

JEFFREY HUNTER, A BANDIT WITH BLUE EYES

written by Mirella Ferrari

In Madrid, Jeffrey Hunter is portraying Joaquín Murrieta, the famous Mexican bandit.

This is Jeffrey's 33rd movie. The audience remembers him, mostly, from his excellent performance as Jesus.

Page 1, upper photo: Jeffrey Hunter as Joaquín Murrieta

Very near Torrelodones, where the road starts to rise and the mountains become sharper and clearer, there is a little village much like the ones we see in westerns. It has a saloon, a bank, a barber shop and the sheriff's office. It looks like a typical western village, and one has the feeling that a group of frantic galloping cowboys is going to show up at any moment, shooting like crazy.

Page 1, lower photo: For the shooting of this film, a little village in the far-west style was built, where Jeffrey can be seen riding on his horse.

The views are rough and rocky. In this village, Jeffrey Hunter and his co-stars Arthur Kennedy, Diana Loris, Sara Lezana, Roberto Camardiel and Pedro Osinaga, are filming the story of Joaquín Murrieta, one of the end-of-the-last-century's most famous Mexican bandits. It is a story of good and evil, injustice and killings. It was previously filmed in 1935, starring Warner Baxter. Now, "Pro Artis Iberica" productions is filming the adventures of Joaquín Murrieta in Madrid, with the great actor Jeffrey Hunter in the leading role.

When we arrived on the set, we found Jeffrey rehearsing a scene inside a saloon: he's wearing a red poncho and a yellow Mexican straw hat, and he's shooting at one of the villains of the movie, who falls dead at his feet. Even though it's a short, easy scene, director George Sherman asks to repeat it a few more times; every time Jeffrey Hunter pulls the trigger, his blue eyes glare devilishly, filled with anger. His eyes, of a sky-blue color, almost transparent, are the first thing one notices about him. Those who watched "King of Kings", where he played Jesus Christ, have not forgotten them.

"That movie was also filmed in Spain," says Jeffrey, "It's been my best role until now, and I still get hundreds of letters every day, relating to my performance as Jesus. It's been almost two years since I last appeared in a motion picture, and the audience remembers me mainly from my role in 'King of Kings'."

"Two years of inactivity?"

"Not at all! Two years on television. I've played Temple Houston, a good man who fights against injustice, on a T.V series. Two years of work, twenty-six episodes.. Temple Houston has been a big hit in the USA."

Henry Herman McKinnies - that is Jeffrey's real name - was born in New Orleans. He lives now in Santa Monica, with his wife Dusty Bartlett and their two sons, Henry, age four, and Scott, one. He's already done thirty-two movies, and he intends to appear on Broadway next year, in a comedy that will begin his work in the theatre. Jeffrey is affable, constantly smiling and friendly with his interviewer.

"I'm glad to be back in Spain. The last time it was hard on me, but my wife, who studied Spanish in Mexico, gave me a few lessons. Now, I can make myself understood quite well. It's easier now, and I also understand this beautiful country much better. I've talked so much about Spain at home that this time my mom and dad have come with me."

Page 2, upper photo: A close-up of Jeffrey as Joaquin Murrieta

Page 2, lower photo: The actor's parents came from Santa Monica, USA, to visit Spain and watch the filming of the movie. Jeffrey's dad frequently takes photos of his son.

Jeffrey's parents sit near us, watching the filming in silence. Now and then, Jeffrey's father takes a photo of his son. He will show them later to his friends back home. Jeffrey is very affectionate with them, and explains the details of the filming.

"They came to Spain to visit Palma de Mallorca. They should have left a few weeks ago, but they'd rather stay with me until I've finished shooting. My wife is arriving in a few days. Then, we will all go to Palma together, won't we?"

The shooting is over for today. The lights go down, the villains take their false moustaches off. The dead man rises and wipes the dust from his clothes. Jeffrey Hunter - with blue, transparent eyes - and his parents, leave the saloon arm in arm.

The good-faced bandit has stopped shooting his gun, for now.