La herencia de la Llorona [The Heritage of the Crying Woman] (Sonora Films, 1946) Exec Prod: Luis White M.; Prod: Antonio R. Vilardeil; Dir-Scr: Mauricio Magdaleno; Photo: Jesús Hernández; Music: Rosalio Ramirez; Prod Chief: Jorge Cardeña; Asst Dir: Matilde Landeta; Film Ed: Carlos Savage; Art Dir: Ramón Rodríguez; Camera Op: Manuel Santaella; Sound: B.J. Kroger, Enrique Rodriguez, Francisco Alcayde; Makeup: Carmen Palomino

**Cast:** Paquita de Ronda (Ana María Márquez), Juan J. Martínez Casado (Rafael), Augusto Novaro (Juan Ramón Ortega), Agustín Isunza (Cirilo Lechuza), Enrique Cancino (Tom López), Dolores Tinoco (dona Carmelita), Consuelo Segarra (Nana Trini), Manuel Trejo Morales (detective), Salvador Quiroz (Anselmo), Alfonso Torres (doctor), Ignacio Peón (lawyer), Roberto Soto Jr., Manuel Pozos (mourner), Julián Pérez, Humberto Rodríguez (lawyer's clerk), Trio Janitzio, Héctor Mateos (mourner)

**Notes:** although the name of the Llorona appears in the title and was used to sell the picture as a horror movie, La herencia de la Llorona is really a mystery film set on a hacienda, and the (fake) "Llorona" appears only briefly. Rather slow and poorly plotted, this is somewhat below average. Mauricio Magdaleno, best-known as a prestigious screenwriter on many of the best films of Emilio Fernández, had a brief (4-film) and unspectacular directorial career, of which La herencia de la Llorona was the final example.

Ana Maria and her mother doña Carmelita live on a ranch in northern Mexico; Ana Maria is engaged to Juan Ramón, the ranch foreman. Shortly before the wedding, news comes that Rafael, doña Carmelita's son--believed dead in the USA--is alive and will return to the ranch. The wedding is postponed so Rafael can attend.

However, when Rafael arrives with his friend Tom López, he takes over the ranch, fires Juan Ramón and forbids Ana Maria to marry her sweetheart. Doña Carmelita is glad to have her long-lost son back, but soon falls ill. Rafael takes her to a hospital in the United States but comes back alone, saying she died. Soon, la Llorona begins to wander the halls of the hacienda, as legends said she did in the past.

Nana Trini confronts the spirit and later dies. But a detective from the city--"assisted" by Ana Maria's goofy cousin Cirilo, who has taken mail-order lessons in detecting--has an autopsy performed and poison is detected. Rafael is an impostor: he and Tom are looting the ranch. Tom shoots Rafael to death when the latter tries to abscond with the money, and is then arrested by the detective. Doña Carmelita is discovered, alive: she was drugged and brought back to the hacienda (why?), and, temporarily insane, wandered around wailing and was mistaken for la Llorona. As the film concludes, Juan Ramón marries Ana Maria, with the recovered doña Carmelita in attendance.

Although the plot is weak and the direction pokey, the cast of La herencia de la Llorona is not bad. Paquita de Ronda is adequate as the heroine and Augusto (later "Tito") Novaro is OK as the hero, but Juan José Martínez Casado, Enrique Cancino, and Manuel Trejo Morales are pretty good as the two villains and the detective who foils them. Agustín Isunza is annoying as the moronic Cirilo.
The production values are satisfactory, although virtually the entire movie is shot on the **hacienda** set.

This film has been released on DVD by Tekila Films and EastWest DVD: the print is rather murky and faded, but has no major damage and appears to be complete.

☠☠☠ ☠☠☠ ☠☠☠ ☠☠☠

**The Beast of Hollow Mountain** (Nassour Studios-Películas Rodríguez/United Artists, 1956)  
*Prod:* William and Edward Nassour; *Dir:* Edward Nassour, Ismael Rodriguez; *Scr:* Robert Hill [Mexican sources credit also I. Rodriguez and Carlos Orellana]; *Addtl. Dialog:* Jack DeWitt; *Story:* Willis O'Brien; *Photo:* Jorge Stahl Jr.; *Music:* Raúl Lavista; *Asst to Prod:* Henry Sharp; *Art Dir:* Gene Anderson Jr.; *Prod Supv:* Henry Spitz; *Film Ed:* Holbrook Todd, Maury Wright, Fernando Martinez; *Spec FX Photo:* Henry Sharp; *Sound Dir:* James L. Fields; *Cinemascope, Deluxe Color, the "Nassour Regiscope Process"

**Cast:** Guy Madison (Jimmie Ryan), Patricia Medina (Sarita), Carlos Rivas (Felipe Sánchez), Edward Noriega (Enrique Ríos), Julio Villarreal (don Pedro), Mario Navarro (Panchito), Pascual García Peña (Pancho), Lupe Carriles (Margarita), Manuel Arvide (Martinez, bank mgr), José Chávez [Trowe] (Manuel), Margarito Luna (José), Roberto Contreras (Carlos), Lobo Negro [Guillermo Hernández] (Jorge), Jorge Treviño (shopkeeper), Armando Gutiérrez (employee), Edmund Espino (shopkeeper)

**Notes:** re-viewing this film after many years, I was not very impressed by it. The monster footage all occurs in the last few minutes of the movie, and even prior to this point the plot focuses almost entirely on a (not very interesting) love triangle between transplanted Texan Jimmie, señorita Sarita, and wealthy Enrique.

The color monster footage is interesting but seems crude today (the beast has a nasty disposition, two big fangs, and a weird, snakey red tongue). Mostly accomplished via stop-motion animation (big monster feet and a monster claw-hand are life-size mockups), the creature is amusing but its interaction with the live characters generally occurs via fuzzy back (or front) projection.

Jimmie Ryan and his partner Felipe moved to Mexico from Texas and established a cattle ranch near the "hollow mountain," which is surrounded by an impenetrable swamp. Jimmie is disliked by the rich Enrique, who resents the gringo's friendship with Sarita, Enrique's fiancee; Enrique doesn't like Jimmie selling cattle at the "government price," thus undercutting his own "black market" deals.

Jimmie's cattle have been disappearing; he suspects Enrique, but the locals think the drought has allowed a monster from the hollow mountain to emerge from the swamp. Pancho and his son Panchito go to work for Jimmie when his other men quit, afraid of the legend (Pancho, while drunk, was being dragged by a horse and Jimmie saved his life, and thus owes Jimmie a debt of honor). Pancho goes into the swamp to investigate the missing cattle, and is eaten by the (unseen) beast. On the day of Sarita's wedding to Enrique, Panchito heads for the swamp to find his father. Sarita, realizing she loves Jimmie, leaves Enrique at the altar and sets out to rescue Panchito. They are both trapped in an old cabin by the monster, but Jimmie rides to the rescue. He lures the monster to the swamp and tricks it into walking into quicksand, where it is swallowed up. The End.

While it's nice to see some veteran Mexican performers working in English, *The Beast of Hollow Mountain* isn't really a satisfactory picture. The monster is a complete deus-ex-machina and only vaguely figures into the plot until the conclusion. Aside from Pancho's death,
Frankenstein, el vampiro y compañía*
[Frankenstein, the Vampire, and Company] (Cin. Calderón, 1961) Prod: Guillermo Calderón Stell; Dir: Benito Alazraki; Scr: Alfredo Salazar; Photo: Enrique Wallace; Music: Gustavo César Carrión; Prod Mgr: Roberto G. Rivera; Prod Chief: Alberto A. Ferrer; Sub-Dir: Jaime Contreras; Ass't Dir: Javier Carreño; Film Ed: José Bustos; Art Dir: José Rodríguez G.; Decor: Carlos Grandjean; Makeup: Concepción Zamora; Dialog Rec: Eduardo Arjona; Re-rec: Galdino Samperio; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Sound Ed: José Li-Ho; Union: STPC

Frankenstein (1948). [It's probably coincidental all of these were directed by Benito Alazraki, although Emilio García Riera points out that two previous collaborations between Salazar and Alazraki--Pistolas invencibles and Ley de las pistolas, both 1959--were also uncredited remakes, of The Outlaw and Winchester 73!]

Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein was the last of the "classic Universal monster" movies, and surprisingly ended the series on a very high note. So popular was it in fact, that its plot (and not just the basic "comedians meet the monsters" concept) was not only borrowed by Salazar and Alazraki in Mexico, but at least one other extremely close remake exists--known informally as Ismail Yassin Meets Frankenstein, the original title of this 1953 Egyptian film seems to have been (in translation), Shame on You (though the DVD sub-titles say Mercy, Please!)

Sadly, Frankenstein, el vampiro y compañía is not a good film--not just in comparison to Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein, or in comparison to other Mexican "multi-monster" movies, but by almost any objective measure. It's not funny, the plot reads like "highlights from Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein" but without characterisation or humour or logic, and the monster makeup is poor (especially the werewolf character).

Loco Valdés and José Jasso are competent entertainers, but Valdés is saddled here with a bizarre combination of no-character (most of the time) and annoying-character (sporadically). For most of the movie he does nothing special, playing his role almost straight--which would be fine, if not humorous--but from time to time he'll slip into his trademark mugging, and--even worse--periodically hears an "inner voice" prompting him to commit cruel practical jokes on other people. Jasso is a nullity, only vaguely assuming the straight-man role but never exhibiting any personality nor any chemistry with Valdés. The other performers go through the motions: Borolas has one big scene but it's a lame recreation of a tired old joke and he overdoes his eccentric shtick too much.

As noted above, the plot is mostly lifted from Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein, but many of the best parts of the earlier film are omitted, altered, or truncated. It's almost as if Salazar and Alazraki expected the audience to remember the previous movie and fill in the blanks themselves. For example, the scene in the wax museum where Lou Costello is frightened by a "moving candle" as he waits alone, then is hypnotised as Dracula and the Frankenstein's monster escape is replaced by a similar but vastly inferior scene: the monsters are carried off by a gang of thugs who--after pointless "freezing" so Agapito thinks they are wax figures--club him unconscious! The classic sequence in which Lou enters Lawrence Talbot's hotel room, unaware the man is turning into the Wolfman,
is replaced with a mild and unfunny clone (and Agapito never even enters the room, remaining in the hall throughout!). The pacing of the entire film is off, and within the scenes there is no comic rhythm and no suspense or thrills.

Jorge Lavalle tells his assistant Socorro he's purchased wax figures of a vampire and the Frankenstein's monster for his collection; however, they are actually the real bodies of these supernatural creatures, intended for a nefarious purpose.

Meanwhile, Dr. Sofía and Dr. Chonchón are interested in the bodies as well, and Chonchón hires detective Hércules to help find them. Parcel delivery clerk Paco and his wacky cousin Agapito deliver the huge crates to Lavalle's house, but the bodies are stolen. Lavalle offers a large reward for the recovery of his property. Chonchón teams up with Agapito and Paco to find the monsters, but warns them he is a werewolf himself.

Meanwhile, Agapito—to Paco's disbelief—is the object of the affections of both Dr. Sofía and Socorro. Dr. Sofía's men stole the monsters' bodies, but the Vampire revived and hypnotised her; she is now helping him in his plan to conquer America. Anxious to obtain fresh victims, the Vampire orders Sofía to throw a party. Agapito, Socorro, Paco, Chonchón and Hércules all attend. The Frankenstein's monster needs a new brain, and Sofía suggests Agapito as the donor. A blood transfusion briefly causes Agapito to act like the monster and vice versa--this bit seems to have been swept from Master Minds (1949), a Bowery Boys comedy—but in a final, fiery climax, the Frankenstein's monster is burned up and werewolf Chonchón stabs the Vampire before succumbing to wounds inflicted by his opponent. Sofía, Socorro, Agapito, Paco, and Hércules escape. Lavalle attempts to get revenge for the destruction of his monsters, but is arrested by Hércules. As the film concludes, Agapito plays one more cruel joke on Paco and everyone (except Paco) laughs at his humiliation. Some fun!

Frankenstein, el vampiro y compañía is sloppy; not technically, the sets and such are satisfactory, but in thematically, dramatically, in terms of pacing and overall story-telling technique. It's not even a tour-de-force vehicle for Loco Valdés—who was never a strong enough performer to carry a film by himself anyway—since he's oddly colourless most of the time.

There are a few good lines, to be fair. After the Frankenstein's monster and Vampire "mannequins" are stolen, Paco wonders "Who would steal wax figures?" Agapito replies "I suspect a candle factory!" Later, when Dr. Chonchón talks about changing into a wolf, Agapito asks "The same wolf as in Red Riding Hood?" (Probably an in-joke, since Valdés had just played the Big Bad Wolf in the Capercita movies)

It's not fair to compare this to Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein, which benefited from a great comedy team, several horror icons, far greater production values, sharp dialogue and comic "business." But that doesn't mean Frankenstein, el vampiro y compañía couldn't have been a fun, entertaining, wacky, lively picture on its own level. But nooooo.....sadly, it's not. Aside from a very few amusing bits and the overall curiosity factor, Frankenstein, el vampiro y compañía is one of the lesser efforts from this era.

Arañas infernales [Infernal Spiders]

(Filmica Vergara Cinecomisiones/Columbia, 1966) Prod: Luis Enrique Vergara G.; Dir: Federico Curiel; Ser: Adolfo Torres Portillo; Orig. Idea: L.E. Vergara; Photo: Eduardo Valdés; Music: Jorge Pérez Herrera; Prod Mgr: Raúl Manjarrez; Asst Dir: Ángel Rodríguez; Film Ed José Juan Munguía; Chief of Tech. Unit: José Rodríguez Rivera; Art Dir: Artis Gener; Makeup: Armando Islas; Dialog Rec: Jesús Sánchez; Music/Re-rec: Salvador Topete; Union: STIC-ANDA

Cast: Blue Demon (himself), Blanca Sánchez (Hilda), Martha Elena Cervantes (Arianec), Ramón Bugarini (Lt. Robles), Sergio Virel (José), Jéssica Munguía, Fernando Osés (Prince Arac), Frankenstein (Moloc), René Barrera (spider man), Enrique Ramírez, Vicente Lara “Cacama” (spider man), Juan Garza and Marco Antonio Arzate (wrestlers), José Luis Fernández (Cámbaro, janitor), Octavio Muñoz, José E. Vergara A.

Notes: long unseen, this long-lost Blue Demon movie surfaced on Mexican TV a few years ago. It is pretty wild, although the overall impact is definitely hampered by
some poor effects work (i.e., the “giant” spider that is central to the plot!). Speaking of effects work, *Arañas infernales* uses stock footage from two Hollywood sci-fi movies of the 1950s—those enduring classics, *Plan 9 from Outer Space* and *Teenagers from Outer Space*! Certainly a list of the 10-worst science fiction films of the decade would include these two titles, but Vergara “borrowed” footage from them! And yet, the scenes aren’t that bad and are more or less seamlessly integrated. Speaking of borrowing, Jorge Pérez Herrera’s music score is liberally sprinkled with cuts from the “Themes from Horror Movies” LP (possibly purchased from an ad in the back of *Famous Monsters* magazine, which is where I bought my copy, back in the 1960s!).

The movie opens with an offscreen narrator declaiming about the vastness of space, which is inhabited by strange beings on other worlds. One such world (referred to as a “galaxy” for some reason) is Arácnea, whose residents have been desperately searching for a source of food to save the life of their queen (a big spider). Earth is chosen, since human brains are apparently like health food for alien spiders. Their (*Plan 9* footage) saucer lands (*Teenagers* footage, including the disintegration of a barking dog), causing Blue Demon’s car to stop operating. When power resumes, Blue and his pal José spot another car on the road, but the driver has been reduced to a smoking skeleton (wearing an unharmed suit)! Although José is introduced as an engineering student, it’s up to Blue Demon to suggest a reason for this phenomenon—it involves neutrinos, anti-matter, and the loss of equilibrium leading to the spontaneous combustion of human beings. Later, the police—represented by Lt. Robles—scoff at this idea. However, Robles, José, José’s girlfriend Hilda, and Blue Demon go out to the countryside where the dead man’s car was found and use a radiation detector to try and track the source.

The “source” is the aliens’ hideout, located in the catacombs under an old *hacienda*. The spider-people are led by the busy but petulant Arianec, who sends her henchmen out to find “healthy, clean brains” for the shrill, demanding queen (who’s located in a big web in the basement). A young woman is brought back as a victim. Tossed into the web, she screams when the “big” spider grabs her. [Two versions of the queen spider were constructed: one, apparently a big puppet or a man-in-suit (whose eyes light up), is used sparingly and only vaguely seen. The other, shown when the queen creeps along the web, is obviously very small—not to mention dopy-looking—and is probably the same as the spider-hand that appears later in the movie. The second spider is never shot so that it effectively seems to be large, and does not in the least resemble the big puppet/suit.]

Arianec spots Blue and his pals on a kind of alien TV set (the aliens’ HQ in the *hacienda* is filled with what appear to be balloons or globes, some that slide like abacus beads on rods, an interesting concept that actually *does* seem “alien”). A paralyzing ray disables the Earthlings, who are then attacked by two spider-men. After a long fight, the aliens vanish, unable to defeat Blue Demon. As a result, Arianec calls the mother ship for reinforcements, and Prince Arac’s flying saucer heads for Earth. Arianec also personally attempts to kill a sleeping Hilda, but the young woman wakes up, grabs a pistol, and shoots the spider-woman’s hand. Arianec flees, leaving behind her weapon (a kind of wand that shoots powder) and blood on the floor. Shaken, Hilda does what anyone would do after such a horrible, life-threatening experience—*she goes back to bed!* (and pulls the covers over her head)
Blue Demon discovers the wrestling arena janitor is actually a spider-man spy. However, Arianec turns her henchman into a smoking skeleton by remote control to keep him from talking. Prince Arac arrives on Earth (Teenagers footage). He defeats three wrestlers at once, and is signed up by impresario Méndez, who has dollar (peso) signs in his eyes. Hilda trails spider-man Moloc back to the hacienda, wanders around in the catacombs for a long time (nearly getting caught by the queen), and—just as she’s leaving—is confronted by Arac. He hypnotizes her into forgetting everything, then lets her leave (why?). Arac meets Blue Demon in the ring. When things go bad, Arac’s right hand turns into a spider (yes, a spider with arms, eyes, and fangs, attached to the end of Arac’s arm! What’s so odd about that?). He tries to bite Blue Demon, but fails (although Lt. Robles, surprisingly, is fatally bitten), then flees. José and Hilda are kidnapped from the arena and taken to spider-people HQ. Hilda’s tossed into the web to be a snack for the queen, while José’s head is cut so his blood can be tested (this is shot from below a glass table, and blood drips onto it, a curiously gruesome and painful scene). The aliens have decided to leave unhospitable Earth. Blue shows up, rescues José and Hilda, fighting Arac (who still has that spider-hand) and the others. The aliens take off in their flying saucer (Teenagers footage), but Blue manipulates the giant sliding-ball controls in the catacomb HQ room and the spaceship bursts into flame and blows up (Plan 9 footage). Earth is saved! Hooray!

*Arañas infernales* is wacky and only the stupid puppet spiders really prevent it from being a satisfactorily weird experience. Blue Demon is in great physical shape and projects a strong, assertive personality. The location shooting is atmospheric and creepy (Curiel and cinematographer Valdéz apparently realized shadows can hide a lot of defects) and the film is certainly not dull. But man, those dumb spider puppets!

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**Chabelo y Pepito contra los monstruos**

Chabelo y Pepito vs. the Monsters

(Estudios Churubusco—Alameda Films, 1973)

*Prod:* Alfredo Ripstein Jr.; *Dir:* José Estrada; *Screenplay:* Toni Sbert; *Photography:* Manuel Gómez Urquiza; *Music:* Sergio Guerrero; *Prod. Chief:* Enrique Morfín; *Asst. Dir:* Mario Llorca; *Film Editor:* Eufemio Rivera y R.; *Decor:* Carlos Grandjean; *Makeup:* Carmen Palomino; *Dialog Rec:* Eduardo Arjona; *Re-Rec:* Ramón Moreno; *Sound Editor:* Sigfrido García

**Cast:** Xavier López "Chabelo" (Chabelo), Martín Ramos (Pepito), Silvia Pasquel (Alicia), Pedro Reiguero (Gerardo), Nothanael León "Frankenstein" (Spectrum 2), Eduardo Casab, Ramiro Orci (police inspector), Emma Grissé (mother), Manuel Cepeda

**Notes:** for some reason, this film is well-regarded by many Mexican critics, who are often very rough on their own country's movies. *Chabelo y Pepito contra los monstruos* isn't bad—in fact, it's a reasonably entertaining children's movie—but it is hardly a cinema classic. Xavier López "Chabelo" began his career in the 1950s and is still active today, a long career based on one piece of schtick—the ability to talk and act like a little kid (actually, López did appear in some other roles, but not many). This isn't unprecedented, but it's still pretty amazing. López is reasonably wacky and entertaining in *Chabelo y Pepito contra los monstruos*, where his one-joke characterization is refined even further: he's not just a grown man playing a little kid, he's a grown man playing a little kid with an insatiable appetite, ha ha!
López and Martín Ramos had previously appeared together in *Pepito y la lámpara maravillosa* [Pepito and the Marvelous Lamp, 1971], with López playing a genie who helps out schoolboy Ramos. They were reunited in *Chabelo y Pepito, detectives* (1973), a direct sequel to *Chabelo y Pepito contra los monstruos*—in that film, they are deputized by the police to investigate juvenile gangs in Mexico City and uncover an alien invasion.

The "monsters" in *Chabelo y Pepito contra los monstruos* are the usual pseudo-Universal lineup trotted out in *El castillo de los monstruos*, etc.—a Frankenstein's monster, a vampire, a Gillman, a mummy, a werewolf—plus some robots and a gorilla. The costumes and makeup aren't anything special, probably Don Post masks purchased from "Famous Monsters of Filmland" magazine ads. While the movie pulls a partial "Scooby Doo" (the villain even refers to "meddling kids!")—revealing the creatures to be robots, not actual monsters, created to scare people away from a clandestine mining operation—the menace they represent is still real, with Chabelo and Pepito in danger of losing their lives for most of the picture. The cast plays it straight, and the picture, after a slow start, moves along at a decent clip, and there are even some clever lines. Director José Estrada had relatively brief but notable career, making a few serious dramas and a raft of comedies and comedy-dramas: the two "Chabelo and Pepito" movies were hardly personal projects, probably done to put bread on the table, but Estrada was a technically agile director and did a better job than a studio hack would have done.

Pepito and his cousin Chabelo join the rest of their Boy Scout troop on a camping trip. Their scoutmaster is Gerardo, the boyfriend of Pepito's older sister Alicia. Alicia goes along so she can work on her thesis in biology. Pepito and Chabelo have seen a TV news report about an escaped gorilla, and hope they can capture it for the reward.

The scouts come across a man working on a broken wagon; after helping him fix it, they see he resembles a monster! However, the man thanks them, then warns them away from a nearby haunted house.

Pepito is embarrassed when his fellow scouts kid him about his sister. Pepito: "There's only one way to erase the stain on our honor--we have to go to the diabolical mansion and prove the story that it's haunted is false." At dawn the next day, Pepito and Chabelo sneak away from camp. They run into the gorilla, who covets Chabelo's bananas. Fleeing from the beast, Chabelo and Pepito hide in a cave, meeting a mummy who chases them deeper into the cavern. They are threatened by the Gill Man, who is distracted by the gorilla—the two creatures fight, then the Frankenstein's monster bursts through a wall and comes to the assistance of the Gill Man (the gorilla loses). Chabelo and Pepito escape through a secret door.

Chabelo nearly falls into a pit full of poisonous snakes. Meanwhile, Gerardo, Alicia, and the scouts enter the cave and discover the empty mummy case. Chabelo and Pepito are confronted by two men in metal masks; one gets knocked out and the other falls into the snake pit.

Further along, Chabelo and Pepito observe a line of the metal-masked men with wheelbarrows, carrying metal boxes through the tunnel. Chabelo and Pepito enter the house, and find a luxuriously-furnished room with a coffin in it! Suddenly, Dracula attacks Pepito, who tries to hold him off with a cross, but the vampire brushes it aside. Pepito shouts: "Chabelo! Food! Vampire chops are great! Food!" The famished Chabelo chases the vampire out of the room.

They explore the house, running into the Frankenstein monster, the Mummy, and the Gill Man again. The Gill Man fights the Mummy, but the Mummy defeats him (and smashes his head with a big rock). Chabelo and Pepito finally get outside, and see a helicopter land on the front lawn. The metal-masked men load the copter with boxes, and it takes off. Pepito and Chabelo decide to spend the night in a nearby tree.

In a hidden lab, Spectrum 2 orders his men to capture the intruders (Chabelo and Pepito), as well as two groups of scouts—Gerardo's boys (in the tunnel) and Jaime's wards (approaching the house). Reentering the house, Chabelo and Pepito spy on Spectrum 2, who tells his men, "the plans of Spectrum cannot be disrupted by a pack of meddling kids.

We will use these captives in our brain transplant experiments. Take them to the lab."

In the tunnel, Gerardo, Alicia and the others are attacked by the Wolf Man but trick him into falling into the snake pit, then enter the house. Chabelo and Pepito discover a large globe with an electronic brain inside: "this..."
must be the control for the whole operation." Dracula grabs Pepito; Chabelo tries to scare off the vampire with a lug wrench in the shape of a cross, then hits the vampire on the head with it. The vampire is a robot! Pepito says, "I knew something was strange. What real vampire wouldn't be afraid of a cross?"

Chabelo and Pepito are caught by the guards and taken to the lab, but Gerardo and the other scouts burst in. Pepito uses his penknife to cause the robot Frankenstein monster to run amuck, but Alicia is captured by the guards, and Gerardo and his scouts are also subdued. "Each one of your brains will substitute for a destroyed robot," Spectrum 2 says. However, Pepito destroys the electronic brain, and Spectrum 2 and his assistant flee.

Outside, the police arrive (brought by another scout), and arrest the villains. A police official explains: "They were part of a gang smuggling uranium out of the country. The uranium was secretly mined in this mountain." They used the false monsters to scare the local people away. The police inspector names Pepito and Chabelo special agents. But--where is Chabelo? He's inside the house, eating all the food left in the scouts' knapsacks.

Chabelo y Pepito contra los monstruos isn't great, but it's a fairly fun juvenile adventure.

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Trampa infernal [Infernal Trap] (Galmex Films-Grupo Galindo, 1989) Exec Prod-Prod: Santiago Galindo P., Eduardo Galindo Pérez; Dir-Scr: Pedro Galindo III; Story: Santiago Galindo P.; Photo: Antonio de Anda; Music: Pedro Plascencia; Prod Mgr: Max G. Llado; Prod Chief: Samuel de la Fuente; Asst Dir: Roberto Sala; Film Ed: Carlos Savage; Camera Op: Agustín Meza; Makeup: Angelina Méndez; Sound Supv: Oscar Topete; Sound Ed: Javier Patiño; Union: STIC

Cast: Pedro Fernández (Nachó Castillo), Edith González (Alejandra), Toño Mauri (Mauricio), Charly Valentín (Charly), Marisol Santacruz (Carlota), Adriana Vega (Viviana), Alfredo Guiñérez (Jeremías), Armando Galván (Javier), Alberto Mejía Barón "Alfín" (Jesse)

Notes: "Pedrito" Fernández (real name, José Martín Cuevas Cobos)--he took his professional name from Pedro Infante and Vicente Fernández--got his start as a youthful (born in 1969) singer/actor in Galindo films like La niña de la mochila azul and La oreja rajada, often teamed with child actress María Rebeca. Fernández grew up on screen in the '80s, teamed with other youthful pop stars like Lucero and Tatiana. Late in the decade, he made a spate of horror films and thrillers, including Pánico en la montaña, Vacaciones de terror, Vacaciones de terror 2, and Trampa infernal.

Like most of the Galindo movies of this era, Trampa infernal is quite "Hollywood" in its style and content. Briskly made, the film mostly avoids gore and features no nudity, but generally delivers satisfactory entertainment. [note: the DVD version runs about 77 minutes but the Filmoteca database lists a running time of 90 minutes and a "C" rating, which would not seem to be justified by the mild gore in this print, so perhaps we've been given a cut version to watch.]

As the film opens, Nacho defeats Mauricio in a paint-ball contest. Sore loser Mauricio challenges his rival to a "real" test of manhood--a hunt for a bear which has recently slain various people in an isolated forest. Nacho, his girlfriend Alejandra, and their rotund pal Charly agree to go on a hunting trip with Mauricio, his friend Javier, and their girlfriends Carlota and Viviana. The group leaves their vehicles at the shabby trading post (located in an old van) run by Jeremías, who warns them of the dangers of the forest. His advice is ignored, naturally.

Hiking into the wilderness, the group of young people finds the skeletal remains of human beings--one corpse has an arrow stuck in it! Mauricio admits the story of the "killer bear" was wrong: he says a crazed gringo soldier named Jesse lives in the woods and thinks "the war" is still going on (presumably Vietnam). Jesse--who wears a mask-wig combination of long blonde hair and vaguely feminine facial features--starts killing them off, one by one. Charly saves Nacho from certain death by shooting Jesse (blowing off his hand!) but Alejandra is captured by the maniac.

Returning to Jeremías's store, Nacho and Charly find him dead. Trying to drive to town for help, Charly is killed when the booby-trapped car explodes.

Nacho returns to the forest and rescues Alejandra. They trick Jesse into entering Jeremías's van, filled with gas fumes, and blow it up, killing the insane slasher.

Trampa infernal is paced well and while the plot does not (by any means) eliminate the standard slasher-film tropes (particularly "irrational actions by the protagonists"
J-ok'el* (Out of Light Entertainment, 2007) *Exec Prod: Roberto Morales Castro, Andrés Arnulfo Rodríguez Zárate, Glenda Guadalupe Rodríguez Zárate, Carlos Meléndez Roldán, Francisco Morales Castro; *Prod: Andrés Rodríguez Franco, Paola Madrazo del Rio, Juan Carlos Arizmendi, Benjamin Williams; *Assoc Prod: Fernando Santiago Robles, Maria Fernanda Morales, Pamella Gómez Cammillieri, James Berry; *Dir: Benjamin Williams; *Scr: Jeremy Williams; *Music: George Shaw.  Fully scored for a symphony, it's appropriate for a high-budget film—expecting the usual synthesizer and/or pop music, I was pleasantly surprised (one might even say stunned).  The acting is good and the script—though it stretches credulity seriously several times, not a big sin—is adequate and (as I noted above) doesn't tip its hand before the surprising climax.

George arrives in San Cristóbal de las Casas, a city in Chiapas.  His mother lives there with her second husband; George has been notified (by a loyal servant) that his mother Helen is hostile and local police commander Flores is unhelpful: many children have been abducted in recent weeks, and Carolina is just one of them.

George attempts to investigate on his own, and meets Carmen, who offers to help.  Her nephew also vanished, and she now fears for her son Fernando's safety.  Carmen tells George the locals believe "J-ok'el" (pronounced "Yo-Kel") is behind the mystery.  Also known as La Llorona, J-ok'el is a Mexican film (despite his Anglo professional name, Benjamin Williams was born in Mexico City as Roberto Carlos Morales Vergara) made in English (there is a fair amount of Spanish dialogue, but most of it is paraphrased or translated immediately, and the DVD version I saw had English subtitles as well).

The cast is mostly Mexican, with the exception of Tom Parker (who resembles a young Harry Hamlin) and Dee Wallace.  Ana Patricia Rojo speaks English very well, Jesús Ochoa—not so much.

This film apparently received a theatrical release in Mexico in 2007, but went straight-to-DVD in the USA.  Reviews found on IMDB and elsewhere on the web aren't very flattering, though I suspect many of the disgruntled authors were misled by the garish monster art on the DVD cover, and expected more blood-and-thunder, when this is actually more of a mystery-thriller with vague supernatural overtones.

J-ok'el is quite well made, with excellent photography and an especially lush and evocative music score by George Shaw.  Shot mostly in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, J-ok'el is unhelpful: many children have been abducted in recent weeks, and Carolina is just one of them.

The cast is:

- Carmen Rojo (Carmen Romero), Ana Patricia Rojo (Carmen Romero), Dee Wallace (Helen Moret), Diana Bracho (J-ok'el), Jesús Ochoa (Capt Flores), Pablo Bracho (Meco), Pamela Trueba (Glória), Angelique Boyer (French girl), Bárbara Guillén (mother of baby), Gabriel Esteban Figueurao Tejero (Fernando Romero), Carlos Jiménez Pacheco (son of J-ok'el), Dana Paola Jiménez Pacheco (daughter of J-ok'el), Juan Jesús Canaán Ramírez (Officer Dominguez), Natzeli Morales Richard (Carolina Moret), Los Terribles (bar band), Guillermo Grajales (Balam), Adán Ramirez Sánchez (Pablo), Hernández Santiago Robles (grandfather), Dolores Montoya (grandmother)

Notes: although I consider MFB a "newsletter of record"—that is, I attempt to list cast, credits, and an accurate and complete plot synopsis of the films I review—I realise this sometimes leads to "spoilers."  So, in case anyone is thinking about watching J-ok'el (which is available on DVD in the USA), be forewarned: the final plot twist is revealed below.  I confess I did not see it coming, so if you prefer to be surprised, skip this article and come back after you've seen the movie!
George scoffs at religion and all manifestations of superstition, offending Carmen. He also runs afoul of Carmen's ex-husband, surly drunk Meco, who claims to know the secret of J-ok'el.

George learns his mother's husband left her, and she doesn't think Carolina can be found. That night, George gets drunk and fights with Meco, winding up in the local jail. From his cell window, he sees J-ok'el steal another child: Fernando, Carmen's son. The next day he is freed and--using a map Carmen had showed him earlier--goes to the lake where J-ok'el allegedly drowned her children. There, in a grotto, he finds Carmen, and together they discover the corpses of the missing children, as well as the still-living Fernando and...J-ok'el, who turns out to be the insane Helen. She has been killing children who come from broken homes, hoping to spare them further emotional pain.

Helen drowns Fernando and attempts to kill George as well, but he shoots her to death. As the film concludes, George and Carmen visit the graves of Fernando, Carolina, and Helen, but they hear an eerie cry and see the ghost of the real J-ok'el, who then vanishes.

J-ok'el could be dismissed as simply another "fake monster" movie, except for a few supernatural touches--George keeps seeing Carmen in various places in town, and the final shot of J-ok'el. It's not suggested that Helen has been possessed by the spirit of the indigenous woman or anything, and the film does cheat a bit, with brief glimpses of J-ok'el during the film hinting that she's a ghost (we only see bits of her white gown and veil, her hands, etc.). And certainly there is no horrible fang-mouthed monster woman as represented on the U.S. DVD box art! [There is one scene in which a sidewalk artist creates an image of J-ok'el with an open, scary mouth--to signify she's wailing, I suppose--but no fangs. To be fair, the Mexican posters were not so misleading.]

Admittedly, it would have been rather cool if Helen had turned into J-ok'el at the end, monster-face or not, but I didn't feel especially betrayed by the lack of a monster, since the film held my interest and didn't blatantly cheat by having clearly supernatural events occur, then explaining them away or (even worse) doing nothing and hoping the audience wouldn't demand an explanation. I was mildly irritated by what I considered a slight loose end: despite the magnitude of the problem, the police don't seem to be very interested in actively pursuing the investigation, and late in the movie Capt. Flores makes a remark to the effect that "the gringo is going to screw things up," which (falsely) led me to believe there was some sort of cover-up going on. If Carmen could pin-point the lake where J-ok'el was to be found, and total stranger George (who doesn't even speak Spanish, despite having lived in Chiapas as a teenager) can locate the "secret" grotto with relative ease, certainly the police could have done so earlier?

Furthermore, the lack of outrage by the townspeople (and the lack of media coverage) also seems unrealistic. The real-life San Cristóbal de las Casas has a population of nearly 150,000 and while the city in the film seems smaller, it's clearly not some isolated, primitive village.

I also wasn't too convinced by George's character. Presumably, he loves his half-sister (though he hasn't seen her for years, and if she's only 12, she must have been very young when he left) and it's later revealed she almost died of an asthma attack while he was babysitting her, years before, so perhaps he feel guilty about that. He also has a bad habit of mocking and denigrating people's religious beliefs to their face--he always apologises and stress might account for some of this insensitivity, but it doesn't make him a very sympathetic character. Yes, the film probably wants to set up some conflict between the "rational gringo" and the "spiritual Mexicans." There's even a scene where Carmen and George witness a shaman performing a limpia (a spiritual cleansing), but given the revelation that the J-ok'el abductions have a non-supernatural explanation, this dialectic doesn't go much of anywhere.

In general, however, J-ok'el impressed me considerably, especially since this was the first feature for director Williams (who's still in his 20s) and cost only about $500,000 to make. It's technically about as slick and glossy as any Mexican or Hollywood film costing 10 or 20 times as much would be, and while some may quibble about the lack of a monster, that doesn't change the fact that this is a respectable, interesting, and very well-made movie.

Let's Go Hugo!

Keiko en peligro [Keiko in Danger]*
(Prods. RAHS, ©1990) Exec Prod: Gustavo Stiegllitz; Prod: Hugo Stiegllitz; Dir: René Cardona III; Adapt: Antonio Orellana, René Cardona III, Hugo Stiegllitz, Ernesto García Cabral; Story: Hugo Stiegllitz; Photo: Francisco Bojórquez; Music: Tino Geiser; Assoc Prod:
Reino Aventura, H.S. Asociados; Film Ed: Jesús Paredes C.; Prod Des: Ernesto García Cabral; Costume Des: Mineko Mori, Johanna Elder; Underwater Photo: Ramón Bravo; Dubbing Dir: Bruno Rey, Héctor Reynoso; Union: STIC

*[the MDVC video box lists the title as Keiko la ballena asesina (Keiko the Killer Whale) but the title on the film itself is unchanged.]*

**Cast:** Hugo Stiglitz (Ricardo; alien father), Susana Dosamantes (Ricardo's wife; space mother), César Bono (Clodoveo), Roberto Ballesteros (compadre), Carlos East (?cut), Juan Peláez (Felipe), Mario Arevalo (Mario; park employee), María Montaño (comadre), Mineko Mori (Mineko, park employee), Carlos East Jr. and Ernesto East (Ricardo's son and space boy), Jorge Zamora "Zamorita" (Timón**), Edda Archer, Aliz Briseño, Cristian Crishan (magician at park), Frida Hauptvogel (Frida?), Guillermo Iván, Leo Rojo, Rolando Zamora and Guadalupe Zamora (Timón's children), Sofía Stiglitz, Charly Hauptvogel, Gerardo Zepeda "Chiquilín" (truck driver), Mario Valdez, María del Carmen Jiménez, Winkar Castañón, Astrid Arevalo

*this might be "Simón," I can't be sure

**Notes:** although fairly well-known because it features the orca who later "starred" in *Free Willy*, *Keiko en peligro* is an only modestly entertaining science fiction movie aimed chiefly at children, and in fact seems more like a promotional film for the Reino Aventura amusement park ("Prods. RAHS" stands for Reino Aventura and Hugo Stiglitz). The optical effects of the alien spacecraft are pretty good (if brief) but most of the "special effects" are more like magic tricks (the alien boy causes urinals to overflow, amusement park rides to stop or start, "heals" broken toys, etc., and at the end the aliens revive a drowned girl with the wave of a "magic" wand).

The plot is rather vague, or perhaps I just wasn't paying very close attention. Ricardo, an employee of the Reino Aventura amusement park, is in charge of the star attraction, orca Keiko. He is disturbed by changes in the health and behavior of the animal, believing acid rain has changed the chemical composition of the water in Keiko's habitat. However, the medicine Ricardo prescribes does not seem to be having much effect.

Meanwhile, a trio of aliens (father, mother, child) comes to Earth on a flying saucer (actually more starfish-shaped). Years before, Keiko had been brought to the "blue planet" (as they call Earth) and now it is time for the orca to be retrieved and taken back home. The explanation for this is not really clear, but it has something to do with Keiko "learning" in the Earth's oceans, and then returning to the alien planet to help revive that world's ecology. Or something. The aliens are surprised to discover Keiko is not in the arctic waters where he (she?) was deposited, but is now incarcerated in a theme park near Mexico City.

Ricardo's wife, son, compadre, comadre (and their son and daughter), some orphans, Timón and his two kids (stranded when their car breaks down, they are given a lift by Ricardo's compadre), and the usual crowd of families visit the Reino Aventura amusement park. Ricardo's son confronts the alien boy and they realize they are almost twins; for a lark, they switch identities. The alien boy makes friends with the Earth children (who don't know he's not Ricardo's son) and Ricardo's son is taken back to the flying saucer (where he isn't amused by food delivered via hoses and his sleeping accomodations in a vapor-filled tube). That night, while their parents are playing cards, the five children (Timón's son and daughter, the compadre's son and daughter, and the alien boy) return to the closed amusement park and have fun (since the alien boy can turn on the rides by telepathy or something). However, Frida (the compadre's daughter) unwisely chooses her spot for hide-and-seek: inside a chamber that suddenly begins to fill with water. Ricardo's son, alerted to the trouble by his alien double, tries to help but the combined efforts of the kids are useless. The adults arrive along with the authorities, and Ricardo swims underwater to rescue Frida, but she has drowned. Suddenly the alien parents appear to retrieve their real son. Ricardo's son and the alien boy shame them into breaking the "law of the galaxy" which forbids them from interfering with life on Earth, and they revive Frida. The aliens also agree not to take Keiko back with them right now, since the children of the Earth love the giant black-and-white sea creature, but warn the others that they can't allow Keiko to stay in a polluted environment. The children all promise to clean up the Earth. The aliens fly away. The End.

*Keiko en peligro* is sincere enough and the 90 minutes pass relatively painlessly, but the movie is no great shakes. César Bono has what might be called the "Resortes" part, as the comic-relief park employee who sees the flying saucer and other strange things but can't make anyone believe him. It's also amusing to read the cast list and see how most of the adult performers managed to get roles for their kids (Hugo Stiglitz also found a part for his then-wife Mineko Mori). The performances are satisfactory: although some of the children are a bit stiff, at least they aren't excessively "cute." I was unable to spot Carlos East despite his fifth-billing--his part may have been cut or maybe he showed up for a cameo and I was distracted and missed it, but he definitely does not have any kind of major role. One curious aspect is the names of the aliens (and their planet), which have a definite Mayan sound (I didn't attempt to write them in the credits).

Overall, harmless and not offensive but bland.
Alarido del terror [Howl of Terror]
(Repros. Video Alfa, 1991) Exec Prod: Joel Robbins, Eduardo Margolis, Dan Epelstein [sic = correctly spelled Epelstein on end credits]; Prod: Gonzalo Herreras Olea; Dir: René Cardona III; Scen: Honorato Magaliní; Story: Honorato Magaliní, René Cardona III; Photo: Germán Salcedo; Music: Juan Carlos Gutiérrez Garcés, Claudio González Azcarate; Exec Prod: Hugo Stiglitz, René Cardona III; Film Ed: Marcos, René Cardona III, Ramón Rodríguez; Decor: Guillermo Buijas; Re-rec: Rodolfo A. Gutiérrez Garcés; Makeup: María Eugenia Luna

Cast: Hugo Stiglitz (Roberto), Roberto Ballesteros (Colibai), Bruno Rey (Carlos), Azela Robínez (Laura), Carlos East (police lieutenant), Sergio Jiménez (Jabalí), Edna Bolkan (psychologist), Sofía Stiglitz (Gaby), Arturo Vences (Chaneque), Rojo Grau (Eladio), Mineko Mori (school teacher), Roberto Ruy (Chuy), Mario Valdez (compadre), Óscar (Juan), children: Daniel Jonathan Robbins, Julima Cardona, Ronen Robbins, Stefani Pier; Jesús Gómez (forensic expert)

Notes: this is a rather decent direct-to-video fantasy film, mixing standard monster-stalking hijinks (and some gore) with Mexican folklore and a slight nod of the head to Poltergeist (possibly coincidental, but...I don't think so). It's still got a cheap look to it, but some thought and ambition was invested and credit should be given for that.

Surly Roberto, his long-suffering wife Laura, and their young daughter Gaby go on a "picnic" at a 16th-century monastery in the forest. Roberto is actually there to meet Carlos and Eladio; the latter knows of a secret passage in the old building which may reveal a hidden treasure. But no, the only thing they find are the bones of a long-dead monk (Eladio filches a few as souvenirs). Suddenly, they're attacked by an armed band of men, and narrowly escape. The raiders help themselves to some bones as well (thinking, for some unspecified reason, they may be "magic"). This was a bad decision, because a demonic creature known as a chaneque wants to keep the skeleton intact (again, for an unspecified reason), and begins slaying everyone who has the bones in their possession.

Shaman Colibrí learns of the chaneque's depredations. His advisor Jabalí says the chaneque may go after Gaby, who is an "innocent spirit" and can provide a pathway to Earth (or something) for the creature. Sure enough, one night Gaby vanishes from her room, though her voice can still be heard echoing throughout the house. Her little dog is ripped to shreds. Roberto and Laura call the police, but their story sounds fantastic. Colibrí arrives and helps bait a trap for the chaneque. The creature arrives but--after a pitched battle with Colibrí, Laura, and Roberto in Gaby's bedroom--creates a portal in the wall and escapes to its own dimension. Before the portal closes, Roberto leaps through, hoping to rescue his daughter. Colibrí performs a ceremony to re-open the portal and follows, instructing Laura to keep a ritual censer burning so the gateway won't close, trapping them forever.

Roberto is assailed by flying balls of fire, nearly strangled by vines, and screwed into the ground up to his neck before Colibrí arrives. Together, they pursue the chaneque. Gaby appears to greet her father, but Colibrí shoots her in the chest with an arrow! However, it was merely the chaneque in disguise. Roberto finds his real daughter and they race back to the portal; Colibrí waves goodbye as the portal closes. The little family is reunited. But "one month later..." Gaby is cuddling a large egg-shaped object which suddenly hatches to reveal...a baby chaneque?!

[freeze frame] The End?

Alarido del terror has a few out of the ordinary facets, including the interesting concept of portraying the central family as dysfunctional: Roberto dislikes his wife (it's suggested he's having an affair), criticises her at every opportunity, is dismissive of Gaby (always referring to her as "your [Laura's] daughter") and is rude and abrasive to
others. Laura is sad but fights back, refusing to passively succumb to Roberto's behaviour (and he indicates she has "nights out" with her friends, returning at 3am, so she isn't a complete doormat). Gaby, as one might expect, is insecure and withdrawn, prompting her school psychologist to request a conference with Laura. This situation is actually relevant to the plot, since Gaby's status as an "abandoned" child makes her more vulnerable to the chaneque's influence.

The film spends a quite a bit of time on Colibrí and his mystic rituals: he's the one who tells Roberto and Laura about chaneques in general (sometimes they're like poltergeists or imps who play pranks, but they can also be malignant creatures; they like beautiful things, they have a sweet tooth, etc.), and he's the one who kills the chaneque in the end, not the putative "hero" Roberto (in fact, Roberto would only be considered the hero because the fact he's portrayed by star Hugo Stieglitz, since his on-screen character is, as noted, quite flawed). Why Colibrí decides to stay behind in the chaneque's dimension isn't clear, but it is his decision, since he makes no attempt to pass through the portal before it closes.

The chaneque costume is never seen clearly, although the gargoyle-like face is shown in quick closeups a number of times. The creature has three-fingered claws, a small mouth with a few pointy fangs, seems to have long hair and possibly pointy ears, and apparently wears clothing (a ratty old cardigan sweater, it looks like). As mentioned earlier, there is some minor gore, mostly in the aftermath of the chaneque's attacks on sheep, people, and Gaby's fluffy little dog. The special effects are rudimentary and mostly mechanical as opposed to optical, but are satisfactory for their purpose. Mention should also be made of the film's music, which is actually quite good, mixing folkloric themes and instrumentation with more conventional "suspense/thriller" cues. The low budget is mostly visible because the (16mm?) photography is bland and nearly everything is shot on location (the chaneque's lair is the only really "designed" space in the film, and it looks cheap, with hanging drapes attempting to disguise the lack of any real other-worldly trappings).

This isn't an unsung classic but it makes an attempt to be different, and largely succeeds. Generally entertaining.

Angeluz (Hugo Stieglitz y Asociados-Resonancia-Avant Films-VideoVisa-Omicrón Films, 1997/©2000) Exec Prod: Gloria Ruiz; Prod: Hugo Stieglitz; Dir-Scr: Leopoldo Laborde; Photo: Francisco Bojorquez; Music: Quinta Raza; Assoc Prod: René Cardona Jr., Elías Zacarias, Laurence Davin; Film Ed: Leopoldo Laborde, Jesús Paredes; Art Dir: Raúl Cárdenas, Manuel Guijoza; Sound Des: M. Angel Molina, Carlos Aguilar; Digital FX/Sound: Ricardo Cobo Audry; Makeup: Keis Maes; Stunt Co-ord: Bernabé Palma; Add'l Photo: Agustín Meza; Direct Sound: Manuel Rincón; Special Mkup: David Ruiz Gameo

Cast: Hugo Stieglitz (Dr. Francisco Vera), Roberto Trujillo (Miguel-Angeluz), José Luis Badillo (Luis de la Garza), Arturo Ramírez (Sergio), Silvia Ramírez (Sandra), Nelly Godoy (Dr. Elena Enríquez), Sophia Stieglitz (Gloria), Armando Infante (ass't to Vera), Ariane Pellicer (Tina), Tina French (Miguel's "mother"), David Valdez (street kid), Rodrigo Lecona (Toño), Francisco Trujillo (heretic), Blanca Julia Figueroa (Dr. Alvarez); Inquisition men: Manuel Escoto, Arturo Godínez, Armando Infante, Manuel Guijoza; Gang members: Antonio Consuegra, Gloria Ruiz, Carlos Gómez, Víctor Hugo Ávila, José Jiménez, Elehui Galván, Mauricio Osorio, Enrique García, Azbeth, Amilcar Sánchez; Paramedics: Pilar Pino, Eduardo Iduñate, Gonzalo Dávila, Arturo Godínez Jr., El Chamuco, Armando Infante, David Ruiz, Elvira Arreola, Manuel Guijoza, Verónica Barreiro

Notes: Angeluz is a rather entertaining film, despite a certain amount of controversy about its production and post-production (producer Hugo Stieglitz allegedly re-cut the film against the wishes of young director Leopoldo Laborde). The film begins as a pastiche of The Exorcist, The Omen, Carrie and other supernatural-themed movies (with strong overtones of The Incredible Hulk), then rather abruptly switches to science fiction in the last half hour or so, tossing in an homage to Alien as it does. These are not necessarily incompatible--in fact, Angeluz is one of those movies which attempts to explain ancient superstitions scientifically, though it hedges its bets and the supernatural explanation wins out in the end. However, the first hour or so is constructed as a mystery of sorts, while the final section is quite action-filmish, so there is some stylistic disconnection.

High school student Miguel is walking with his friends Luis and Sandra (who are sweethearts) when they are confronted by Sandra's former boyfriend Toño and his gang. The thugs begin to abuse Luis and Sandra, causing
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Miguel to have some sort of seizure; a pane of glass falls out of a window, impaling one of Toño's pals, and Toño himself is struck by a car and killed as he attempts to flee. Miguel disappears from school, worrying his two friends. Later, when Miguel shows up once more, he tells them he has a kind of "existential" problem but is seeking help. However, Toño's brother Sergio and some friends abduct Luis, Miguel, Sandra, and Luis's little sister Gloria, taking them to an abandoned house for revenge. Sergio molests Sandra and she strikes him with a bottle; he cuts her throat angrily. However, Miguel has another "attack" and uses his psychic powers to decimate the gang, although he spares Sergio's life.

Luis later tracks down his friend, who is hiding in the gang's house. Miguel's face has become oddly distorted, and two small horns have sprouted from his forehead. He tells Luis a strange story: centuries before, he was a member of a warrior class who slew a thousand men to protect innocent women and children. This offended the "Lords of Light," who opposed killing, and they cursed him: each time he kills, he changes more into a diabolical creature, but each time he does a good deed, he foretells the metamorphosis.

Suddenly, scientist Dr. Francisco Vera and his assistants burst in and capture Miguel. He asks Luis and Gloria (who led them to her brother) to accompany him to his laboratory. Dr. Vera explains Miguel is an "angeluz," a different species of being believed extinct for over 600 years. Reports of angels and devils in the Bible and throughout history did not refer to supernatural creatures, but to the angeluz race, who had special powers. The scientist has Miguel chained up naked in a special chamber, and hopes to ascertain where he came from and what exactly he is.

However, in true King Kong-fashion, Miguel breaks free and converts fully into an angeluz. His telekinetic powers seal the laboratory building (although Sergio, back again for revenge--you'd think he'd leave well enough alone) manages to get inside. Dr. Vera has his people split up and search for Miguel (using an electronic tracking device which shows Miguel stalking one of his assistants, a sequence which ends with the angeluz appearing on the ceiling of the corridor and snatching up the hapless scientist, later seen only as a bloody, disembodied arm).

Miguel captures Sergio and offers to allow Luis to kill the man who murdered Sandra, but Luis refuses (so Miguel breaks Sergio's neck). However, Luis convinces Miguel to reject violence and seek forgiveness: Miguel leaps out a window to his death, changing back to human form as he dies. He's welcomed into Heaven by a glowing figure.

Angeluz plays with some interesting ideas, although they're not exactly cohesive or coherent. Miguel himself claims he was converted into an angeluz for his violent actions, Dr. Vera says the angeluz are a separate species, and there are also suggestions it's a sort of God vs. the Devil deal. Miguel also refers to the powers which "cursed" him in the plural, but later has long (one-sided) conversations with God, bemoaning his fate and how unfair it is for God to torment him. The final scenes are jaw-dropping, with literal glowing "angels" (looking like paper cut-outs), psychedelic lights, and a white-light Jesus (I guess) welcoming Miguel into Heaven?!

In general, however, Angeluz holds one's attention, isn't boring, and doesn't insult the viewer's intelligence. I'd have liked a bit more in the way of special effects in the earlier sections--Miguel goes through various gyrations but his physical confrontations with Sergio's gang in the old house aren't convincing and no one has their head explode or anything (one gang member is forced to shoot himself in the mouth, but that's about it), and there aren't many manifestations of Miguel's supposed psychic power (a bit of house-shaking, but hardly an impressive amount). Later, when he's converted to an angeluz (fortunately growing a sort of furry loincloth to hide his naughty bits), he's satisfactorily agile and vicious (though his head is disproportionately large--the makeup is these sequences is good and fairly well articulated, but Laborde wisely keeps it mostly in the shadows).

The performances are satisfactory. Most of the heavy dramatic lifting is done by Roberto Trujillo as Miguel (although his voice is over-dubbed when he changes into an angeluz, so who knows who gets credit for that) and José Luis Badillo as Luis: Hugo Stiglitz's character is underdeveloped, he first appears to be a heroic character, then turns villainous later, while Arturo Ramirez as Sergio is a typical crazy, punk thug. Tina French does a good job as Miguel's adoptive mother, who takes care of him even though he's slowly changing into a monster.

The production values are fine, the low budget shows mostly in the lack of special effects--these would have helped quite a bit, giving the film a stronger impact than it has as it stands. Otherwise, the photography, editing, music, and so on are quite professional and slick, so it's a shame the "wow" factor couldn't have been ramped up.

A decent effort and not at all boring or inept, but nothing spectacular.

Trivia note: Angeluz is dedicated to the late Claudio Brook and Gilberto Martinez Solares, among others.

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