"That yuh keep yore hands off my boy—an' let him go."

"You ain't got no fret on that score," said Black Mac quickly. "If you talk straight, I'm releasin' both of you. But if you try to run a blazer on me—well, that boy of your'n is due for a damn' sight worse dose than I've give you! Savvy?"

Old Rand nodded. "I aim to come clean, Slade," he said evenly.

And he did.

Despite Glenn's protests, he gave Black Mac true and detailed directions as to where to find the gold prospect. He would have done anything to save Glenn from Black Mac's torturing hands.

And when old Rand was done, Black Mac grinned evilly and said: "I'm a man of my word, Rogers. I'm *releasin'* you, right now."

And with that, he calmly drew his gun and shot old Rand Rogers dead where he lay....

WITH the first faint break of true dawn, Black Mac and his ruffians were on the move. Black

Mac himself rode ahead, with a leather-faced hombre called Dave beside him. Behind these two rode Glenn Rogers, under the watchful eye of the red-bearded giant, Clem. The rest of the bunch, seven hard-bitten riders—one of them with his arm in a sling—brought up the rear. Ten ruthless men bound for bloody gold....

Glenn was atop his own pinto. His ankles were roped together under the brute's belly, his hands snagged tight to the saddle horn. His face was curiously hard. That twilight tragedy and the long, long night while he lay thinking, thinking, had done something to Glenn Rogers. It had tempered him as steel is tempered in a fire. He was no longer a youth on the edge of manhood; he was a man—hard, alert, dangerous.... And the burden of his thoughts, as he rode with cold eyes boring into the back of the man who had killed his father, was vengeance....

At high noon the cavalcade turned into the mouth of the box canyon where Glenn and his father had made their strike. And a couple of miles up-canyon they came upon the series of prospect holes that zigzagged up a hard gravel slope toward the base of a grim cliff that probably housed the mother lode.

A little way beyond, beside the flow of a small spring, lay a great heap of raw gravel which the two had laboriously carried from the prospect holes to wash for colors. The spring flow supported a small area of grass before it was sucked dry by the sands of the canyon floor. Nearby was one lone cottonwood tree, and beneath it stood a weathered tent.

Black Mac surveyed the prospect holes with appreciative satisfaction.

"Must be good, boys," he observed. "Must promise a neat lode—to make a man keep a shut mouth under hot iron, th' way I laid it on—"

"Damn you!" cried Glenn, white-

lipped. He surged wildly against his bonds. "If I could get a hand on you I'd fix you for what you done to my dad!"

Black Mac sneered. Then with a lightning fast move, he drew his gun. "One of them holes will make a right nice place to bury you!" he said. And with slow deliberation he lifted the muzzle of the gun until it was pointed squarely at Glenn's midriff.

Glenn stiffened to meet the expected shock of the slug, but it didn't come.... And after a long moment, Black Mac laughed harshly and chocked the weapon home in its holster.

"Too soon," he said. "No use of us blisterin' our hands, boys, when there's a healthy young jasper like this one to hunt th' lode for us. Put him in that top hole an' throw him a shovel! And Clem, you set up there with yore Winchester an' see that he don't lay down on th' job!"

The sun was hellish. It spilled liquid fire on Glenn's bent back as he toiled in the last prospect hole that he and his father had started. Clem kept him at it under the muzzle of a thirty-thirty. And Glenn worked, his jaw tight and curiously suggestive of old Rand's. If the odds were not quite so great....

Black Mac and the rest of his ruffians lazed in the tent and in the shade of the cottonwood, curling cigarettes, talking, napping.

At mid-afternoon the guard was changed. And a couple of hours later Black Mac set Glenn to carting the dug gravel to the spring flow and to panning it there.

No colors showed. Black Mac cursed and put him at digging another hole, at an angle up the slope. He kept Glenn at it until it was too dark to swing a shovel.

They fed him a supper of scraps, like a dog, and then trussed him securely for the night....

Another day of muscle-cracking toil lay ahead.

At mid-forenoon Black Mac came and stood on the edge of the hole. Glen leaned on his shovel and addressed the surly gang leader.

“You ain’t in any great hurry to snag that lode, are you?”

“Meanin’ what?” snapped Black Mac.

“Meaning, if I was in your place, I’d get what I was after as quick as I could,” said Glenn calmly, “before somebody happens along and puts a crimp in th’ game.”

Black Mac sneered. “Tired diggin’?”

“Not whatever,” asserted Glenn. “I ain’t never tired until I’ve finished what I start. But I figure a stick of dynamite now and again would be some quicker’n a shovel. You’re going to need it, anyway, when you get up under th’ cliff at th’ top of th’ slope where I reckon th’ lode is hiding. That’s th’ way me and dad figured it—and we aimed to pack a load of dynamite out from Los Astros, next trip we made. If you an’ your damn’ buzzards—”

“Shut yore mouth an’ lay onto that shovel handle!” snapped Black Mac.

Glenn fell to work silently. Black Mac turned and walked away, but his sour visage was thoughtful. ... And half an hour later he was back.

“Sam,” he said to the guard, “me and some of th’ boys are goin’ in to Los Astros. We need grub, an’ maybe I might bring back some dynamite. We’ll show up around sundown tomorrow. I’m leavin’ you an’ Clem an’ Dave to keep this jasper workin’. Start him on another hole in th’ mawnin’.”

“Right,” grinned Sam. “He’ll dig.”

At the heel of the afternoon, Clem put Glenn to washing gravel. Dave and Sam were napping in the tent. A few flakes of color showed in Glenn’s pan, then finally a nugget about the size of a lima bean. Clem pocketed the nugget avidly, with a grunt of satisfaction. And he didn’t reveal the find to his two fellow

ruffians.

Next morning, at the start of a new prospect hole, Glenn cocked an eye up at the base of the cliff and probed Clem with a tentative word.

“Have to strike a whale of a lode, I reckon, for you to get much outa this deal.”

Suspicion flowed over Clem’s heavy features. “What yo’ drivin’ at?” he demanded.

“Figure it out yourself. A nine-way split, after Black Mac takes his cut, likely won’t be much...” Glenn looked significantly toward the tent, where Sam and Dave were cleaning up the breakfast dishes. “How about you an’ me talking turkey?” he suggested. “We can—”

Clem scowled and cut him short by jabbing the muzzle of his rifle into his ribs. “Get goin’ with that shovel!”

The sun rolled high, lancing Glenn’s bent back with shafts of fire. Clem swore at the heat and called Sam up from the shade of the cottonwood to stand guard a spell.

Black Mac had fallen for Glenn’s suggestion about the dynamite and posted off to Los Astros with six of his men. But what of it, Glenn reflected bitterly. The odds were reduced, all right, to a fighting chance—if he could only get a chance to fight...

The hole deepened, slowly. Dave took a turn with the Winchester. And shortly after mid-afternoon Clem relieved Dave.

The sun crawled lower. The hole was deeper than Glenn’s height now; its rim was more than a foot above his head. Clem was sitting aside, out of sight, but his head and shoulders were shadowed on the east rim.

Glenn’s eyes began to speculate on that shadow. It would be near time, now, for Black Mac and his crowd to return. God! If only he had a gun! ...

Suddenly Glenn’s eyes narrowed. He turned his back on the east rim and Clem’s shadow there, and his shovel began to fly. He

worked with guarded intensity, lest too greatly increased activity should arouse Clem's curiosity.

The trap was set. Glenn put down his shovel and picked up a pebble. "Holy smoke!" he exclaimed—and his simulation of surprise and exultation was perfect. He whistled with evident amazement.

The shadow came to quick life. Clem bellied down at the edge of the hole. His heavy, inquiring face appeared there beside the outthrust barrel of his Winchester.

"What yo' found?" he demanded.

"A nugget—big as a road-runner's aig!" said Glenn.

"Hand it over!" growled Clem.

Glenn clutched the pebble defensively. "You've got one," he said. "I'm keeping this one myself."

"Th' hell yo' are! Hand it over, I say!" Glenn shrugged hopelessly. He lifted his hand slowly, reluctantly. Clem's cupidity made him reach farther down with his grimy paw. The move brought his weight nearer the edge of the hole.... With a sudden crumbling, the deep undercut that Glenn had made there gave way. Into the hole Clem fell headlong, rifle and all, too surprised to cry out.

He hit the bottom on his face, squirmed, spat gravel, and clawed wildly for his six-gun. Glenn's shovel suddenly came down, a whistling streak, and cracked his skull like an egg.

With swift, sure fingers Glenn transferred the dead man's gunbelt and forty-five to his own lean waist. He picked up the rifle and thumped its barrel free of sand. Then he listened breathlessly....

There was no sound from the camp. Evidently the ill-fated Clem's disaster had not been observed. Glenn braced the shovel, stood on it, and cautiously reconnoitered.

There was no sign of either Sam or Dave. Evidently they were in the tent. Certainly they

had not left the vicinity of the camp, for their horses, along with Clem's mount and Glenn's own pinto, were hobbled on the short grass beyond the tent.

Cautiously Glenn climbed out of the hole. And a moment later he was sheltered in another, farther down the slope. A shallower hole, only shoulder deep.

He didn't delay action. He sent a searching bullet from the rifle ripping into the tent, low. It brought immediate results in the shape of a wild yell of pain and a sudden commotion. Sam staggered dazedly into view, cursing, one arm limp, the other stabbing at his holster. Glenn laid him down with a thirty-three slug through the head.

Glenn saw Dave snaking swiftly along the ground from the rear of the tent toward the bole of the cottonwood. The rifle cracked again. One of Dave's legs jerked convulsively; then, by a prodigious effort, he gained shelter behind the tree. A moment later a slug from his six-gun kicked gravel into Glenn's tense face.

Glenn ducked. Evidently Dave wasn't hit badly enough to prevent him from being a very lively menace. Glenn proved it by thrusting the crown of his Stetson above the rim of the hole and getting a neat vent through the crown.

Although Glenn had a rifle; the advantage of location was Dave's. Glenn's head was down and Dave was alert. Glenn cursed softly. It looked as if he'd have to stay holed up until Black Mac and his gang arrived to surround and finish him off....

Suddenly a grim, humorless twist showed on his lips. Why the devil hadn't he thought of it before! Why hadn't he remembered that there was a hornets' nest high up among the branches of the cottonwood! He backed against the far side of the hole, slowly rose. The topmost branches of the tree came into view, then more of them.

And finally he saw it—a gray blur among the green.

His first shot tore half the nest away. His second severed the small limb supporting it. It fell to the ground.

A moment later he heard Dave yell. He rose swiftly, saw the man floundering away from the trunk of the tree, beating frantically at his head with both hands, oblivious to everything except the angered hornets that were swarming round him. Glenn's rifle cracked, and Dave was suddenly still.

Glenn wasted no time. This was a box canyon, and he knew that he'd have to get out before Black Mac and his returning riders should reach the mouth. Glenn scrambled out of the hole and ran to the tent.

He found there his own six-gun, which he belted on along with Clem's.

His own saddle gun was nowhere to be seen, but he still had the thirty-thirty. And he was lucky enough to find an unopened box of twenty cartridges for this weapon.

A hasty search of the dead Clem's pockets yielded half a dozen more cartridges. He thought of annexing Dave's six-gun, and Sam's. But he decided against it; he had weight enough to carry. Only two things more he took from the dead—a sack of tobacco and a handful of matches.

He wanted a smoke like the very devil, but he didn't pause to roll a cigarette. He gathered up his saddle, which lay with the three others beneath the cottonwood, and ran for his pinto. He screwed down the rigging hurriedly. But before he mounted, he freed the three hobbled horses and started them high-tailing up the canyon; if anything should possibly happen to delay or prevent the return of the bandits, he didn't want good horseflesh to be left hobbled out in that desolation.

He little suspected, as he swung into leather and went pounding down the canyon, that his bit of thoughtfulness for dumb brutes was destined to figure tremendously in the

happenings of the hours to come.

GLENN was half a mile or so from the mouth of the canyon, traversing a long bottle-neck where the walls on either hand rose bleak and sheer from a litter of gigantic fragments of fallen rimrock, when fate slipped a tight cork in the bottle.

From around a shoulder of the canyon wall, some four hundred yards away, Black Mac and his men appeared. Riding leisurely, they hazed a loaded pack horse ahead of them.

They spotted Glenn at the same moment he discovered them. Glenn drew his pinto to a desperate sliding stop. And with a collective yell that carried deadly menace up along the intervening stretch of blue dusk, the ruffians quickened their horses.

Glenn realized that he was bottled for fair, knew that there was no going forward or retreating. Thought and action went hand in hand; he kneed the pinto sharply to the left and sunk a smart rowel.

In three startled leaps the pinto was among the sandstone fragments. And two more jumps carried horse and rider behind a great boulder that was big enough to shelter both. Glenn tossed the reins and hit the ground with rifle at full cock. And a moment later the canyon was re-echoing to the spiteful bark of the thirty-thirty.

Glenn's hasty shooting from behind his solid rampart wrought no particular damage. But it had the result he had hoped for; it checked the charge of Black Mac and his riders before it was fairly under way.

One horse went down, throwing the bunch into confusion. Its rider extricated himself from tangled leather and ran for shelter behind a nearby rock. He made it safely and plunged out of sight. His companions, yelling imprecations, scattered to either flank of the canyon and took the handiest cover. Within ten seconds not a man was visible—nor any horse, except the dead

one and the pack animal.

This pack brute, startled by the blended roaring of guns that broke out behind it, took panic and came pounding on alone. Glenn, crouching behind his boulder where lead was spattering viciously, saw the frightened animal, nostrils flaring, snorting alarm, go tearing past to disappear up-canyon.

For a couple of minutes the firing was hot and furious. Glenn made no effort to reply. He assured himself that his pinto was at a safe stand, then lay low with a grim twist to his lips. And as he broke out the fresh box of cartridges and refilled the magazine of the thirty-thirty, he gave sober thought to his situation.

The words of his father when they had first spotted Black Mac on their trail and Glenn had wanted to take cover and do battle, came back to him now: "... maybe throw a little long lead to keep our heads down... dry us out until we rattle..."

Well, here he was in just that predicament. But at least he had enough lead to make things interesting for Black Mac and his men before their odds of six to one must finally overwhelm him.

When the firing eased off, Glenn chanced a quick look down the canyon. He saw nothing except the dead horse. But some alert bandit spotted him and sent a rifle bullet winging up through the deepening dusk to kick stinging particles of rock dust into his face. He managed to turn loose a couple of retaliatory shots before a second fusillade forced him to duck hurriedly.

As dusk deepened it became apparent to Glenn that Black Mac didn't intend to starve or dry him out. A light wind was moving up-canyon and it brought sounds to Glenn's ears: the clash of a rifle barrel on stone, the roll of a rock, a harsh voice, the words indistinguishable. Black Mac and his men were moving in, stealthily shortening the

distance. Glenn suspected that they meant to charge his position at dark.

He strove again to catch sight of a target. Belly down, he peered stealthily around the boulder, rifle poked ahead and ready. And he did catch glimpse of a dim figure slipping from one rock to another. He took a quick snap shot that connected. The fellow yelled sharply, staggered, fell and lay still.

Glenn made the grim tally under his breath: "That's four! Leavin' five." He then considered the possibility of escape under cover of darkness. Success was remote. Retreat would only mean another stand somewhere up the canyon. There was no scaling those walls, anywhere. Might as well stay where he was and fight it out....

Soft darkness was beginning to flow like a slow tide along the bottle-neck. And with it came the charge Glenn had expected. But he was alert. He poured thirty-thirties at the lancing gun flashes along either wall until the magazine was empty. He dropped the hot weapon, yanked out both six-guns, and turned them loose.

His fire was so rapid, so hot, that it broke the charge. The ruddy belches of those guns out front were suddenly lowered, telling him that his besiegers had dropped among the rocks. He reloaded swiftly with fingers that never fumbled. He wondered if he had connected with any of his attackers. He covertly studied the location of the slower gunfire, counted stabs of flame in five separate places, two on one side of the bottle-neck and three on the other. The odds were still five to one.

The bandits were working closer, ever closing in. Glenn held them back, retarded their progress, with an occasional well-placed bullet. Yet he realized, as his precious ammunition slowly dwindled, that sooner or later they'd be close enough to dare another charge.

It was very still now. Glenn was straining his ears for sounds out front, when he heard a sound behind him—the faint scrape of a shod hoof on stone. He wheeled alertly.

Sounds of hoofs quickening. And a moment later the pack horse, alone and seeking the company of its kind—which it had not found at the camp up-canyon—came ambling wearily in to rub noses with the pinto.

For a moment Glenn thoughtfully regarded the misshapen loom of the pack. Then a swift eagerness, a sudden hope, animated him. He moved quickly, silently, in the darkness. His flying fingers began to work at the diamond hitch that held the pack.

OUT there among the rocks Black Mac looked at the rapidly brightening sky and cursed irritably. Once the moon should come to illumine their position, the task of clearing a way to the gold would be doubly difficult. He ordered a charge.

Hugging the base of the wall, three on one side and two on the other, they ran forward, darting gun flames leaping from outstretched hands. The night was rent by the roar and clamor of those five belching weapons.

But, strangely, there was no answering fire from Glenn's position. Black Mac noticed this and craftily slowed, wondering why.

The four were converging. Shooting wildly, yelling now a throaty triumph, they were within ten yards of their objective. Black Mac was as many yards behind them.

A faint flare, as of a struck match, lit the wall alongside the boulder for a moment. And a split second later a tiny eye of red, spitting sparks, cut a swift arc from behind the boulder and landed squarely in front of the charging men.

Black Mac checked himself, turned desperately to run. But before he had taken three steps the night echoed with mighty thunder. And, as if a sudden giant hand had smote him on the back, he sprawled headlong,

his weapon flying....

That blast of buckling air flowed around and over the big boulder, making Glenn's ears ring but not harming him. He rose and scaled the rampart like a mountain cat. He stood there on its crest, legs spread, a gun in each hand, alert to finish with lead, if needful, the work of that bomb he'd built by tying together four sticks of dynamite and a short length of fuse from the pack.

The moon sailed clear of the rim-rock, pouring a flood of green-white light into the rocky cut. It revealed to Glenn a ragged depression out there in front of the boulder where the dynamite had let go—where the four men had been charging almost shoulder to shoulder. A basket would have been needed to collect them.

Glenn's eye traveled beyond. He saw a bulky figure getting dazedly to its feet. His gun swung that way—but he stayed his finger on the trigger, for that figure was Black Mac.

Glenn leaped down, skirted the hole, and confronted the killer of his father.

The two faced each other. Black Mac looked queerly bewildered, but he was recovering fast. And he read sure doom in the posture of the slightly crouched, steel-hard figure before him.

"I ain't heeled!" Black Mac kept repeating over and over.

Glenn made no audible comment. But his grim young face expressed bitter contempt. He tossed one of his two six-guns at Black Mac Slade's feet.

"Pick it up!" he ordered.

Black Mac stared at the six-gun glinting at his feet in the moonlight.

Glenn's iron chocked home in its holster.

"Pick it up, Slade!"—relentlessly.

Black Mac's tongue flicked along his lower lip.... His eyes gleamed, calculating chances.... With a sudden desperate move, he stooped and swept up the six-gun.

Glenn waited until the swift muzzle of Black Mac's weapon was almost upon him. Then his gun hand—and it might have been Rand Rogers' own, the speed with which it moved—streaked holsterward.

The two guns roared almost as one—Glenn's a shade before Black Mac's.

The heavy slug struck Black Mac squarely on the breast bone. He staggered, braced his legs, and tried again to lift the

smoking gun in his hand. But it was no use. His fingers relaxed. The weapon dropped. He wheeled slowly around and fell crashing.

Glenn bolstered his own smoking weapon. As he stood looking down upon the lifeless huddle in the moonlight that had been the killer of his father, he unconsciously dusted the palms of his hands, one against the other, as if to rid them of a stain that was unclean.