

Joaquin Murietta, The Bandit of the Goldfields

retold by
S. E. Schlosser

Joaquin Murietta and wife Rosita lived with his older brother Carlos in California. The three Mexican immigrants were living on a small, successful farm and the men were also working a claim near Hangtown. However, the other miners living nearby tried to run them off, telling them that it was illegal for Mexicans to pan for gold or hold a claim. The Murietta brother's ignored their threats and continued to live peacefully on their farm and work in the gold-fields.

Enraged by this flagrant disregard for the American laws, a drunken mob attacked the little family late one night, shooting Carlos, and then ravishing and murdering Rosita while Joaquin was forced to watch. The mob bound the Mexican to a stake in the yard, where they beat him with a whip. He strained angrily against his bonds, but finally his wounds overcame him and he slumped senseless against the post. The mob left him for dead, but when a few sober citizens came the next day to help the Mexican family, Joaquin was already gone.

A few months later, a dark-bearded, long-haired stranger with cold black eyes set up a gambling establishment in Hangtown. Shortly after the stranger's arrival in town, miners started going missing, one after another, and their dead bodies were turning up in unlikely places. All of them had their ears cut off. A few of the smarter folks realized that each of the dead miners had been a party to the illegal slaying of Carlos and Rosita Murietta. There were thirty-one men in the mob that night, and fourteen were now dead. When this became known, the other seventeen men scattered to the winds overnight; but one by one, they

were hunted down, killed, and their ears were cut off.

Finally, a miner who had once had a claim near to the Murietta brothers came to Hangtown and identified the owner of the gambling establishment as Joaquin Murietta. His cover blown, the Mexican fled into the wilds and started to gather other wild and restless Mexicans to him. Soon he was the head of a mighty gang, riding a black stallion and robbing the Americans of their gold. Dangling from the bandit's saddle was the string of dried ears taken from the members of the mob who killed his wife and brother. Together with his bandits, Joaquin Murietta robbed the miners of a million dollars in gold. Yet for all his ruthlessness, Joaquin was kind to his fellow Mexicans, and would never turn down a friend who was in need. He gave his riches liberally to the poor, and avenged those who were oppressed. In turn, they sheltered him from the law, and called blessings down upon him.

Travel in the goldfields was made nearly impossible by the threat of Joaquin Murietta and his gang, so California's governor hired a group of rangers to track down and kill Joaquin. Led by a Captain Love, the rangers ambushed Joaquin and his men, and shot the Mexican bandit and his horse to death. Captain Love decapitated the Mexican bandit and put his head into a jar filled with alcohol, which he paraded through the streets of San Francisco. The head was finally placed behind the bar of the Golden Nugget Saloon in San Francisco, where it leered at the folks who came there to drink until the saloon was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake.

To this day, Joaquin's headless ghost continues to ride through the gold fields, terrorizing all who crossed his path with cries of: "Give me back my head."

Joaquin's ghost tries to reclaim its head from the owners of the Golden Nugget Saloon in [Spooky California](#) by S.E. Schlosser.