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OBITUARIES

JORGE LUKE

Actor Jorge Luke died of heart failure on 4 August 2012 in a Mexico City hospital; he was 69 years old.

Jorge Obscura Lango was born in 1942 in Mexico City. He began acting professionally in the late 1960s, after studying architecture at UNAM and singing with the band “Los Rippers.” Luke’s brother Pepe was also a singer and his sister Patricia later became an actress and then worked behind the cameras in film production.

Luke’s first major screen role was in the Western *El sabor de la venganza* (1969), but he also appeared in a



number of “serious” pictures, particularly early in his career. These included *Las puertas del paraíso*, *El jardín de tía Isabel*, *El Santo Oficio*, *El encuentro de un hombre sólo*, *Foxtrot*, and *La guerra santa*, for “name” directors including Arturo Ripstein, Sergio Ohlovich, Felipe Cazals, Jorge Fons and

Carlos Enrique Taboada. He received an Ariel nomination as Best Actor for *Las puertas del paraíso* (1971) and was later nominated as Best Supporting Actor for *Morir de madrugada*. He won a Diosa de Plata as Best Actor for *El Santo Oficio*.

However, much of Luke’s career was spent in action films (and later, *videohomes*) where his saturnine visage could be put to good use in tough-guy or villainous roles. He also appeared in a number of co-productions and international movies shot in Mexico, such as *Ulzana’s Raid*, *The Revengers*, *La chèvre*, *The Return of a Man Called Horse*, *The Evil That Men Do*, *Salvador* and *Clear and Present Danger*. In the Mexican-Soviet co-production *Campanas rojas* (1981), Luke was cast as a hero of the Revolution, Emiliano Zapata.

Jorge Luke and Isela Vega were a romantic couple from the late ‘60s to the mid-70s—they met while appearing in a play directed by Alejandro Jodorowsky--and had one daughter, Shaula. (Ironically, Vega played Luke’s mother in *El sabor de la venganza*!) Luke also served as a

surrogate father during this period for Arturo Vázquez, Vega’s son by singer Alberto Vázquez. After Luke’s death, Arturo Vázquez indicated the actor had been depressed over the state of his career, which--although it had included two recent theatrical films, directed by Juan Antonio de la Riva and Alfredo Gurrola, and a role on a *telenovela* (“Soy tu fan”)--was otherwise characterised by extended periods of unemployment.



LUCY GALLARDO

Actress Lucy Gallardo passed away in Los Angeles on 12 August 2012; she was 83 years old. Born Lucía Elida Cardarelli in Buenos Aires, Argentina in December 1929, Gallardo made her screen debut in several Argentine movies in 1949. She was briefly married to actor Luis Aldás (an Argentine actor who’d been working in Mexican cinema for nearly a decade).

After her divorce from Aldás, Gallardo began appearing in Mexican cinema, television, and on the stage in the mid-1950s. She won the Best Supporting Actress Ariel for *Con quién andan nuestras hijas?* (1956) and Best Co-Starring Actress for *Bambalinas* (1957), and was a prolific performer throughout the ‘50s and ‘60s.

Lucy Gallardo married Enrique Rambal, a Spanish actor who’d also relocated to Mexico in the 1950s, and they worked together many times in various venues until his death in 1971. Gallardo and Rambal had one daughter, Rebeca Rambal, an actress and television personality.

In the mid-1980s, Gallardo moved to Los Angeles to live with her daughter, and occasionally worked in U.S. media, including the 1988 *videohome* *Crimen en Los Angeles* (with her daughter Rebeca), the film *How the García Girls Spent Their Summer* (2005) and the 2003 *telenovela* “Te amaré en silencio” (also with Rebeca Rambal).

Among Gallardo’s notable Mexican films were *El ángel exterminador*, *Una vez...un hombre*, *El amor tiene cara de mujer* (repeating her *telenovela* role), and *Maten al león*, although she also appeared in numerous comedies



like *El día de la boda* and *Las fieras* (both with Enrique Rambal).



DULCE KURI



Dulce Kuri, who produced such Mexican films as *Danzón*, *El jardín del Edén*, and *Frida, naturaleza viva*, died of cardiac insufficiency in Mexico City on 11 August 2012; she was 64 years old.

Kuri began working in the cinema industry in the 1970s, producing the documentary *Viaje a Cuba*, then working on various independent productions in the following decade, including *¿Cómo ves?*, *Frida, naturaleza viva*, and *Barroco*. In the '90s and beyond she was responsible for projects like *Danzón*, *Sobrenatural*, *Sin dejar huella*, *Crónica de un desayuno*, and the animated feature *La revolución de Juan Escopeta*, her final film.

Kuri is survived by her husband.

CHAVELA VARGAS

Isabel Vargas Lizano, better known as singer Chavela Vargas, died in a Cuernavaca hospital on 5 August 2012; she was 93 years old. Vargas was born in Costa Rica in 1919 and lived in poverty and illness as a child. Emigrating to Mexico as a teenager, she was allegedly discovered by José Alfredo Jiménez while singing on a street corner. Vargas's

interpretations of classic *rancheras* earned her fame, and she became friends with Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and other well-known artists and intellectuals of the era. Later, Vargas succumbed to alcoholism and lost 15 years of her career



before making a comeback in the 1990s.

Chavela Vargas recorded new albums, heard her songs used in various films (including multiple pictures by Pedro Almodóvar), and even appeared in several movies herself: Herzog's *Scream of Stone* (1991), the English-language *Frida* (2002), and the documentary *Hecho en México* (2012). In her 80s she wrote her autobiography, revealing her homosexuality and other details of her long life and career.



ALBERTO VÁZQUEZ-FIGUEROA, NOVELIST AS DIRECTOR

Some sources claim Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa is one of the most successful Spanish authors of popular fiction, having sold millions of copies of his many novels over the

past 30+ years. Born in the Canary Islands in 1936, Vázquez-Figueroa grew up in Africa and worked as a professional diver and globe-trotting journalist before devoting himself full-time to writing books (mostly fiction) after suffering a diving accident in the late '70s. Many of his books are set in exotic locations, including his first major success "Ébano" (1975, filmed as *Ashanti* in 1979), "Manaos," and "Tuareg."

Vázquez-Figueroa was involved with the cinema as early as 1971, when he collaborated on the screenplay of *Es usted mi padre?*

Other film adaptations of his novels include *El Perro* (aka *The Dog*, 1977—this novel was later re-adapted into the 2004 film *Rottweiler*), *Tuareg* (1984), *Sangre en el Caribe* (a Mexican-Spanish co-production, 1984), and *Iguana* (1988, directed by Monte Hellman).



In 1976, the Spanish magazine "Blanco y negro" announced Vázquez-Figueroa was working on a film project about traffic in blood, to star Sandra Mozarowsky, Antonio Ferrandis, and Lola Gaos. This eventually became *Oro rojo* (1978), albeit with a completely different cast. Vázquez-Figueroa directed the film himself—shot on location in Lanzarote in the Canary Islands—as he did the following year with *Manaos*. The latter was a rare example of a novelist directing a film based on his own book (*Oro rojo* was based on an original screen story).

Although he's not directed any films since, Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa continues to be active as an author, winning the prestigious Premio Alfonso X El Sabio award in 2010 for his novel "Garóe." He also devotes a considerable amount of his time and effort working on the process of desalination, with an aim towards increasing the world's potable water supply.



Oro rojo (Sangre) [Red Gold—Blood]

(Prods. Esme-Ízaro Films, 1978)* *Prod:* Carlos Vassallo; *Dir-Scr:* Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa; *Photo:* José Luis Alcaine; *Music:* Carmelo Bernaola; *Prod Dir:* J. Estelrich; *Asst Dir:* Kuki López Rodero; *Film Ed:* Rosa Gracelia Salgado; *Decor:* Enrique Alarcón, Francisco Prosper; *Makeup:* Cristóbal Criado; *Prod Admin:* José Luis Antón



*Mexican-Spanish co-production

Cast: Isela Vega (*María*), Hugo Stiglitz (*Víctor*), Jorge Luke (*Lucas Almeida*), José Sacristán (*Beni*), Patricia Adriani (*Aurelia*), Terele Pavez (*Rufa*), Eduardo Bea (*bodyguard*), Carlos Ballesteros (*Mr. Thompson*), Alfredo Mayo (*Aurelia's father*), Antonio Passy, Mónica Randall

(*Raquel*), Francisco Ortiz, Chelo Navarro (*Aurelia's neighbour*), Fernando Baeza (*Mr. Walter*), Alejandro de Enciso, Antonio Gamero (*ship's captain*), José Manuel Martín, Joaquín Pamplona (*lawyer*), José Yepes (*doctor*), Luis Barboo (*Faro*), José Riesgo (*doctor*), María José García Cortés, Juan Calvo, Alfonso del Vando, Alfonso Ortuño, Carlos Pisaca (*prisoner*), Fernando Corujo, Manuel de León, Alfredo Llorente, Nicolás Pérez

Notes: *Oro rojo* was the first feature film directed by author Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa. In an article for the "El País" newspaper in September 1978, Vázquez-Figueroa wrote a "self-criticism" of the film:

"It's an authentic story, told with honesty, directly, with marvelous photography by Luis Alcaine and some wonderful views that the island of Lanzarote has.

The errors, which are numerous, each spectator will discover according to their own taste: inexperience in the handling of the actors or the camera, lack of rhythm or a connection between one sequence and the next...I don't know. If I had known, I wouldn't have committed such errors, of course. Overall, my opinion is that I have made a film that is 80% of what I wanted to make before I began, which isn't a bad percentage, in my way of looking at it...for a first [film]...it is [the story] I wanted to tell and in the form I wanted to tell it."



Victor, the bosun of a cargo ship plying the Caribbean trade, goes ashore on the island of Providencia, run by the dictator Almeida. His captain warns him the ship must sail on the morning tide or their cargo will rot. Spotting a shabby-looking man about to cook and eat a dead rat, the disgusted Víctor instead hires the man--Beni--as his guide. Beni takes him to prostitute Raquel, and then to a bar. He tells Víctor that the Almeidas sold Providencia's fishing rights to a Japanese company, putting him out of work: now he and many others sell their blood to buy food. Leaving the bar, Víctor is mugged by some thugs, tipped off by Raquel. His ship sails without him. Discovered by Beni, Víctor says he can't apply for help to his consulate because he's a wanted man in his own country, and he can't get a berth on another ship because his seaman's papers (stolen from him) were false and can't be replaced.

Victor stays with Beni in a derelict fishing boat in the abandoned shipyard. Beni introduces him to his friend Aurelia (she's referred to as his "sister" once, but it's

unclear) and her elderly father. Since Beni is a known union member (from the old days) and Víctor is a foreigner, they can't find work and have to sell their blood. Beni signs a contract that will allow his organs to be harvested and his cadaver used for scientific research after



his death, then gives the money to Víctor to purchase a new fake ID card. Once Víctor escapes from Providencia, he can send for Beni, Aurelia, and her father. However, Víctor is arrested by the secret police on suspicion of being a spy, and sent to a nearby island where convicts work in the salt flats.

Meanwhile, Beni grows weaker from loss of blood. Aurelia is raped by Lucas Almeida, the playboy son of the island's president. Her father, shamed by his inability to protect or provide for his family, commits suicide by walking into the sea.

After six months of hard labor, Víctor escapes from the prison colony and washes up on a rocky beach, where the lusty María and her bitter sister Rufa have a small cabin. María frankly admits she needs a man, and allows Víctor to stay--over her sister's objections--until he can repair their late father's fishing boat. When the boat is ready, María announces her intention to leave as well. Rufa, trying to shoot Víctor, accidentally kills María.

Victor returns to Providencia but it is too late for Beni, who dies. Víctor and Aurelia burn his body so it won't be turned over to the Almeidas. Lucas Almeida tracks down Aurelia but Víctor kills several of the man's bodyguards and the dictator's son as well. Pursued by the police,



Victor discovers his former ship is in the harbor. The captain welcomes his errant crewman, but Victor returns to shore for Aurelia. The vengeful Rufa tries to kill him once more, but Aurelia saves the wounded Víctor and they row out to meet his ship. A printed message appears on the screen: "In more than a dozen countries today, there is traffic in human blood. Only united effort can stop the

most detestable commerce that man has been capable of inventing."

Oro rojo is actually a very good film, despite the self-deprecating comments of its author-director (in fact, it's better in many ways than his *second* movie, *Manaos*). The atmosphere of oppression, dread, and hopelessness of the



island of Providencia is conveying in very convincing fashion, helped in no small measure by the location shooting on the bleak volcanic island of Lanzarote. Vázquez-Figueroa doesn't bludgeon the audience with too much symbolism: there are a few posters featuring the image of President Almeida (who's otherwise not seen in the movie), and the dictator's police are dressed in curious fashion (all-black cowboy outfits, dark glasses) and ride around in white jeeps, but these aren't overly obtrusive to the point of fantasy.

The film also, surprisingly, is restrained in its depiction of the trafficking in blood. Lucas Almeida has a contract with Mr. Walter and Mr. Thompson--most likely Americans--to supply blood, but his company doesn't kidnap people or otherwise take their blood by force, it simply takes advantage of the government-created economic climate that gives the residents no other option. Late in the movie, Almeida tells a roomful of wealthy supporters that the government has purchased 40 pieces of heavy equipment that will free hundreds of poor *campesinos* from back-breaking labour. Of course, as one person remarks, that will mean those "poor *campesinos*" will now have to sell their blood to earn money, thereby enriching Almeida even further.



Although Providencia is a fictional country, Beni does mention other dictatorial families who treat their nations like "private property"--the Duvaliers in Haiti, the Somozas in Nicaragua, and the Trujillos in the Dominican Republic--and Víctor says Providencia has a "fascist" government. And like another fascist government--in Nazi Germany--the minions of the Almeidas are scrupulous (in some ways) about legal matters: Beni signs a contract to

sell his cadaver, agreeing to comply with various restrictions imposed by the lawyer, the doctors at the blood company keep careful records (clients can only sell their blood once a week--although Víctor points out that once every two months is the safe interval), and so on.

However, Lucas Almeida uses his thugs to ensnare Aurelia so he can rape her, several times (even though he has a sexy blonde as his constant companion), and otherwise abuses his position as the son of the island's dictator. Political prisoners are sent to the *salinas* (salt flats), where they are compelled to work in the blazing sun, raking briny seawater and extracting the salt crystals. Lucas at least gets his just deserts, shot to death by Víctor and left in the island's trash dump.

The performances in *Oro rojo* are quite good overall, even though the standard Spanish-cinema post-dubbing robs some of the performers of their own voices. Interestingly enough, the dubbing in the version I've seen is not strongly "Castilian," suggesting this might be a Mexican release print (Isela Vega's top-billing also indicates this, since José Sacristán was the major "name" for the Spanish domestic market). Jorge Luke is certainly dubbed by someone else, while Isela Vega does her own voice (Hugo Stiglitz's voice is a toss-up). The dramatic heavy lifting is fairly evenly split between Sacristán and Stiglitz, with Patricia Adriani and Isela Vega providing substantial support. Vega, despite her top-billing and the prominent use of her image on the Mexican posters, doesn't appear until nearly an hour has elapsed and is on-screen for a relatively short period of time before her character is killed off, but she's very good nonetheless.

In addition to the possibility of different dialogue tracks, it's also possible there were other differences between the Spanish-release and the Mexican-release versions of *Oro rojo*. Vázquez-Figueroa makes a point of saying the film contains "only a woman chastely nude for three seconds," whereas photos exist (see the lobby card on the previous page) which show Isela Vega naked (and not very "chastely"). I'm fairly certain I saw such footage years ago when I first watched the movie, but I'm not sure if Vázquez-Figueroa was referring to this scene, or to one brief shot of Almeida's blonde companion topless by a pool (she dresses extremely provocatively in every other scene she's in, but she's not nude), or something else. The version I watched for this review only includes the topless shot, not the Vega nude scene, and was further edited for language. However, the Spanish version was rated for audiences of 18-and-older, which suggests it *might* have contained more than "three seconds" of chaste nudity.

Oro rojo is put together professionally, the narrative is straightforward, the location shooting contributes significantly to the feel of the film, and the performances are good. Overall, this is a satisfactory action-drama with substantial socio-political content.



Manaos* (Prods. Esme-Ízaro Films-The Federico G. Aicardi Org., 1979)** *Exec Prod:* Federico G. Aicardi, José Ma. Reyzaal; *Prod:* Carlos Vasallo; *Dir:* Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa; *Scr:* Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa, Carlos



Vasallo, Juan Antonio Porto; *Orig. Novel*: Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa; *Photo*: Alejandro Ulloa; *Music*: [Franco] Bixio, [Fabio] Frizzi, [Vince] Tempera; *Prod Mgr*: Salvador Gines, Pancho Medina; *Asst Dir*: Kuki López Rodero; *Action Dir*: Hernando Name; *Film Ed*: Sigfrido García, Otello Colangeli, Roger Macrosky; *Art Dir*: Kleomenes Stamatiades; *Script Supv*: Carlos Falomir; *Dialog Coach*: Carlos Nieto, John Fonseca; *Camera Op*: Cirilo Rodríguez; *Second Unit Photo*: Francisco Bojórquez; *Brazilian Photo*: Jean Marzon; *Special FX*: León Ortega; *Sound Op*: José García; *Sound Ed*: José Li-Ho; *Makeup*: Esther Oropeza, Franco Shioppa, Gianni Marosi; *Re-Rec*: Jesús González Gancy

*aka *Rebelión en la selva* [Mexican release title]

** Mexican-Spanish-Italian co-production

Cast: Jorge Rivero (*Howard*), Andrés García (*Carmelo Sierra*), Jorge Luke (*Ramiro*), Miltón Rodríguez (*Aranda*), Carlos East (*Charlie Scott*), Carlos Nieto (*Yusufaki*), Wally Barrón (*Saldaña*), Mike Moroff [as "Manuel Burciagas" on Spanish version] (*Joao*), Alfredo Mayo (*Sebastián*), Alberto de Mendoza (*Mario Buendía*), Fabio Testi (*Arquimedes*), Agostina Belli (*Claudia*), Florinda Bolkan (*Manuela Aranda*), Miguel Fuentes & Jorge Reinoso [sic] (*Sierra's bodyguards*), Yogi Ruge (*singer*), Carlos Nieto (*Yusufaki*), Eduardo Noriega (*Echevarría*), John Fonseca (*Blanchard*), Kleomenes Stamatiades (*Souza*), Carlos González (*Tigre*), Humberto Johnson (*Chino*), Luis

Negrete (*Blanquenegro*), Lizetta Romo & Margarita Vernise (*women*), Manuel Anaya (*Indio*) [**note**: cast listed in Mexican-version order; the Spanish and Italian releases *Manaos* bill Belli, Testi, Rivero and García in that order]

Notes: it's difficult to evaluate a film when a definitive version doesn't exist. *Manaos* received extensive international release, and various copies of different lengths and content are extant. For this review, I looked at 3 versions [but I did not do a scene-by-scene comparison.]: a) *Manaos*--just over 80 minutes in length; dubbed in Castilian Spanish; credits in English; contains nudity in the scene in which Claudia is raped. Found on the Internet somewhere.



b) *Rebelión en la selva*--just over 100 minutes in length; dubbed in "Mexican Spanish"; credits altered; no nudity. Recently shown on Cine Nostalgia (a channel owned by Carlos Vasallo, one of

the film's original producers).

c) *Manaos*--just under 93 minutes long; English-language version (with sub-titles in some Scandinavian language); nudity in rape scene. Available on YouTube. For the record, if you look at the actors' lip movements, it is apparent they were (mostly) speaking English during shooting, but the English-dubbed print is just that, a *dubbed* copy and not the original voice track.

To confuse matters even more, another YouTube video has just the credits of a "VHS" version: these are English-language credits **but** the main title is *animated* and in a different font than the "other"



English-credits version of *Manaos*, and the contents of the credit screens are different (for instance, Fabio Testi is top-billed, Belli second, Rivero third, each on a *separate* screen). Some of the other credits are missing (only Fabio Frizzi is credited with the music), some of the fonts are different, and the credits sometimes appear over different backgrounds than in the "other" versions (aerial shots of the Amazon in all cases, but not the *same* aerial shots). Furthermore, there is an extensive printed prologue (in English) that provides historical context, a prologue not present in *Rebelión en la selva*, or on either of the other two versions of *Manaos* I have!!

“Nearing the end of the nineteenth century, raw rubber came to be even more cherished than gold. It was obtained from a wild tree, which sprouted only within the Amazon Jungle.

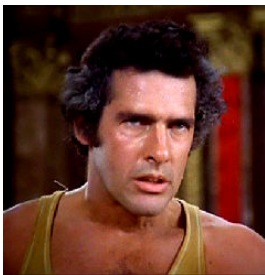
The monopoly of its exploitation lay only in the hands of a small group of men who, from MANAOS, turned the Amazon area into the largest prison known to human kind.

During the rubber fever days, it is estimated that a million persons lost their lives in the Amazona.”

There are other versions floating around, including a Condor Video of *Rebelión en la selva* that supposedly runs 104 minutes.



probably—gore; also, most extant versions are full-screen rather than wide-screen). Regardless, *Manaos* is not an especially good film. Although it’s not dull, too much is left unexplained, some scenes run far too long, and the story is simultaneously too broad in scope and too narrow in execution. Like Vázquez-Figueroa’s first film, *Oro Rojo*, *Manaos* has a political viewpoint, but it is much



more muted. The character of Arquímedes is introduced as a man who tried to start a revolution, and he later helps free some enslaved workers (and sends them away to Venezuela, out of danger), but he doesn’t verbalise his political beliefs and most of his actions seem simply like the decent thing to do, rather than a committed effort at social change. The oligarchs who control the rubber plantations are depicted negatively, but only Sierra’s atrocities are shown and the other men are not particularly evil (at least, not much more evil than all rich people in such movies are usually presented).



Working involuntarily on the plantation are Howard—a gringo who’d previously had an affair with Claudia—and Arquímedes, imprisoned for fomenting revolution. Sierra

One would assume the longest version (in my case, *Rebelión en la selva*) comes closest to the original concept for the movie (except for the cut nudity and—

probably—gore; also, most extant versions are full-screen rather than wide-screen). Regardless, *Manaos* is not an especially good film. Although it’s not dull, too much is left unexplained, some scenes run far too long, and the story is simultaneously too broad in scope and too narrow in execution. Like Vázquez-Figueroa’s first film, *Oro Rojo*, *Manaos* has a political viewpoint, but it is much

As the film opens, rubber baron Carmelo Sierra arrives at one of his jungle plantations, accompanied by his mistress, Claudia.

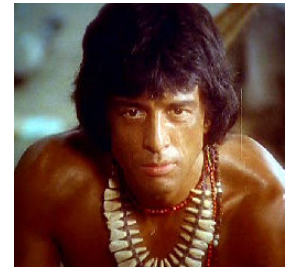
hands over Claudia to the workers, ordering them to repeatedly rape her for her infidelity. Howard and Arquímedes are disgusted by this brutality, but are unable to intervene. Joao, Sierra’s foreman, plans to have



Howard castrated by pirañas to avoid trouble, but Arquímedes warns his friend and Howard escapes, hiding in the jungle

nearby. Arquímedes’s native assistant Ramiro offers to guide them to safety through the jungle, but Howard won’t leave without Claudia. Claudia murders Joao and they all set off for freedom.

Their trek through the jungle is long and arduous. Claudia learns she is pregnant and has to undergo a painful miscarriage (aided by Ramiro) so she can continue. Sierra sends slaver Yusufaki after the fugitives but he is forced to free them in exchange for his own life when a hostile tribe of indigenous people steal their canoes. Howard, Arquímedes, Claudia and Ramiro reach the Ecuadorian border but are fired on by soldiers: Ramiro is mortally wounded and the others have to turn back. With the aid of disgruntled guard Sebastián, the group



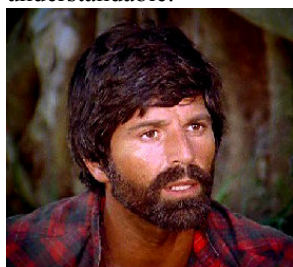
takes over a rubber camp, freeing the workers. They ambush the luxurious river boat of Sierra’s fellow exploiter Aranda.

Aranda is betrayed by his own wife Manuela—appalled at his brutality towards his indigenous workers—and hung. Also on board the boat is gambler Mario, who knows Claudia’s family. Howard arranges for Mario to take Claudia home. As the boat passes the city of Manaus, Howard and Arquímedes disembark to find and kill Sierra, sending the others away to freedom and safety.

Sierra and the other rubber barons have learned a British agent has stolen rubber seeds and a rival rubber industry is becoming established in the Far East. Sierra disposes of his holdings and makes plans to depart for Borneo with a cargo of the prohibited seeds himself. On Yusufaki’s houseboat (where the seeds are hidden), he’s assaulted by Howard and Arquímedes. Howard is killed,

but Arquímedes locks Sierra in the boat and watches as it plunges over a waterfall, killing the villain.

How much of *Manaos* was shot in Brazil is debatable—the Estudios Churubusco and locations in the states of Tabasco and Chiapas probably account for much of the footage. The production values are adequate if not exorbitant—the “sets” are mostly shacks in the jungle, there aren’t huge crowds of extras, and there is no spectacle to speak of. The cast, on the other hand, is strong, and fairly evenly balanced between the participating countries—Rivero, García, Luke (Mexico), Belli, Testi, Bolkan (Italy), de Mendoza, Mayo (Spain)—although ironically Spain seems to be the minor partner in this respect, since its “names” are supporting players. Given that most of the movie was filmed in Mexico, the presence of numerous Mexican character actors in the cast—Rodríguez, East, Barrón, Nieto, etc.—is understandable.



Judging performances in a dubbed film is difficult, but most of the players are

satisfactory. Jorge Rivero and Fabio Testi are both handsome, bearded heroes and since their back-stories are negligible, there isn’t much to choose between them. Andrés García makes a nice, arrogant villain and Agostina Belli is attractive.

Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa was primarily a writer, and while *Manaos* isn’t badly-directed, it’s certainly not inspired, either. Too many scenes consist of people sitting around talking, and the “exciting” action sequences are



either minimally competent or less than that. The assault on Aranda’s riverboat is one example, running too long and featuring boring

footage of people shooting, intercut with shots of stuntmen stiffly falling off the craft into the river. Most of the movie is shot in medium shot or *plan américain*, and isn’t framed or edited for maximum dramatic impact.

The music is also variable. Many reviewers have commented on the theme song, which is an extremely catchy if anachronistic disco tune (in English). Half the lyrics are unintelligible, but the words include “Manaos, that is where we are going, today, Manaos! Keep on moving or lose your way, caramba! If they catch us we all are gonna die...Manaos! Tried so hard to get along but they just wanna fight...” Unfortunately, the rest of the score vacillates between occasional instrumental versions of the theme, dramatic orchestral music (appropriate), and treacly

library-sounding music (inappropriate). [Note: it’s possible the different versions have altered music tracks as well as dialogue tracks.]

Manaos is an adequately entertaining historical/jungle/action-drama with a good international cast, but it’s not an especially well-made film.



TWO JOSÉ BOHR FILMS



Quién mató a Eva? [Who Killed Eva?] (Prods. Duquesa Olga, 1934) *Dir:* José Bohr; *Adapt:* Eva Limiñana; *Story:* Xavier Dávila, Eva Limiñana; *Photo:* Alex Phillips; *Music:* José Bohr; *Music Arr:* Max Urban; *Asst Dir:* Miguel M. Delgado; *Film Ed:* José Marino; *Art Dir:* F.A. Rivero; *Asst Photo:* Agustín P. Delgado; *Sound:* José B. Carles; *Titles:* C. Véjar Jr.

Cast: José Bohr (*José Rolán**), Josefina Vélez (*Nancy*), Julio Villareal (*Mario Rosales*), Miguel M. Delgado (*Raúl*), Joaquín Busquets (*César*), Lucy Delgado (*Dolores*), Alfonso S. Tello (*González, detective*), Nellie Parodi (*Delia Medina*), L. Sánchez Tello (*Capt. Lobo*), *detectives:* Jorge Treviño, Arturo Manrique, Santiago Ramírez; Carlos López “Chaflán” (*drunk*)

*some sources list Bohr’s character name as “José Roldán,” but the film’s opening credits and a newspaper clipping shown in the movie indicate it is actually Rolán.

Notes: José Bohr was born in Germany in 1901, but traveled with his family to Turkey, Marseilles, and Argentina before finally settling in Chile as a boy. His career as an actor and singer eventually brought him to the USA, where he appeared in some of the Spanish-language versions of Hollywood films made in the early years of sound. Relocating to Mexico, Bohr directed and starred in his first film there in 1933. *Quién mató a Eva?* was the second of 14 features he would direct in Mexico between 1933 and 1939, at which time he left the country, eventually returning to Chile where he made more than a dozen more films over the next two decades.

Quién mató a Eva? is interesting in a number of ways, although it’s not as entertaining as it had the potential to be. After a group of young women say in unison

"Duquesa Olga presenta," the opening credits are shown over live footage of Bohr's character conducting an orchestra and singing, a very unusual format for the period (credits over live-action were rare until the 1960s, and even then the on-screen action was usually "traveling" shots rather than dialogue scenes or musical numbers).



Later, there are some odd musical interpolations: a quartet of comedy detectives sings their own "theme song" not once but twice, a group of four seedy-looking characters in a café perform a "scat-singing" number followed by two other, abbreviated songs. Bohr's opening song is entitled (in translation) "How Bored I Am," and sets up the plot; when he reprises the song a few minutes later, the lyrics are changed because he's not bored any more!

Wealthy playboy José Rolán comes home to find burglar Mario Rosales in his house. José agrees not to call the police if Mario makes him his partner: José wants danger and excitement in his life. They move on to Mario's next target, but discover the owner of the house--actress Eva Urquiza--has been stabbed to death. The two



men narrowly escape the police, but José leaves his hat behind and has to go into hiding. Mario takes him to the hotel run by Nancy, introducing him as gangster "Luponini from Chicago." Also in the hotel are Delia and Dolores:

Dolores was Eva's secretary and Delia is her friend. José and Mario realise they must solve the crime to clear their names. However, Mario is murdered and Dolores is abducted. José eventually sets a trap that exposes Nancy's boyfriend Raúl as the murderer--they were blackmailing Eva. Raúl is killed fleeing from the police and Nancy is arrested.

Too much of *Quién mató a Eva?* is spent running around pointlessly, and the dialogue and performances are



never as amusing as the film pretends. José doesn't do much investigating: most of the clues fall into his lap, and Delia is actually the one who ascertains who sent Eva a parrot on the last day of her life (it was Raúl).

The characterisations are uneven and their motivations are unclear or illogical for the most part. There are also too many coincidences.

José Bohr is an engaging performer (curiously, he has an Argentine accent when he sings, but not when he talks) and one wishes the script had taken better advantage of his breezy personality. For those who are most familiar with

Julio Villareal's later roles as a curmudgeon, it's interesting to see him play a different sort of part here. Josefina Vélez was the sister of Lupe Vélez and the ex-wife of Miguel M. Delgado, who plays her lover in *Quién mató a Eva?* (apparently they remained on good terms after separating). As "Nancy," she's wry, sexy, and independent, sparring verbally with José when he arrives at her hotel.



The production values are adequate. The film concludes with a car chase and wreck, in which a car actually crashes into a ravine, an unexpected luxury. However, most of the film was shot in the studio on rather nondescript sets.

It should be noted that the version of *Quién mató a Eva?* shown on Cine Nostalgia is missing a large amount of footage from the original--up to 20 minutes, if the original running time of 80 minutes is correct--including several additional songs by Bohr and one by Josefina Vélez. Although the plot seems more or less intact, the absence of the musical numbers is unfortunate.



Luponini de Chicago* [Luponini of Chicago]

(Prods. Duquesa Olga, 1935) Dir: José Bohr; Adapt: Eva Limiñana

"Duquesa Olga," José Bohr; Story: Xavier Dávila; Photo: Alex Phillips; Music: José Bohr; Orch: C. Jaramillo; Asst Dir: José Benavides; Film Ed: José Marino; Art Dir: José Rodríguez; Sound: B.J. Kroger



*some advertisements for the film list the title as *Luponini* (*El terror de Chicago*), but most print sources give the title as *Luponini de Chicago*; the re-release (García Riera says "pirated") title was *El Manos sangrientas* (Bloody Hands)

Cast: José Bohr (*Luponini*), Anita Blanch (*Luisa Benítez*), Carlos Villatoro (*Chato*), Isabelita Blanch (*Isabel*), Maruja Gómez (*Maravilla*), Raúl Talán (*Colibrí*), Manuel Buendía (*Dominguez, chief of detectives*), Arturo Manrique (*Moreno*), Jorge Treviño (*Montes*), Paco

Martínez (*Luponini's father*), G[odofredo] de Velasco (*Juan Orlando*), Consuelo Segarra (*Sra. Benítez*), Ernestina Estay

Notes: one of José Bohr's best-known films today is *Luponini de Chicago*, a Hollywood-style gangster film. In *Quién mató a Eva?*, Bohr's character used the "Luponini de Chicago" pseudonym, implying he was a gangster, and returned to the name and profession here. The film opens with a



printed title indicating "The action occurs in any country in the current day"--it clearly doesn't take place in Chicago, but rather a unnamed Mexico City--and the explanation of the "Chicago" part of the title only comes about half-way through the movie. The police learn Luponini *was* born in Chicago and lived there until he was 15 years of age, but there is no suggestion he is supposed to be an American gangster or even that he learned his trade there.

Unfortunately, as with a number of the un-restored films being shown on the Cine Nostalgia channel, *Luponini de Chicago* (or to be more precise, the re-release version titled *El Manos sangrientas*) is severely cut. All of Bohr's musical numbers are missing (as are all but one fragment of those performed by Maruja Gómez), and the first 20 minutes of the movie have been severely truncated, omitting a lot of expository material.

Luponini (his first name isn't given, and his friends call him "Lupo" anyway) is a teller at the Banco de Comercio. He's in love with Marta, daughter and secretary of bank president Orlando, but Orlando doesn't consider Lupo a socially-acceptable match for her. Stung by Orlando's attitude, Lupo steals a car and takes fellow teller

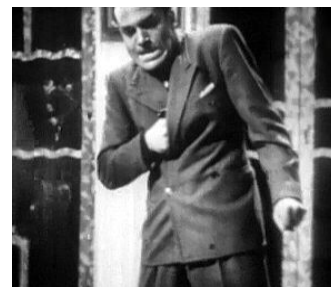


Luisa to a fancy dance, also attended by the Orlando family. Although he is not prosecuted for theft, Luponini loses his job. For some reason (the missing footage would have been helpful here), Lupo is also compelled to marry Luisa. Months go by, and Luisa and her mother become frustrated at Lupo's failure to get a job. Instead, he hangs out in a billiard hall with would-be crooks Chato and Colibrí. Finally, through the intervention of Chato's girlfriend Isabel, Lupo is hired by the Cine Esperanza as a projectionist, but it is too late to save his marriage: Luisa divorces him. Luponini bitterly says she would love him if he were rich, and vows to some day throw money in her face.

Luponini, Chato, and Colibrí form a gang and begin robbing banks and other businesses. Due to his athletic leaps during the crimes, Lupo is dubbed the "Hombre Mono" (Ape Man). One day, they rob the Banco de Comercio. Lupo is masked but Luisa gazes into his eyes and--when he tosses money at her--recognises the Hombre Mono as Lupo. She refuses to denounce him to the police, and is fired from the bank. Because she knows his identity, Lupo forces Luisa to leave home and join the gang, although he has a new girlfriend, Spanish dancer Maravilla. Their headquarters is in a cabaret conveniently located next to the Cine Esperanza: Lupo sings, Maravilla dances and sings, and even Luisa is pressed into service as a tap dancer. There is considerable friction between Luisa and Maravilla.



A planned robbery of the nightclub goes awry. Lupo's identity as the Hombre Mono is exposed; he flees with Chato, Isabel, and Colibrí, with the police in hot pursuit. Chato and Colibrí are killed. [note: printed sources say Colibrí turned informant and Lupo kills him, but this is unclear in the extant version.] Lupo tells Isabel to return to the city and wait for his message. His car goes off a cliff and he is presumed dead, but Lupo survives and visits a plastic surgeon, who makes him look Asian (!). He is reunited with Luisa and Isabel, but Luisa succumbs to police pressure and tells them Lupo will be at the Cine Esperanza watching Maravilla perform. At the cinema, Lupo proposes that he and Luisa re-marry and leave the country. She leaves the cinema first but she and Isabel are prevented by the police from warning Lupo about the ambush. Lupo is mortally wounded. Believing Luisa betrayed him for money, Lupo shoots her. They both die.



The conclusion of *Luponini* was obviously inspired by the then-recent demise of John Dillinger (he was killed in July 1934, a year before *Luponini* went into production): the police, tipped off by a woman, gun down the Most-Wanted gangster as he is leaving a cinema. Similarly, Lupo's career as a bank robber is somewhat reminiscent of Dillinger's crime spree, and Bohr even sports a pencil-thin moustache once he leaves the honest life behind.

In most aspects, *Luponini* is far superior to *Quién mató a Eva?* The story is straight-forward, the production values are somewhat better (including some interesting location shooting), and the characterisations are more detailed. Luponini starts off as a fairly normal young man who is angered by the socio-economic bias of his boss at the bank. This develops into a sort of mania, whereby

POR FIN...

Producciones
DUQUE
presenta
a



**JOSE
BOHR**
EL ÍDOLO DE LA PANTALLA
HISPANO -- PARLANTE --

LUPONINI DE CHICAGO

El maravilloso drama realista, cruel, emocionante y atrevido que pinta con dinámicos colores la fantástica vida del más formidable criminal de los tiempos modernos....

she is *forced* to marry him are unclear, and their marriage doesn't exactly blossom. Lupo is attracted to Luisa--but still cares about Marta--and Luisa is interested in him yet (egged on by her mother) criticises him for his failure to obtain honest employment and then divorces him. He is cool (even hostile) to her when they meet again, yet Luisa seems to be carrying a torch, although Lupo's now involved with Maravilla. Luisa's actions are almost entirely motivated by jealousy from this point onward. At the finale Lupo claims she's the one he's really loved all the time (even though he's still infatuated with Maravilla, at least enough to risk going to see her perform), and then--just before he dies--decides Luisa turned him in for the reward and kills her!

The performances are generally very good, starting with Bohr, who--as just indicated--plays Luponini as a rather bitter individual. Anita Blanch makes her screen debut here and is fine. She's not conventionally beautiful but this actually contributes to her effective portrayal of the insecure Luisa. The other Blanch sister, Isabelita, also does a good job as the supportive Isabel, while Maruja Gómez is adequate as the stereotypical jealous, hard-boiled gangster's moll.

Carlos Villatoro and Raúl Talán (the latter a boxer and occasional actor) are satisfactory as Lupo's henchmen, although Villatoro's role is rather colourless.

Trivia notes: at the film's climax, the Cine Esperanza is apparently showing (based on posters outside the theatre) John Ford's *The Informer* (as *El Delator*) and a Mickey Mouse cartoon. The choice of *The Informer* may have been deliberate or possibly just a happy coincidence, since it is an emotionally-conflicted "informer" who causes the death of Luponini.

Lupo feels everyone (except himself, of course) is motivated by money, and this is manifested in their rejection or ill-treatment of him. The relationship between Lupo and Luisa is odd--as noted above, the reasons why



Luponini, like *Quién mató a Eva?*, includes a "real" (i.e., not stock footage) car crash staged for the movie, but trumps the earlier production by (a) having car go over an ever steeper embankment, and (b) burst into flames when it finally comes to rest!

The sad state of the current print of *Luponini* is lamentable, but it at least provides some hint of the original film, which seems to have been an entertaining Mexican version of a Hollywood gangster movie of the era.



ACTION!

Salvando al soldado Pérez [Saving Soldier

Pérez] (Lemon

Films-Fidecine-

Vía Media-

Terregal Films,

2011) *Exec*

Prod: Billy

Rovzar,

Fernando

Rovzar, Mariana

Menéndez,

Anwar Safa,

Alejandro Safa,

Alex García;

Prod: Bill

Rovzar,

Fernando

Rovzar, Alex

García, Walter

Von Borstel,

Alexis Fridman; *Dir*: Beto Gómez; *Scr*: Beto Gómez,

Francisco Payo González; *Photo*: Daniel Jacobs; *Music*:

Mark Mothersbaugh; *Supv Film Ed*: Alex Rodríguez; *Film*

Ed: Mario Sandoval; *Prod Design*: Raymundo "Cyber"

Cabrera; *Art Dir*: Alejandra Quijano; *Sound Des*: Enrique

Greiner, Eric Dounce; *Asst Dir*: Hugo Rodríguez; *Prod*

Dir: Sandra Solares; *Prod Mgr*: Juan Uruchurtu

Cast: Miguel Rodarte (*Julián Pérez*), Adal Ramones (*Benito García*), Jamie Camil (*Eladio*), Jesús Ochoa (*Chema Díaz*), Gerardo Taracena (*Carmelo Benavides*), Joaquín Cosío (*Rosalío Mendoza*), Isela Vega (*doña Elvira de Pérez*), Rodrigo Oviedo (*Pumita*), Marius Biegai (*Sasha Boginski*), Claudia Salinas (*Chayito*), Michelle Marie Benoit (*news correspondent*), Michael Birnberg, Alex Cervantes (*Julián as a boy*), Manuel Domínguez, Roberto Espejo (*Lucio*), Verónica Falcón (*Arab woman*), Juan Carlos Flores (*Juan Pérez Nomel*), Vicente Fox (*himself, in news footage*), John Gerald Randall (*Daily*), Alfredo Herrera (*Arab contact*), Alexander Minchenko (*Yuri*), Guillermo Quintanilla (*Delfino*), Miguel Enrique Rodríguez (*Carmelo as a boy*), Randy Vásquez (*Lt. Díaz*), Gerardo Ott (*Pascual*), Leonardo Kourchenko, Kaveh Parmas (*Ahmed Kubba*), William Raymond (*Willis*)

Notes: One of the most successful Mexican films at the box-office in 2011, *Salvando al soldado Pérez* is a slick and amusing comedy-action movie. The title (but not the



plot) spoofs *Saving Private Ryan* (the USA-release title was *Saving Private Pérez*) and also evokes the legend of “Juan Soldado,” a Mexican soldier executed (some say unjustly) in the 1930s who has become a folk saint. [Another folk saint, legendary bandit Jesús Malverde, is referenced in the film as well.]



In 2003, druglord Julián Pérez visits his elderly mother, doña Elvira, in a nursing home in the USA. Years before, after the death of her husband and Julián’s choice of crime as a career, doña Elvira took her younger son Juan and emigrated to the USA. In a reversal of the stereotypical situation, the “one who remains behind” becomes rich and (in)famous, while the Promised Land of the USA is not kind to doña Elvira and her son, who struggle to make an honest living. Juan enlisted in the U.S. Army and has gone missing in Iraq. Despite their estrangement, doña Elvira orders Julián to help his brother.

Julián—who isn’t too bright but has a highly-competent, computer-savvy assistant in the person of Eladio—forms a team of experts to rescue Juan. “Comando Tomate,” as it is dubbed, includes Yaqui Indian Carmelo (a childhood friend of the Pérez brothers), military veteran Chema, *norteño* Rosalío, and hired-assassin Pumita (freed from prison by Julián’s men). Pumita is the outsider in the group (he even tried to kill Julián once!). In Turkey, they are joined by Russian Sasha (supplied by another Russian, “fixer” Yuri), who serves as their interpreter and guide across the Turkish-Iraqi border. Time is of the essence: the Iraqi insurgents are planning to execute some American military hostages shortly.

Despite having to fight both the Iraqis and the American forces, and despite various missteps along the way, Comando Tomate eventually achieves its goal and returns Juan Pérez to his mother, who reconciles with Julián as well. Pumita remains in Turkey to begin a new life; Chema is mortally wounded during the escape. [A printed epilogue says Julián was murdered in Mexico several months later.]

Salvando al soldado Pérez is exciting and entertaining, with action taking precedence over humour. There is humour in the film but this is not a slapstick comedy—the humour arises from the characters and situations, rather than pratfalls and overt “jokes.” Julián—and his rival, drugload Benito García (a cameo by Adal Ramones)—are

stereotypical *naco-narcos* who live lives of conspicuous (even excessive) consumption: lavish mansions, “classy” servants in addition to armed henchmen, menageries of wild animals, fancy cars, outrageous clothing, etc. Julián therefore seems buffoonish at first, but as the film goes on, he becomes less of a clown and more of a worthy protagonist. His character and his relationship with his brother are fleshed out via a number of flashback scenes to Julián and Juan’s early life together, as well as a sequence in which Julián—now wealthy—confronts Juan, who’s selling *burritos* from a food-truck in Los Angeles (and wearing a demeaning hat with gigantic “burro” ears).

Once they’re introduced, the script does not provide much additional characterisation of the other members of “Comando Tomate.” Carmelo is worried about his tomato crop, Chema has a young wife (girlfriend? daughter?), Pumita is insecure around the others (in a nice, telling bit, at one point the group is dining on some green glop concocted by Sasha—Chema shares his bottle of hot sauce with the others, but Pumita sits apart) but eventually proves his worth. [In one of the rare slapstick bits, Pumita’s touching farewell scene is marred when he drops the urn containing Chema’s ashes, which blow in everyone’s face.] However, the film doesn’t really give each man any special, unique ability (Chema sometimes makes comments on military tactics, but this is underplayed), and long scenes of introspection or character-building monologues are largely absent. However, all of the performances are fine, and—with the exception of Adal Ramones, who’s only briefly on-screen—are mostly naturalistic. Even Marius Biegai, who plays the group’s flamboyant guide, isn’t a caricature.

The production values are excellent, with location shooting in Turkey adding scope and verisimilitude to the Middle Eastern setting. There’s nothing lacking here in terms of polish, even though this film ventures (at least partially) into an area where Mexican cinema has rarely gone (i.e., the “war” movie).

The political content of *Salvando al soldado Pérez* is slight. No particular explanation is given for the invasion of Iraq, and there is one scene in which an Iraqi insurgent justifies his actions by saying his people are just fighting to survive, *not* for ideology, but for the most part the U.S. troops and the Iraqis pose equal threats to the Mexicans (one might say the Iraqis appear slightly worse, morally, since they are preparing to behead a group of captive American soldiers and video-tape it, whereas the American soldiers are portrayed as professionals). The climax is slightly annoying and confusing: Julián and his group have rescued



Juan (and some comrades) from the Iraqis and then the Americans arrive and start shooting. Julián drags/carries his brother away, dodging bullets: the soldiers shout "release the hostage!" but if they think Juan is a hostage, why were they shooting at him?

Overall, the film's popularity with Mexican audiences is easy to understand. Most people don't approve of the drug trade and its affect on Mexico, but some admire (or are at least fascinated by) the *narcos* for their fearless behaviour and flamboyant lifestyle (perhaps there are those who feel "these are criminals but they're *our* criminals"), and this may be less morally questionable when one is dealing with fictional characters in popular culture. Furthermore, *Salvando al soldado Pérez* whitewashes Julián and his gang—they're only preying on each other and fighting "foreigners" (largely in self-defense, or at least in pursuit of a noble goal, the rescue of a fellow Mexican) and casts familiar performers in sympathetic roles. And finally, this is a fun, fast-paced, and well-produced action movie without a heavy message or a downbeat conclusion. Perfectly calculated for box-office success, and...it worked.



Escuadrón de la muerte [Death Squad] (Prod. Metropolitana, 1984) *Exec Prod:* Ignacio García, Miguel



Kahan; *Prod:* Abe Glazer; *Dir:* Alfredo Gurrola; *Scr:* Vicente Armendáriz, R. L. Arego; *Story:* Vicente Armendáriz; *Photo:* Agustín Lara; *Prod Mgr:* Roberto Lozoya; *Asst Dir:* Francisco Guerrero; *Film Ed:* Francisco Chiu; *Art Dir:* José Luis Garduño; *Action Co-ord:* Julio Collantes; *Makeup:* Antonio Castañeda; *Re-rec:*

Ricardo Zaldívar

Cast: Mario Almada (*Capt. Mario Balbuena*), Miguel Ángel Rodríguez (*Fabián Ordoñez*), Hugo Stiglitz (*Sergio Enríquez*), Sergio Goyri (*Ramón Cabrera*), Gerardo Vigil (*José María Lizárraga*), Rojo Grau (*Jaime Morales*), Jorge Luke (*El Loco Ordoñez*), Norma Lazareno (*Sra. Balbuena*), Delia Casanova (*Ruth, La Peregrina*), Rubi Re (*Paty Balbuena*), César Sobrevals (*police commander*), Carlos Cardán (*one-eyed man*), Honorato Magaloni (*Mateo Luján*), Humberto Luna (*Humberto, druggist*), Guillermo Ríos, Alejandro Parodi (*Gabriel Patiño*), Eduardo López Rojas (*Velázquez*), Mario Arevalo (*man in pool hall*), Eva Revueltas, Fernando Yapur (*Morales*), Leo Villanueva, Marcelo Villamil (*Mr. Atkins*), Guillermo Ayala, Carlos Terán, Carlos González, Mundo Armenta, Chavalo

Zaldívar, Alejandro de la Peña, René Barrera, Gustavo Aguilar, Fidel Abrego, Guadalupe Perullero

Notes: the 1980s were the heyday of the Mexican action film, and *Escuadrón de la muerte* is one of the better movies of this type, at least in terms of its action sequences. The characterizations and the plot are a little thin, but not really bad, and the cast is pretty strong.



Capt. Mario Balbuena, unjustly discharged from the police force through the machinations of some drug smugglers, hires five criminals to help him crush the crime ring--former soldier Fabián, smuggler Sergio, Ramón, José María, and Jaime. The men receive their first month's pay, and carry out some raids, but the identity of the real kingpin is still unknown.

Corrupt police identify Mario as the man behind the attacks, and gangster Mateo Luján and some men surprise Mario, his wife, and grown daughter Paty in the countryside. Mario is riddled with bullets, his wife is stabbed and tossed off a cliff, and Paty is raped and murdered. Mario's men find the bodies, but discover Mario is still alive. While he's in the hospital, the group decides they owe Mario the rest of the month's service he paid them for--they go undercover and eventually learn Gabriel Patiño is the head of the narcotics organization.

With the aid of Fabián's brother "El Loco"--another ex-soldier who constructs a mortar for them--the men raid Gabriel's rural laboratory. After a long battle, Fabián catches Mateo and cuts off his head, while Gabriel burns to death as his lab is destroyed. Most of Mario's men are injured, but all escape alive.

The action sequences of *Escuadrón de la muerte* are well-staged and executed, with particular emphasis on speeding motorcycles and fiery explosions. Sometimes this gets a little ridiculous: a wooden lookout tower is hit by a mortar round, topples over, and crushes a wooden hut with a thatched roof, resulting in a huge fireball and explosion (why?)! However, for the most part the stunts are slick and exciting and not cheats.

As mentioned above, the characterizations of the five men (Jorge Luke, as "El Loco," appears only in the latter sequences and has no dialogue) are very sparse. Only Fabián is given much of a "back story," which he explains to Mario's daughter in one scene--he thought about

studying to be an engineer, but decided it would take too long! He emigrated to the USA but was caught by *La Migra*; then he joined the U.S. Army and traveled the world, but eventually went out on his own as a mercenary. [If you watch this scene carefully, the boom mike can be glimpsed in the shots of Rubí Re.] Jaime and José María have brief "undercover" scenes, but Hugo Stiglitz and Sergio Goyri's characters mostly just hang around with the group.

The rest of the cast is good, with surprising cameos by Eduardo López Rojas and Delia Casanova, as well as the usual good work by Cardán, Sobrevalls, and Parodi, all veterans of this sort of picture.

Fast-paced and entertaining, although not very deep.



Escuadrón Counterforce* (Golden Sun/Esme/Soltar Corp**, 1988) *Prod:* Carlos Vasallo; *Dir:* J. Anthony Loma; *Scr:* Douglas Borton; *Story:* Douglas Borton, Sandra K. Bailey, Carlos Vasallo, J. Anthony Loma; *Photo:* Joan Gelpi; *Music:* Joel Goldsmith;



Asst Dir: Paquita Vilanova; *Film Ed:* Nicholas Wentworth, J. Anthony Loma Jr.
*[the English-language version of this film is known as *Counterforce*]
**[Spanish-Mexican co-prod]

Cast: George [Jorge] Rivero (*Harris*), George Kennedy (*Vince Colby*), Andrew Stevens (*Nash*), Isaac Hayes (*Ballard*), Louis Jourdan (*Moamar Kassir*), Kevin Bernhardt (*Sutherland*), Hugo Stiglitz (*The Blond*), Simon Andreu (*Chief Rodriguez*), Kabir Bedi (*Koura*), Robert Forster (*The dictator*), Susana Dosamantes (*Roxana*)

Notes: Unfortunately, despite the good international cast and reasonable production values, this action film is actually pretty boring. The script is extremely superficial: what we get is a string of sequences in which people shoot at each other, run, jump, duck, and blow up things. If these sequences were *great*, the film might be more entertaining, but since the action is just adequate, the movie slumps badly.

In the "Republic of North Africa," a dictator (obviously based on Ghadaffi) is nearly killed by an assassin's bomb. The dictator believes exiled politician Kassir was responsible (although the film seems to indicate that the USA was actually behind the bomb), so he orders Kassir killed in revenge. Kassir is living with his wife Roxana and young son on the Mediterranean island of Ibiza. The dictator's nephew Koura is put in charge of the project, and he hires international killer The Blond. Opposing the assassins is the Counterforce group, 4 trained soldiers (Harris, the leader, Nash, Ballard, and Sutherland) supervised by Vince Colby (it isn't clear if the group is part of the U.S. military or not). Kassir is badly wounded while making a speech, but Counterforce saves his life from numerous other attempts; finally, the dictator's men

kidnap Roxana and her son. The hostages are held separately, so two simultaneous rescue attempts have to be made. Kassir's family is saved, but Sutherland is mortally wounded. The dictator flees and Kassir returns to his country to lead a democratic government.

Carlos Vasallo produced a number of international action films like *Fist Fighter*, *Day of the Assassin*, *Target Eagle*, and *Killing Machine*, in addition to a number of other movies. One might note the frequent presence of "George" (Jorge) Rivero and Susana Dosamantes in Vasallo's

films: Rivero because he was something of an international star, and Dosamantes because she was Vasallo's wife. Vasallo also utilizes (slightly faded)



"name" performers from Hollywood--Jourdan, Forster, Hayes, Stevens, and Hayes in this case, and people like Lee van Cleef, Mariel Hemingway, Chuck Connors, George Peppard, Richard Roundtree, and even Glenn Ford also showed up in his pictures.

Unfortunately, the script of *Counterforce* spends all of its characterization time and effort on Kassir and (to a lesser extent) his wife, leaving the members of Counterforce and the villains as complete ciphers. There are a few pitiful attempts to give Nash, Ballard, Harris, et al., some personal traits, but basically they are just four more or less interchangeable tough guys. The assassins are even less interesting. Overall, a mediocre picture.



Escuadrón salvaje [Savage Squadron] (Prods. EGA-Gazcón Films-Prods. Raúl de Anda, © 1990) *Exec Prod:* Ana Luisa Casamadrid; *Dir-Scr:* Antonio de Anda; *Photo:* Agustín Meza; *Music:* Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.]; *Prod Mgr:* Héctor Baltierra C.; *Asst Dir:* Raymundo Calixto; *Script Clerk:* Aurora Martínez; *Film Ed:* Sergio Soto; *Camera Op:* José Luis Vera; *Makeup:* Karla Acosta; *Dialog Rec:* Eduardo Martínez; *Re-rec:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Stunts:* Gerardo Soublett, Alfredo Ramírez; *Union:* STIC

Cast: Edgardo Gazcón (*Raúl Serrano*), Olivia Collins (*Ana Luisa Alvarez*), Jorge Russek (*Cmdte. Miranda*), Arturo Martínez Jr. (*Julián Romero*), Fernando Sáenz (*Marcos Gasque*), Carlos East (*Carlos "El Coronel" Pereira*), Dacia González (*Raúl's mother*), Lizzeta Romo (*Ofelia Marrón*), José L. Murillo (*academy psychiatrist*), Luis Bravo Sosa (*forensic instructor*), bikers--Tito Guillén, Rodolfo Reyes A., Carlos Hauptvogel V., Armando Juárez R.; José Luis Cordero "Pocholo" (*bookstore manager*),

Fernando Gálvez (*instructor*), Jorge Carlos Treviño and Guillermo Treviño (*boys*)

Notes: this is a fairly good action film that does have its



share of unlikely coincidences which drive the plot, but the overall package is slick and the characterizations--both in the script and as acted--are rather better than usual for this type of movie. Antonio de Anda has had a lower profile than the other movie-making sons of Raúl de Anda--Raúl Jr., Rodolfo, Gilberto and the late Agustín--and worked mostly as a cinematographer

prior to his directorial debut in 1987. *Escuadrón salvaje* was only his second feature as a director, but is overall quite good, fast-paced and professional.

Raúl Serrano arrives at the police academy in Mexico City, hoping to become a member of the Policía Judicial Federal. His father was a policeman in Guadalajara, but died in a shootout two years earlier. The killer, a South American druglord named Carlos "El Coronel" Pereira, escaped. On his first day in the academy, Raúl meets two fellow cadets, Marcos and Julián. Marcos flirts with an attractive young woman in the cafeteria, and has coffee

dumped in his lap for his pains; later, the recruits discover the woman is Ana Luisa Alvarez, a ballistics instructor.



Marcos and Julián, childhood friends, are leading a double life. During the day they study at the academy, but at night are in the employ of "El Coronel," who uses them to deliver drugs to the biker gangs that sell them. Most of the time, Marcos and Julián try to rip off their customers, leading to various shootouts. [Given the large number of drug dealers in Mexico, it's certainly a coincidence that the man who killed Raúl's father *just happens* to be the employer of Marcos and Julián. Also, El Coronel handles a lot of low-level, hands-on chores himself, for somebody supposed to be a big-time *narcotraficante*.]

Raúl becomes acquainted with Ana Luisa and when they meet accidentally outside the academy--she drops her groceries and loses her car keys outside a store, so Raúl drives her home--they make a dinner date. However, Ana Luisa learns Raúl *hid* her keys so he would have an excuse

to escort her, and she breaks the date. Later [in another outrageous coincidence] a bookstore accidentally sells Raúl a book Ana Luisa had ordered for her father's birthday; he gives it to her but extracts the promise of a date in exchange. However, Raúl is shocked to discover Ana Luisa's father is the commandant of the police academy [and, *another* coincidence, he was with Raúl's father in the fatal shootout; in fact, Raúl's father took a bullet intended for the Commandant! Small world, isn't it?]

The students at the academy progress through their studies, including law, ballistics, explosives, firearms and unarmed combat training, forensics, etc. The cadets are also compelled to take a battery of psychiatric evaluation tests. Afterwards, Marcos is called into the Commandant's office: his test showed him to be dangerously unstable, so the Commandant is going to recommend his dismissal.

That night, Marcos enters the Commandant's house, shoots him, and steals the memo ordering his dismissal. Ana Luisa comes downstairs and has a shootout with the masked killer, but Marcos escapes unharmed. Later, Marcos and Julián have a confrontation with some other drug dealers, and lose the AK-47 Marcos used to kill the Commandant. When ballistic tests match the bullet from the Commandant to one found in the body of a drug dealer, Raúl does some detective work--interviewing a prostitute who was awakened by the noise--and learns the weapon was picked up by some young boys. The boys sell the gun to another criminal but Raúl recovers it.

Marcos and Julián abduct Ana Luisa but she is rescued by Raúl. Ana Luisa has the chance to shoot Marcos, her father's killer, but restrains herself. At the film's conclusion, Raúl has a showdown with Carlos "El Coronel," and similarly finds himself in the position to avenge *his* father's murder, but instead arrests the criminal.



Escuadrón salvaje (the title really means nothing) is a pro-police movie, no small feat in Mexico (where audiences generally have little respect for law enforcement officers). When Marcos confronts the Commandant, he says he won't let anything stand in the way of "getting his badge." "You'd kill me for a piece of tin?" the policeman asks. Marcos says becoming a police officer will give him the chance to become financially secure, place him above the law, allow him to operate with impunity, etc. The Cmdte. says "it's the ones like you who undermine the public's confidence in institutions [like the police]," and is shot to death. The film goes to considerable lengths to depict the professionalism of the police, the stringent training in the academy, and so forth, and the restraint shown by Ana Luisa and Raúl in the dual conclusions--placing their legal duty above personal feelings--also reinforces this positive image of the PJP. (Whether anybody in audience bought this is hard to imagine)

The acting is overall quite good. Gazcón is his usual breezy, handsome self, and Olivia Collins is sympathetic (and cute as always). The father-daughter repartee between Russek and Collins is amusing and realistic; Russek otherwise plays his familiar gruff, cigar-smoking good-guy character (as opposed to his familiar gruff, cigar-smoking *villainous* character). Carlos East is satisfactory as El Coronel but has only a few scenes, and Sáenz and Martínez Jr. are OK as the two crooked would-be cops. Lizzeta Romo has a nice scene as an irascible prostitute who is tricked into admitting Raúl into her apartment when he pretends to be taking a radio listenership poll. He gives her a box of candy as a "prize"—after hearing her story about the shooting, he asks her why she decided to talk to him. "Because this is the first time anyone ever gave me chocolates," she replies wistfully.

The production values are adequate. The film is paced well and there are some decent action sequences.

Trivia note: Edgardo Gazcón's character is named "Raúl Serrano"—Raúl de Anda was the father of director Antonio de Anda and the elder de Anda's wife's last name was Serrano (so, in the Mexican style, Antonio de Anda's full name is Antonio de Anda Serrano) so this is something of an inside joke (and since Olivia Collins' character has the same first name as the movie's executive producer, that might be a joke too).

A well-made action film, not spectacular but solid entertainment overall.



Bonus Jorge Luke Film Review



El precio de la fama* [The Price of Fame]

(Prods. Alfa Audiovisual-Cinema Films, © 1998) *Prod:* Ramón Barba Loza; *Dir/Story:* Julio Ruiz Llana; *Scr:* Ramón Barba Loza*; *Photo:* Manuel Tejeda; *Music:* Javier Castro; *Prod Mgr:* Gerardo Velazco; *Asst Dir:* Javier Vera; *Film Ed:* Alfonso Curiel [and Osvaldo Gómez, on end credits only]; *Re-Editing:* Ramón Barba Loza; *Makeup:* Guadalupe Peralta [end credits say "Juanita" Peralta]; *Sound Engin:* Rafael Reséndez

***Note:** aka *Susana Santiago*. Also, this film should not be confused with *El precio de la fama "Show Musical"*, a 1991 *videohome* shot in Florida which features a guest appearance by Los Tigres del Norte.

**the opening credits list Ruiz Llana as the writer, but the end credits give Barba Loza a credit for "arreglos guión" [arranging the script]

Cast: Jorge Luke (*Pedro*), Salvador Pineda (*Arsenio*), Jacaranda Alfaro (*Lety*), Elsa Montes (*Natividad Pérez aka Susana Santiago*), Antonio Raxel (*don Anselmo Pérez*), Jesús Briones (*Marcelino*), Mario del Río (*Miguel*), Socorro Albarrán (*Gladys*), Martín Gómez (*Roberto*), Blanca Lidia Muñoz (*doña María Pérez*), Armando Zamarripa (*leading man*), Oscar Alvarez (*drunk*), Rubén Gondray (*Filemon*), Susana Contreras (*doña Julia*), José Aguilera (*don Trini*)

Notes: this *videohome* is slightly better than average, with a straight melodrama plot, fairly good production values, and decent acting from most of the performers. The video box says this is a "special edition," which means...what? It's possible some additional footage was added, and this might also explain the "re-editing" credit for producer Barba Loza. I can't really spot anything that looks out of place—Jacaranda Alfaro has a brief topless dance and Elsa Montes and Mario del Río have a nude bedroom scene, so these might be the "special" scenes.

One interesting aspect of this movie are the overt references to several other pictures. A poster for *Los aboneros del amor* (1989) is prominently displayed on an apartment wall in several sequences, and in another—rather odd—scene, Marcelino tells Natividad he just saw the movie *Tiempo de lobos* (odd, because that film was made in 1981), and describes the plot in detail! I guess the first could just be a coincidence, but the reference to *Tiempo de lobos* must have been inserted by Julio Ruiz Llana, who was one of the producers of that movie.

Natividad lives in a small town with her elderly father and mother; she helps out with the family expenses by operating a small taco stand. One day, a passing traveler—who says he's a talent scout—gives her his card and tells her to look him up if she ever comes to Mexico City. Natividad dumps her suitor Marcelino (because, as a butcher, he smells like meat!) and packs her bag for the big city. After some false starts, she locates the talent scout (Arsenio), only to discover he's a lazy bum who lives in a rundown *vecindad*. Renamed "Susana Santiago," Natividad moves in with Arsenio (platonically) and gets a job making sandwiches for a sidewalk vendor! But Arsenio also gets her a part in a movie (probably a *videohome*), where she's promptly raped by the star in his

RV. She later goes to work as a cigarette girl in a sleazy nightclub, where her neighbor Lety is a topless dancer.

Lety and her boyfriend Roberto introduce Susana to their friend Miguel. Arsenio is cast aside as Miguel takes Susana shopping and then to “the best hotel in the capital” (the Airport Marriott) for a night of *amor*. Roberto and Miguel turn out to be *tiras* (plainsclothes cops, practically synonymous with corruption) who use Lety and Susana as lookouts when they rob a car repair shop. But the two men have been under surveillance and the (good) cops arrive, killing Roberto and Miguel and arresting Lety and Susana.

Pedro, an unlicensed lawyer who lives in the same *vecindad* as the two women and has long lusted after Lety, takes the case (Arsenio takes Susana’s job making sandwiches to pay his fees). Susana discovers she is pregnant and provokes a miscarriage. The hard-boiled Lety takes the blame and Susana is released (Lety will get a couple of years in prison but she and Pedro finally get together). However, Susana doesn’t think Arsenio loves her, and returns to her hometown, only to discover her father has just died (her mother died of cancer earlier). Marcelino comes around again but leaves when Susana explains what happened to her in the city, and tells him she can no longer have children. But for a happy ending, Arsenio shows up and he and Susana drive off together.

Elsa Montes, whose career dates back to various *sexy-comedies* of the 1980s, looks a little too tough to play the “innocent” Natividad (she also has a rather noticeable scar near her mouth that reinforces this image) but she handles the role reasonably well. Only when she’s called upon to express extreme grief or sorrow does she falter, more or less resorting to a patently false “boo hoo hoo” type of crying. She also has a corny musical *leitmotif* which isn’t her fault but harms the overall impression. Jacaranda Alfaro appears to have undergone a little plastic surgery on her face since *her* stint in *sexy-comedies* of the 1980s, but on her it looks good, and she turns in a solid performance as Lety. On the male side, Jorge Luke, despite top-billing, only appears in a few scenes and delivers his usual shtick, while Salvador Pineda—at one time a leading man type,

albeit a rough-hewn one—looks and sounds horrible as Arsenio. Perhaps it’s supposed to be part of his character, but Pineda overacts throughout. The rest of the cast is competent; Susana Contreras stands out as the *portera* of the *vecindad*, and Antonio Raxel has one good scene where he warns Natividad about the dangers of city life.

The script isn’t bad—most of the

characters act (and talk) in fairly realistic fashion, with the possible exception of the overly-ingenuous

Natividad/Susana. [When she’s in the prison hospital, recovering from her abortion, Arsenio brings Susana roses. But she later tells Pedro she knows Arsenio doesn’t *love* her, because he brought *yellow* roses that you give to a “friend,” whereas you give *red* roses to someone you *love*. Who knew?]

There aren’t any of the outrageous coincidences or occurrence that melodrama writers love to employ (Susana doesn’t become pregnant after her first sexual experience, the rape, but does become pregnant after the *second* time she has sex, with Miguel). Despite what the title suggests, Susana doesn’t become a “big star” (in fact, after her one film role, we don’t see her do any “acting” at all)—more realistically, she is stuck in various low-level jobs and exploited by her employers (and by Arsenio, actually). Lety urges Susana to participate in the robbery so they can buy their own nightclub instead of working for other people; when Susana asks Lety why Miguel and Roberto—who are policemen, remember—want to commit a robbery, Lety says they earn very little as cops (so that makes it OK, I guess).

El precio de la fama was shot on location, and this is definitely a plus, particularly since Manuel Tejada’s photography is nice and sharp overall (the sound falters in a couple of scenes, though). The music score is just synthesizer junk for the most part, but aside from a few corny bits, it isn’t bad.

All in all, a moderately entertaining film.



Coming Soon: the Halloween Issue!!

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