

The Mexican Film Bulletin

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Special Halloween Issue!!



'40s Fantasy



El que murió de amor [He Who Died Of Love] (Artistas Asociados de México, 1945) *Prod:* Gonzalo Elvira; *Dir-Scr:* Miguel Morayta; *Dialog:* Carlos León; *Story:* Antonio Momplet, Tito Davison; *Orig. Story:* T[héophile] Gautier; *Photo:* Ignacio Torres; *Music Dir:* Elías Breeskin; *Prod Chief:* Luis G. Rubín; *Asst Dir:* Luis Abbadie; *Film Ed:* Mario González; *Art Dir:* Luis Moya; *Decor:* Manuel Parra; *Camera Op:* Andrés Torres; *Makeup:* Felisa L. de Guevara; *Animated Titles:* Saviur y Eddy; *Dialog Rec:* Rafael Esparza; *Music Rec:* Manuel Esperón; *Script Clerk:* Carlos Villatoro

Cast: Julián Soler (*Count Octavio de Riminsky*), Luis Aldás (*Carlos Verlán*), Fernando Cortés (*Dr. Aladino Jr.*), Hilda Kruger (*Countess María*), Amparo Morillo (*Elisa*), Fanny Schiller (*Aunt Rita*), Pita Amor (*Julia, sister*), Rosa Castro (*other aunt of Carlos*), Jorge Treviño (*Gen. Sibelius*), Conchita Carracedo (*Lolita, maid*), Alejandro Ciangherotti (*voice of "La Gran Fuerza"*), Norma Ancira, Ramón G. Larrea (*doctor*), Manuel Pozos (*old accordion player*), Ángel di Stefani (*tall guest at party*), Héctor Mateos (*man at duel*), José Escanero (*Count's servant*)

Notes: re-viewing this film after many years, I was pleased to discover my original positive impression was not mistaken. This is an amusing fantasy-comedy with good performances and some clever touches.

Carlos has fallen into a depression his doctors can't cure, so one of his aunts calls in Dr. Aladino Jr., a "spiritual advisor." Carlos confesses he's fallen in love with the Countess María, but she considers him only a friend and remains faithful to her husband. Aladino instructs Carlos to visit his office at midnight. Carlos is preceded by Count Octavio, who is also in need of Aladino's assistance. Instead, the spiritualist puts Octavio in a trance. When Carlos arrives, Aladino offers to insert the soul of Carlos in Octavio's body (and vice-versa), so Carlos will be María's "husband" and can enjoy the pleasures of the conjugal bed. To achieve this, he uses a cigarette lighter ("the great-grandson of Aladdin's Lamp") which summons the



"Great Power" to do his bidding. Elisa, Aladino's receptionist, has fallen in love at first sight with Carlos, but is unaware of the soul-switch.

Carlos (in Octavio's body) has a difficult time adjusting to life as the foreign Count. To make matters worse, María demands he speak to her in their native language ("Kinlandés"--they're from the fictional nation of "Kinlandia") before she will admit him to their bedroom. Octavio (in the body of Carlos) is having an



even worse time, since he doesn't know about Aladino's plot. As "Carlos," he attends a party at Octavio's house, and the two men exchange insults--this is an amusing scene, since Carlos insults

Octavio (but he's in Octavio's body, so it seems as if he's insulting *himself*) and Octavio counters with insults about Carlos (but again, he appears to be denigrating

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himself). The two men arrange for a duel the next morning.



To prevent the duel (and save Carlos), Elisa steals the magic lighter and commands the Great Power to stop the duel: Carlos and Octavio realise that killing each other would essentially be suicide, so they reconcile and demand that Aladino fix the situation. However,

when the reverse soul-switch is to be performed, Carlos--who now knows he'll never have María's love--abandons his body, although Octavio is restored to *his* and joyfully reconciles with his wife.

Aladino, who loves Elisa, puts his own soul into the vacant body of Carlos.



Despite displaying many of the magician's former mannerisms, he fools Elisa into believing he is the man she loves. However, the Great Power strikes down Aladino-Carlos and convinces the disembodied soul of

Carlos (sitting on a cloud) to resume its rightful place. The *real* Carlos and Elisa embrace.

El que murió de amor is basically a "mistaken identity" farce, but the fantasy elements make it somewhat more entertaining and complex. Julián Soler and Luis Aldás do a decent job of playing two characters, their own and the "assumed" persona, Carlos-in-Octavio and Octavio-in-Carlos. Soler has most of this body-switch footage and while he's not necessarily *like* the "real" Carlos (we haven't seen enough of Aldás in this role to get a good idea of his personality), he is distinctively different than he is as the foreign nobleman Octavio. Aldás isn't especially notable playing Octavio-in-Carlos, but he's quite funny as Aladino-in-Carlos. The actual soul transfer is accomplished via double-exposure, but the rest of the time it's up to the individual actors.

They are given a few special ties (Carlos loosens his collar, Octavio flicks his beard) to identify them in their new bodies, but this is not really necessary and a bit annoying after a time.

Fernando Cortés, as Dr. Aladino Jr., is



extremely amusing in his role. Amparo Morillo does the best she can with a poorly-written part (she falls in love

with the real Carlos--although he's rude to her--then develops a relationship with Octavio in the body of Carlos, then winds up with the real Carlos again, suggesting she only cares for him due to his physical appearance). Hilda Kruger, a German actress who was allegedly one of the mistresses of Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels (and later, of future Mexican president Miguel Alemán, among other prominent political and business figures), appeared in a handful of Mexican films during WWII. She speaks adequate Spanish (with a heavy accent) and is satisfactory in her role. She sings one song during the party sequence, but this scene does not seem designed to showcase her musical talents, focusing instead on the comic actions and reactions of Julián Soler, playing Carlos-in-Octavio.

The script has a few logical flaws but it also includes a number of good lines and funny bits. For example, as several doctors are leaving the house after examining Carlos, they're asked by his aunts about his case.

We know what he's suffering from, they say, and the autopsy will prove our point! Carlos-as-Octavio stumbles through a breakfast with María, making *faux pas* after *faux pas* (he lights his cigarette on "the sacred flame," turns down his usual breakfast of eggs--to the stunned shock of the servants--puts his cigarette butt in a heirloom samovar, then spills the hot water on his wife, etc.) The joke of Carlos's ignorance of the language "Kinlandés"--which sounds like a combination of Russian, German, and who-knows-what-- is used a number of times. Carlos-in-Octavio learns a few words of greeting in time for his wife's party, but when his countrymen speak to him at length, he is unable to understand or reply, leading to hard feelings.

The production values of *El que murió de amor* are fine, with some substantial sets and sufficient number of extras in the party sequence. The design of Aladino's "office" is effectively *outré* and, as noted earlier, the sparse special effects are satisfactory.

El que murió de amor is a lively farce with a witty script and strong performances from its main players.



El sexo fuerte [The Strong Sex] (CLASA Films Mundiales, 1945) *Exec Prod:* José Luis Bueno; *Dir:* Emilio Gómez Muriel; *Adapt:* Humberto Gómez Landero, Max Aub; *Scr Story:* Miguel Morayta, Agustín M. Carnicero; *Photo:* Agustín Martínez Solares; *Music:* Rosalío Ramírez; *Songs:* José de la Vega, Ernesto Cortázar; *Prod Chief:* Ricardo Beltri; *Asst Dir:* Jesús Cisneros Tamayo; *Film Ed:* Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir:* Jorge

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Fernández; Camera Op: J. Antonio Carrasco; Decor: Arq. Manuel Parra, Edward Fitzgerald; Makeup: Elda Losa; Costume Des: Armando Valdés Peza; Dialog Rec: José de Pérez; Re-rec: José de Pérez, Antonio Bustos; Music/Re-rec: Manuel Esperón

Cast: Mapy Cortés (*Eva XLV*), Rafael Baledón (*Adán Preciado*), Ángel Garasa (*Curro Calvo*), Delia Magaña (*Eva's secretary*), Emperatriz Carvajal (*Minister of War*), José Pidal (*don León*), Alma Rosa Aguirre (*first "patient"*), Elsa Irma Aguirre (*Minister of Health*), Elisa Christy (*Minister of Internal Affairs*), Pedro de Aguillón (*operator*), Velia Martínez (*auctioneer*), Olga Leticia Mendoza (*first sergeant*), Francisco Reiguera, Hernán Vera (*prisoner*), América Imperio (*second sergeant*), Humberto Rodríguez (*one of Eva's suitors*), José Escanero (*prisoner*), Héctor Mateos (*man in nightclub*)

Notes: I first saw this film a number of years ago at a film festival in Mexico, and was recently able to re-view it on the Cine Nostalgia channel. *El sexo fuerte* is a very glossy and entertaining picture and a good example of the "female-dominated society" sub-genre of fantasy films. Other examples include the British-made *Bees in Paradise* (1943), and the Cuban production *Cuando las mujeres mandan* (1951). The latter film seems to have

been strongly influenced by *El sexo fuerte*, since there are a number of plot elements which are almost identical between the two pictures. Unlike *Bees in Paradise* and *Cuando las mujeres mandan*,



both of which are set in contemporary times (one during World War II and one during the Korean War), *El sexo fuerte* is set in an unspecified future period and thus has some additional (albeit mild) science-fiction elements (ubiquitous television screens which also serve as telephones, modernistic weapons--which are never fired, though--and "champagne pills," for example).

All three movies, however, share some basic similarities: women run an isolated island nation

("Paradise Island" in *Bees in Paradise*, "Edén" in *El sexo fuerte*), men occupy subservient, traditionally-female roles in society; then a small group of men from the outside world accidentally arrive on the island and shake up the *status quo*. The humour arises from the inversion of "natural" social



roles, with men acting like women, and vice versa. *El sexo fuerte* isn't quite as didactic as the other films mentioned: although there are scenes in which men knit, serve drinks, and perform other traditionally female duties, the men themselves are not aggressively feminised (as they are in *Cuando las mujeres mandan*, for instance). In fact, one of Edén's rules is that men allow their beards to grow, which emphasizes their masculinity. Furthermore, the men are actively plotting

to seize political power: in a spoof of contemporary Mexican politics, the "masculinists" are split into two opposing parties, PIM and PAM (which eventually merge to form PUM).



Lost at sea, *charro* Adán and Spanish

stereotype *Curro* are "rescued" by women from Edén island. Edén is governed by Queen Eva XLV, who is "engaged" to seven elderly scholars. The two castaways attract considerable attention because they are clean-shaven, a novelty on the island where all men have beards (no boys are seen). *Curro* and Adán are purchased at a slave auction by the Minister of *Gobernación* (Internal Affairs) and the Minister of War, respectively, but this angers Eva and she "expropriates"



the two men. They are assigned to the palace as servants: Adán as a manicurist (he uses his pocket knife on his clients and also bites

off their hangnails!) and *Curro* as a housekeeping assistant. The queen finds herself attracted to the handsome *charro*, but the Minister of War continues her efforts to woo him. *Curro*, meanwhile, is pursued by Eva's personal secretary, although she's married to don León.

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Adán and Curro collaborate with the *masculinista* party and help finance the upcoming revolution. Queen Eva orders them shot but changes her mind and instead condemns them to exile, but Adán is rescued by the Minister of War's troops and taken her to her beach



house. Using books from the palace's secret library, Eva's secretary teaches the queen how to speak and act like a Mexican: Eva, dressed in *charro* garb, serenades Adán. They escape from the beach house

together, but when they arrive at the palace, discover the Minister of War has staged a coup.

However, Curro and the island's men arrive and carry out a counter-coup (Curro routs the all-woman army using a wind-up toy shaped like a rat). Adán becomes King, with Eva as his queen, while Curro is named Minister of Feminine Reeducation. As the film concludes, Adán--although king--is still easily manipulated by Eva's feminine wiles.

El sexo fuerte has a thin plot, Eva is extremely annoying (although Mapy Cortés looks great in her mini-skirted costumes), and the queen's romance with Adán is unbelievable, but the film is nonetheless entertaining and



mostly amusing. Rafael Baledón and Ángel Garasa are excellent, the sets and costumes are splendid, and there are even a few good jokes. Elsa Aguirre and her sister Alma Rosa Aguirre make early screen

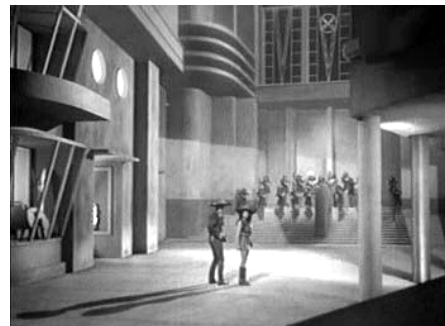
appearances here as a member of Eva's cabinet and a young "patient" of Curro, respectively.

Despite the presence of Mapy Cortés, *El sexo fuerte* does not contain many musical numbers. Delia Magaña sings a "Spanish" song (to impress Curro), Cortés performs a tango (at the 55-minute mark), and later sings a *ranchera* song, then exchanges *coplas* (sort of a musical duel) with Emperatriz Carvajal. Surprisingly, Cortés does not have any dance numbers nor are any of the songs "tropical" in nature.

As noted earlier, the film has some mild science-fiction overtones, but these don't really have any bearing on the plot. *Bees in Paradise* takes almost the exact opposite tack, presenting its female-dominated society as largely agricultural and pre-industrial, but likewise makes little concrete use of this setting. In *El sexo fuerte*, it's not entirely clear when and why women seized

political power, and if this was the result or the cause of the inversion of socio-cultural sex roles. In other words, just because the government is run by a queen and an all-female cabinet doesn't mean men have to assume traditional female occupations and social roles, or act effeminately.

Trivia note: several times during the film, newspaper



headlines appear on screen. One (apparently real-life) article on the front page of *El Masculinista* paper--not the made-up headline relative to the plot--reads "*Murió abandonado y fué devorado por las ratas*" (He Died Alone and Was Eaten by Rats)!

A genial fantasy-comedy with some science fiction elements, *El sexo fuerte* is fun to watch but the superficial script prevents it from being more than that.



Frightening '50s The Nostradamus Series

As noted in my article "Epics of América" (*MFB* 11/6, Aug-Sept 2005), the Estudios América opened in 1957 and began to produce film "series," ostensibly theatrical or television shorts that were actually written to be combined and released as theatrical features (in contravention to the union agreement between STIC and STPC). The first nine series (prior to 1960) all consisted of 12 or 13 "episodes" that were edited into 4 feature films. Beginning in 1960, the standard series was 9 episodes and thus 3 features.

La maldición de Nostradamus was one of the last of the four-film series. Federico Curiel, after a long career as an actor, songwriter, and artist, was given the opportunity to direct (he also handled the "Látigo Negro" series that year) and proved himself to be a highly competent genre director right from the start. The scripts were written by the newly-formed team of Carlos Enrique Taboada and Alfredo Ruanova, who also wrote the 1959 "Chucho el Roto" series at América.

Germán Robles had shot to fame as the title character in *El vampiro* (1957), and while he assiduously sought varied roles--including portraying composer Agustín Lara in the biopic *La vida de Agustín Lara* (1958)--he was the only real "horror star" Mexican cinema had at the time and was cast as the vampiric master criminal. Opposing Robles were veteran character actor Domingo Soler and young leading man Julio Alemán (also the "Látigo Negro"). Aurora Alvarado, an extremely attractive but untried actress, was the female lead in all

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four features, a rather thankless role since her character had little or nothing to do. The other repeated character is Leo, the hunchbacked assistant of Nostradamus: he's played by "Mamber" (usually billed as "Manver," a contraction of the actor's real name, Manuel Vergara). Stereotypically moronic, subservient, and fawning, Leo nonetheless has a rather endearing personality (even when he's murdering people for his master).

The Nostradamus films somewhat resemble *El fistol del Diablo*, a 1958 América series co-scripted by Federico Curiel: both series had a mysterious, supernatural villain who encountered different people in each episode. However, the Nostradamus films have a continuing set of heroes who provide narrative continuity throughout the series, something the *Fistol* films did not. Curiel, Ruanova, and Alemán would reunite in 1960 for the "Neutrón" series, which veered away from supernatural horror and into the realm of science fiction

and *lucha* heroes. The Neutrón films are slicker in many ways than the Nostradamus pictures. Without the need for a "new" plot and characters in every episode, the Neutrón features seem less fragmented and more like "real" movies.

Released to U.S. television

by the K. Gordon Murray organisation, the Nostradamus films are fairly well known in genre fandom. Aside from the dubbing, Murray's versions are essentially the same as the originals and thus give a good idea of the Mexican series.

The atmospheric settings, dynamic villain, and outré situations make the films generally entertaining, although the episodic format and the lack of narrative closure in the first three features are weak spots in the viewing experience.



La maldición de Nostradamus [The Curse of Nostradamus] (Estudios América, 1959) *Production Dir:* Víctor Parra; *Dir-Scr:* Federico Curiel; *Story-Adapt:* Carlos E. Taboada, Alfredo Ruanova; *Photo:* Fernando Colín; *Music:* Jorge Pérez; *Prod Chief:* José L. Murillo, Raymundo Parra; *Co-Dir:* Alberto Mariscal; *Asst to Dir:* Patricia Nieto; *Editor General:* Federico Landeros; *Film Ed:* José J. Munguía; *Art Dir:* Arcadi Artis Gener;

Camera Op: Raúl Domínguez; *Sound Rec:* Enrique L. Rendón; *Re-rec:* Enrique Rodríguez; *Sound Ed:* Felipe Marino, José Leader; *Union:* STIC

U.S. Version: *Prod:* K. Gordon Murray; *Dir:* Stem [sic] Segar

Cast: Germán Robles ("Ericson" aka Nostradamus), Julio Alemán (*Antonio Suárez*), Domingo Soler (*Prof. Durán*), Aurora Alvarado (*Anita Durán*), Mamber [sic, Manuel Vergara "Manver"] (*Leo*), Manuel Casanueva (*Carlos Blanco García*), Manuel Dondé (*Dr. Camarena*), Roberto Araya, Reynaldo Rivera, Amado Zumaya (*Ángel Mendieta*), Patricia de Morelos, Fernando Curiel (*police cmdte.*), Enrique Couto, Rafael Estrada (*guest at party*), Ramón Bugarini (*Gómez, police agent*), Sadi Dupeyrón, Manuel Trejo Morales (*Retis, journalist*)

Episodes: 1. "El dedo del destino" (The Finger of Destiny); 2. "El libro de los siglos" (The Book of Centuries); 3. "Las víctimas de la noche" (The Victims of the Night)

Notes: the first of a 4-film series compiled from 12 separate "episodes," *La maldición de Nostradamus* is interesting but—as one would expect—episodic. Early in the movie, Nostradamus tells Prof. Durán he will kill 12 people (and Durán will be the 13th and last): these murders will presumably be spread over the 12 episodes, so in *Maldición* 3 people die, and then the film rushes to a rather anti-climatic conclusion. There isn't a lot of



character development, either: the supposed romance between Antonio and Durán's daughter Anita is hardly touched upon at all (indeed, Anita appears only briefly). On the positive side, the performances and production quality are very good. Although the film was shot on a limited number of sets and sometimes seems cramped, the sets themselves are well-designed and dressed (the crypt where the body of the original Nostradamus is kept is particularly effective). *Maldición* does not look cheap. Federico Curiel had just made the leap from actor-writer-cartoonist to director, and he seems to have had an instinctive feel for this sort of cinema (possibly due to his previous training as an artist), since the direction is quite assured and fluid without flashy directorial fireworks.

The special effects, unfortunately, are not very special. Nostradamus changes into a bat a number of

times during the film—none of these transformations are actually shown, but in bat form Nostradamus is alternately played by one of the usual rubber bats and by minimal cartoon animation (basically a vaguely bat-shaped blob which moves around the screen randomly). The conclusion of *Maldición* illogically has Nostradamus fleeing *on foot* from Antonio, who has a revolver loaded with silver bullets—why the vampire didn’t change into



a bat and fly away is unclear. Overall, the movie treats Nostradamus’ status as a vampire in an odd fashion—when threatened (by a crucifix, for example) he sprouts fangs; he can change

into a bat; he fears sunlight, silver bullets, and crucifixes; he sleeps in a coffin; and—one time—he bites someone. But his overall plan has nothing to do with vampirism, how/why he became a vampire isn’t explained, and he acts more like a vengeful criminal than a vampire.

I watched the K. Gordon Murray dubbed version (from Something Weird’s collection) simultaneously with the Tu Cine DVD release of *La maldición de Nostradamus* (muting the English dialogue). The DVD, as would be expected, has a much sharper image and even a little extra room at the top of the frame—no significant additional information is provided, but apparently Murray’s 16mm TV prints were slightly cropped. Interestingly enough, the credits artwork for the dubbed version is completely different (and actually much better) than the original Mexican credits, which are shown over a murky night-time image across which an animated cartoon bat occasionally flaps. The Mexican version retains the original chapter titles, but other than this the two films are virtually identical.

Prof. Durán and his assistant Antonio are members of the Commission to Abolish Superstition. However, one evening Durán is confronted by “Ericson,” the son of the deceased prophet Nostradamus. Ericson wants Durán to rehabilitate his father’s name, so that he will receive credit for his great powers and predictions. When Durán refuses, Ericson promises to murder 12 people—and Durán will be Number 13—starting with Carlos Blanco. Ericson’s hunchbacked henchman Leo rents a room for his master in Blanco’s house. That night, Ericson shows up and places Blanco in a cataleptic state, resulting in the man being buried alive. Informed of this by the vampire, Durán has Blanco’s grave dug up, but the man is now dead (for real).

After Blanco’s death, Ericson gives Durán another chance to cooperate, and is turned down once more. The next victim is antiquarian bookseller F. Landeros [an in-joke, since the “Editor General” of the series was Federico Landeros]. Ericson delivers one of his father’s books to Landeros, then possesses the man’s body and has him visit a potential buyer: when the collector opens his safe to extract the payment, Landeros shoots the man

to death. The next morning, the police, accompanied by Durán and Antonio, visit the bookseller. Accused of murder, Landeros goes mad, shrieking about “the eyes! The eyes!” and leaps out of a window to his death.



Ericson indicates police agent Ángel Mendieta will be the third to die because of Durán’s stubborn attitude. However, the police tell Durán no such person is employed on the force. The professor is shocked when an old friend brings his nephew—recently arrived from the provinces—to visit him. The nephew is seeking work. His name? Ángel Mendieta. Later, Mendieta is coincidentally hired by the “secret service” (essentially, the plainclothes detective branch of the police) and sent out on a mission. Hypnotised by Ericson, Mendieta abducts Durán’s daughter Anita and takes her to the Castle of the Marqués, where Ericson has his lair. Durán and Antonio arrive too late to save Mendieta (who’s bitten and killed by Ericson), but Anita is rescued. Ericson flees through a series of tunnels in the castle, pursued by Antonio whose pistol apparently holds an endless supply of silver bullets. A fortuitous cave-in buries the vampire in a pile of dirt and stones.



Nostradamus y el destructor de monstruos [Nostradamus and the Monster Destroyer]



(Estudios América, 1959)
Director of Prod: Víctor Parra;
Dir-Scr: Federico Curiel;
Story-Adapt: Carlos E. Taboada, Alfredo Ruanova; *Photo:* Fernando Colín;

Music: Jorge Pérez; *Prod Chief:* José L. Murillo, Raymundo Parra; *Co-Dir:* Alberto Mariscal; *Asst to Dir:* Patricia Nieto; *Editor General:* Federico Landeros; *Film Ed:* José J. Munguía; *Art Dir:* Arcadi Artis Gener; *Camera Op:* Raúl Domínguez; *Sound Rec:* Enrique L. Rendón; *Re-rec:* Enrique Rodríguez; *Sound Ed:* Felipe Marino, José Leader; *Union:* STIC

U.S. Version: *The Monsters Demolisher*-- *Prod:* K. Gordon Murray; *Dir:* Stim Segar

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Episodes: 4. "El destructor de monstruos" [The Destroyer of Monsters], 5. "El estudiante y la horca" [The Student and the Gallows], 6. "El ataúd vacío" [The Empty Coffin].



Cast: Germán Robles (*Nostradamus*), Julio Alemán (*Antonio Suárez*), Domingo Soler (*Prof. Durán*), Aurora Alvarado (*Anita Durán*), Mamber [sic, Manuel Vergara "Manver"] (*Leo*), Rogelio Jiménez Pons "Frijolito" (*Pedro Morales*), Antonio Raxel (*José Marchiotti aka Pepe "El Güero"*), Grek Martin (*Igor*), Magda Monzón (? *Sra. Morales*), Mario Chávez (*Miguel Castillo*), José Loza (*Ramírez*), Luis Aragón (*Tomás Villaseñor*), Alma Margarita (*singer*), Rafael Estrada (*commission member*), Fernando Curiel (*man at execution*), Ignacio Peón (*priest*), Ernesto Finance (*doctor at mental hospital*), Fernando Yapur (*Mario, attendant in mental hospital*)

Notes: the second entry in the "Nostradamus" series isn't bad, but it seems to be marking time to some extent. A major new character is introduced, but the script is unfocused and the conclusion is confusing and abrupt. Nostradamus himself is now mostly interested in annoying Prof. Durán, and appears to have dropped his campaign to restore his father's reputation. The "Nostradamus" films should really be considered as one long series rather than discrete feature films, since they don't really stand up individually.

Two schoolboys stumble upon a tunnel that leads into the Castle of the Marqués. Leo, the hunchbacked assistant of Nostradamus, chases the boys away, and in doing so stumbles across the buried body of his master.



Nostradamus is revived with no particular effort, and resumes his pattern of (a) informing Durán in advance about the next victim, and (b) carrying out his threat. The first name given

in this film is "Pedro Morales." Durán and Antonio visit the man's home, but learn he's been dead for months. However, the man's young son is *also* named Pedro, and—what a coincidence!—turns out to be one of the

boys from the opening sequence. Pedro moves into the Durán household to protect him from Nostradamus, but the wily vampire abducts him anyway. Leo is sent to kidnap Durán's daughter Anita, but is scared off by Durán's hounds. Durán and Antonio trail Leo to the vampire's hideout and rescue Pedro, but fail to destroy Nostradamus (who toys with his attackers, vanishing and reappearing at will as they try to shoot him). Pedro, apparently safe now (Durán later says Nostradamus won't try again to kill someone if he fails the first time), is never seen again.

Antonio meets Igor, the descendant of a European family of vampire hunters. Igor joins forces with Durán. Nostradamus chooses criminal José Marchiotti as his next victim: however, Marchiotti is hung for his crimes. [Which raises the question: Nostradamus failed in his attempt to kill Pedro, and isn't involved in Marchiotti's death at all, so do these count towards his "12 victims" goal as stated in the first movie?] Medical students Miguel and Ramírez arrange to purchase Marchiotti's

corpse from a morgue attendant, but Marchiotti comes back to life (he was bitten by Nostradamus before he was hung, and is now a sort of zombie-vampire) and



kills the morgue worker and Miguel. Ramírez falls into a catatonic state and is sent to a mental hospital.

Marchiotti turns into a bat and enters Ramírez's hospital room, causing the other man to try and escape through the window. Instead, he falls to his death. However, a scrap of Marchiotti's clothing left behind in the room allows Igor to locate the vampire's resting place (instead of a crystal ball, Igor has a bubbling cauldron that allows him to see into the past and divine other things). Igor, Antonio, and Durán open Marchiotti's casket and Igor stakes the corpse with his cane (which doesn't have a sharp point or anything, but apparently can still kill vampires). At the moment Marchiotti is destroyed, Nostradamus—in *his* hideout—clutches his chest, screams, and collapses.

The conclusion of *Nostradamus y el destructor de monstruos* is less satisfying than that of *La maldición de Nostradamus*. The main villain isn't even in the same location as the heroes, and there's no particular logic to having the death of Marchiotti result in the death of Nostradamus (if anything, tradition has the vampire's *victims* recover or collapse when he dies, not vice versa). Of course, audiences watching the "Nostradamus" features were informed at the end of films 1, 2, and 3 that the story wasn't over, so whatever mild closure that each feature had was understood to be temporary in nature.

There are a few interesting facets to *Nostradamus y el destructor de monstruos*. "Grek Martin" (aka Jack Taylor, real name George Randall) was born in the USA

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but spent most of his professional career in Europe after working in the latter half of the 1950s in Mexico.

Presumably "Igor" is the "Destroyer of Monsters" of the film's title, and he steals most of the spotlight from



Durán and Antonio in this picture (and Anita is almost completely absent), with his slightly-accented Spanish, mutton-chop whiskers, ivory-headed cane, and bubbling pot'o

mystery. Conversely, Germán Robles has less to do this time, and his absence is only partially compensated by Antonio Raxel as zombie-vampire Marchiotti. Marchiotti has a scar on his neck from the noose, and Miguel shoots him 3 times so he has 3 bullet-holes (well, bloodstains) on his shirt for the rest of the film, in addition to a generally pasty complexion. Although Marchiotti can turn into a bat and sleeps in a coffin, he doesn't flash any fangs and his demeanour is more zombie-ish than vampiric.

The production values are still satisfactory, with a mix of actual exteriors (luckily, Mexico has a lot of old buildings from the 19th century still standing) and interior sets. Director Curiel, as mentioned in the previous review, doesn't draw attention to himself but very smoothly integrates high-angle shots, extreme closeups, and understated but effective camera movement, resulting in a film which is visually quite smooth and pleasing.



Nostradamus el genio de las tinieblas
[Nostradamus, the Genius of Darkness] (Estudios América, 1959) *Director of Prod:* Víctor Parra; *Dir-Scr:* Federico Curiel; *Story-Adapt:* Carlos E. Taboada, Alfredo Ruanova; *Photo:* Fernando Colín; *Music:* Jorge Pérez; *Prod Chief:* José L. Murillo, Raymundo Parra; *Co-Dir:* Alberto Mariscal; *Asst to Dir:* Patricia Nieto; *Editor General:* Federico Landeros; *Film Ed:* José J. Munguía; *Art Dir:* Arcadi Artis Gener; *Camera Op:* Raúl Domínguez; *Sound Rec:* Enrique L. Rendón; *Re-rec:*

Enrique Rodríguez; *Sound Ed:* Felipe Marino, José Leader; *Union:* STIC

U.S. Version: *The Genie of Darkness*; *Prod:* K. Gordon Murray; *Dir:* Stem [sic] Segar

Cast: Germán Robles (*Nostradamus*), Julio Alemán (*Antonio Suárez*), Domingo Soler (*Prof. Durán*), Aurora Alvarado (*Anita Durán*), Mamber [sic, Manuel Vergara "Manver"] (*Leo*), Grek Martin (*Igor*), Fanny Schiller (*Rebeca, Leo's mother*), Rina Valdarno (*Nora Valdarno*), Luis Aragón (*Tomás Villaseñor*), Carlos Nieto (*Claudio Suárez*), Guillermo Bravo Sosa (*policeman*), Carlos Hennings (*Dr. Schiller*), Fernando Curiel (*police cmdte.*), Enrique Couto (*Commission member*), Manuel Dondé (*Dr. Camarena*), Ángel Di Stefani (*hypnotist*), Rafael Estrada (*Commission member*)

Episodes: 7. "El genio de las tinieblas" [The Genie of Darkness], 8. "Más allá de la vida" [Beyond Life], 9. "El hijo de la noche" [The Son of the Night].

Notes: the third film in the "Nostradamus" series is an improvement over its immediate predecessor, although it still flaunts its episodic origins and the conclusion is once again indecisive and a bit of a cheat.

Nostradamus collapsed at the climax of the previous movie, but once again revives fairly easily with the assistance of faithful hunchback Leo. Durán and Antonio are still collaborating with vampire hunter Igor, who tells them Nostradamus possesses an ancient parchment which, if

obtained, will allow his enemies to destroy him. The parchment is kept in a wooden chest buried in the hut of Rebeca, a "witch" who is also the nagging mother of Leo. In a chillingly



effective scene which demonstrates the evil nature of Nostradamus, the vampire retrieves the parchment and hypnotises the recalcitrant Rebeca, forcing her to stand motionless and laugh wildly as her hut is burned down around her. Leo begs for his mother's life but Nostradamus refuses to have mercy. When Durán, Antonio and Igor arrive, the hut is a smoldering ruin. Nostradamus has left them a note, saying the next victim "is among you now."

Antonio is possessed by Nostradamus, who sends him to murder Igor. Antonio fails and flees to the lair of his vampiric master, with Igor in pursuit. Igor snaps Antonio out of the hypnotic spell, then confronts Nostradamus. The two men have a battle of wills and just when it seems Igor has won, Leo appears and kills the vampire hunter.



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Antonio and Anita visit a psychic, who goes into a trance and speaks with the voice of Nostradamus and gives them the street address of the next victim. Nostradamus boasts to Leo that he will prove his power is greater than true love. Durán and Antonio visit the indicated address and are confronted by a mysterious woman, Nora Valdarno. [Later, in both this film and the next, she's referred to as "Nora Herrera" for some reason.] Nora's lover Claudio appears and she brusquely rejects him. Claudio is shot to death by a



policeman while trying to scale the wall and get back into the house. Durán and Antonio discover Nora's room is now dusty and deserted, and the policeman says she's been dead for months. Nora was

resurrected by Nostradamus to torment Claudio, but when he offers to make her his Undead Queen, she turns him down as well: she continues to love Claudio, even after death (Claudio's corpse smiles at this). The angry Nostradamus sends her back to the grave. [This "Phantom Hitchhiker"-like episode is out of place but is quite well-done and entertaining.]

Through another coincidence (Antonio bumps into an artist on the street who *just happens* to have a painting of a building Antonio recognises as the hideout of Nostradamus), Durán, Antonio and the now-convinced members of the Committee to Abolish Superstition storm the monster's lair (they're even carrying torches!). Nostradamus and Leo escape, but Durán finds the vampire's coffin—it's full of his ancestor's ashes, upon which a vampire must sleep. Durán takes the ashes to Dr. Schiller for analysis, but Nostradamus hypnotises Schiller's assistant into attacking the scientist and they kill each other. However, the ashes were left in the lab and Durán scatters them, proclaiming victory over the vampire, who now has nowhere to rest...or does he? [Well, of course he does, because there's one more movie to go!]

Genio de tinieblas raises a number of issues then drops them. The "valuable parchment" is essentially a MacGuffin to set up the sequence featuring Leo's mother. Fanny Schiller, particularly in the '50s and '60s, could play contemporary matrons (either straight, evil, or humorous) and cackling, toothless crones with equal facility. She's in toothless-crone mode here, berating Leo for his mindless allegiance to Nostradamus that has so far produced no riches or power, then cringing and begging when the vampire appears in person to call her out for her loose talk. Leo has a larger role in *Genio* than he did in the previous film, faithfully serving his master (and once again saving the life of the vampire, for which he's not thanked) and exhibiting some more human emotions, particularly in his scenes with his mother.

Genio also previews the final film in the series: Durán mentions in passing that he's experimenting with high-frequency sounds that disorient bats, and has recently obtained a (suspiciously modern-looking) vacuum tube or something that will allow him to broadcast these sounds over a wide geographical area. Nothing is made of this at the moment, but Durán's invention will receive more attention in *La sangre de Nostradamus*.

Nostradamus is given additional characterisation in this film. In the opening episode, he's even more cruel and heartless than usual (although in *Maldición* he caused one guy to be buried alive), condemning Rebeca to a painful death, making her laugh as she's dying, and doing it all in front of her son, his aide! In the second section, he seems to be following the same trend, mocking romantic love by resurrecting a dead woman from the grave and having her reject her lover. Then, however Nostradamus himself essentially proposes to Nora, only to have her turn him down. Oh, that's gotta smart! The vampire tries to shrug it off—brusquely ordering Leo to take her away in her coffin—but clearly he's irritated and hurt. Oddly enough, Nostradamus apparently never gives Durán's daughter Anita a second thought, except as a means by which he can harm Durán.



La sangre de Nostradamus [The Blood of Nostradamus] (Estudios América, 1959) *Director of Prod:* Victor Parra; *Dir-Scr:* Federico Curiel; *Story-Adapt:* Carlos E. Taboada, Alfredo Ruanova; *Photo:* Fernando Colín; *Music:* Jorge Pérez; *Prod Chief:* José L. Murillo, Raymundo Parra; *Co-Dir:* Alberto Mariscal; *Asst to Dir:* Patricia Nieto; *Editor General:* Federico Landeros; *Film Ed:* José J. Munguía; *Art Dir:* Arcadi Artis Gener; *Camera Op:* Raúl Domínguez; *Sound Rec:* Enrique L. Rendón; *Re-rec:* Enrique Rodríguez; *Sound Ed:* Felipe Marino, José Leader; *Union:* STIC

U.S. Version: *The Blood of Nostradamus*; *Prod:* K. Gordon Murray; *Dir:* Stem [sic] Segar

Episodes: 10. "El aparecido en el convento" [The Apparition in the Convent], 11. "El ave negra" [The Black Bird], 12. "La última víctima" [The Last Victim].

Cast: Germán Robles (*Nostradamus*), Julio Alemán (*Antonio Suárez*), Domingo Soler (*Prof. Durán*), Aurora Alvarado (*Anita Durán*), Mamber [sic, Manuel Vergara "Manver"] (*Leo*), Rosario Durcal (*Olga María*), Carlos

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Ancira (*Andrés Rojas*), Erick del Castillo (*González*), Cora del Rey, Carlos Becerril, Alejandra Meyer (*gossiping woman*), Celia Manzano, Luis Aragón (*Tomás Villaseñor*), Harapos (*man in mob*), Guillermo Rivas (*Lt. Mendiola*), Fernando Curiel (*police official*), Goyo Dante (*monk*), Mario Sevilla (*police agent*), José Eduardo Pérez (*Insp. Fulton*), Patricia de Morelos (*wife of Ambrosio*), Rafael Estrada (*Ambrosio, commission member*), Enrique Couto (*commission member*), Manuel Donde (*Dr. Camarena*), Jesús Gómez (*police agent*), José Chávez Trowe (*member of mob*), Manuel Alvarado (*gossiping man*), Rubén Márquez (*gossiping man*), René Barrera (*member of mob*)

Notes: the final film in the "Nostradamus" series (the mysterious "fifth film," *El testamento del vampiro*, was actually just a re-titling of an earlier feature), *La sangre de Nostradamus* is one of the best, although the fact that it provides the closure that the first 3 movies didn't have is a strong point in its favour. Although the episodes are very separate and don't really flow smoothly from one to the next, each individual part has something to

recommend it. Furthermore, the character of Nostradamus is developed more fully--he romances a woman, shows some feeling for his down-trodden assistant Leo, suffers extreme



self-doubt, and is physically tortured via remote control, allowing Germán Robles the opportunity to demonstrate a lot of "acting!" rather than merely lurk around spouting menacing dialogue. Leo becomes a more sympathetic--or pitiful--character in this film as well, although his loyalty to Nostradamus--and his willingness to carry out evil acts for his master--is unshaken.

There are curious religious undertones in *Sangre*, over and above the usual "vampire flinches at the sight of a crucifix" scenes. For instance, when Nostradamus is undergoing a crisis because he can't locate his selected victim Villaseñor (who's hiding out in a monastery), the vampire beseeches his dead father for help, and he later repeats this when he's in agony because Durán's anti-vampire machine is broadcasting supersonic waves throughout the town. Nostradamus looks and sounds as if he is performing a strange parody of prayer in these scenes. His hunchbacked henchman Leo murders Villaseñor in the monastery, unaffected by the religious barrier the vampire couldn't penetrate. When the deed is done, Leo literally offers up the victim as a sacrifice to his master, Nostradamus, and asks for his reward, another twisted version of religious devotion.

As the film begins, Nostradamus follows his usual *modus operandi*, informing Durán of the identity of his next victim. This time it's the irascible chief of police Rojas. Rojas isn't sure he believes Durán's story, but he surrounds himself with a roomful of armed detectives

and survives the night unscathed. However, Nostradamus takes advantage of a solar eclipse to hypnotise Rojas into thinking one of his aides is an enemy: Rojas shoots at the startled policeman, who returns fire in self-defense and kills the chief.

The next victim is buxom (and I do mean *buxom*) singer Olga María. Warned by Durán and Antonio, she scoffs at their tale of vampires. However, when she notices that her suave suitor casts no reflection in a mirror (yes, it's Nostradamus), Olga sends a message to Durán for help.

However, Nostradamus swoops down on Olga in the street, bites her neck (in a very graphic scene, it actually looks as if his fangs are going into her neck) and kills her. This episode is odd, because although Nostradamus has singled out Olga as a future victim, his actions towards her and his demeanour in her presence give the impression that he's *really* romantically interested in her (otherwise, he could have killed her fairly easily at almost any time). It's only when she "betrays" him to Durán does he angrily pursue her in bat form, changing back to his human guise to deliver the *coup de grace*.



Nostradamus visits Durán at his home and says "the next person that enters this room" will be his next victim. It's Tomás Villaseñor, a member of the Commission to Abolish Superstition. As mentioned above, Villaseñor flees in panic to a monastery, but is killed by Leo. The other members of the Commission, fearful for their lives, depose Durán as president. Durán works on his sound-generating machine. Nostradamus, meanwhile, starts rumours that Durán is the one behind the murders in the city, and *two* mobs storm his house with torches: one



composed of general riff-raff, and the other made up of the deluded members of the Commission! Nostradamus is nearly paralysed with pain by the operation of Durán's machine,

and the scientist sends Antonio and police inspector Fulton to raid the vampire's nearby lair. They find it, but Nostradamus changes into a bat and escapes, as the mob wrecks Durán's lab and prepares to burn him at the stake.

Just as Durán is about to be killed, Nostradamus appears and attempts to bite him, but is shot (with silver bullets) by Antonio. In bat form, Nostradamus plummets to the ground. Durán uses Igor's cane (taken from the vampire's lair) to stake the creature, who turns into Nostradamus in human form, then crumbles to dust.

La sangre de Nostradamus seems to have had more money spent on it than the previous episodes—given that this was shot as a single series, it's not a matter of a higher "budget" for *Sangre*, but more likely that the



producers decided to save their money for the climax. It still looks economical, but instead of Durán and Antonio sitting in a "café" which consists of a close shot of them sitting

at a table (and *nothing else*), this time we get an actual nightclub set with musicians and a fair number of people sitting around at tables (there's another scene in a *cantina*, which is so brief and irrelevant it hardly justifies using the set at all). Director Curiel also got about 30 extras for the final mob scene and does his best to make it seem like more, and the mob smashes up the equipment in Durán's lab pretty thoroughly. [Oddly enough, one member of the mob seen in only a couple of shots and given no dialogue or closeups is Mario García "Harapos," who's billed ahead of a number of performers who have much larger roles (and some people who aren't credited at all are more prominent than Harapos).]



Scary '60s

La marca del muerto [Mark of the Dead

Man]* (Alameda Films-César Santos Galindo, 1960)
Prod: Alfredo Ripstein Jr.; *Dir:* Fernando Cortés; *Adapt:* Alfredo Varela Jr.; *Story:* José María Fernández Unsain; *Photo:* José Ortiz Ramos; *Music:* Gustavo César Carrión; *Prod Mgr:* Armando Solís C.; *Prod Chief:* Antonio Guerrero Tello; *Asst Dir:* Jaime L. Contreras; *Film Ed:* Alfredo Rosas Priego; *Art Dir:* Gunther Gerzso; *Decor:* Rafael Suárez; *Lighting:* Daniel López; *Camera Op:* Manuel González; *Makeup:* Armando Meyer; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Rodolfo Solís; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed:* José Li-Ho; *Union:* STPC

*revised U.S. version: *Creature of the Walking Dead* (ADP, 1965) "Jerry Warren presents" *Prod:* Alfred Ripstein; *Dir:* Frederic Corte; *Scr:* Joseph Unsain; *Music Dir:* Gustav Carrión; *Photo:* Richard Wallace; *Unit Mgr:* Joseph Alcalde; *Prod Asst:* Michael Delrod; *Film Ed:* Jerry Warren, Jorge Bustos; *Prod Design:* Luis de Leon; *Lighting:* Richard Knox; *Set Design:* Mala Winter; *Sound Rec:* Guy Stafford; *SpFX:* Nicolas Reye [note: some of these credits refer to the new footage shot by Warren, others are Anglicised versions of the actual Mexican crew, while others are completely incorrect and

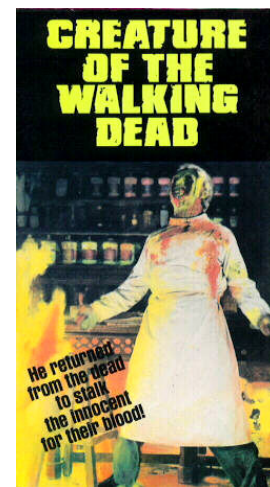
seem to have been randomly taken from other Mexican films.]

Cast: Fernando Casanova (*Gonzalo Malthus; old Dr. G. Malthus*), Sonia Furió (*Rosa*), Rosa María Gallardo (*2nd victim*), Aurora Alvarado (*Luisa, maid*), Guillermo Cramer (*Inspector*), Pedro de Aguillón (*priest*), Juan José Martínez Casado (*prison warden*), Edmundo Espino (*Antonio, major-domo*), Guillermo Bravo Sosa (*Remigio*), Armando Velasco (*Rosa's uncle*)

Added Cast for *Creature of the Walking Dead:* Rock Madison (*Ed, cop*), Ann Wells (*secretary on phone*), George Todd, Willard Gross, Bruno VeSota (*inspector*), Lloyd Nelson (*Mr. Simms*), Robert Christopher (*Det. Lt. Ed Jamieson*), Chuck Niles (*masseur*), Katherine Victor (*Mrs. Roger Vernon*), Fred Hoffman (*det. sgt.*)

Notes: *La marca del muerto*, at least in its original form, is one of the lesser-seen Mexican horror films of the '50s-'60s horror cycle. It's been released on DVD in France, but otherwise—unless one happens to have a TV-broadcast version of the original (as I do)—most people are more familiar with the "revised" Jerry Warren version, *Creature of the Walking Dead*. Warren, unlike K. Gordon Murray or the unidentified U.S. distributors of the "Neutrón" films and a few other Mexican titles, did *not* dub his foreign films into English (making few other changes), but utilised a combination of voice-over narration and newly-shot scenes to create confusing hybrids. The reasons for Warren's "revisions" are not clear: he certainly did not "take the easy way out"—as we shall see, a considerable amount of re-shooting and re-editing was involved—however, the results were, unfortunately, not only generally poor by any objective standard of film quality, but also tend to obscure the virtues of the Mexican source work.

La marca del muerto was produced by Alameda Films, a company that—at least in the late '50s through the mid-'60s—mostly made Westerns and the occasional comedy. Their only prior significant fantasy film was *Los misterios del ultratumba* [*La marca del muerto*



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borrowing Gustavo César Carrión's bombastic music score and at least one shot (of a gallows) from *Los misterios del ultratumba*], although the Gastón Santos Westerns *El grito de la muerte* and *El pantano de las ánimas* had some pseudo-fantasy content. Fortunately, despite the company's lack of experience with horror movies, *La marca del muerto* turned out rather well. The age-effects makeup is fine, the optical effects (showing two Fernando Casanovas conversing with each other) are decent, the sets and photography are atmospheric, and the script is trim and tidy for the most part.

The film begins in 1890: a mysterious figure abducts a young woman as she walks home in the dark after



evening Mass. Taking her to a hidden laboratory, the man-- Dr. Malthus--begins to transfuse blood from his unconscious victim to himself but is interrupted by a pounding at the door

of his house. Malthus is arrested by the police and sentenced to hang. In prison, he ages incredibly rapidly but retains his youthful vigor and refuses to repent of his crimes when the chaplain visits, insisting he's immortal. However, Malthus is taken to the gallows and executed.



The present day. [Curiously, in one scene Gonzalo says it's "1962." García Riera speculates that by setting the film two years in the future perhaps the filmmakers anticipated a delayed release of *La marca del muerto*, which went before the cameras on the last day of November 1960, and was released late in 1961.] Gonzalo Malthus returns to Mexico City from Europe, where he's been studying medicine for the past 5 years. His fiancée Rosa has had his ancestral home refurbished in anticipation of their wedding. That night, as Gonzalo gazes on a portrait of his grandfather, he hears the man's voice saying "You are a Malthus. Look in the Bible." A nearby Bible contains a mysterious message--which vanishes after Gonzalo reads it--about "an angel falling," and a decorative angel is the key to open a secret passage. Gonzalo discovers his grandfather's laboratory--complete with the skeletal remains of his final victim, as well as several other skeletons locked in prison cells--and a book labeled "Mis Experimentos." Dr. Malthus found the secret to eternal life, but it requires the fresh blood of victims no older than 25 years of age. Gonzalo also learns his grandfather is only in a state of suspended animation and can be revived. Apparently figuring "what could go wrong?" Gonzalo removes the dessicated corpse of Dr. Malthus from the family crypt and abducts Rosa's maid Luisa to supply the fresh blood.

Dr. Malthus returns to life and youth. He and

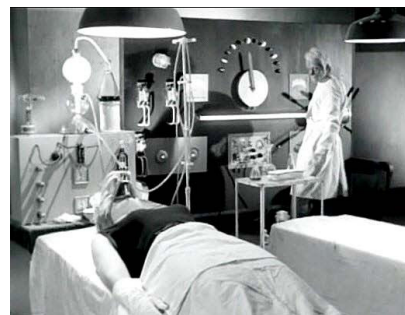
Gonzalo are twins, except for the grandfather's antiquated hairstyle and bushy sideburns. The formula for eternal youth has



one drawback: it lasts only two weeks, then a new blood transfusion is required. Luisa is stuck in one of the cells to serve as a future donor.

Time passes, and Gonzalo's relationship with Rosa suffers because of the horrible secret he's hiding. When Gonzalo refuses to provide a new victim (Luisa is still alive, but is too weak to supply more blood), the rapidly-aging Dr. Malthus locks him up and kidnaps a woman himself. [In a nice stylistic touch, this abduction mirrors the film's opening scene: the new victim is also shown leaving church at night, is stalked through the streets by Malthus, and then abducted. The main difference is that in 1890 Malthus had to dodge a horse-drawn carriage, while in 1962 he's nearly run over by an automobile. This in itself is clever, as Malthus runs back into his house after his close call, then nervously peeks outside to make sure the diabolical machine has gone.]

Returned to the appearance of youth, Malthus shaves off his sideburns, cuts his hair, and impersonates Gonzalo, even fooling Rosa. However, a short time later Rosa spots a strange mark on Gonzalo's neck (the scar from when Malthus was hung) and is shocked to see her fiancé suddenly begin to age. "Gonzalo" says he's ill, and leaves. Back in the lab, Malthus and Gonzalo argue:



Luisa and the latest victim are too weak to donate more blood, and Malthus can't risk kidnaping another woman on the street, as the police are now on the alert.

The mad scientist gets a brilliant idea: Rosa! Rosa is lured to the house and prepped for the transfusion procedure. However, Gonzalo and the others escape from their cells (one of the women managed to snag the keys, which had been carelessly tossed aside by Malthus). Gonzalo and his grandfather fight in the lab (for a rather long time) until finally the older man is knocked down and a fire breaks out. Gonzalo and Rosa escape but Malthus perishes in the flames, shouting "Malthus is immortal!"



La marca del muerto is a good film with some interesting aspects, but it's not a classic. Fernando Cortés was an extremely competent director, and not merely of comedies (despite the fact that as a performer his forte was comedy). The pacing is good, and there are many atmospheric shots and the usual "shock" sequences involving Malthus's "monster face," but the picture still seems a little rushed and superficial (it's also on the short side, only about 80 minutes long).

Part of this can be blamed on the script: Gonzalo hesitates not at all when he revives his grandfather, even though it means (as far as he knows) murdering the innocent maid Luisa (the fact that she survives the transfusion comes as a welcome surprise to Gonzalo). Only later does he begin to disagree with Malthus, first complaining that the older man's demands for chemicals and equipment are straining his budget, then finally refusing to provide another victim, although whether this is out of a suddenly-developed conscience or just fear of being caught is not clear. Furthermore, late in the film when Malthus says he'll use Rosa as a source of blood, Gonzalo tries to dissuade him, saying "I'll help you get another woman!" And this is the film's hero?

Malthus, on the other hand, is a satisfactory villain, completely self-centered and capable of impersonating Gonzalo and even marrying Rosa, not to mention abducting young women and draining their blood. The film does nothing of a "Rip van Winkle" nature other than the aforementioned scene in which Malthus is startled by an automobile. In keeping with the insular feel of the picture, Malthus spends most of his 20th-century time hidden in the laboratory, emerging only twice (that we see), once to capture a victim and the second time to have dinner at Rosa's house (after which he begins to age and has to flee home), so his interactions with modern life are limited.

Rosa is somewhat annoying, throwing herself at Gonzalo repeatedly, despite his neglect, missed appointments, and outright hostility at times. These are the only significant characters: Antonio the butler, Rosa's mother, and a few other people have minor roles (Guillermo Cramer appears in one scene as a police inspector), but *La marca del muerto* is very insular and

while this isn't necessarily a flaw, it does make the movie seem somewhat "thin," dramatically.

The performances are all satisfactory. Although as noted above Sonia Furió's character is not written very well, she's adequate in the role. The supporting players are all right, although no one really has to exert themselves. Fernando Casanova does well enough with a dual role and the various means of portraying both Gonzalo and Dr. Malthus--split-screen, alternate-shots, and doubles--are effective. The old-age makeup is quite good, and while there aren't any "transformation" scenes as such, Malthus does go through various stages, from youthful to mature to elderly to ancient, and each is acceptably realistic.

La marca del muerto contains several oddly disturbing bits. For example, when Malthus plunges a long needle into the chest of his victims, they groan in pain (despite being unconscious). To be fair, he sticks a similar needle into his own chest without complaint! There is also a bizarre and unexplained scene in which Malthus is shown dissecting a dead dog!

A trim and generally effective horror film with above-average monster makeup, *La marca del muerto* deserves to be more widely seen, so it won't just be known as "the Mexican movie that was adapted into *Creature of the Walking Dead*."



Bonus *Creature of the Walking Dead* analysis:

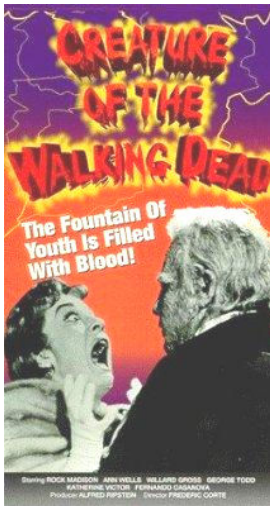
Jerry Warren's *Creature of the Walking Dead* is practically a textbook example of the different ways one can "adapt" a foreign film. Except that he uses *all* of the different ways in the *same* movie!

- (a) dubbing: although he did his best to eliminate most of the long dialogue sequences from the original film, Warren actually does dub a bit of the Mexican footage into English. This is generally restricted to shots where a character's mouth is not actually shown, or easily-dubbed words (that didn't have to be translated) such as "No!" and "Malthus! Malthus!"
- (b) voiceover narration: this is least effective when the narrator is speaking over a shot in which the characters on-screen are shown talking. As noted above, Warren edited out the majority of the conversations from *La marca del muerto*, but was forced to retain a few of them. Voiceover narration is used to better effect (relatively speaking) in the prologue and a few other scenes

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where no one is talking on-screen and narration thus seems more normal.

- (c) self-contained new footage: the most notorious example is the nearly 7-minute “massage” scene early in the movie, in which the corpulent Bruno VeSota and two other men ramble on about crimes Dr. Malthus *could* have committed (this is set in “1881,” after his arrest). There are several other such sequences, one of which is actually reasonably relevant (some detectives discuss the disappearance of a young woman the night before) and another which is not (a seance). These three scenes account for almost 20 minutes of *Creature of the Walking Dead*'s running time.
- (d) newly-shot footage incorporated *into* the original footage: there are at least two surprising instances where Warren has his actors “interact” with the Mexican actors. In one, a shot of Sonia Furió picking up the telephone leads to a monologue by an American actress playing the receptionist of Dr. Malthus. This is preceded by a scene showing Fernando Casanova in his doctor’s office—Warren actually went to the



trouble to shoot an insert of a desk with a name-plate reading “Martin J. Malthus MD” and a framed photo of Casanova and Furió! An even more shocking example of new footage occurs a short time later:

Rosa (or “Beth” in the dubbed version) visits the home of Malthus, and is admitted by butler Antonio (played by Edmundo Espino). Warren actually filmed a *different* actor as the butler, who appears in *one shot* and delivers a line (which isn’t even a crucial plot point), before cutting back to the Mexican footage.

- (e) Rearranging the original footage: although it does not appear Warren mixed footage from more than one movie in *Creature of the Walking Dead* (something he did in *Face of the Screaming Werewolf* and *The Wild World of Batwoman*), he does occasionally insert shots out of their original sequence.

The changes Warren made, with the exception of the three long interpolated sequences, are not particularly onerous, although the removal of most of the dialogue scenes also meant that most characterisation was also taken out. There are a few gaps in continuity or “how

did that happen?” moments, but these aren’t too noticeable. The voiceover narration for the dialogue scenes looks odd as well. However, the major problem with the Warren version is the new scenes, which are ridiculous, boring and pointless. It’s extremely difficult to conceive how anyone thought this footage *added* anything to the final product other than 20 minutes of sync-sound footage in English.



El terrible gigante de las nieves [The Terrible Giant of the Snows] (Cin. Grovas-Soc. Cooperativa de Producciones Cinematográficas de Técnicos y Artistas “La Mexicana,” 1962) *Exec Prod:* Adolfo Grovas; “*Jesús Grovas Presents*”; *Dir:* Jaime Salvador; *Scr:* Federico Curiel, Alfredo Ruanova; *Photo:* Ezequiel Carrasco; *Music:* Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Mgr:* Adrián Grovas; *Prod Chief:* José Luis Busto; *Asst Dir:* Manuel Ortega; *Film Ed:* José W. Bustos; *Art Dir:* Salvador Lozano Mena; *Decor:* Raymundo Ortiz; *Camera Op:* Manuel Santaella; *Lighting:* Luis García; *Makeup:* Concepción Zamora; *Sound:* Ernesto Caballero, Enrique Rodríguez

Cast: Joaquín Cordero (*Jorge Méndez*), Ana Bertha Lepe (*Lupe Moctezuma de Méndez*), Andrés Soler (*Dr. Moctezuma*), Antonio Raxel (*Mr. Morris*), José Eduardo Pérez (“*Eladio Parra*” *aka Argumedo*), David Hayat (*Alberto Moctezuma*), José Chávez Trowe (*henchman of Morris*), Amado Zumaya (*Román*), Elizabeth Dupeyrón (*Lita Méndez*), Julián de Meriche (*Rinaldo*), Roberto Mayer [sic] (*irate townsman*), Rafael Plaza

Notes: for a number of years, *El monstruo de los volcanes* and its sequel, *El terrible gigante de las nieves*, were quite difficult to see. Then *El monstruo de los volcanes* showed up, and turned out to be an interesting Mexican variation on the Yeti theme. *El terrible gigante de las nieves* took longer to emerge (the version I’ve seen came from a San Diego TV broadcast) and is a much lesser film.

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First (spoilers), it's a "fake monster" movie and those are almost always irritating. Furthermore, the woolly monster himself appears only twice, once for a few seconds, and at the climax for one or two minutes. The rest of the film is slow and boring, constructed in a curious fashion as a hybrid mystery-family drama. There is a slight hint of the supernatural—Dr. Moctezuma has two conversations with "El Señor de los volcanes," represented as a disembodied voice coming from Popocatepetl, the volcano near Mexico City—but it's also possible this is supposed to indicate Dr. Moctezuma is insane and talking to himself (although that'd be a little subtle for this level of movie).

El terrible gigante de las nieves takes place 7 years after the events in the first movie. Engineer Jorge is now married to Lupe; they have a young daughter, Lita, and live in the same provincial village in the shadow of Popocatepetl, with Lupe father's Dr. Moctezuma and



brother Alberto. However, Jorge and his family are planning to move to Mexico City. The local *comisario*

(similar to a sheriff) is discovered with injuries that appear to have been committed by some sort of large beast; he later dies. His replacement, Eladio Parra, takes a search party into the nearby mountains, accompanied by Jorge. Román, another policeman, wanders off from the group and is killed. Footprints nearby make Jorge suspect the Señor de las Volcanes monster is still alive and has resumed its murderous ways.

Dr. Moctezuma believes the monster is immortal; in the mountains, he speaks to the unseen creature, who demands the return of the sacred medallion (from the first movie), which contains directions to the monster's hidden treasure. Meanwhile, Alberto is confronted by the first film's villain, Mr. Morris, who survived his encounter with the beast (although he's now scarred and walks with a limp): Morris also demands the medallion. However, in one of the movie's most amusing bits, the medallion now hangs around the neck of little Lita, who emits a piercing shriek whenever anyone attempts to touch it. [Lita overreacts by screaming once and then *immediately* returns to normal, smiling as if nothing happened. She is supposed to be about seven years old—but looks and acts older—which makes this behaviour absurd and yet hilarious.]

After a needlessly-complicated series of events, Lita is abducted by Morris and...she doesn't have the medallion anymore! Jorge is instructed to bring the medallion (which he'd taken from her) to the mountains to exchange it for his daughter. However, after Morris gets the medallion, he's attacked and killed by the monster,

who then turns on Jorge. Jorge is saved by arrival of Dr. Moctezuma, who shoots the "creature"—revealed to be false *comisario* Eladio Parra, a former accomplice of Morris, who was also seeking the treasure. Dr. Moctezuma explains he knew the monster wasn't the *real* Señor de los Volcanes, because the false creature had spoken rudely to him and the real Señor would never have been so discourteous! Dr. Moctezuma agrees to move to Mexico City with Jorge and his family.



El terrible gigante de las nieves has little to recommend it. Jaime Salvador was never a very innovative or stylish director (to say the least), but some of his movies were at least partially redeemed by other factors (*El jorobado*, *El moderno Barba Azul*, *Escuadrón 201*, *Pacto diabólico*, *La señora muerta*, etc.). *Terrible* doesn't have the supernatural content of its predecessor, the monster is off-screen for the majority of the picture's running time, there is little suspense, and the interior sets are drab (although the exterior location shooting is interesting, even though no footage was shot in the Cacahuamilpa grottoes this time). About half the film focuses on Dr. Moctezuma's obsession with the Señor de los Volcanes, which approaches religious mania (at one point he shouts, "Tell me what to do! I'm your slave!"), and Morris and the other conspirators don't appear until the second half of the picture. Presumably it's Morris and his gang who murdered the original *comisario* so the false "Eladio Parra" could replace him, but it's not clear why this had to be done at all—the only thing Morris wants is the medallion, so wouldn't have it been easier to kidnap Lita (or Lupe, or both) and demand that Dr. Moctezuma turn it over (since they didn't know Lita had it) in exchange?



El terrible gigante de las nieves was shot immediately after *El monstruo de los volcanes* in 1962: the same white monster-suit was used, but it's less impressive here (despite only being seen twice). The first film effectively made the creature seem other-worldly and

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mythic, mostly through the script but also visually, while this movie keeps it off-screen too much and the final fight sequence—while not too bad, with Joaquín Cordero



leaping and karate-chopping the bulky monster, to no avail—exposes the design flaws. The body is sturdy enough (albeit plump) but the feature-less head looks like a white, furry bucket with two holes (for eyes), and the head-piece

threatens to pop off several times during the battle. Of course, in the context of this picture it is supposed to be “just a costume,” but that’s not really an excuse since this isn’t revealed until the end (think about the aquatic monster in *El pantano de las ánimas*, which was extremely effectively designed and constructed).

Curiously, although it was probably a coincidence, the drop-off in quality between *El monstruo de los volcanes* and *El terrible gigante de las nieves* was mirrored in the posters for the two movies. The key art for *El Monstruo* was quite good, while *Terrible* had appropriately terrible art featuring awkward paste-ups of Joaquín Cordero and Ana Bertha Lepe (in a scene not even present in the film) and poor artwork of the monster, who resembles the Pillsbury Doughboy or the Michelin Man rather than a shaggy white monster.

Trivia: although most of the time Dr. Moctezuma (and everyone else) refers to “El Señor de los volcanes” (The Lord of the Volcanoes), in one scene Andrés Soler slips and says “El Señor de las nieves” (The Lord of the Snows).



El asesino invisible [The Invisible Killer]*

(Filmadora Panamericana, 1964) *Prod:* Alberto López; *Dir-Scr-Adapt:* René Cardona [Sr.]; *Story:* René Cardona Jr.; *Photo:* Raúl Martínez Solares; *Music Dir:* Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Mgr:* Luis García de León; *Prod Chief:* Jorge Cardeña; *Asst Dir:* Ignacio Villareal; *Film Ed:* José W. Bustos; *Art Dir:* Roberto Silva; *Decor:* Pablo Galván; *Camera Op:* Cirilo Rodríguez; *Lighting:* Miguel Arana; *Makeup:* Concepción Zamora; *Choreog:* José Silva; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Rafael Esparza; *Music Rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed:* Raúl Portillo; *Union:* STPC

*U.S. version (dubbed): *Neutron Traps the Invisible Killers*

Cast: Ana Bertha Lepe (*Ana Berta*), Guillermo Murray (*Insp. Raúl Martínez*), Carlos Agosti (*Prof. Eric Larsen*), Adriana Roel (*Adriana Green*), Miguel Arenas (*Prof. Green*), Jorge Rivé [aka Jorge Rivero] (*El Enmascarado de Oro*), Manuel Garay (*detective*), Mario

Vega, Víctor Velázquez, Guillermo Rivas (*mgr of nightclub*), Mario Sevilla (*detective*), Margarita Delgado, Héctor Suárez, Linda Vera, Martha Lipuscuá, Juan Garza (*Jaime*), René Dupeyrón, Enriqueta Carrasco (*furrier employee*), Myron Levin (*Manzur, furrier*), Guillermo Bianchi (*nightclub employee*), Jorge



Casanova, Felipe Flores (*emcee at club*), Rubén Márquez (*doctor*), Conjunto “Los Sinner,” Ballet “La Fuente”; *wrestlers:* René Guajardo, Karlof [sic] Lagarde, Dorrel Dixon, Ray Mendoza, El Bizarro

Notes: after losing the services of El Santo in a contract dispute, producer Alberto López attempted to create a Santo-clone with “El Enmascarado de Oro” (get it? His mask is *gold*, not silver!) in *El asesino invisible*. However, the resulting film is weak and the new masked hero did not catch on.

There are a number of problems with this film. The hero’s role is split between El Enmascarado and police inspector Raúl, with Raúl taking top honours—he’s got



the personality, he’s got the love interest, he’s got more screen time. El Enmascarado gets no build-up: he appears in the opening sequence as Prof. Green’s confidante and later seamlessly

joins the hunt for the Invisible Killer, but is not much more than a guest star. The masked man drives a spiffy sports car (but a dark one, unlike Santo’s silver or white vehicles), and one scene hints that he has a secret hideout (a “brick” wall moves so he can drive thru), but he doesn’t *do* much at all (to be fair, it’s difficult to make “fighting” an invisible opponent look interesting or thrilling). The mask is ugly and even his name is generic (Raúl calls him “Enmascarado”). Jorge Rivero is muscular but his face isn’t shown (towards the end he’s unmasked in the ring but his face isn’t revealed clearly) and his voice seems to have been post-dubbed by someone else. The other characters are not much more

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interesting: Carlos Agosti is nothing more than a generic rotter, Ana Bertha Lepe spends more time dancing than anything else, and Adriana Roel might as well have stayed home for all she contributes to the picture.



The script is also weak. In the opening sequence, Prof. Green (Miguel Arenas, with a hilarious accent and mannerisms) claims his invisibility machine is the “greatest invention in the history of the

world” (hyperbole much?) and—as every good scientist who invents a weapon does—claims it will “end war” if placed in the proper hands (at the end of the movie El Enmascarado says the plans should be given to the “armed forces”—yeah, *that* will “end war” alright). So what happens when a villain takes control of the machine? He robs a bank, steals some jewels, robs rich people at dinner, beats up a few wrestlers. And not even to enrich himself, it’s to taunt the police and demonstrate his power. This is not only illogical, it reduces the scope of the film to a petty argument among a small group of people. Compare this to *El hombre que logró ser invisible*, which personalises the invisible man (*El asesino invisible* is structured as a “mystery,” and even cheats on that) and makes him a megalomaniac out to dominate and punish the world (even if he also never gets beyond a small circle of people).



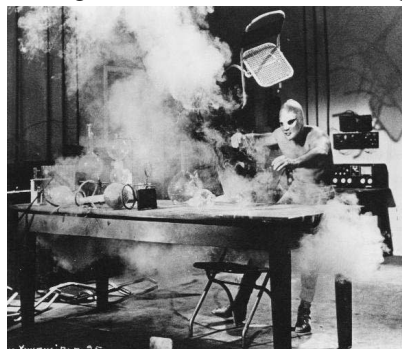
El asesino invisible is paced horribly, with far too many musical numbers—most featuring Ana Bertha Lepe, but also one *ranchera* song—and a very long, irrelevant *lucha* match (there is also a shorter match

towards the end but this one at least ends with the intervention of the Invisible Killer). The only positive aspect of the dances & songs is Ana Bertha Lepe’s costuming, which includes two see-through costumes which—while not revealing anything forbidden—are still rather racy.

The special effects are largely mechanical—floating pistols, doors opening by themselves, footprints appearing on the ground—and are adequate. There are two nice bits, one in which the Invisible Killer steals El Enmascarado’s sports car (the “driverless” car illusion is effective), and another in which the villain wears a duplicate Enmascarado mask over his invisible head (but the eye sockets are completely empty). At the very end there is a brief double-exposure when Raúl uses the old

“throw paint on the invisible man to make him visible” gag.

As the film begins, Prof. Green successfully demonstrates his invisibility machine on a rabbit to El Enmascarado de Oro. Green says he’ll make himself invisible the next day, the first test on a human being. However, Green is murdered and an invisible man robs a bank shortly afterwards. El Enmascarado and police Insp. Raúl Martínez try to solve the case. The suspects include Eric Larsen, Green’s assistant and the boyfriend of Adriana, Green’s daughter (although Larsen is also pursuing dancer Ana Berta), as well as Green’s handyman Jaime, who has...vanished. The Invisible Killer foils the police at every turn, evading their traps and mocking them. He even intervenes in a wrestling match between El Enmascarado and another *luchador*, knocking them both out and unmasking the unconscious



Enmascarado! However, this proves the villain’s undoing, since a stray police bullet wounds him here.

The Invisible Killer, disguised as El

Enmascarado, goes to Ana Berta’s apartment but is scared off; he then visits Adriana Green and compels her to phone for a doctor to treat his injury. However, the police and El Enmascarado arrive and the killer shoots Adriana, then flees (stealing the masked man’s car). Finally, Raúl and El Enmascarado confront the killer at Green’s lab (where he has to return periodically to become visible or risk dying as a result of the treatment): it’s Eric Larsen, who is electrocuted when he bumps into a piece of high-voltage equipment. All is well...or is it? (Viewers will remember Larsen had alibis for some of the Invisible Killer’s crimes) Sure enough, another invisible man threatens Raúl and El Enmascarado, but is exposed by having white paint tossed on him and is then shot to death. It’s Jaime, Green’s handyman, who was in villainous partnership with Larsen.

El asesino invisible has a number of flaws but perhaps the most crucial is its lack of a charismatic central character. Jorge Rivero would very shortly become an unmasked leading man whose starring career would span five decades, but in this movie he’s betrayed by a bland and clumsy script.



***El vampiro y el sexo* [The Vampire and Sex]**
(Cinematográfica Calderón, 1968) Prod: Guillermo Calderón Stell; Dir: René Cardona [Sr.]; Scr: Alfredo Salazar; Photo: Raúl Martínez Solares; Music Dir: Sergio Guerrero; Prod Mgr: Roberto G. Rivera; Prod Chief: Alfredo Chavira; Sub-Dir: Manuel Muñoz; Film

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Ed: José W. Bustos; *Art Dir:* Salvador Lozano Mena;
Decor: Carlos Cortéz; *Makeup:* María del Castillo;
Sound Supv: James L. Fields; *Sound:* Eduardo Arjona,
 Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed:* José Li-Ho; Eastmancolor;
Union: STPC



*non-nude version: *Santo en el tesoro de Drácula* [Santo in the Treasure of Dracula]

Cast: Santo (*himself*), Aldo Monti (*Count Drácula*), Noelia Noel (*Luisa*), Roberto G. Rivera (*Dr. Kur*), Carlos Agosti (*Dr. César Sepulveda*), Alberto Rojas (*Perico*), Pili González (*Paquita*), Jorge Mondragón (*Prof. Soler*), Fernando Mendoza (*Prof. Van Roth*), Javier Rizo (*Dandy?*), Carlos Suárez (*Ratón*), Víctor Manuel González (*Atlas?*), Guillermo Hernández "Lobo Negro" (*wrestler X*), Roberto Y. Palacios (*José, gardener*), Gina Moret (*Lupe, maid*); ?José Luis Carol (*scientist*), Mirón Levine (*scientist*), Enrique Pontón (*scientist*); *vampire women:* Jéssica Rivano, Diana Arriaga, Magali, Paulette; Sonia Aguilar (*Mara*)

Notes: long-coveted but feared lost, the rediscovery of *El vampiro y el sexo*--the "nude scenes" version of *Santo en el Tesoro de Drácula*--was one of the most talked-about stories of 2011 and 2012, receiving mainstream media attention in Mexico and international interest among film fans. Viviana García Besné revealed the existence of the film in the Calderón vaults in her 2009 documentary *Perdida*, but the "re-premiere" of the movie scheduled for the 2011 Guadalajara Film Festival was cancelled due to opposition by El Hijo del Santo, and it wasn't until later in the year that *El vampiro y el sexo* was shown in select cinemas. A hoped-for DVD release did not materialise, and in 2012 the movie was shown on the "Cine Mexicano" cable channel in Mexico --and was immediately bootlegged and disseminated on the Internet (with an enterprising fan even creating English sub-titles).

For this review, I compared an "Internet version" (tagged "Cortesía de Mariachi de Corazón," a Mexican blogger) with Rise Above's DVD release of *Santo en el*

tesoro de Drácula. My copy of *El vampiro y el sexo* is faux-letterboxed to hide the "Cine Mexicano" screen bug in the upper left-hand corner of the screen but--curiously--while this means a fair amount of the upper part of the screen is missing compared to the full-frame *Tesoro*, there is a bit more image on the bottom and the sides in *Vampiro*. Since the movie was not shot wide-screen, this suggests that the black-and-white TV prints of *Tesoro* may have been very slightly cropped.

Aside from this artificially-applied aspect ratio difference, the different main title, and the colour/black & white dichotomy, the two films are virtually identical except for the nude scenes. These are responsible for the approximately 4-minute difference in running time: *Vampiro* is just over 86 minutes long, while *Tesoro* is a bit more than 82 minutes in length.

The nude scenes actually last about 9 minutes, but some of the content overlaps with the "clothed" version. For instance, in one scene Count Drácula approaches servant Lupe, bites her neck, then commands her to follow his orders.

But in *Vampiro*, he also takes time to open Lupe's blouse and fondle her bare

breasts for a while (there is an added closeup as he bites her neck, whereas in *Tesoro* this is shown in long shot). Consequently, it takes a longer amount of time to advance the narrative the same distance.

There are three basic nude set-ups, presented in five different scenes. The first occurs about 18 minutes into the movie. Drácula enters his subterranean crypt, greets his primary aide Mara and some other vampire women, fondles a busty blonde and busty redhead reclining on stone slabs, bites them, and stabs them to death (they are instantly converted into vampires). He then exposes the breasts and

shoulders of his 2 new converts and their 5 companions (not including Mara), stamping their necks with his ring, leaving a bat-like tattoo. The women (including

Mara) all strip completely (they are wearing skin-coloured crotch covers which actually look more obscene than pubic hair would have), turn into bats, and fly away.



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The same action transpires in *Tesoro* but, of course, everyone remains completely clothed.

The next sequence follows immediately afterwards. Drácula enters the bedroom of Luisa, fondles her bare breasts, then vanishes out of frame as she writhes in passion (clearly intimating he is performing oral sex on her), reappearing to kiss her and then bite her neck as she moans in passion. This is fairly explicit soft-core footage and some of it is repeated as a flashback later in the movie, when a resurrected Drácula reencounters Luisa in 1968.

The third instance of nude footage is the aforementioned scene with Lupe the maid. [Both Noelia Noel (Luisa) and Gina Moret (Lupe) had nude scenes in *El horripilante bestia humana*, also directed by René Cardona.] The fourth instance of nudity is the repeat of part of the Drácula-seduces-Luisa sequence. Finally, near the end of *Vampiro*, Drácula introduces an entranced Luisa to Mara and the other vampire women in the crypt, and they are fully nude (but have miraculously--perhaps magically--donned their black gowns when Santo and his friends arrive to try and save Luisa).

The nude scenes (and colour) mean *El vampiro y el sexo* is rather more entertaining than *Santo en el tesoro de Drácula*, but it is still not an especially good



movie. Alfredo Salazar was one of the most notorious recyclers among Mexican screenwriters. *Vampiro* borrows parts of its plot from Salazar's earlier *Las luchadoras contra la momia* (especially the part about a wrestling match to determine ownership of an artefact which reveals the location of a hidden treasure, one of the most contrived inclusions of wrestling footage in history of *lucha libre* films). *Santo y Blue Demon contra Drácula y el hombre lobo* borrows ideas and even whole scenes from *El vampiro y el sexo*. However, an even closer "remake" was *La venganza de la Llorona*, another Calderón film, but Salazar didn't even receive screen credit this time!

El vampiro y el sexo is seriously flawed structurally: the period sequence (without Santo--Santo's first action sequence doesn't occur until more than halfway through the picture, and he's off-screen for nearly a third of the running time) is a fairly straightforward (and decently-done) version of "Dracula" (using the original novel and previous vampire films as "inspiration"), but the transition to the contemporary plot is very clumsy and Dracula's reappearance is even more contrived and abrupt.

Santo, demonstrating a scientific ability we haven't seen before, has invented a time machine. With the aid of

his friend Dr. Sepulveda, he shows it to a group of scientists. But, since he hasn't tested it, they scoff. Afterwards, Santo says the ideal subject would be a young woman. Luisa, Sepulveda's daughter (and the only woman we've seen within a mile of the lab), takes the hint and volunteers. Soon, dressed in a silver space suit, she steps into the machine (which has a spiral design, indicating that Santo was a fan of the "Time Tunnel" TV series). In a nice (if incongruous) shot, Luisa (now wearing a nightgown) falls (in slow motion) out of space into a large, luxurious bed in a 19th-century bedroom.



Professor Van Roth arrives to consult with Prof. Soler, Luisa's father. Soler says Luisa has been suffering from exhaustion and anemia lately, and has two small punctures on her neck. If this wasn't suspicious enough, Soler's new neighbor stops by, a foreign nobleman named "Count Alucard."

In his subterranean hideout, the Count creates some new converts: first he bites them, then he stabs them, then he stamps them on the neck with his signet ring. In a cloud of smoke, they turn into bats and fly off in search of prey. Dracula stops off to bite Luisa again. Meanwhile, Van Roth is experimenting with the name "Alucard," and discovers that--held up to the mirror--it spells "Dracula"! The Count himself appears and smashes the mirror (since he doesn't cast a reflection, he doesn't care much for them--this scene is lifted from the 1931 Bela Lugosi *Dracula*), but is chased off when Van Roth brandishes a sprig of mandragora bush. Luisa is given a necklace of the anti-vampire herb to wear, but Dracula hypnotizes the maid, who promptly removes it. Luisa is now free to leave with Dracula. He shows her a coffin full of the gold and jewels (the "treasure" of the title).

Meanwhile, Soler and Van Roth--in a scene taken from Bram Stoker's original novel--track down and stake another vampire woman. Using a dog, they trail Dracula and Luisa to the grotto where their coffins lie (Luisa, having been bitten three times, is now a full-fledged vampire and can even turn into a bat). Dracula gets the stake treatment, but before Luisa can be hammered, Santo (who has been watching the whole story on a TV set) brings her back to the present (unfortunately, this is depicted by running her original, slow-motion arrival in reverse, which is not only silly, it breaks continuity, since this time she's lying in a coffin in a cave, not in her bedroom). Luckily, she's not a vampire anymore when she gets back to 1968.

A black-hooded figure has been spying on the entire experiment. He wants that coffer full of gold. Santo, still

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smarting at his rejection by the scientific community, says he can prove that his time machine works if he can find Dracula's treasure. Luisa isn't crazy about this idea, but they go to Dracula's crypt and take a medallion from his chest (it apparently contains a clue to the location of the gold). Black Hood and his gang—including his son, wrestler Atlas—follow, and a fight breaks out. In all of the confusion, Santo forgets to take Dracula's ring, which contains another part of the puzzle. The Black Hood and his gang promptly take possession of the ring. In a confrontation with the crooks, Santo refuses to give up the medallion. Dr. Sepulveda proposes that Santo wrestle Atlas, winner take all, and the Hood agrees.

Two weeks later, Santo beats Atlas and the Hood hands over Dracula's ring. However, he's made a copy, and gets the brilliant idea to revive Dracula and use him to find the treasure (or at least retrieve his missing jewelry). So, the stake is removed from the vampire's corpse. Dracula goes to Sepulveda's house, where little Paquita (an orphan whom Luisa has adopted) has been playing with the medallion. As he steals it from the sleeping girl, Dracula spots Luisa and recognizes her as his long-lost mate. He hypnotizes her and they leave, thrashing some of the Hood's gangsters and Sepulveda's gardener as they go. The gardener tells Santo, and he sets off with Perico and Sepulveda; the Hood and his men follow, and eventually force Santo's car to stop. After a fight, the police arrive and arrest the crooks. The Hood is exposed as Dr. Kur, one of the scientists who doubted

the efficacy of Santo's time machine.

Santo, Perico and Sepulveda go to Dracula's hideout. The vampire has reconstituted his corps of vampire women (he says they were dormant during the period he was staked), and is preparing to



bite and stab Luisa. Dracula traps Santo and his friends with a net, but suddenly a huge hole opens in the roof of the grotto, and sunlight kills Dracula and his crew. Wrestler X, Santo's friend, alerted by Santo on his wrist radio (earlier we'd seen Santo give him one), had blown open the roof with dynamite. When X and his wrestler friends ask about the "danger" Santo had been in, they're shown the pitiful remnants of a few bats on the floor. This isn't too impressive, and they leave, probably

thinking Santo is a little screwy. Santo, Luisa, Perico, and Sepulveda also depart.

Aldo Monti is OK as Dracula: he looks right and acts suavely, although he really doesn't have too much to do (particularly in the modern sequence). Noelia Noel, who didn't have an especially stellar film career, is attractive and a competent actress, although again she's not given too much opportunity to display this. Alberto "Caballo" Rojas, dressed in "mod" clothing (including a huge dollar sign hanging from a chain around his neck, perhaps inspiring future rappers like Flavor Flav), handles the comic relief chores about as well as one would expect; in one scene, "Lobo Negro" demonstrates some wrestling holds on the spindly comedian, and when Santo and Lobo Negro leave the gym, they **step** on him! Santo's personality in this film is a bit odd: he's clearly irked when the scientists scoff at his "I invented a time machine" claims, and acts (atypically) like a jerk at other times. He seems to realise this, because at the end he apologises to Luisa for not heeding her warnings about resurrecting Dracula, seeking the hidden treasure, and so forth. Furthermore, although Santo did set up the final plan to destroy Dracula and the vampire women, the actual work is done by Wrestler X, with Santo as a helpless onlooker.



The production values are adequate but not elaborate, and Cardona's direction is routine and not too atmospheric. Those who've only seen *Santo en el tesoro de Dracula* should not base their opinions of the photography, art direction, etc., on the black-and-white television print, which is much too dark (since it was converted from a colour film, and not shot b&w): the film looks much better in colour.

One curious note: Count Dracula "converts" two women into vampires by first biting them and then stabbing them to death with a ritual dagger (at the climax he's preparing to stab Luisa with the same knife). For whatever reason, the actual stabbing is not shown—even in the nude version! Instead, Dracula raises his arm, then there is an obvious cut and he walks away from his victim.



Eerie '80s



Calacán [Skeleton Town] (Emulsión y Gelatina/DASA Films, 1985) *Exec Prod:* Norma Galván; *Dir-Scr:* Luis Kelly Ramírez; *Scr:* Luis Kelly, Mauro Mendoza, Fernando Fuentes; *Photo:* Fernando Fuentes; *Orig. Music:* Luis Guzmán; *Music Dir:* Eduardo Díazmuñoz; *Assoc Prod:* Fonoimagen Prods., Cia. teatral "La Troupe," Emilio Ebergenyi; *Prod Mgr:* Norma Morel; *Asst Dir:* Alejandro Aguilar; *Film Ed:* Luis Kelly Ramírez; *Prod. Artística:* Cia. teatral "La Troupe"; *Prod. Design:* Mauro Mendoza; *Art Dir:* Carlos Cantú; *Decor:* Luis Kelly, Mauro Mendoza; *Sound:* Hugo Rodríguez; *Sound Ed:* Saúl Aupart; *Makeup:* Norma Betancourt, Francisco Lezama; *Puppeteers:* Marco Antonio Serna, Carlos Cantú, Carmen Luna, Sylvia Pérez, Agustín Hernández, Alfredo Mendoza, Dora Montiel

Cast: Mauro Mendoza (*Matz*; *Prof. Fonseca*), Sylvia Guevara (*Metz*; *servant*), Dora Montiel (*Pancho*, *baker*), Emilio Ebergenyi (*Emilio*), David González (*Felipe*), Heriberto Luna (*Ernesto*), Agustín Hernández (*Cuca*),

Marco San Martín (*archeologist Razo*), Carmen Luna (*don Venancio*; *Gloria*), Marco Antonio Serna, Juan Carlos Morgado, Norma Betancourt, Alfredo Mendoza, Erika Fitchett



Notes: based on my knowledge of its premise, *Calacán* was a film

I'd wanted to see for quite some time, and thus I was pleased to discover it on YouTube (albeit in a murky, VHS-sourced, water-marked copy). What I hadn't realised, however, is that this is basically a childrens' movie, and thus would perhaps be less interesting than I'd hoped. Still, *Calacán* gets credit for trying, and it is reasonably entertaining after all.

An archeologist brings a map to Prof. Fonseca at UNAM. Fonseca is trying to locate a town called "Calacán," and reads to the archeologist from a diary written by young Ernesto...one night, Ernesto stumbles across a secret meeting in which Satan tells his minions of his plan to flood the market with plastic pumpkins (Jack-O-Lanterns). Satan sends his emissaries Matz and Metz to the village of Calacán to put his scheme in motion. Ernesto convinces his father, a traveling salesman of traditional Mexican candies, to search for

Calacán, which is located somewhere near a lake in the state of Michoacán.

Meanwhile, we are introduced to Calacán, a village of the dead: animated skeletons "live" normal lives (*calaca* is what the Día de los Muertos decorations of skulls and skeletons are called). Felipe lives with his father Pancho and mother Cuca: they are the village bakers.

Other residents include stereotypical Spanish shopkeeper don Venancio, the town drunk, etc. Matz and Metz set up



headquarters in an abandoned house, and begin producing plastic pumpkins for the "General Punkin Food" company, using a computerised machine. They want to replace the traditional "Day of the Dead" with "Halloween." They also try to prevent Pancho, Cuca, and Ernesto from making the treats called *calaveras* (decorated sugar skulls), and even convert the town drunk into their zombie henchman.

Ernesto finally locates Calacán and teams up with Felipe and his parents to defeat Matz and Metz by sabotaging their plastic-pumpkin machine.

The narrative format of *Calacán* is rather complex for a childrens' movie: it's told in flashback as Prof. Fonseca reads Ernesto's diary, alternating scenes of Ernesto and his father driving around rural Michoacán and scenes set in Calacán--both daily life and the schemes of the

bumbling Matz and Metz. There are some logical gaps in the story itself--Satan's plot is unclear and there's no indication Calacán is the center of



calavera production for Mexico, or something, so the selection of this town as the headquarters of plastic-pumpkin production doesn't make much sense. Matz and Metz are referred to as "special agents" by the Devil, and later called *brujos* (they look human but have green skin;

Matz strongly resembles comedian Rip Taylor) and seem to possess some supernatural powers (although Metz in particular is extremely incompetent), but also rely on various types of technology (the computerised manufacturing machine, an ATV, a "sugar detector").



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Much of the film is devoted to daily life in Calacán, which resembles that of any small provincial town in Mexico, except that the inhabitants are skeletons (there are even skeleton cows, a skeleton dog, and a skeleton rooster). There are *some* gags about their undead status, but this is very inconsistent. For example, Pancho produces and sells normal baked products in his *panadería*, but Cuca buys "fish" (fish skeletons) and a taco stand sells tacos featuring (among other things) "finger bones" and "finger nails" as fillings. Felipe literally "goes to pieces" when he first sees Metz (live people scare the skeleton inhabitants of Calacán just as ghosts scare humans) and later removes his head and holds it up so he can peek into a window.

The inhabitants of Calacán are portrayed via two different techniques. Most are actors wear makeup and/or latex "appliances" that cover the upper-half of their face to give them a skull-like appearance, but leaves their mouths free so they can talk. When done properly this is effective but the results are variable here. Some other actors appear to be wearing full-face masks which aren't articulated so their mouths *don't* move as they talk. The other method is puppetry, which ranges from simple (talking *calaveras* and pieces of pastry), to more complex (don Venancio is a Muppet-sized, chest-up creation), and even marionettes (two life-size cow skeletons and an ambulatory dog skeleton). The mixing of techniques is noticeable but not too jarring--for example, the interaction between don Venancio and live actors is relatively seamless.

Calacán's production values are adequate. The village exteriors were shot in Santa Fe de la Laguna, Michoacán, and the various interior sets are satisfactory (although in one scene it's clear Matz and Metz are using a film projector or a telecine as one of their "diabolical" devices). Although not expensive, the movie is rather slick in terms of its film style, with tracking shots, etc.. In other words, this isn't a crude, static low-budget effort. Although this was Kelly's feature film debut, he had considerable experience in both the film industry and on the academic side (as a graduate of CUEC). Curiously, the finished version of the film has a few technical flaws, including shots of the boom mike, some abrupt transitions, and even a large "X" on the print at one point.

The film carries two music credits, one for "original music"--presumably the brief songs sung by various characters in Calacán--and the other for "music direction," which probably means Eduardo Díazmuñoz arranged the "stock" background music score. The songs are, as mentioned, very short and not too painful, and the library music is appropriately chosen and effective.

As noted above, the plot is predicated on the (vague) premise that Satan, through the "General Punkin Foods" corporation, is attempting to sell plastic pumpkins (the kind children carry when trick-or-treating) and thereby replace the Day of the Dead with the foreign celebration called Halloween. This isn't hammered out as blatantly as it could have been, although Matz and Metz occasionally speak English, which reinforces the idea

that they are outsiders trying to undermine Mexican traditions for the sake of commerce. Unfortunately, it might have been better if Kelly *had* been somewhat more didactic, since as it stands the film only indirectly makes the point that national traditions need to be defended--much of the meaning is lost among the slapstick bumbling of Matz and Metz, and the lack of clarity re: Calacán's role in the Day of the Dead traditions.

Calacán is not wholly successful but it scores more than it misses, and is unusual enough to warrant a look.



Trivia note: among the numerous people thanked in the end credits of *Calacán* is Guillermo del Toro, at the time a young man mostly known for his makeup and special effects work. He's not credited as actually working on this movie, but may have provided some technical advice to the filmmakers.



Terrifying 2000s

El Fantasma vs. el secreto de la urna maldita
[The Phantom vs. the Secret of the Cursed Urn]
(MaxOne/Telestar, 2008) *Exec Prod:* Julio Aguado Bazua; *Prod:* Ramón Barba Loza; *Dir-Scr:* Julio Aldama Jr.; *Photo:* Juan Carlos Martín; *Musicalisation:* Alfonso Curiel; *Prod Mgr:* Lic. Laura Zafra; *Asst Dir:* Alejandro Magaña; *Film Ed/Digital FX:* Osvaldo Gómez; *Sound Engin:* Jesús Hernández



Cast: El Hijo del Fantasma (*El Fantasma*), Julio Aldama [Jr.] (*Cmdte. Medina*), El Fantasma Internacional (*father of El Fantasma*), Valeria Gallart

(*Laura Espinosa*), Gizela ("*Francesca Draca*," *vampire woman leader*), Vampiro Asesino (*masked vampire*), Rubén Prieto (*lucha commissioner*); *men who become*

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vampires: Mario Jiménez, Mario Hernández, Martín Barrón; *luchadores*: Septiembre Negro, Cyborg, Judas; *luchadoras*: Lady Rabbit, Principesa, Miss Judas; Héctor García (*don Pablo Díaz*), Miguel Vilchis (*Dr. Vilchis*), Fernando Carbonel (*Igor*); *vampire women*: Elvira García, Madai García, Tania Bracamontes

Notes: producer Ramón Barba Loza has been active in Mexican cinema for more than 2 decades, mostly in the *videohome* area. In recent years, he has invested in high-def equipment which—along with digital editing—gives his films a slightly glossier look than 16mm direct-to-video product, along with the (sometimes dubious) advantage of digital effects. A number of his films feature masked wrestlers and/or have science fiction and fantasy elements; these seem to be aimed chiefly at juvenile audiences. Barba Loza's website is here: <http://peliculasbarbaloza.com/index.htm>

El Fantasma vs. el secreto de la urna maldita is one of 3 recent films featuring El Hijo del Fantasma. The son of wrestler El Fantasma, El Hijo is young (born in 1984), well-spoken, and a surprisingly decent actor (or



perhaps he simply seems better, given the weak competition he faces in these movies). Both El Fantasma (now billed as El Fantasma Internacional) and El Hijo wear

costumes modeled after the U.S. comic strip character "The Phantom," created in the 1930s by Lee Falk.

Sadly, the talents of El Hijo del Fantasma are mostly wasted in *El Fantasma vs. el secreto de la urna maldita*, given the film's (a) simplistic script, (b) mostly terrible acting, and (c) awful direction, particularly in the "action" sequences. This movie appears to have been made for literally no money (except for the actors' salaries), since it was shot on location in Naucalpan de



Juárez (a suburb of Mexico City) and has no sets or effects (other than digital). The lack of a budget does not have to doom a film to mediocrity (or worse), if any sort of

imagination is employed by the director and writer, and if some reasonably competent people are in front of the camera.

To be fair, a few of the "actors" are adequate but many more are poor and/or rank amateurs, and/or overact ridiculously. It doesn't help that the "vampires" wear full sets of plastic "vampire teeth" (like you'd buy at the dollar store), which makes speaking clearly *extremely*

difficult (and looks dumb, too). Even this would not necessarily be a kiss of death, but combined with the weak script and—especially—the clumsy direction, *El Fantasma vs. el secreto de la urna maldita* is very weak overall.

It may come as a surprise to those unfamiliar with *lucha* hero movies, but the action sequences are generally not a strong point of this genre. The ring action is sometimes decent, but when professional wrestlers—as opposed to movie-quality stunt men—are stuck in "real" locations and instructed to fight, the results often seem awkward, slow, overly rehearsed, and not exciting or realistic. This is frequently compounded by uninspired direction and editing. *El Fantasma vs. el secreto de la urna maldita* is noticeably worse in almost every aspect. The "ring" sequences (there are two) actually take place in an empty field (!) rather than a ring, with a handful of children doing their best to feign enthusiasm as an audience. The match between El Hijo del Fantasma and Septiembre Negro is particularly bad, with neither wrestler exerting himself at all, so that their "wrestling match" more closely resembles a slow-motion training exercise or *tai chi* practice. The fight scenes in the rest of the film are even worse, because the participants (El Hijo, a few beefy guys) seem to be trying to avoid damaging any furniture (or themselves) in the rooms where they are battling in a desultory fashion. The final confrontation between El Hijo and Vampiro Asesino is somewhat better because (a) the Vampiro has a great costume and actually looks muscular and athletic, (b) there are some nice digital "ray" effects, and (c) the fight is relatively brief. But taken as a whole, there was literally no effort to make *El Fantasma vs. el secreto de la urna maldita* exciting, nor is there anything resembling "atmosphere" or "horror" on display.

A museum in Naucalpan de Juárez receives a funeral "urn" that has a reputation of being cursed. [The *urna* is actually a wooden box and I wouldn't call it an "urn," but this translation might be acceptable in Mexico, given that the box is a receptacle for human ashes, and also that *urna* is a nickname for a ballot box, for instance.]

Museum officials don Pablo and Laura mount an exhibition, but (hilariously) allow a worker to surround the object with



crucifixes, portraits of the Virgin Mary, candles, and other religious paraphrenalia to ward off evil. This stymies the attempts of goofy hunchback Igor (of course) to steal the urn, which contains the ashes of his vampire master. Needing help, Igor revives 4 vampire women (from their own wooden urns). The female vampires prey on a few hapless males to gain strength for their quest.

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Meanwhile, el Hijo del Fantasma attends the exhibition opening as a guest of the local *lucha* commissioner, who is trying to convince El Hijo to turn pro. However, the young masked man prefers to battle evil throughout the world, and will only wrestle in charity events (in grassy fields, apparently). The vampire women, suitably disguised as sexy ladies, also attend the reception and find some new victims, although their leader—who introduces herself as a Ukrainian *luchadora* named “Francesca Draca”—pairs off with El Hijo (but doesn’t bite him). The men who are bitten by the other 3 *vampirás* die, revive as vampires themselves and massacre some nurses in a hospital, then become henchmen of Igor and the others.



After getting advice from the ghost of his father, El Hijo joins police Cmdte. Medina to solve the case. As usual, Medina scoffs at the tale of “vampires,” although the piles of bloodless bodies with bite marks on their necks should be enough to convince just about anyone. Laura is bitten by Igor and falls under the vampires’ spell. She tricks don



Pablo into taking the urn out of the museum, then murders him and turns it over to the vampire gang. The king-vampire is revived, but El Hijo appears and destroys him with his power ring (oh, did I mention that? El Hijo has a ring that shoots beams of light). The female vampires are also wiped out, and all the victims return to normal.

There was no way *El Fantasma vs. el secreto de la urna maldita* was going to be a very good movie, but there is really no excuse for squandering a fairly competent and interesting leading man/masked hero in a such a lame effort. I have copies of the other two *Fantasma* movies, but I doubt if I’ll spend 3 hours of my life looking at them (until, possibly, the next Halloween issue).



La leyenda de la Llorona [The Legend of the Crying Woman] (Ánima Estudios-Eficine/Videocine,

2011) *Exec Prod*: Alex García, Fernando de Fuentes; *Prod*: José C. García de Letona, Fernando de Fuentes; *Line Prod*: Francisco Hirata, Gabriela Salazar; *Assoc Prod*: Ricardo Arnaiz; *Dir*: Alberto Chino Rodríguez; *Animation Dir*: Jorge Medina Macías; *Scr*: Omar Mustre, Ricardo Arnaiz, Jesús Guzmán; *Story*: Ricardo Arnaiz, Jesús Guzmán; *Music*: Leoncio Bon Lara; *Prod Dir*: Mariana Suárez Molnar; *Film Ed*: Roberto Bolado; *Art Dir*: Jorge Carrera Quiroz

Cast (Voices): Yair Prado (*Leo San Juan*), Mónica del Carmen (*Kika*), Andrés Couturier (*don Andrés; Pujo*), Rafael Inclán (*El Alebrije*), Mayté Cordeiro (*Teodora*), Rocío Lara (*La Llorona*), Rosario Zúñiga (*Rosa*), Miguel Couturier (*Willy; Fray Godofredo*), Jesús Guzmán (*Pecas; Finado*), Erick Cañete (*Beto*), Valeria Russek (*Leo's mother*), Humberto Solórzano (*Padre Tello; Tiro*), Mercedes Hernández (*Yoltzín*), Romina Marroquín (*Moribunda*)



Notes: La Llorona is the most popular indigenous Mexican “monster,” having appeared in numerous films (Mexican and international), plays, stories, comics, TV shows, and songs for nearly a century. *La leyenda de la Llorona* is one of the most recent appearances of the wailing spirit: a sequel to 2007’s popular *La leyenda de la Nahuala*, *La leyenda de la Llorona* was also a box-office success. A third adventure—dealing with the Mummies of Guanajuato—is teased at the end of *Llorona*.

In colonial-era Mexico (the first film was set in 1807 and this one shortly afterwards), young Leo San Juan sails over Mexico in a combination hot-air balloon/ship with a group of special friends. They include elderly Spanish ghost don Andrés (who wears armour and resembles don Quixote), mystical beast El Alebrije (depicted here as a multi-coloured, fire-breathing dragon), girl-ghost Teodora (a *niña fresa*--something like a Valley Girl), and animated *calaveritas* (candy skulls) Finado and Moribunda. An urgent letter from Padre Tello brings them to Xochimilco, at the time a village well outside the city limits of the capital: La Llorona has been abducting children and terrorising the village.

During a storm, Leo falls overboard and is rescued by Kika, a feisty little girl whose brother Beto was taken by La Llorona while they were out trick-or-treating. Kika’s mother Rosa tells Leo the tale of La Llorona: she was an indigenous woman named Yoltzín whose two children accidentally drowned. She is now a vengeful spirit, always seeking her own children and stealing others in a vain attempt to replace them. Padre Tello’s notebook

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informs Leo that he must "make her see" that her children are dead, to end the curse. Kika is abducted by La Llorona, and Leo vows to rescue her.

Meanwhile, don Andrés, El Alebrije, Finado and Moribunda have crash-landed on a strange island populated by dolls, under the control of evil puppet Pecas ("Freckles," who vaguely resembles Howdy Doody).



After a protracted struggle, don Andrés and the others triumph, freeing an old *campesino* who had been enslaved by Pecas. He agrees to lead them to La Llorona.

Following Padre Tello's instructions, Leo enters an old church and--with the aid of his friends and Kika--shows La Llorona the crypt bearing her children's names. She changes from a monstrous spirit back into a human, is reunited with her offspring, and "moves on" into the after-life. Leo meets his mother's spirit as well: she says a mother's love is eternal. Leo and his friends prepare to depart, but the ghost of Padre Godofredo (from the first movie) appears and says the Mummies of Guanajuato have kidnaped Xochitl (Leo's girlfriend from the first movie) and have the city in a grip of terror. The balloonship departs for new adventures.

La leyenda de la Llorona is aimed at children but it is certainly entertaining enough for an adult audience. The film does not preach, there are no songs, the humour is tolerable, the pacing is satisfactory, and there are enough exciting sequences (some of which would probably frighten young children) to hold one's interest. La



Llorona herself is quite scary in design and action (only late in the movie do we see she hasn't harmed the children she's abducted), and maniac-puppet Pecas is unrelentingly evil and vicious.

The voice work is satisfactory: while the first movie featured a number of "names" in the cast (Martha Higareda, Germán Robles, Jesús Ochoa, Loco Valdés, Ofelia Medina), the only hold-over in the sequel is Rafael Inclán as El Alebrije. However, the replacements are perfectly adequate. The major new character is Kika, voiced by Mónica del Carmen, and she's entertaining as

the spunky chatterbox. One interesting note is that Yoltzín and La Llorona both speak Nahuatl, and in one scene Kika translates for Leo. This is curious, since while Kika has some indigenous traits, her mother and brother do not look indigenous at all.

The film is reasonably faithful to the Llorona legend and only occasionally steps out of its colonial-era setting: Teodora is an anachronistic character--which she wasn't in the first movie, apparently--dressing in modern clothing and talking, as noted earlier, like a Mexican version of a Valley Girl; there are a few minor gags with anachronistic bases, but not many. In contrast, don Andrés speaks archaic Spanish and at times is difficult to understand (El Alebrije even complains about it).

The animation in *La leyenda de la Llorona* is serviceable but not spectacular. The character designs are "cute" and stylised (big eyes and heads, smallish bodies), and there are times when the characters move rather stiffly and in an awkward manner and the animation seems limited. This is not consistent, however, and La Llorona--who is frightening in appearance--moves smoothly and rapidly. The backgrounds are excellent and at no time does the film look cheap or shoddy, but there are definitely "throwaway" scenes where the animators cut corners, and others where more work was expended for a better result. Given the intended audience, full animation would probably have been wasted, anyway.

Not a great film, *La leyenda de la Llorona* is still fun and short enough (the narrative portion of the movie--i.e., not counting the credits--is less than 70 minutes in length) to be entertaining.



Obituaries

Gustavo Montiel, 1954-2012



Film producer

Gustavo Montiel Pagés died on 19 August 2012; he was 58 years old and had been suffering from cancer. Montiel was born in April 1954 in Michoacán. He studied Communication Science at UNAM and film directing at the Centro de Capacitación

Cinematográfica (CCC). Montiel directed several features, including *Entre paréntesis* (1981) and *Marea de arena* (2008), as well as numerous shorts. He also served as director of CCC and taught production, direction and screenwriting. From 1998-1999 Montiel was the director of production at IMCINE.

At CCC, Montiel helped produce numerous features by new directors like Carlos Carrera, Francisco Athié, Juan Carlos Rulfo, and Eva López Sánchez. These titles

included *La mujer de Benjamín*, *Dama de noche*, *Un hilito de sangre*, and *Por si no te vuelvo a ver*. He also produced *Zurdo*, *Crónica de una desayuno*, and other pictures in the '90s and beyond.



Aurora Bautista Dies

Spanish actress Aurora Bautista died of an infection on 27 August 2012 in Madrid; she was 2 weeks shy of her 87th birthday. Aurora Bautista Zumel was born in Valladolid in October 1925, and began acting professionally on the stage in 1944. She became famous for playing "Juana la loca" in the international hit *Locura de amor* (1948) but her contract with Spanish production company Cifesa limited her to a handful of screen roles over the next several years. In 1959 Bautista appeared in



the Spanish-Mexican co-production *Sonatas*, with María Félix and Francisco Rabal; however, her scenes were shot in Spain and she didn't come to Mexico until a theatrical tour in 1961. After making *Las ratas* in Argentina and returning to Spain to appear in the well-received *La tía Tula* (1964), Bautista came back to Mexico to

appear in the second film version of Félix B. Caignet's radionovela-telenovela, *El derecho de nacer* (1966). This would be her last Mexican movie, although Bautista remained active in European films, on television, and on the stage until the mid-2000s.

Aurora Bautista married Hernán Cristerna, a Mexican, in 1963, and had one son. She later wed Cuban impresario Luis de Luis.



Manola Saavedra, 1936-2012

Actress Manola Saavedra died on 25 August 2012; she was 76 years old.



Born in Spain in 1936, Saavedra came to Mexico at a young age and made her screen debut in 1956, appearing in *El bolero de Raquel* with Cantinflas, and *El pantano de las ánimas* with Gastón Santos. *La cama de*

pedra (1958), *Una pasión me domina* (1959), *Yo, pecador* (1960), *Teresa* (1960), and *Bonitas las tapatías*

(1960) followed, along with a number of *telenovelas* in this period, then the actress disappeared from the screen for two decades. In 1981 Saavedra reappeared in *Los renglones torcidos de Dios* and made occasional *telenovela* appearances thereafter. Her final film appearance seems to have been in *Romancing the Bride* (2005), a U.S. made-for-TV movie that was shot in Mexico and features some local performers in the cast.



Luis de Llano Palmer Dies

Producer Luis de Llano Palmer died on 23 October 2012 in Mexico; he was 94 years old. The father of actress Julissa and TV producer Luis de Llano Macedo—their mother was actress Rita Macedo—Luis de Llano was born in Spain in 1918 but emigrated to Mexico in 1939 as a result of the Spanish Civil War. He worked in radio, helping create the horror series "El Monje Loco," among other programs, and then became a pioneering television producer at Televisión, Telesistema Mexicano, and Televisa. De Llano was also a talented composer and lyricist.



Notes

In October, I presented a paper entitled "For All the World to See: Foreign Literary Adaptations in Mexican Cinema during World War II" at the 2012 Literature/Film Association Conference in York, PA. Perhaps in 2013 I shall include a revised version of this paper in an issue of *MFB*.

During the first week of November I shall be in Madrid at the Hispanic Cinemas conference, although my presentation in this case shall deal with Nuyorican cinema (which has some connections to Mexican cinema). Upon my return, I'll get to work on the next issue of *MFB*, which should be out before the end of the year.



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