

# The Mexican Film Bulletin

## Volume 24 Number 1

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### The Mexican Film Bulletin

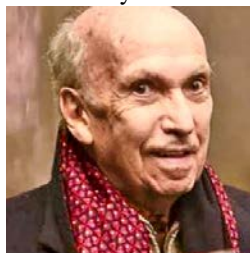
Our 24<sup>th</sup> year begins. News & reviews of Mexican cinema since 1994. Welcome to new readers and many thanks to our faithful readers.



#### Obituaries

##### David Antón

Art director David Antón died on 28 December 2017; he was 93 years old. Antón, born in 1924, began



designing for the stage in the 1950s, eventually working on more than 600 plays, ballets, musicals, and operas. He received many honours during his long and prolific career, including the Instituto de Bellas Artes medal.

Antón worked on a number of Mexican films, including *Andante*, Jodorowsky's *The Holy Mountain* (La montaña sagrada), *La chevre* (a French-Mexican co-production), *Toña Machetes*, and *Rastro de muerte*.

David Antón and novelist (and occasional film director) Fernando Vallejo were life partners who had lived together in the same Mexico City apartment since 1971. Vallejo survives him.



##### Agustín Bernal

Mexican actor Agustín Bernal, a familiar face in numerous films and *videohomes* from the 1980s onward, died of a heart attack on 8 January 2018 on his ranch in the state of Michoacán; he was 59 years old.

Bernal, whose real name was Romualdo Bucio Bucio, first began appearing in Mexican cinema in the 1980s, after 6 years in the armed forces and several years working in the USA. His deep voice, muscular frame and stern face resulted in numerous roles as villains, even monsters (*Ladrones de tumbas*, *El*



*arma secreta*, *El trono del infierno*), but in later years he also essayed some heroic roles. Bernal began directing *videohomes* in the mid-1990s, eventually earning more than 40 directorial credits, in addition to writing and producing some of his own films.

Agustín Bernal's movies included *No se aceptan devoluciones* (possibly his final role), *Nacido para matar*, *Violación*, *La guerrera vengadora*, and *Ansia de matar*.



##### Graciela Bernardo

Graciela Bernardo, who acted in a number of



*telenovelas*, on the stage, and at least one film from the 1970s until 2014, died on 27 January 2018. Bernardo (whose name is spelled in some sources as "Bernardos"), appeared in Arturo Ripstein's theatrical feature *Principio y fin*, but spent most of her career in

television series like *Valeriana y Maximiliano*, *Imperio de cristal*, *Luz Clarita*, *María la del barrio*, *El pecado de Oyuki*, *Mujer--casos de la vida real*, and *Como dice el dicho*.



##### Graciela Doring

Graciela Doring, a film and television actress whose career spanned seven decades, died on 14 February 2018; she was 79 years old. Doring, born in 1939, began working in *telenovelas* in the late 1950s, and continued this until the early 2010s. She also appeared in a number of films, including the first version of *Pedro Páramo* (which starred John Gavin, also recently deceased), *El planeta de las mujeres invasoras*, *Damiana y los hombres*, and the Hollywood film (shot in Mexico) *The Wild Bunch*.



## Bradford Dillman

Hollywood actor Bradford Dillman died on 18 January 2018 from complications from pneumonia. He was 87 years old.

Bradford Dillman was born in San Francisco in 1930, and attended Yale University, then served in the U.S. Marines before becoming an actor. After making his stage debut in the mid-Fifties, Dillman moved to Hollywood and worked steadily in films and on television until his retirement in the 1990s.



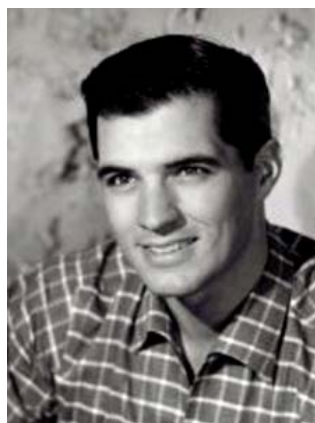
Dillman appeared in several Mexican films during his long career: *Chosen Survivors*, *Guyana: el crimen del siglo*, and *El tesoro de Amazonas*.

The actor was married twice and had 5 children; his second wife was model-actress Suzy Parker, who died in 2003. His daughter Pamela Dillman is an actress.



## John Gavin

John Gavin, actor and former ambassador to Mexico, died on 9 February 2018 of complications from pneumonia. He was 77 years old. Juan Vincent Apablaza, his real name, was born in Los Angeles in April 1931; his mother was Mexican and his father was of Chilean descent. After his mother's divorce and remarriage, Juan's



legal name was changed to John Anthony Golenor.

Gavin attended Stanford University and served in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War, then signed an acting contract with Universal-International. He was cast in several big-budget melodramas, including *Imitation of Life* with Lana Turner and Susan Kohner (the daughter of Mexican actress Lupita Tovar and Pancho Kohner). He also appeared in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. When his contract with U-I was up, Gavin made some films in Europe and also starred in *Pedro Páramo* in Mexico. During the 1970s he began working on the stage and television.

President Ronald Reagan appointed Gavin Ambassador to Mexico in 1981, and he served in this role until 1986.

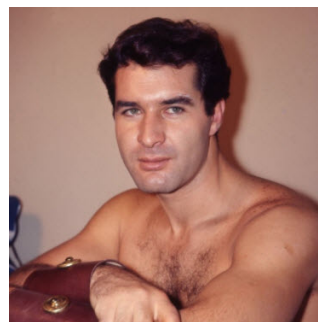
John Gavin was married twice and had two daughters, both of whom entered show business. His second wife was actress Constance Towers, who survives him.



## Rogelio Guerra

Actor Rogelio Guerra died of respiratory failure on 28 February 2018 in Mexico City; he was 81 years old.

Guerra had been in ill-health for several years, suffering from Alzheimer's disease and then a stroke.



Hildegardo Francisco Guerra Martínez was born in Aguascalientes in October 1936. He worked in various jobs--including bellhop--before being "discovered" and turning to acting in the late 1950s. Guerra appeared in

numerous films, stage plays, *videohomes* and *telenovelas* as late as 2014.

Guerra's films included *El planeta de las mujeres invasoras*, *Chico Ramos*, *Los leones del ring*, *Ángel del silencio*, and *7 mujeres, 1 homosexual y Carlos*.

Rogelio Guerra was married numerous times--sources differ. His first marriage was to Durcy Denys (it lasted only 2 weeks) his second to actress Otilia Larrañaga, his third (according to some sources--others claim she was his romantic partner but not wife) to actress Phaedra Johnson; his final marriage was to Maribel Robles, daughter of Germán Robles, which lasted more than 30 years. Guerra had 5 children and one grandchild.



## Carmela Rey

Singer Carmela Rey died of heart failure on 13 February 2018; she was 86 years old. María del Carmen

Sánchez Levi, her real name, was born in Xalapa, Veracruz state in December 1931. She trained as a singer and became popular as a television and recording artist in the 1950s. Rey married Rafael Vázquez in 1959 and formed a musical duo, "Carmela y Rafael," which was very successful in the 1960s and beyond.

Carmela Rey appeared as both singer and actress in a number of Mexican films of the 1950s and 1960s, including *A sablazo limpio*, *La mujer marcada*, *Mi mujer necesita marido*, *Yo pecador*, *Viva la parranda*, *Las hijas de Amapolo*, and *Escuela para solteras*.

She is survived by her husband and their children and grandchildren.



## María Rubio

Actress María Rubio, best-known for her villainous appearances on various *telenovelas*, died on 1 March 2018; she was 83 years old. María de Jesús Rubio Tejero was

born in Tijuana in September 1934, but spent 10 years of her youth in San Sebastián, Spain. Returning to Mexico as a teen, Rubio studied dance and acting at INBA, and became a professional actress in 1956. She began appearing on television and in films in the 1960s, achieving her greatest popular success in the *telenovela* genre in the 1980s, especially as the villain in “Cuna de lobos.” Rubio’s films included *El hijo de Huracán Ramírez*, *La noche violenta*, *El rediezcubrimiento de México*, and *Traficantes de niños*. Due to ill health, Rubio retired from performing in the early 2010s.

María Rubio was married to writer Luis Reyes de la Maza. They had two children, Adriana and Claudio.

Claudio Reyes Rubio, a *telenovela* producer and director, was killed in an automobile accident in 2017.



## Film Reviews

### Literary Adaptations

**Pedro Páramo** (CLASA Films Mundiales--Prods. Barbachano Ponce, 1966) *Exec Prod*: Federico Amerigo, Felipe Subervielle; *Prod*: Manuel Barbachano Ponce; *Dir*: Carlos Velo; *Scr*: Carlos Fuentes, Carlos Velo, Manuel Barbachano Ponce; *Orig Novel*: Juan Rulfo; *Photo*: Gabriel Figueroa; *Music*: Joaquín Gutiérrez Heras; *Prod Admin*: Héctor López; *Prod Chief*: Enrique Morfín; *Asst Dir*: Ignacio Villareal;



*Film Ed*: Gloria Schoemann; *Art Dir*: Manuel Fontanals; *Lighting*: Daniel López; *Camera Op*: Manuel González; *Costume Supv*: Georgette Somohano; *Makeup*: Armando Meyer; *Sound Dir*: James L. Fields; *Sound Op*: José B. Carles; *Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Union*: STPC

**Cast**: John Gavin (*Pedro Páramo*), Ignacio López Tarso (*Fulgor Sedano*), Pilar Pellicer (*Susana San Juan*), Julissa (*Ana Rentería*), Graciela Doring (*Damiana Cisneros*), Carlos Fernández (*Juan Preciado*), Augusto Benedico (*Padre Rentería*), Beatriz Sheridan (*Eduviges Dyada*), Roberto Cañedo (*Toribio Aldrete*), Alfonso Arau (*Saltaperico*), Jorge Rivero (*Miguel Páramo*), Narciso Busquets (*Bartolomé San Juan*), Claudia Millán (*Doloritas Preciado*), Rosa Furman (*Dorotea “La Curraca”*), Joaquín Martínez (*Abundio Martínez*), Jorge Russek (*Tilcuat*), Eric del Castillo (*Perseverancio*), Amparo Villegas (*Mama Villa*), Graciela Lara (*Chacha Margarita*), Álvaro Ortiz (*Cacarizo*), Juan Ferrara (*Florencio*), Claudio

Obregón (*lawyer*), José Torvay (*Terencio*), Victorio Blanco (*Galileo Aréchiga*), Ramiro Orcí (*Casildo*), Dolores Linares (*Sixtina Cisneros*), Javier Ruán (*miner*), Jorge Fegan (*wedding photographer*), Armando Acosta (*rebel advisor*), Regino Herrera (*villager*), Rubén Márquez (*rebel*)

**Notes**: *Pedro Páramo*, based on a famous novel by Juan Rulfo, is a well-made, “prestige” film with a number of good points, but it cannot exactly be said to be “fun” or entertaining. The film was submitted to the Cannes Film Festival but failed to win a prize.

Juan promises his dying mother Doloritas that he’ll travel to Comala to meet his father, Pedro Páramo, and demand his birthright.

Juan is guided to Comala by burro driver Abundio, who says he’s also “a son of Pedro Páramo.”

Comala seems ruined and abandoned. Juan meets three women: innkeeper Eduviges, nun Ana, and Pedro’s housekeeper Damiana. Each is



revealed to be a ghost after they tell their tales (in flashback). Juan himself dies without ever meeting his father.

[Flashbacks] Pedro Páramo and his faithful aide Fulgor will stop at nothing—including murder, marriage for money, threats—to expand Pedro’s properties. Pedro marries Doloritas but doesn’t love her. Pregnant, she leaves him to live with her sister. Time passes. Pedro’s grown son Miguel is a wastrel and hell-raiser, who kills a stranger on a whim, then seduces Ana, the man’s daughter (and niece of the town priest). Miguel is killed by a horse and his ghost visits Ana; Pedro pays Padre Rentería to give Miguel a church burial.



Susana San Juan, daughter of mine supervisor Bartolomé, falls in love with miner Florencio, who is later killed in a mining accident (possibly staged by her father). Bartolomé seduces Susana; they both leave town after the mine workers walk off the job to join the Revolution. Because he desires Susana, Pedro repeatedly tries to lure Bartolomé and his daughter back to Comala and eventually does. Susana goes mad and dies.

Fulgor is killed by rebel troops under the direction of Perseverancio. Pedro pays the rebels to leave him alone (the rebel advisor tells Perseverancio that they'll take control of the government and then Pedro and the other *hacendados* will be evicted anyway). Pedro also agrees to finance a rebel army for Tilcuat, urging him to raid other towns and leave Comala alone.

However, when the townspeople celebrate Susana's death with a fiesta (because they hate Pedro), Pedro decides to withdraw his support and let the town wither away. An aged Pedro lives alone in his ruined *hacienda* with housekeeper Damiana. One day a drunken Abundio approaches and mortally wounds Pedro, who--dying--says he's going to join Susana.



The plot of *Pedro Páramo* differs in a number of respects from the original novel. Director Carlos Velo--whose previous directorial efforts were documentaries--reportedly worked on the adaptation for a number of years. The final version, credited to Carlos Fuentes and Manuel Barbachano Ponce in addition to Velo, did not please everyone. The presence of Hollywood actor John Gavin in the title role was also controversial, although Gavin was partly of Mexican heritage and spoke Spanish well. The rest of the cast is a mix of popular "name" performers (Jorge Rivero, Julissa), relative newcomers, and established Mexican movie veterans. [It's a curious coincidence that John Gavin and Graciela Doring--who won a Diosa de Plata for her role in *Pedro Páramo*--both died in February 2018. Fortunately, quite a few of the other cast members are still alive more than 50 years after the film was made, including Julissa, Jorge Rivero, Juan Ferrara, Alfonso Arau, Eric del Castillo, Pilar Pellicer, and Ignacio López Tarso.]

None of the performances is particularly outstanding, but all are satisfactory. John Gavin is fine, but the role of Pedro Páramo as



written does not have a great deal of depth. Pedro's great love of Susana San Juan is not given much background and it is rather puzzling why he expends so much time trying to get her and her father to return to Comala. Pedro behaves like a standard literary-cinematic *hacendado*, flaunting his power and influence over the people around him.

Production values were substantial, with Gabriel Figueroa handling the black-and-white cinematography. The sets and actual locations are melded seamlessly, and

*Pedro Páramo* has a dry, dusty, eerie "feel" about it. Carlos Velo's direction is not particularly stylish, taking a back seat to the sets and cinematography.

Rulfo's novel was filmed again in 1976, by director José Bolaños. Carlos Cardán played Pedro Páramo, and the director's wife--Venetia Vianello--was Susana San Juan. The only actor who appeared in both versions was Narcisco Busquets, who switched from Bartolomé San Juan in the original to Fulgor Sedano in the second (Julio Bracho played Bartolomé in the Bolaños film).

*Pedro Páramo* is a gloomy, depressing film in many ways. It's not without entertainment value, but the principal character is unsympathetic, the setting is unpleasant, and the ending is grim. It's a "art" film, based on a classic work of literature, but it hardly makes for a fun evening at the cinema (not that this is the sole or even the primary aim of cinema--I'm just saying).



**Principio y fin** [Beginning and End] (CONCAFFCC-IMCINE-Univ. de Guadalajara-Alameda Films, 1993) *Prod:* Alfredo Ripstein Jr.; *Dir:* Arturo Ripstein; *Scr:* Paz Alicia Garciadiego; *Orig. Novel:* Naguib Mahfouz; *Photo:* Claudio Rocha; *Music:* Lucía Álvarez; *Asst Dir:* Sergio Muñoz G.; *Film Ed:* Rafael Castanedo; *Prod Des:* Marisa Pecanins; *Décor:* Macedonio Ramos; *Makeup:* Carlos Sánchez

**Cast:** Ernesto Laguardia (*Gabriel Botero*), Julieta Egurrola (*Ignacia Botero*), Blanca Guerra (*Julia*), Verónica Merchant (*Natalia*), Bruno Bichir (*Nicolás Botero*), Alberto Estrella (*Guama Botero*), Alonso Echánove (*Evon, el Cariñoso*), Lucía Muñoz (*Mireya Botero*), Luis Felipe Tovar (*César*), Julián Pastor (*Luján*), Luisa Huertas (*Isabel*), Jorge Fegan (*Absalón, Julia's father*), Ernesto Yáñez (*Polvorón*), Alejandro Parodi (*Dr. Tessier*), Darío T. Pie (*Javier Maurer*), Luis Rábago (*Guardiola*), Graciela Bernardos (*Sra. Guardiola?*), Julius Jansland (*boy*), Alejandra Montoya (*Támara*), Osami Kawano (*Okura*), Roberto Antúñez (*Genaro*), Dolores Beristáin (*Cleo*), Alexandra Vicencio (*prostitute*), Mariana León (*Pujarita*), Lupita Gámez (*licenciado*), Abel Woolrich (*man in bathhouse*), Gastón Melo (*school*)

*prefect*), Loló Navarro (*vendor in Veracruz*), Jaime Hinojosa (*witness*), Blanca Lidia Muñoz (*proprietor of shop where Mireya changes clothes*)

**Notes:** more misery and depression from Arturo Ripstein, this time stretched out to nearly three hours (the Alameda website lists the running time at 165 minutes, but other sources give varying lengths of up to 188 minutes; I saw the 165-minute version, which seemed to have rather abrupt cuts in several scenes). *Principio y fin* is nonetheless an almost epic picture showing the disintegration of a family, and won seven Arieles: Best Film, Actress (Lucía Muñoz), Actor (Bichir), Supporting Actress (Guerra), Supporting Actor (Luis Felipe Tovar), Editing (Rafael Castanedo), and Set Decoration (Marisa Pecanins).



Office worker Botero dies, leaving his widow Ignacia with only a small pension (12% of his previous salary). Ignacia has four children: Guama (a loafer), Nicolás and Gabriel (students), and daughter Mireya. Ignacia insists Guama get a job and stop drinking; he moves out of their apartment and is hired as a bouncer (who occasionally doubles as a singer) in the bar run by Polvorón; he also becomes the pimp and lover of prostitute Isabel, but doesn't contribute to his family's finances. Nicolás and Gabriel graduate from high school, but when Gabriel fails to get a full scholarship to university, Ignacia decides Nicolás—who wants to be a writer—should postpone his plans for further education. She arranges for him to get a job as a school "inspector" in Veracruz, and he will send as much money home as possible to help put Gabriel through college. Mireya is compelled to drop out of school and become a seamstress. Despite all of these sacrifices, Ignacia and her family have to abandon their apartment and move to the squalid basement of the building.

The stories of Ignacia's children follow (intercut but related here separately). Guama occasionally gives Gabriel and Nicolás money, but is otherwise estranged from the family. One day, he visits the apartment and asks Ignacia to hold a package for him, saying his life depends on it; when he leaves, she opens the package and finds drugs, which she pours down the sink. Later, Guama returns for the dope and, learning it is gone, tells his mother she has signed his death warrant. Guama is badly beaten by Polvorón's thugs; Isabel brings him to the Botero apartment and says they will leave the city and take refuge

in her home village, presumably never to be seen by Ignacia or the others again.

In Veracruz, Nicolás rents a room from Julia, a widow with a small child and an invalid father. They fall in love and Nicolás begins to write stories in his spare time. Julia cannot understand why Nicolás continues to send money to Ignacia (mostly for Gabriel's college expenses, such as a car). He apparently stops doing so, because Ignacia makes a trip to Veracruz to see what has occurred, and has a confrontation with Julia. Nicolás has to choose between his family and Julia. He chooses his family, and is transferred to the capital, where he moves back into the family apartment. When Gabriel gets his sweetheart Natalia pregnant, Ignacia and Gabriel pressure Nicolás into marrying her so Gabriel's career path won't be hindered. Natalia and her baby also move into the basement apartment!

Gabriel does well at the university but is shocked when he does not receive an expected scholarship. His friend Javier says it is because Gabriel does not have influential connections. Gabriel's sweetheart is Natalia Guardiola, the daughter of a well-off family friend of the Boteros; they have arranged a party to "celebrate" Gabriel's scholarship. At the party, the bitter Gabriel rapes the virginal Natalia. When she later tells him she's pregnant, Gabriel insists she have an abortion, but she refuses. However, Gabriel does experience one bit of luck: Luján, Javier's influential uncle, agrees to become Gabriel's mentor (based on Gabriel's knowledge of opera, passed on to him by his father), and even arranges for him to receive a scholarship and become student body president. Things are finally looking up for the Botero family, it seems.



Mireya has been working hard as a seamstress, making wedding dresses and other clothing for acquaintances. She is seduced by César, who works in the bakery located in the building where the Boteros live. However, Mireya—who even loans César money to cover his gambling debts—discovers the baker is engaged to another young woman. Mireya, whose self-esteem is very low, is raped and sodomized by Iván "El Cariñoso," who gives her some money (pitifully, she asks him to "at least say you liked it"). Mireya eventually becomes a streetwalker, turning tricks in a bathhouse—she tells her mother she has a job across town as a dressmaker.

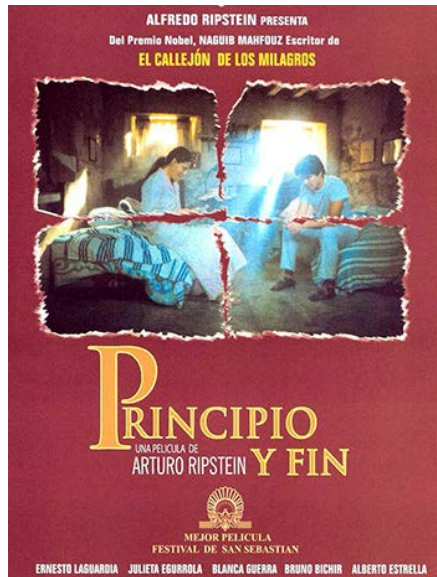
One day Gabriel gets a call from Javier, summoning him to a police station (Javier and Gabriel are law students, and Javier is working in a station house through his uncle's influence to gain experience). Mireya was arrested after one of her client's died while he was with her. Javier warns Gabriel that his uncle (Gabriel's patron) won't like this sort of "scandal."

Mireya is released in Gabriel's custody. Since she gave her name to a reporter, Gabriel knows the incident can't be hushed up. He tells his sister her life is irrevocably ruined, no one would ever marry her or employ her. He convinces her the only way to save the family reputation is to commit suicide, leaving a note indicating she went temporarily insane. They go to the bathhouse and Mireya slits her wrists. Gabriel wanders through the massive building, finally stopping in the boiler room where he, too, commits suicide by using a razor blade to cut his wrists.

Despite being very long and having enough plot for three or four movies, *Principio y fin* is never dull and only the very final sequence--Gabriel stumbling through the building to the ever-increasing noise of drum beats--drags a bit. Otherwise, the film is consistently engrossing if ultimately sad.

The audience may (justifiably) harbor some rancor towards the character of Ignacia Botero (who never

suggests getting a job herself, although perhaps this is a cultural or social thing), who manipulates her children's lives relentlessly. However, it can't be necessarily said that she ruined their lives, since other options were available that her children did not take (for example,



Nicolás was too weak to choose Julia and independence)--although one might argue that they were conditioned by her to make the "wrong" decisions. There are also hints of incest between Ignacia and her sons (the cuts I mentioned earlier seem to occur in scenes where this might be openly exposed), particularly between Guama and his mother (at one point she says she loved him more than his father).

At the film's outset, Gabriel does not appear particularly ambitious or ruthless, but his mother's insistence that he is the only one who can "save" the family turns him into a manipulative and self-centered young man and provokes his final infamy, the coerced "suicide" of Mireya. Guama, although the eldest son, is almost childlike in his actions; he wants to be a lounge

singer, but Polvorón warns him he's being hired as a bouncer and "the singing is just a hobby." Isabel chooses Guama as her pimp, and Polvorón browbeats him into becoming a go-between in drug deals: at no time is Guama assertive or adult in his actions. Nicolás, on the other hand, seems to have the best chance to escape but admits to Julia that he does not have the willpower to turn his back on his mother and her demands. And Mireya is just sad and pitiful, convinced she's unattractive, betrayed by her own sexual needs, exploited by César, and finally brainwashed by her older brother into taking her own life to preserve his future.

The acting in *Principio y fin* is uniformly good or better. I am a big fan of Blanca Guerra but I don't know if I would have singled her out for praise (Best Supporting Actress), and the same can be said for Luis Felipe Tovar--they are both good, but their roles don't stand out in the same way that Lucía Muñoz (Mireya) or Julieta Egurrola (Ignacia) do. Both were nominated for the Best Actress prize (Muñoz won) and both are excellent in their roles. Everyone else is also fine, with Ripstein using various members of his "stock company" (for example, Guerra, Parodi, Yáñez, Loló Navarro, Fegan, Luisa Huertas, Abel Woolrich, and Alberto Estrella were all in *El imperio de la fortuna* and *Principio y fin*, made 8 years apart). One of the most surprising casting decisions was Ernesto Laguardia as Gabriel--Laguardia was a young and handsome "male ingenue" with mostly *telenovela* and lightweight film experience, and this prejudiced some critics against him, but he's perfectly satisfactory here.

The production values and technical aspects of *Principio y fin* are excellent: no expense was spared in shooting it appears, and this is a world-class film in appearance. Ripstein does not seem to have a particular visual style, preferring the "zero-degree" style whereby the camera does not call attention to itself by movement, placement, or set-up, but this does not imply static camerawork or dull visuals, only that it appears Ripstein is more interested in the characters and plot.

*Principio y fin* is a really fine motion picture, a "serious" film that captures the viewer's attention and emotion and does not let go for nearly three hours.



## The Films of Ariel Bautista

Avinadain Bautista Nájera has a Facebook page, but since I long ago stopped using that platform, I don't have a lot of biographical information about him. However, between the 1980s and the mid-2000s (at least), Bautista wrote, produced, directed and acted in a number of action films, often with martial arts content.

Presumably filmmaker Bautista is the same "Avinadain Bautista Nájera" who received his teaching degree from the Benemérita Escuela Nacional de Maestros in 1975, and



his law degree from UNAM in 1976. For whatever reason, a few years later he branched out into filmmaking, and continued this for more than two decades, as director, writer, and actor (performing under the name “Ariel Bautista”).

Bautista’s first three films were all heavily influenced by the kung fu movie craze that emerged from Asia and became popular in the Western world in the Seventies. In Mexico, this was reflected in a brief flurry of such pictures from the *cine nacional*, including *Atacan las karatecas*, *Puerto maldito*, *Misterio en las Bermudas* and *La furia de las karatecas*. [see “Mexican Martial Arts Movies” in *MFB* Vol. 5 #6, February 1999 for more examples.]

*Mercenarios de la muerte* began shooting in December 1982 and wasn’t completed until July of 1983;



*Kung fu mortal* was shot in December 1983-January 1984. Neither received theatrical release for a number of years (1989 for *Mercenarios...*, 1987 for *Kung fu mortal*). Bautista produced (under the Prods. Xóchitl banner), wrote the screen story and appeared in both pictures, although established Mexican star names like Eric del Castillo, Gregorio Casal, Jaime Moreno, and Armando Silvestre were given top billing. Bautista followed up in 1988 with *Itara, el*

*guardián de la muerte*, taking over the directorial reins in addition to his producing, writing, and acting chores (he was credited as the star in this one, although various familiar supporting actors do appear). Although set in Mexico, these films all draw heavily on Asian martial arts themes, with “schools” of kung fu practitioners and the ubiquitous monks, Asian characters (sometimes played by Mexicans) and so on. This is somewhat at odds with many (but not all) other Mexican martial arts movies, which tended to insert martial arts practitioners into more traditional domestic action settings.

Bautista’s first three films—all of which received theatrical release, albeit belatedly—also feature members of his “stock company” of performers, some of whom appear to be his relatives. The same names will continue to appear in his later projects, an economical practice (and to be fair, many of these people are reasonably proficient in martial arts and can act sufficiently enough to earn their keep).

One outlier in Bautista’s filmmaking career is the 1989 comedy *Peligro paradas continuas*, which does feature a bit of martial arts action and a number of Bautista regulars in the cast, but is mostly a very mild comedy.

The Mexican film industry went into decline in the 1990s and Bautista switched to filmmaking for the *videohome* market. This had an impact on the content of

his pictures: budgets (probably never high) were cut, the films were now mostly traditional urban action pictures, and Bautista usually hired one or two “names” for marketing purposes (Mario Almada, Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, Jorge Reynoso, Hugo Stiglitz, Flaco Guzmán), although he continued to take major roles and his stock company of friends and family still made up a substantial percentage of the supporting casts.

The vagaries of *videohome* distribution make it difficult to accurately track Bautista’s production activities in this period: some films were released multiple times (on video and DVD) under different titles, years apart, and there is no comprehensive catalog of Mexican direct-to-video movies in any event.

Bautista made several films in the early 1990s, then another group in the early 2000s, but (as noted above) the exact production dates are unclear. The 1990s *videohomes* are *Atentado*, an urban action film, and *Infierno verde*, with a rural setting. Bautista has the primary heroic role in each. Late in the decade and into the early 2000s Bautista directed a second group of *videohomes*, including *Máximo reto* (1998), *Rivales a muerte*, *Guerra de pandillas* and *El Víbora* (all copyrighted in 2000), *Matar para vivir* (2002) and *Chacales de la calle* (2004), the last films of his I have discovered to date.

These often star younger members of Bautista’s stock company (Javier Rivera, Carlos Amador) while Bautista takes a supporting role. [Ariel Bautista also appears in *Se equivoco la ley* in 2003, but this was directed by Francisco Joel Mendoza and does not seem to be part of the Ariel Bautista personal *oeuvre*.]

The films of Avinadain Bautista Nájera have a number of elements which distinguish them from other action movies made by the *cine nacional*. In addition to his on-screen presence—and that of his stock company—most contain martial arts sequences and a number deal with foreign terrorism (even before 9/11). The majority (but not all) are contemporary urban thrillers, especially his post-1990 *videohomes*, with the major outlier in this era the rural action picture *Rivales a muerte*. Does this make Avinadain Bautista Nájera an *auteur*? I vote...yes.

## Filmography

*Mercenarios a la muerte* (1982): Producer, screenplay, actor

*Kung fu mortal* (1983): Story, actor

*Itara, el guardián de la muerte* (1988): Producer, director, story, actor



*La ruta del amor (Peligro, paradas continuas)* (1989):

Director, actor

*Atentado* (1990): Director, story, actor

*Infierno verde* (1991): Director, story, actor

*Máximo reto* (1998): Director, story, actor

*Rivales a muerte* (2000): Director, story, actor

*Guerra de pandillas* (2000): Director, story, actor

*El víbora* (2002): Director, story, actor

*Matar para vivir* (2002): Director, actor

*Se equivoco la ley* (2003): Actor only

*Chacales de la calle* (2004): Director, story, actor



**Mercenarios de la muerte** [Mercenaries of Death] (Producciones Xóchitl, 1982) Prod: Avinadaín Bautista (and uncredited, ?Gustavo Alatríste, Juan José Pérez Padilla, Manuel Muñoz); Dir: Manuel Muñoz and Gregorio Casals; Scr: Avinadaín Bautista (uncredited); Photo: Fernando Colín (and ?Ángel Bilbatúa); Post-Production Mgr: Lázaro Morales; Film Ed: Francisco Chiu; Union: STIC

**CAST:** Emilio "El Indio" Fernández (*Maestro Tata*), Gregorio Casals (*Mai-Ko*), Jaime Moreno (*Chang*), Armando Silvestre (*Sung-Ya*), Rubí Re (*Gina*), Tito Junco (*father of Mai-Ko*), Víctor Junco (*Comisario Raúl*), Sergio Bustamante (*Kan-Jen, el Verdugo*), Charito Granados (*mother of Mai-Ko*), Aries Bautista (*Ling Ho*), Ramiro Orci (*Andrés el Callado*), Agustín Fernández (*monk*), Salvador Godínez (*monk*), Fernando Yapur (*deputy*), Xavier Loyá and Toño Infante (*outlaws*), Leo Villanueva and Rigoberto Carmona (*men who try to rescue Gina*)

[note: most of the character names are spelled phonetically--to the best of my ability. Aries Bautista's character, for example, could be "Ying Ko" or "Ling Ho" or "Ying Ho" or...?! The *Revista Cinefagia* website also names the characters phonetically, but for some odd reason they heard Jaime Moreno's screen name as "Yan Piau"]

**Notes:** This is a strange piece of Mexican cinema, a martial arts-Western, with most of the cast made up to appear Asian. The film is technically a bit on the rough side (there is a lot of poorly-dubbed dialogue and voiceover narration; the photography is muddy and too dark), although

it does sport a Western town set and a substantial cast, with plenty of extras. The martial arts scenes are competently done but actually get rather boring after a while, since too many of the participants are anonymous kung fu-fodder. For example, Mai-Ko and Chang are introduced in a long sequence as they compete, blind-folded, against men with various weapons (nun-chucks, spear, sword, etc.). Later, the mercenaries of the title attack a temple and--after a long battle--kill all of the "apprentice" martial artists.

The late 19th century: a group of Chinese immigrants live peacefully with their Mexican



neighbors. Some of the immigrants are members of the "Shio-Lan" sect [not to be confused with "Shaolin," I guess], led by the Maestro Tata; the monks practice martial arts and memorize a lot of philosophical quotations. Among the most prominent of the martial artists are Mai-Ko and Chang. Chang is in love with Gina, Mai-Ko's sister.

However, a multi-national group of mercenaries (with names like "Chacal," "Hiena," "El Callado," "El Verdugo," "Cuchillo,"



"Katana," and "Ángel Asesino"), led by Sung-Ya, is on its way to the little town. They plan to plunder the town and then rob the Shio-

Lan sect of its sacred treasure. When they arrive, the mercenaries easily defeat the sheriff (*comisario*) and his deputies, locking them in their own jail cell. Gina goes to warn the Shio-Lan monks of danger; returning to town, she sees the mercenaries kill her parents and younger brother (but Gina kills two of the bandits herself!). Gina also learns one of the monks plans to betray the Shio-Lan sect, so she goes back to the temple to warn them.

The mercenaries arrive and kill most of the monks--including Maestro Tata--steal the treasure, and kidnap Gina.

However, many of the mercenaries are also killed. Sung-Ya comes to town with Gina and the treasure; he meets a group of outlaws (several of their number had been part of his original band), but kills them when they try to double-cross him.



Meanwhile, Mai-Ko and Chang discover the remains of the battle at the temple. Ling Ho, their teacher, tells them what happened, then dies. The two

young men go to town and challenge Sung-Ya. Chang kills the mercenary.

Shot in late 1982 and early 1983, *Mercenarios de la muerte* was not released theatrically until 1989, by which time some of its veteran performers (Emilio Fernández, Charito Granados, both Junco brothers, as well as co-director Manuel Muñoz) had passed away. Fernández, looking very old and uncomfortable, appears in three sequences but has almost nothing to do; the Juncos only have a couple of scenes, as does '40s star Granados, but Casals, Moreno, Silvestre and Rubí Re all appear in a significant amount of footage (all 4 are lightly made up to appear Asian: Casals and Moreno are given slanted eyebrows and Silvestre has a stringy Fu Manchu moustache). Casals had earlier directed a rural action film (*Tetakawi*, 1982); his collaborator on this picture is Manuel Muñoz, a long-time STPC assistant director who had directed some STIC films in the early days of the América studios.

*Mercenarios de la muerte* is an oddity, and even at 81 minutes it drags a bit, but it is rather interesting nonetheless.



**Kung Fu Mortal (Operación Zodiac)\*** [Deadly Kung Fu: Operation Zodiac] (Prods.Xóchitl--Cin. RA, 1983) *Exec Prod:* Javier Bautista García; *Dir/Scr* Adapt: Angel Rodríguez Vázquez; *Story:* Lic. Avinadain Bautista Nájera; *Photo:* Alfredo Uribe Jacome; *Music:* Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.]; *Asst Dir:* Therese Margolis, Raúl González R.; *Film Ed:* Francisco Chiu Amador; *Camera Op:* Armando Castillón; *Makeup:* Antonio Castañeda; *Sound Op:* Rogelio Pichardo M.; *Re-rec:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Union:* STIC

\*aka *Misioneros de la muerte* [Missionaries of Death], *El clan de la muerte*, *Verdugos de la muerte*, *Operación Zodiaco*

**Cast:** Erick del Castillo (*Grand Shaman*), Roberto Cañedo (*Padre Tello*), Víctor Alcocer (*Alfredo Tello*), Avinadain Bautista ("*Aries*" [*Avinadain Tello*]), Javier Roan [sic] (*Padre José*), foreign businessmen: Carlos East, Carlos Pouliot; Fidel Garriga, Salvador Julián, Bruno Schwevel; Cain Pérez C., María Cardinal (*cult member*), Karla Lárraga (*Laura*), Julia Patricia (*Julita?*), Nathanael

León Moreno "*Frankenstein*" (*cult member*), Hilda Godoy, Reidy Bautista, Oliver Bautista, Héctor Conde Lezama, Alejandro Conde Lezama, Armando Rodríguez, Raúl Lozano Reyes, Armando León, Carlos Salgado, Marco Antonio Vázquez, Luis Alfredo Vázquez, Avinadain Bautista Jr. (*Avinadain as a boy*), Raúl Ronquillo, Adrián Quintana, Rómulo Castro, Arturo Gutiérrez, kung fu boys: Arturo Iván, Carlitos Amador, Jesús Vega R., Adrián Conde, Ernesto Beltrán, Simón Puentes, Miguel Ángel Ponce, Martín Ponce, Nicolás Gil, Salvador Rodríguez, José Cochis; Esmeralda Bautista (*counter girl at snack bar*)

**Notes:** *Kung fu mortal* is a professional job that moves along at a decent pace but comes to a rather abrupt ending. The technical aspects aren't bad. Bautista's dialogue was post-dubbed, and the sounds the kung fu fighters make while fighting are rather humorous (they sound like cats or birds), but satisfactory use is made of location shooting (including a fair amount of footage shot in Acapulco) and the score is surprisingly good (although it is probably comprised of music written for other films; at least one sequence is scored with strange electronic music *a la* Joe Meek).

The martial arts sequences vary in effectiveness. In some scenes, the punches and kicks--while well-executed--never look like they are making contact or doing any damage. At other times, the fights are filmed more effectively, which really helps. Virtually all of the action is shot in medium long-shot with very little use of dynamic editing; some technical tricks (fast- and slow-motion, reversed footage) are used to spice up the fighting.

The cast is sprinkled with veterans: Cañedo is good, but Víctor Alcocer and Carlos East have only minor roles. In fact, Carlos East is one of five "foreign" businessmen who are the instigators of the villainy, but there are several sequences where only the other four men are present and East is conspicuous by his absence. Eric del Castillo has a



limited number of scenes as well, and in the scene when he's hired by the businessmen, his voice is heard but he isn't shown. María Cardinal is featured prominently in the advertising material, but has almost nothing to do in the actual film: mostly she wanders around the sect's

headquarters in a one-piece bathing suit and a mask (plus a very brief appearance as a waitress in a Chinese restaurant, passing information to fellow sect members). Nora Lárraga aka "Karla" (billed here as "Karla Lárraga") made a fair number of screen appearances in the late '60s-early '70s, but this is a rare later role for her. She only has 3 short scenes and the strange ending of the film never explicitly shows her being rescued from the sect!



The second film of Avinadain Bautista Nájera includes brief glimpses of his future stock company of performers, including young Avinadain Bautista Jr. (presumably the future "Avi Baiza"), Arturo Iván, Carlitos Amador (instantly recognisable as one of the boys in the martial arts match at the end), and Esmeralda Bautista. As noted above, Bautista himself is the protagonist and while he doesn't have to "act" much (and his dialogue is post-dubbed by someone else), he displays considerable martial arts talent.

Alfredo Tello, owner of a large *hacienda*, dies without reconciling with his son, who ran away years before. Tello's brother is the local priest. A group of foreign businessmen approach Padre Tello and offer to buy Alfredo's *hacienda* (they want the oil that lies beneath it). He refuses and they hire the martial arts cult "Zodiac" to



steal the deed. The leader of the cult, Shaman, sends "Aries" on the mission (each of the members

is named after a sign of the Zodiac). Aries tries to force Padre Tello to hand over the papers, but the old priest refuses. Aries is prepared to kill him but suddenly recognizes Padre Tello as his uncle: Aries is the long-lost son of Alfredo Tello. What're the odds of that?!

Aries switches sides and decides to help Padre Tello, even though this means the rest of the cult will try to kill

them both. They go to Acapulco, but the cult trails them there. However, Aries defeats each member of the cult he faces. Finally, the cult kidnaps Laura, Aries' girlfriend, to use as bait. In a final battle, Aries wipes out the rest of the evil martial artists and frees Laura (we assume--we just see him walking into the house where she's a prisoner, then there's an abrupt cut). As the film ends, Aries has begun teaching martial arts to the children (all boys, apparently), in Padre Tello's catechism class. (The foreign businessmen and Shaman apparently escape unpunished!)

The climax of the film is curiously edited, even setting aside the absence of closure. Aries approaches the house where Laura is a prisoner. In the garden, Aries fights a horde of guards (dispatching most of them with one kick or punch). Next up--we expect--he'll enter the house, battle the two main cult members (Leo and Scorpio) and free Laura. Nope! Instead, he's seen combatting another score of guards on a large, open lawn, and finishes up by defeating Leo (I think--it's very dark). This goes on forever. Aries finally confronts Scorpio, urging the other man to stop following the sect's orders, but Scorpio refuses and they fight. Scorpio loses (he's hiding in the bushes and Aries throws a knife which hits the man in the heart) and Aries prepares to go in to the house and...cut to the catechism class!



The earlier martial arts battles pit Aries against Sagitario (archer), Cancer (swordsman), Capricornio and 2 other villains (one of whom uses the ancient ninja weapon...hand grenades), and one final fight against a cult member in broad daylight in the middle of a street in Acapulco. Aries uses his ninja vanish-and-reappear trick, but this clash is relatively short. Aries leaves and his opponent tries to follow, but is set upon by a gang of robbers; the cult member defeats the crooks but is then confronted by the police and shot to death after he kills one officer with a throwing star. This is a clever bit.

"Serious" martial arts films and literature distinguish between various styles and national origins (kung fu is Chinese, ninjas are Japanese) but Western pop culture tends to mix-and-match, and *Kung fu mortal* is no exception. Aries describes himself as a ninja (and wears traditional ninja garb when infiltrating houses), but the

martial arts on display seem--as suggested by the film's title--more kung fu in nature. As mentioned above, most of the fight scenes feature the combatants uttering shrill shrieks (*kiai*) and this gets tedious (and unintentionally funny) very quickly. They also pose in various kung fu "style" stances, which seem authentic (but what do I know).



The plot doesn't make a great deal of sense. Padre Tello informs the businessmen that "you, as foreigners, can never own these lands or others on Mexican coasts, because our laws forbid it" (which is true). Yet the businessmen don't give up, hiring the Zodiac sect to steal the deed to the *hacienda* from Padre Tello anyway. If they'd simply been patient, they could have waited until Alfredo Tello's will was probated, then negotiated with his heir to lease the land for oil exploration. Regardless, after the defection of Aries, Zodiac doesn't pursue Padre Tello or the deed any more, they devote all of their energy to hunting down and killing the "traitor" (who is, to be fair, in the same location as Padre Tello, but the ninjas never pay attention to him). However, this is all irrelevant: the *raison d'être* for *Kung fu mortal* is to showcase martial arts action, and it definitely delivers on that.

Not too badly done and all things considered, fairly entertaining.  
originally reviewed in MFB 5/5 but re-watched and the review significantly revised in 2018.



**Itara (El guardian de la muerte)\*** [Itara, the Guardian of Death] (Prods. Xóchitl, 1989) *Dir:* Avinadain Bautista N.; *Adapt:* Javier Bautista Garcia; *Story:* Avinadain Bautista Nájera; *Photo:* Armando Castillón; *Music:* Gustavo Pimentel; *Prod Exec:* Lázaro Morales G.; *Asst Dir:* José Medina; *Film Ed:* Francisco Chiu; *Camera Op:* Silvano Zúñiga; *Makeup:* Angelina Chagolla; *Sound Op:* Roberto Martínez; *Sound Ed:* Ernesto Guillén; *Re-rec:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Union:* STIC

\*DVD release in 1998 (? IMDB says 1992) as *El séptimo guerrero* [The Seventh Warrior], cut by about 20 minutes (?)

**Cast:** Ariel Bautista (*Samuel aka "Itara"*), Rosenda Bernal (*Xiomara*), Ana Luisa Peluffo, Juan Peláez (*Ramiro*), La Princesa Lea (*Yolanda*), Fidel Garriga (*Samir*), Antonio Raxel (*Luciano*), Héctor Sáez (*Camilo*), Carlos León (*police official*), Robert Kwor (? *Jin Mai*), Agustín Bernal (*muscular henchman*), Javier del Valle\*\* (*Fernando*), Lilián Castro (? *Julieta*), Blanca Nieves (*exotic dancer*), Arturo Iván, Guillermo Ayala, Esmeralda Bautista (*Estela*), Avi Baisa (*Samuel's son Merloc*), Carlos Amador (*Samuel's youngest son*), Paty Perete, Bony Perete, Ivonne Gutierrez, Simón Puente, Juan Moro (*Ramiro's henchman*), Kain Pérez C., Luis Moya, Mario del Río, Rubén Gondray (*commandante judicial*), Andrés Boris, Charly Bogel [aka Hauptvogel] (*mercenary*), Angtuncio Sakai, Jesús Cevallos, Emilio González, Jesús Rodríguez, Janeiro Valencia, Salvador Araujo, Feliciano Araujo, Guillermo Cruz, Armando Rodríguez, Óscar Risso, Sergio García

\*\*later billed in Bautista films as "Javier Rivera"



**Notes:** *Itara (El guardian de la muerte)* was the third of Ariel Bautista's Mexican martial arts movies, the first he directed himself, and the last to receive theatrical exposure (as far as is known).

In China, a gang of evil, laughing bandits (on horseback) attacks a monastery. Their leader, Jin Mai, tries to make aged head monk Li Pei reveal the location of a set of seven sacred books. A set of seven crystals mystically reveals the location of one book: across the ocean. Some time later, Jin Mai shows up in America to find that book (what happened to the other six books is never revealed, but the first one is the "key" without which the others are useless). Jin Mai hires a multi-national gang of mercenaries (who also break into evil laughter at the least provocation) to help him obtain it: the group includes several Middle Easterners (who pronounce "p" as "b"), a bald Russian (who looks a lot like Telly Savalas), and an Italian (with the most stereotyped Italian accent ever--he even says "Mamma mia!"). The book is allegedly hidden in an old monastery near Río Escondido in Mexico: the monastery is now a martial arts school run by Samuel, a disciple of Li Pei actually named Itara.

Coincidentally, drug smuggler Ramiro has a clandestine airstrip near the monastery. Mexican police ambush his men and capture Ramiro, but Jin Mai and his

gang arrive and massacre the police. Ramiro agrees to help them obtain the sacred book, and his henchmen join forces with Jin Mai's bunch. [Although the mercenaries seem to recognise Ramiro when they decide to rescue him, he doesn't know who they are or why they're there--although he apparently knows Luciano, the *mafioso* who welcomed the group to Mexico--but decides to help them because he's grateful. This is very confusing.]

Samuel, his family (his wife Xiomara and 3 sons), and his students (including young women, who later demonstrate some martial arts prowess but don't participate in the rituals of the male students) live in the old monastery. Fernando--one of Samuel's sons-- and his fiancée Julieta are kidnaped in an attempt to force Samuel to surrender, but he refuses (the young people are eventually released, although Julieta is raped--off-screen--by one of Jin Mai's men). Samuel himself is



captured and repeatedly tortured but won't talk. However, when one of his sons is killed, Samuel and his students attack Ramiro's hideout and wipe out all of the mercenaries (Ramiro is arrested by Camilo, a member of his gang who is really an undercover cop).

*Itara* has a lot of loose ends. In the first place, the "seven sacred books" apparently convey a great power to the owner, but this "power" is never made clear. Furthermore, the mumbo-jumbo with the seven crystals is just tossed in and then forgotten, and the location of the other six books is never revealed. The book that Samuel allegedly has is just a "McGuffin" to pit Jin Mai and his bunch against Samuel and his students.



Another example: some of Ramiro's men and Jin Mai's men stumble across the young kung fu women swimming in a pond (wearing their slips). The men attempt to molest them, but the women know martial arts and hold their own in the battle. This sequence cuts before any resolution is reached, and in the very next scene we see 3 of the same villains from this fracas arrive at the monastery, looking for Samuel (he isn't home, so they abduct Fernando and Julieta instead). What happened to the women and the other bad guys? To follow the thread even further, Fernando and Julieta are captured, Fernando is beaten and Julieta is raped, but then they're both just set free (or they escaped, but we don't see any of this--they just show up at the monastery again). The stated purpose of their abduction was to use the couple as hostages to

force Samuel/Itara to negotiate, but the villains...changed their minds?

The chronology of *Itara* is also problematic.. First, are there still kung fu monasteries in Red China? If not, then the opening sequence must be taking place prior to 1949 (and even then, bandits on horseback were probably scarce), yet it is not clear that 40 years have elapsed before Jin Mai finally gets to Mexico (although his hair is streaked "gray" --really sort of lavender--in the Mexico sequences). To confuse things even more, Samuel's wife Xiomara tells her sons that the "Taoist" temples in China (such as the one seen in the opening sequence) were destroyed by the "Manchus" (the Manchu dynasty fell in 1912).



Bautista's films often feature a handful of "name" performers. Ana Luisa Peluffo's role is unclear: she hangs out at the monastery, but it isn't clear who she is, and I don't think her character even has a name. Antonio Raxel appears briefly as a Mafia boss; Princesa Lea and Blanca Nieves are in the same sequence as eye candy. Juan Peláez and Rosenda Bernal both have substantial roles.

Bautista's stock company is here in full force: Javier del Valle (later Javier Rivera), Esmeralda Bautista, Avi Baiza, and Carlos Amador, to name a few. There are also some repeats from *Kung fu mortal*, including Fidel Garriga, Caín Pérez, and Simón Puente. The performances are adequate overall.

Obviously the seasoned professionals do a better job, but no one is horrible (although a fair amount of dialogue--including that of director/star Bautista--was post-dubbed, which can hide some acting sins). The repeated bursts of sinister laughter from nearly all of the villains (they love their work!) are slightly hokey, but not necessarily bad.

The action sequences in *Itara* are decently executed, although the martial arts are mostly restricted to the finale; the only extended fights (which are intercut) are between Fernando and one henchman, and between Samuel and Jin Mai, both pretty well done. While the film was obviously made on a low budget, the director varies his camera angles (including some high-angle shots) and tries to make the physical action exciting.

There is one brief bit of nudity (a topless scene which is cut in some prints) and several graphic gore effects (including a severed hand which continues to twitch), but the film by and large is very mild in these areas--even avoiding some perfect opportunities to show nudity and



gore--so why these few shots were included at all is a mystery. [In retrospect, this is something of a Bautista trademark--he never goes full exploitation, but isn't averse to a bit of skin from time to time, although he generally eschews gory makeup effects.]



Production values aren't bad, but the technical aspects are somewhat of a downgrade from *Kung fu mortal*: the canned music score is much more obvious and less effective, the photography isn't as slick, and even the credits are more reminiscent of the cheapjack titles used by some of the lesser companies (*Kung fu mortal* had titles with *faux* "Chinese" style lettering and crude but energetic artwork, this film has the credits superimposed over live action). There are still enough extras and the locations used for filming are very good.

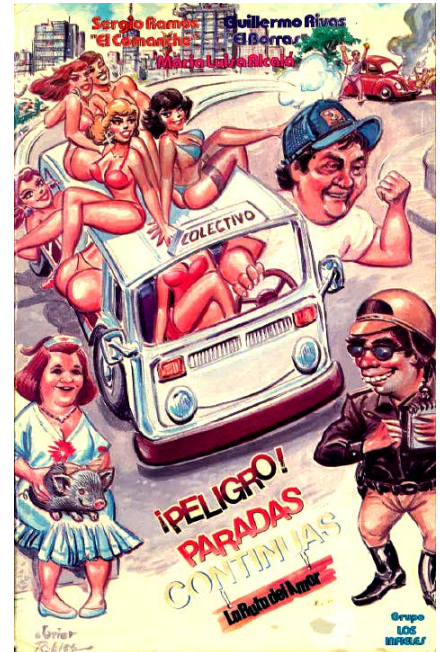


**La ruta del amor (Peligro, paradas continuas)\*\*** [The Love Route (Danger, Frequent Stops)] (Prods. L.M.G. - Prods. Xóchitl, ©1989) *Prod*: Lázaro Morales George; *Dir*: Lic. Avinadain Bautista Nájera; *Story/Adapt*: Lázaro Morales George; *Photo*: Febronio Tepozte; *Film Ed*: Jorge Rivera; *Makeup*: Yolanda Molina; *Sound*: Alejandro Chilpa  
 \*\*title varies, some prints have *Peligro, paradas continuas* (*La ruta del amor*) instead; the DVD-case title is just *Paradas continuas* and *Peligro* has been blotted out on-screen in this print.

**Cast**: Guillermo Rivas (*El Borrás*), Sergio Ramos (*El Comanche*), Isabel Rojas (*Gloria*), María Luisa Alcalá (*woman with pig*), Martha Elena Cervantes (*pregnant woman*), Javier Del Valle (*Memo*), Jacqueline Goldshimied [sic] (*female driver ?*), Paty de Perete, Ariel Bautista (*martial arts teacher*), Arturo Albo, Alex del Castillo (*magician*), Mario Farfán (*Kiri the clown*), Miguel

Torres, Gabriel Medina, Patricia Navarro, Billy Moton (*criminal*), Alexandra Shoukair, Luis Mejía, Pilar Ávila, Ruth Rueda, Brenda Analí, Ernesto Irigoyen, Guillermo Cruz, Óscar Risso, Janeiro Valencia, Luis Ramos, "Los Infieles" (*band*)

**Notes**: Lázaro Morales George worked in various capacities--including producing, directing, and scripting--on a number of Mexican films & videohomes in the 1980s and 1990s. He was the executive producer of Avinadain Bautista's 1988 *Itara, el guardian de la muerte*, among other projects. The two men were reunited as co-producers on *La ruta del amor*, this time with Bautista directing from a script by Morales and



appearing only briefly in the film himself. Unlike *Itara*, which did receive a theatrical release, *La ruta del amor* apparently went straight to video.

*La ruta del amor* has almost no plot. It follows the misadventures of El Borrás and Memo, two *combi* (VW microbus) drivers in Mexico City. The majority of the film consists of brief vignettes--Borrás picks up a clown and magician, who rob him; a woman gives birth in the *combi*; a woman with a squealing pig is a passenger; Borrás tells interminable stories; Memo has sex with his girlfriend in the van; transit cop El Comanche stops Borrás, Memo, and a woman driver and so on. There's even a long, pointless scene in which one of Memo's passengers puts on her makeup while he drives!

About halfway through the movie, a gang hijacks Memo's bus, beats him up, robs the passengers and rapes a woman. Later, a woman driver is nearly assaulted by 2 criminals, but Memo defeats them with his martial arts prowess. When female *combi* driver Gloria is car-jacked by the original gang, she tips off Memo and the other drivers via radio. In a final confrontation, the gang is defeated by the combined forces of Memo, his pals, his martial arts teacher, El Borrás, and El Comanche. The last 10 minutes of the film is a party



scene, featuring a song (the second one in the movie) by Gloria, and one by "Los Infieles."

The film was shot entirely on location, with a great deal of the dialogue post-dubbed. The photography (probably 16mm) is adequate in terms of framing the shots, but the quality of the image is quite poor, washed out and with wildly varying colour tones. The music score is mostly library music (including "The Old Gray Mare" and other hoary classics).

Director Bautista appears in two scenes, including the action finale, where he and Memo team up to defeat the largest gang member (black actor Billy Moton--sometimes

billed as Morton or Morthon). Memo (Javier del Valle, who appears in other Bautista films as Javier Rivera) gets to do a bit of martial arts in this scene and in the earlier confrontation with the two would-be robbers, but otherwise there's not a lot of physical action, not even slapstick



comedy. Most of the humour is verbal, with Guillermo Rivas and Sergio Ramos given free rein to ramble on, telling jokes, making puns, and so on.

It's a little curious that Rivas and Ramos essentially recreate their characters from the '70s television program "Los Beverly de Peralvillo" (also turned into 2 feature films) in many of their screen appearances, and no one seemed to care. It's as if Henry Winkler played "Fonzie" in dozens of television shows and movies for 20 years after "Happy Days" went off the air. [This tolerance was not widespread in Mexican entertainment--Roberto Gómez Bolaños clashed with Carlos Villagrán, María Antonieta de las Nieves and Rubén Aguirre over their attempts to use their characters from "El Chavo del Ocho" after the show ceased production.] Rivas and Ramos are modestly amusing here at best.

*La ruta del amor* is one of a number of films in this era about *combis* or *peseros* including *Los peseros*, *Las paradas de los choferes* and *El Agarratado* (*Precaución: Paradas continuas*) (the latter two also featuring Sergio Ramos). There was even a 2009 film entitled *Paradas continuas*.

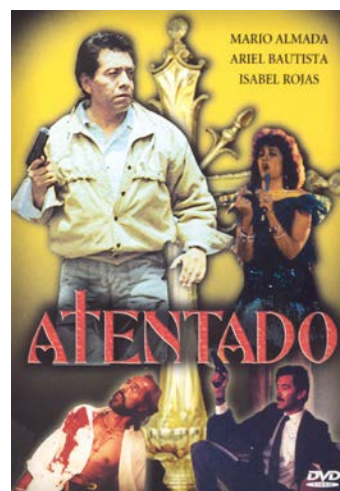
Overall, a very minor film with little to recommend it.



**Atentado\*** [Attempt] (Prods. Xóchitl--Video Distribuidora Continental, ©1990) *Exec Prod*: Lázaro Morales, Bernardo Ríos; *Dir*: Avinadain Bautista; *Adapt*: Javier Bautista García; *Story*: Avinadain Bautista Nájera; *Photo*: José Luis Lemus; *Music*: Raúl Martell; *Asst Dir*: Carlos Zúñiga; *Film Ed*: Jaime Jaimes; *Makeup*: Yolanda Medina; *Sound Engin*: Jorge Gutiérrez; *Union*: STIC

\*also released on DVD as *Atentado al Papa* [Assassination Attempt on the Pope]

**Cast**: Mario Almada (*Commandante*), Ariel Bautista (*Lt. Robles*), Isabel Rojas (*Isabel*), Javier Rivera (*agent*), Carlos East (*Terry*), Alejandro Ávila (*agent León*), Roberto Montiel (*agent González*), Esmeralda [Bautista] (? *Julietta*, reporter), Arturo Iván (*Valseca Jr.*), Roal [sic] Roger (*Sam*, terrorist), Javier Carmona, Irene Arcila (*agent*), Jorge Camarena, Laila Malei, Arturo Alvo, Avi Baiza, Miguel Torres, Manuel Vázquez, Erick Velázquez (*Isabel's child*), Billie Morton (*Faraón's henchman*), Bernardo Ríos, Lázaro Morales, Jorge Villa, Luis Ramos, Ricardo Moreno, Manuel Velázquez, Los Infieles (*band*), Arturo Gutiérrez, Ramón Ibarra, Héctor Conde



**Notes**: in May 1990, Pope John Paul II visited Mexico. He had previously been there in 1979, and would return in 1993, 1999, and 2002--his 1979 visit was celebrated in the Mexican film *Amigo* (1979). This time, filmmaker Avinadain

Bautista was ready, and shot footage for the climax of *Atentado* during the Papal visit, inserting it into an action thriller about an assassination



attempt planned by "international terrorists" (the members of the team are multi-national, but the leader and some henchmen appear to be from the Middle East).

*Atentado* isn't poorly made, but the script is too diffuse and the "detecting" done by the heroes isn't very logical or methodical, so their ultimately successful foiling of the plot seems more like happenstance. This is also a relatively early example of Mario Almada-exploitation, where his brief presence (6 brief scenes, mostly unimportant) was used to sell the film in a somewhat misleading fashion.



Almada plays the irate police commander trying to control his "loose cannon" subordinate, Dirty Harry-ish Ariel Bautista. The performances are satisfactory--even the "terrorists" avoid blatant over-acting for the most part.

The cast contains a number of familiar Mexican cinema performers, in addition to the usual roster of Bautista family and friends. Ariel Bautista uses his martial arts expertise only briefly: like most Mexican films and *videohomes* of the action genre, there is more gunplay than hand-to-hand combat.

Although it seems possible *Atentado* was intended for theatrical release, it appears to have only been released on video, with video-generated opening titles and a co-production credit for a video distribution company. However, it looks like it was shot on 35mm and production values are adequate. In certain sections the sound mix seems off, making it difficult to understand the characters' dialogue.

A special anti-terrorist unit in Mexico discovers a cache of weapons and arrests a suspicious man. He refuses to talk and is later murdered in prison.

Believing a prominent visitor to Mexico City is being targeted for assassination, the unit



desperately tries to track down the terrorists, while the terrorists in turn attempt to eliminate loose ends by killing possible informers. After one of his men is abducted and murdered, Lt. Robles forces pimp Faraón to identify one terrorist; when that man refuses to talk, Robles shoots him in cold blood. He later massacres some henchmen of the terror gang. [At some point, Robles is ordered to stand down by his boss but refuses. However, this goes nowhere and at the climax Robles simply shows up and is welcomed back, no questions asked.] Pope John Paul II arrives in Mexico. The police learn a local priest wasn't



able to attend the ceremony and has been replaced by another "priest"--it's terrorist Terry (Terry the Terrorist! aka Terry O'Rist?), who is killed by Robles before he can open fire on the Pope.

*Atentado* is chiefly random scenes of the police trying to interrogate people, the terrorists killing people, the police fighting various small groups of terrorists, the terrorists discussing their plans with each other, and so on. There's also one fairly long dance number (at the conclusion of which the dancer is shot to death on the dance floor, right in front of the police who were waiting to interview her). There are a few character-building scenes of Rojas and his wife (? it's unclear, but they have a

young child together) Isabel tossed in for good measure. There isn't much suspense, and as noted above, the viewer does not have any sort of good idea how the case was solved, since most of the interrogations seem quite random and unconnected.



**Infierno verde** [Green Hell] (Guerrero Films, ©1991) *Prod:* Lázaro Morales George? [uncredited]; *Dir:* Avinadaín Bautista N.; *Adapt:* Javier Bautista G.; *Story:* Avinadaín Bautista; *Photo:* José Luis Lemus; *Music:* Raúl Martell; *Asst Dir:* Román Hernández; *Film Ed:* Pedro Contreras, Javier Bautista G.; *Makeup:* Yolanda Molina; *Sound:* Arturo Larios; *Union:* STIC

**Cast:** Leticia Perdigón (*Paula*), Ariel Bautista (*Carlos*), Ana Luisa Peluffo (*Brenda's mother*), Isabel Rojas, Javier Rivera (*Polo*), Alejandro Ávila (*Nicolás*), Roberto Ruy (*Nazi* [sp.]), Roal [*sic* Rual] Roger (*Kovaski*), Arturo Iván (*Ruy*, Esmeralda [Bautista] (*Julieta*), Luis Enrique Parra, Jorge Camarena, Raceec [*sic* = Rasec, aka Julio César Báez] (*guard*), Jesús Cervantes, Adriana Servín, Avi Baisa, Billy Morthon [*sic*] (*Mongo*), Claudia Moore, Erik Velázquez (*Paola's son*), Ramón Ibarra, Víctor Villa, Antonio Reséndiz, Armando Rios, José Alarcón, Filemón Patiño, Manuel Velázquez

**Notes:** although made independently in Chichihualco, Guerrero--

undoubtedly on a low budget--*Infierno verde* is an acceptable action drama. A fairly large cast (including numerous extras), interesting location shooting (at an actual mine), and decent photography and other production niceties help offset some of the plot holes and inconsistencies. There are even some explosions, martial arts action and gratuitous nudity! This does not seem to have been released theatrically--it has video-generated credits, for example--but the film looks as if it was originally made to be shown in cinemas.



It's unclear when *Infierno verde* was produced. I'd assumed it was shot after *Itara* and before *Atentado*, but *Infierno verde* carries a 1991 copyright date and *Atentado* was shot in May 1990.

*Atentado* and *Infierno verde* were probably made around the same time, since the

common cast members look basically the same, especially Erick Velázquez, who's a very young child in both movies.

The acting varies, from satisfactory to outrageous scenery-chewing (Alejandro Ávila, I'm looking at you--if



this is same "Alejandro Ávila," he has since gone on to a substantial career in *telenovelas*). Curiously, despite her third billing, Ana Luisa Peluffo has about two minutes of screen time (= three brief scenes; her character is later reported to be "sick"--if Peluffo worked more than one day on this movie I can't see how).

Avinadain Bautista's direction is competent and professional--he knows how to shoot a scene efficiently and effectively. *Infierno verde* isn't perfect--the pacing could be better, for instance--but it's not a bad film at all.

As the film opens, two men flee through a forest, pursued by several others with guns and dogs. One man is caught in a trap, the other is shot and falls off a cliff. The captive is returned to a mining operation, flogged, and then shot. A large group of men and women are held as slaves



in the mining camp, which is run by two "foreigners," Nicolás (possibly Nicolai) and Kovaski (who call each other "comrade"). The mine produces a valuable ore that is secretly exported to their (unspecified) country for the "war" effort. [At a later point,

Nicolás rants about the "Arab nations" taking over the world, but he is definitely not Arab (his accent sounds German more than Russian, but certainly isn't Middle Eastern).] A new bunch of workers arrive, including Brenda, her mother and her father: they were hired on a

yearly contract but discover they're now slaves for life.

[This premise is somewhat reminiscent of *El valle de los miserables* (1972), based on the historic "Valle Nacional" tobacco plantations in



the early 20th century. Ana Luisa Peluffo also appeared in that film.]

The guards mistreat the workers, sending those who can't work "for a rest" (i.e., a dungeon in the mine where they're left to die). Nicolás has attractive women prisoners brought to his hut at night. When poisonous gas is uncovered in the mine, Nicolás refuses to stop work or even give the men protective masks (nothing comes of this, however).

Carlos, hiking through the mountains (trying to find peace after some mysterious personal tragedy), finds the second fugitive, who (before he dies) informs him of what is happening at the mines and asks Carlos to help his son. However, Carlos is captured and becomes a prisoner himself. He avoids being executed as a spy by claiming he's a criminal who killed two policemen, and is put to work in the mines. Polo and Nazi, two fellow slaves, ask Carlos to join their escape plan but he suggests a revolt instead. One night, while the guards are watching some imported strippers, Carlos and the others steal dynamite

and weapons. Carlos trains the prisoners to fight & shoot (in theory--they don't actually get to fire their guns) and everyone prepares for the revolt.

One of the guards is killed and Nicolás orders Ruy to be shot, but the rest of the workers pull a *Spartacus* and everyone confesses to the murder. Carlos, Nazi and Polo are selected to be "crucified" (hung up with ropes, not nailed to crosses). The women rebel, shouting "*Queremos libertad!*" They're



dispersed by some gunshots but the men workers then begin to sing "*Aunque el amo me mata a la mina no voy*" ("Although the boss kills me, I'm not going to the mine").

And...nothing happens. [This is a very pointless sequence.]

That night, 3 of the women kill Kovaski (cutting his throat) and free Carlos and the other 2 men. In a continuity gaffe, suddenly it's daylight and Carlos begins the revolt by blowing up a guard post with dynamite.

Hidden charges (triggered how?) wipe out some more guards.

The men and women attack the rest of the guards with clubs.

Polo and a guard face off in a martial arts battle; Carlos, also using martial arts, kills Nicolás, then defeats huge guard Mongo. The prisoners are now free.



The End.

*Infierno verde* is a pastiche of prison/slave camp/chain-gang movies: beginning with scenes of mistreatment & atrocities, then the careful planning for escape or revolt, followed by the climactic vengeance wreaked on the guards and the final escape to freedom. There are perhaps too many extraneous scenes, things are left unexplained, and the pacing could have been improved, but overall it's a cut above what one would expect.



### Máximo reto [Greatest Challenge] (Prods.

Guerrero Films, ©1998) *Dir:* Avinadain Bautista Nájera;

*Adapt:* Javier Bautista García, Arturo Bautista García;

*Story:* Avinadain Bautista Nájera; *Photo:* Manuel Tejada;

*Prod Mgr:* Jesús Galindo; *Asst Dir:* Iván Ortigosa; *Film*

*Ed:* Javier Bautista García; *Makeup:* Yolanda Molina;

*Sound:* Felipe Núñez

**Cast:** Ariel Bautista (*Roberto Ríos*), Miguel Ángel Rodríguez (*Billy el Verdugo*), Javier Rivera (*Víctor*), Arturo Iván (*Ray*), José Luis Cordero "Pocholo" (*Raúl*), Avi Baisa, Carlos Amador (*Antonio*), Vanessa Perbillini (?*Guadalupe "Lupita"*), Reidy, Manuel Ávila, Arturo Albo, Roberto Ruy (*Fernando Gómez*), Mel Batatz, Erick M. Velázquez (*young Víctor*), Jessica Cruz (*young*

Guadalupe), Melissa Velázquez (*orphan*), Jonathan Arreola (*young Antonio*), Andy Cortez, Moisés Lobato, Raúl Ferrati, Esmeralda Bautista (*Juanita*)

**Notes:** this is a moderately entertaining *videohome*, which follows the pattern of the later Ariel Bautista movies--he has a supporting role, and the main protagonist



is a younger member of his stock company, in this case Javier Rivera. Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, cast as the main villain, is the "name" performer used to sell the product to consumers, with José Luis

Cordero the other "outside" performer (that is, not a member of Bautista's stock company).

Production values are adequate, with a few exceptions: a hair on the camera lens in some shots (not a lot, but enough to be noticeable), and the re-use of a number of shots (including one establishing shot at the orphanage, shown twice--although the scenes take place 10 years apart, the same boy is sitting in the same spot both times: that's a long time to sit). It's also mildly annoying that the film is split into two sections, ten years apart, and yet the only characters who have changed their appearance at all are Víctor and Lupita, who go from children to young adults. Seriously, no one else looks even slightly different.



Billy "El Verdugo" kills federal police agent Fernando as Fernando's young daughter Lupita looks on. Lupita is taken to Padre Francisco's orphanage, where her father's friend Roberto is working. Roberto promises to help find her father's murderer and

also inspires orphans Víctor and Antonio to take up martial arts. Billy wants to eliminate Lupita as a witness--he does murder her nanny--but eventually gives up.

10 years pass. Grown-up Víctor and Lupita haven't forgotten about the assassin. Roberto has been recalled to government service: he runs an elite para-military group now. Meanwhile, Billy and his henchmen are getting rich betting on "clandestine" full contact, no-rules martial arts bouts. They are grooming the vicious, psychotic Ray to be their new champion.

[These brightly-lit "clandestine" fights take place on what appears to be a high school basketball court, and are attended by a motley audience of middle-aged, middle-class men and women who don't look like low-rent gamblers at all. *Bloodsport's* "kumite" this is not.]

Long story short, Roberto pretends to be a big-time Central American gambler; accompanied by Víctor and Lupita, he attends one of Billy's fights, Ray against the champion--who happens to be the grown-up Antonio!

What're the odds? Ray defeats Antonio, who later dies. Also, Lupita identifies Billy as her father's killer (she easily recognises him because, as noted above, he hasn't changed at all). Víctor challenges Ray, and Roberto makes a large bet to encourage Billy to agree to the bout.

Víctor defeats Ray. A post-fight shoot-out leaves Billy and most of his henchmen dead. Víctor and Lupita can now go on with their lives.



Aside from the rather illogical (but typical for a film) coincidences of the plot, *Máximo reto* is a decent picture. Ariel Bautista uses martial arts once--defeating three purse-snatchers who accost him in a parking lot--and this sequence is shot and edited to maximise his actual fighting skills (in fact, his prowess is hilariously over-emphasized, with the crooks flying into the air after he kicks them in the crotch, for example). The long, staged martial arts bouts are much more realistic and violent, but after a while they begin to drag somewhat.



The performances vary. The child performers, especially the young Lupita, are marginal at best. Most of the rest of the cast is satisfactory, with Miguel Ángel Rodríguez and Pocholo laughing wildly in a sinister manner at the drop of a hat. They love their work!

Not great, but passable.



**Guerra de pandillas [Gang War]\***(Metrópoli Films, ©2000) *Exec Prod:* Javier Archundia R.; *Dir-Story:* Avinadain Bautista Nájera; *Photo:* Agustín Meza; *Asst Dir:* María Elena Estrada; *Film Ed:* Bernardo Larraguivel, Carlos Amador Bautista; *SpFX:* Jaime González; *Sound:* Elías Martell, Guillermo Carrasco

\* DVD re-release in 2005 as **La banda de los ojetes** [Band of Assholes]

**Cast:** Jorge Reynoso (*Buendía*), Manuel Ojeda (*don Poncho Díaz*), Ariel Bautista (*Max*), Javier Rivera (*Tigre*), Arturo Iván (*George*), Carlos Amador (*Pepe*), Avia Baiza (*Tony*), Moisés Lobato (*Romeo*), Andy Cortez (*Mosco*), Deybi Reynoso (*Cabezón*), Hilda Limón (*doña Juana*), Sandra Vega (*Carmen Díaz*), Erick Velázquez (*Pepinillo*), Melisa Velázquez (*Pamela*), Alfredo Siu (*Chivo*), Sebastián Ocampo (*Juan*), Abel Vázquez (*Botas*), Jaime Gozález [sic] (*Chencho*), Juan J. Negrete (*Uzi man*); *Mafiosos:* José A. Argüello, Roberto Dávila, Agustín García; Leña Caliente (*band*)

**Notes:** *Guerra de pandillas* is not badly made but is rather boring and somewhat pointless, with a “moral” that’s jettisoned at the end and a strange conclusion that resolves nothing.

In a working class neighbourhood in Mexico City, rival gangs led by George (the “13”) and Tigre (just called “El Tigre’s Gang”) strive for control. Actually, they seem less like “gangs” than groups of young men who just hang out



together, sort of like the Bowery Boys. George’s group robs people on the street of their money and valuables (like jewelry), then sells the stolen proceeds. While illegal, this seems pretty innocuous

compared to things they could be doing (selling drugs or murdering people or something).

Poncho comes home after 6 years in prison and convinces Tigre and his pals to go straight. He teaches them carpentry and urges them to avoid confrontations with George and his henchmen. However, when the alcoholic Chenchó, son of fellow *vecindario* doña Juana, is killed by the “13” gang (to be fair, he drunkenly threatened them with a knife first), Tigre’s gang and George’s gang have a confrontation, which is...inconclusive. Shortly afterwards, police agents Buendía and Max arrest most of George’s henchmen after a robbery, but George escapes. The end?



*Guerra de pandillas* is very slow. There are 4 martial arts fights and two gun battles, but the space between these is filled with extended conversations (plus one very tame “sex” scene and one musical number). The fights are reasonably well executed, shot and edited, but there are virtually never any consequences: the combatants take repeated punches and kicks but bounce right back up and continue fighting. The “big” fight at the end is staged as a series of one-on-one confrontations, concluding with Tigre versus George, but neither man is triumphant at the end of the sequence.

It seems the film is trying to make the point--via the character of don Poncho--that violence and law-breaking is a dead end, and working hard is the way to get ahead, but

this is tossed out the window after Chenchó’s murder. Tigre and the others reject don Poncho’s teachings and head out to fight George’s gang. Curiously, we never see Tigre and his friends committing any sort of crime, so what they did before Poncho arrived is unclear. Fighting the “13” gang--in self-defense most of the time, apparently--is hardly hard-core gang activity.

George is depicted as moderately ruthless but not psycho (which is too bad--that would have been more interesting), while his followers are mostly bland, interchangeable

“henchmen” (one guy has an eye patch, I remember, but most of the others are indistinguishable).

The majority of the performers are marginally adequate as actors, which makes Manuel Ojeda stand out as a true professional.

However, he doesn’t have a great deal to do, not even a big dramatic scene. Jorge Reynoso and Ariel Bautista pop in and out without affecting the plot much one way or the other; they’re the only police seen in the whole movie, and this becomes a little ridiculous when something bad happens and Tigre and his pals can only say “well, we have to wait until [Reynoso and Bautista] finish what they’re doing.” All of the martial arts scenes are handled by the younger members of the cast: Bautista is Reynoso’s sidekick and fires his gun a couple of times, that’s all.

As an actor and screenwriter Bautista doesn’t get a very good grade for *Guerra de pandillas*, but his direction is fairly slick, and the overall production values aren’t bad. The sound mix is, however, fairly annoying: the music is much too loud in some scenes, drowning out the dialogue at times. Also, in the first gun battle scene there are a couple of video-generated muzzle blasts (which look terrible), but only a couple.

Not terrible, but tedious and forgettable.



**Rivales a muerte** [Deadly Rivals] (Metropoli Films, ©2000) *Exec Prod:* Javier Bautista García; *Dir/Story:* Avinadain Bautista Nájera; *Photo:* Agustín Meza; *Asst Dir:* Luis Salinas; *Film Ed:* Javier Bautista, Bernardo Larraguivel; *Makeup:* Yolanda Molina; *Sound Engin:* Manuel Rincón

**Cast:** Jorge Reynoso (*Santiago Mendoza*), Ariel Bautista (*Fabián González*), Javier Rivera (*Valentín González*), Lorena Velázquez (*Carmen*), Jorge Ortín (*Lugardo Mendoza*), Nataly Velasco (*Lupe*), Arturo Iván (*Emiliano*), Avi Baiza (*Pablo*), Carlos Amador (*José Francisco González*), Moisés Lobato (*Gabino*), Raúl Ferrati (*Julián*), Grisel Velasco (*Sara*), Martín Campos (*comisario*), Erick Velázquez & Melissa Velázquez (*children*), Casimiro Sánchez (*comisario ejidal*), Gontrán Palomares (*Gerardo*), José Alberto Argüello (*drunk*)



**Notes:** a change of pace from most of Avinadain Bautista's later *videohomes*, *Rivales a muerte* is a rural action film shot in San Salvador Atenco, a town in the state of México. Although it starts slowly and feels as if it's going to be a predictable tale of a feud between two families, the script takes some interesting turns and the final product is surprisingly decent.

For the longest time it's unclear if *Rivales a muerte* is supposed to be a period picture or not. Everyone rides



horses, the farmers use manual implements, there are no telephones or televisions in evidence, and yet some of the costumes (and sunglasses--a Bautista trademark) are modern and José Francisco is

repeatedly called a *chilango* (slang for a resident of Mexico City), which may have been used earlier but feels like modern terminology. Later in the movie, a bus is seen (as well as "Coca Cola" signs in the *cantina*), which settles the issue (although why nobody has a tractor or uses a telephone still seems odd, especially since the town doesn't appear especially poor or isolated).

José Francisco returns to the rural area where his parents--Fabián and Sara--and relatives live. He marries Lupe, daughter of Julián and Carmen. Lupe was formerly the girlfriend of bully Lugardo, the son of wealthy Santiago Mendoza. Santiago hates Fabián because the latter killed Santiago's brother in self-defense, some time ago. José Francisco and Lupe settle down to work



on their farm and raise a family, despite the hostility of Lugardo, Santiago, and their adherents. José Francisco is a pacifist, who believes violence never solves anything, and is repeatedly harassed and humiliated by the Mendozas.

One day Lugardo and his pals force José Francisco to remove his boots at gunpoint and walk over rough ground until his feet are bloody. José Francisco's brother Valentín and cousin Gabino ride up and a gunfight ensues: Lugardo is badly injured. Santiago wants José Francisco arrested but it's clear his son was at fault. Fabián warns Santiago to leave his family alone: if Santiago wants revenge for his brother's death, he can deal with Fabián alone.

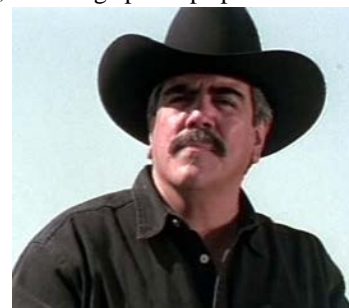
Time passes. Lugardo returns from convalescing. Santiago urges his son to let matters drop: "You'll end up dead or in prison." When Lugardo says he doesn't fear death, Santiago replies: "A man dies for a reason, not just so they'll compose *corridos* about him." Lugardo lassoes

the pregnant Lupe and drags her behind his horse; she dies as a result. José Francisco takes a pistol and confronts Lugardo and his two henchmen and is shot to death.

Fabián kills Santiago in a gunfight in the *cantina*. Fabián, Valentín and Gabino face off against Lugardo and his men: the villains are all killed, although Gabino also dies.

The set-up for *Rivales a muerte* is rather slowly paced, taking its time to introduce José Francisco, Lupe, Lugardo and Santiago in particular, but things pick up speed later on, after the wedding

sequence. José Francisco's status as an outsider and a pacifist is established, even though there are some logical gaps and questions which are never answered: why did José Francisco go to



Mexico City in the first place, and why did he come back and become a farmer? The traditional answers would be "he went to the capital to study, and he came home to implement the new agricultural practices he learned there," but neither one of these is apparently the case. And despite the persecution he and Lupe suffer, José Francisco stubbornly refuses to leave, even when Lupe says they should. His attachment to "the land" is thus not seen as especially admirable (in other films, he'd be given a clearer reason to stay), and even somewhat foolish (especially in retrospect, since he and his wife both die). His pacifism is also presented in an ambivalent manner. Fabián gives José Francisco a pistol as a wedding present, and Lupe's father says "I hope you never have to use it, but if you do, use it with honour."

Lugardo repeatedly provokes José Francisco, who refuses to defend himself: even in the middle of the scene where he's being tortured by Lugardo,



José Francisco urges Valentín and Gabino not to get in a gunfight with the villains, saying they can "talk." From his point of view, José Francisco doesn't want to become involved in the cycle of inter-family violence, but rather than being principled, he seems weak. Of course, once Lupe is killed, he snatches up his pistol and runs to face Lugardo, only to be shot down effortlessly by the villains. This type of moral dilemma is not new--*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, *Straw Dogs*, for instance--but it adds a dimension to *Rivales a muerte* that one doesn't see in a lot of rural action films.

Another example of the relatively nuanced content of *Rivales a muerte* can be seen in the presentation of the villainous characters. Santiago is a typical *cacique*, manipulating the authorities and dominating the weaker

residents of the region. He holds a grudge against Fabián but is also realistic and rational. He won't take any action until he is sure he can get away with it. On the other hand, Lugardo is a creature of pure impulse: he "loves" Lupe in an obsessive manner and thus hates José Francisco (why he kills Lupe is puzzling but since she's pregnant and Lugardo's friends mock him about this, perhaps he thinks "if I can't have you, no one can!"). As mentioned above, Lugardo refuses to take Santiago's advice to cool it, and pursues his vendetta to the bitter end. At least he's not depicted as a coward who sends others to do his dirty work. Emiliano and Pablo, Lugardo's two sycophants, are mostly as bad as he is, enabling his violent behaviour. Pablo twice slightly disagrees with Lugardo--Lugardo shoots close to his head both times, and Pablo backs down (dying in the final gun battle, along with Emiliano and Lugardo).

It was Carlos Amador's turn to play the lead in a Bautista film in *Rivales a muerte*-- Javier Rivera got the main roles in *Guerra de pandillas*, *Matar para vivir*, and *Máximo reto* (they were roughly equal in importance in *Chacales de la calle* and *El Víbora*). Amador is fine as José Francisco, as is the attractive Nataly Velasco as Lupe. Bautista himself--with a bushy moustache pasted on his upper lip--is absent for most of the middle section of the film; he's satisfactory as a typical bluff *ranchero* type.

The cast of *Rivales a muerte* includes most of the other Bautista regulars-- Avi Baiza, Moisés Lobato, Erick and Melissa Velázquez, Arturo Iván (I didn't see Esmeralda Bautista though, and the other martial artists who populate Bautista's contemporary-set films took a vacation for this one)--and has 3 "name" performers to top the cast: Jorge Reynoso, Jorge Ortín and Lorena Velázquez. All are old pros and handle their roles as such.

Production values are satisfactory. The music score--almost certainly canned music--is appropriate, the photography is fine, and the locations are clearly authentic.

Not a classic, but better than I expected, and a significant change of genre for Avinadain Bautista (although *Mercenarios de la muerte*, *Itara el guardián de la muerte* and *Infierno verde* all had mostly rural settings, none of these were "typical" Mexican rural action films).



**El Víbora** [The Viper] (Metropoli Films/Provincine, ©2002) *Exec Prod:* Hugo Contreras; *Dir-Story:* Avinadain Bautista Nájera; *Photo:* Alfredo Luna; *Music* Music & Images; *Asst Dir:* Antonia Presa; *Film Ed:* Bernardo Larraguivel; *Sound Engin:* Bernardo Jiménez

**Cast:** Ariel Bautista (*Max Montero aka El Víbora*), Hugo Stiglitz (*George*), Javier Rivera (*Jaime León*), Arturo Iván (*Jorge Ruiz*), Carlos Amador (*Armando López*), Avi Baiza (*Ramiro García*), Víctor Vigoro

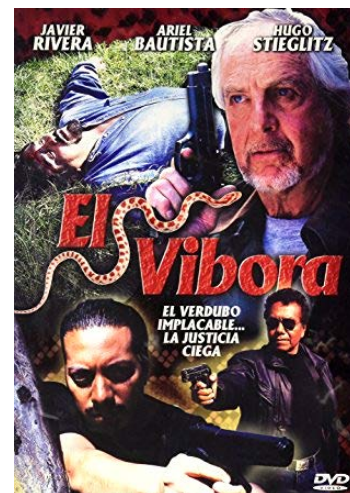
(*Charly*), Ramón Gómez (*Sajid Atta*), Fernando Carbonel (*Alberto Resendiz*), Checo Zaimán (*Jhonny*), Esmeralda Bautista (*singer*), Erick Velázquez (*Lalo*), Javier Carmona (*Abel*), José Negrete (*Apache*), Julio Escalero (*El Dandy*), Abraham Becerril, Abel Vázquez, Refugio González (*Ramzi*), Andy Cortez & Moisés Lobato (*gang members*), Antonio Chávez (*Kalif*)

**Notes:** this is a slick but not particularly outstanding *videohome*. There is very little character development of the good guys--led by Ariel Bautista, with Javier Rivera, Arturo Iván, Carlos Amador, and Avi Baiza along for the ride as usual--and a substantial amount of footage is spent on the activities of the villains, notably Hugo Stiglitz and Víctor Vigoro. The action is mostly gunplay, with almost no martial arts on display.

There are no significant female roles and none of the characters is given any sort of backstory or home life. There are only two aspects of the film which aren't part of the main narrative: several songs (sung by Esmeralda Bautista) and a very, very minor sub-plot in which *El Víbora* befriends a street kid, hires him for the anti-terrorist team (= he sweeps up the office) and later promises to help the teen and his homeless friends live better lives.

A special anti-terrorist squad led by *El Víbora* foils a plan to detonate bombs in three areas of Mexico City, arresting mastermind Sajid Atta and defusing the explosives. Atta, even under duress, refuses to talk. Meanwhile, *gringo* George is sent from Houston to Mexico to clean up the loose ends. Accompanied by his henchmen Apache, Charly, and Jhonny, they assassinate plotters Ramzi and Kalif, then murder Resendiz (a member of *El Víbora's* team) and finally execute their local contact Abel, but Jhonny is mortally wounded in an encounter with the authorities.

George, Charly and Apache ambush *El Víbora* in his home: George says he'll pay *El Víbora* a large sum of money to deliver Sajid Atta to him. *El Víbora* agrees. He brings the prisoner to a park and hands him over to George and the others, then drives off. However, it's a trap: *El Víbora* and his men kill the three foreigners and recapture Sajid, who'll be handed over the U.S. authorities.



*El Víbora* alternates scenes of El Víbora and his friends trying to track down the terrorists with footage of George and his men carrying out their assassination duties. It's all very routine and (as happens in some of Bautista's other films) the narrative thread is weak: A doesn't lead to B that leads to C, etc. Instead, a string of things happen but the



*denouement* comes out more or less coincidentally or as the result of a *deus ex machina*. For example, El Víbora and his men don't "track down" George

through their expert police work, George and his gang go to El Víbora's home to see him, unbidden and thus seal their own fate. Also, the exact motivation of George is unclear (he's being paid by some mysterious forces, but why they send him to bring back Sajid is vague: since Mexico intends to extradite Sajid to the USA anyway, this isn't obviously some sort of CIA plot, and yet George doesn't appear to be helping the terrorists either--in fact he kills several of them).

This is not to say *El Víbora* is a bad film. Avinadain Bautista Nájera is a competent director, and the film is quite professional in all technical aspects. It was shot on location on a low budget in actual locations and there aren't any notable special effects or even car chases (and, as mentioned above, no martial arts scenes), but one doesn't expect these from a *videohome*, and *El Víbora* is glossier than most, with a decent (canned music) score and



professional sound recording and photography. The pace is good enough, with enough happening to hold the audience's attention most of the time.

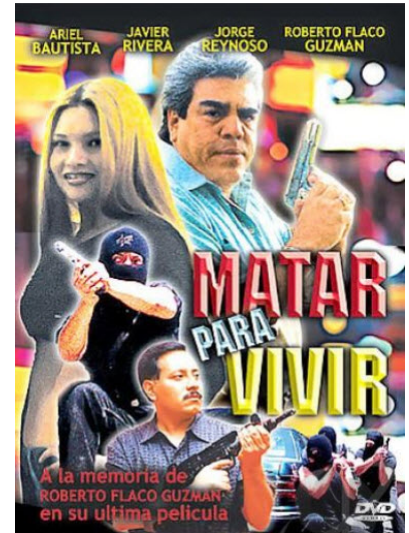
The performances are generally good. Hugo Stiglitz doesn't exert himself unduly, but he's a pro and is fine as the mastermind of the assassination team. He's ably seconded by Víctor Vigoro as Charly; Vigoro isn't an actor I'm familiar with, but he does a good job as a loose cannon killer. Ramón Gómez is also satisfactory as terrorist Sajid. On the side of the angels, Ariel Bautista is his usual stoic self, while his younger sidekicks are given relatively little personality or even activity. Erick Velázquez, who had been in most of Bautista's movies since he was a toddler, is much taller than he was just a couple of years before, and is (barely) adequate as the street-savvy kid.



**Matar para vivir** [Kill to Live] (Metropoli Films/Provincine, ©2002) *Dir:* Avinadain Bautista Nájera; *Story:* Avinadain Bautista Jr.; *Photo:* Agustín Meza; *Prod*

*Mgr:* Ricardo López de Lara; *Asst Dir:* Antonio Preza; *Film Ed:* Javier Bautista, Sandra Vega; *Sound Engin:* Manuel Rincón; *Union:* STIC

**Cast:** Jorge Reynoso (*Chicano*), Ariel Bautista (*Cmdte. González*), Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán (*Quintero*), Javier Rivera (*Rolando*), Jorge Aldama (*Julián González*), Carlos Amador (*Cholo*), Arturo Iván (*Estrada*), Avi Baiza (*Rodríguez*), Melisa Velázquez (*Rolando's daughter*), Sol Ángel (*Sofía*),



Moisés Lobato (*Benítez*), María de Lourdes (*Laura*), Perfecto González (*doctor*), Ricardo López de Lara Jr. (*cardiologist*), Esther Manshel (*comadre*), Andy Cortes & Ábel Vázquez (*guards*), Javier Carmona (*Arabe*), Omar Beltrán (*pistolero*), Ricardo López de Lara (*neighbour*), Claudia N. (*dancer*), Brenda N. (*dancer*)

**Notes:** unusual Avinadain Bautista film in that there is no martial arts action at all, strictly gunplay. Bautista himself appears only a couple of times in the first ¾ of the picture, then has a somewhat larger role in the last 10 minutes or so.

Rolando and his wife Sofía have a young daughter suffering from a heart condition. She needs an operation to survive, but only a costly private hospital can handle it. They try desperately to borrow the money needed, but cannot accumulate the full amount.

Meanwhile, Chicano sells anthrax and other biological agents on the black market. It's unclear if his customers are terrorists, although there seems to be little other reason for them to be buying these substances (and they buy them quite frequently). [The main buyer is nicknamed "Arabe,"



but he's not an obvious Middle-Eastern type.] Quintero works for Chicano, but is not above cheating his boss: he has corrupt police "confiscate" the money after a deal, then they split it with him.

Quintero kills police agent Julián, believing he's betrayed them.

Rolando bumps into Quintero on the street: Quintero's late son was a schoolmate of Rolando. Quintero gets Rolando a job in Chicano's gang. Later, Quintero proposes that Rolando help him cheat Chicano. Rolando agrees,

needing the money for his daughter's medical treatment. Quintero pulls the same "police" sting as before, but this time he kills the two corrupt cops (Estrada and Benítez); he and Rolando flee in the dead men's unmarked police car (which they continue to drive for the rest of the movie, since apparently the Mexican police aren't looking for it, even after they find the corpses of their two agents in the middle of the street).

Chicano and his gang set out to find Quintero and Rolando, both to kill them and to recover the briefcase full of cash they got for the last delivery. Quintero is killed, but Rolando continues to evade the crooks, with a little help from police commander González. Julián was his brother and he wants Rolando to help him catch Chicano. Rolando refuses at first but changes his mind when Chicano abducts Sofía and threatens to kill her.



Rolando goes to Chicano's house. González and a group of ninja cops attack, killing or arresting the criminals. Rolando and Sofía are set free, and even get to keep the money.

González says he's out to avenge his brother as a private matter, and apparently the police (and the film in general) aren't very interested in Chicano's actual business (which is, as noted above, obviously linked to terrorism). Because he (reluctantly) served as bait, Rolando gets off scot-free (with a satchel of cash to boot) even though he knowingly aided and abetted furnishing the deadly toxins to unauthorised individuals.

*Matar para vivir* was one of Flaco Guzmán's final films: it was copyrighted in August 2002, and he died on 9 August 2002. He looks rather haggard--but then again, he'd looked that way since the 1980s!--but turns in a good, animated

performance (much better than in *Dracula mascafiello*, another of the films he made in the final months of his life). In addition to the usual Bautista-film performers,



we also see "names" Jorge Reynoso and Jorge Aldama for "box-office" (DVD-rental) appeal. Reynoso, who looks like a barrel with arms and legs, has a substantial role and--his criminality aside--makes a point about being "betrayed" by Quintero and Rolando; they weren't undercover agents for the police, they just wanted money, and his feelings are hurt. The other performances are adequate if not outstanding. Javier Rivera, as Rolando,

doesn't go through a lot of soul-searching either before or during his criminal career: he never really has a chest-beating scene where he expresses his fear for his daughter's life and his willingness to break the law to help her (he does, at one point, say "I'd even rob" to get the money, but this is practically in passing).

As mentioned above, there's no martial arts action in *Matar para vivir*; the "ninja cops" who accompany González to the final showdown do some running and jumping, but in the end they just shoot the bad guys like regular police would. There are two other minor points of interest. Esmeralda Bautista, a regular in Bautista's movies gets to sing *ranchera*-style in a nightclub. There is also a very brief topless scene courtesy of Chicano's girlfriend.

Reasonably interesting thanks to the presence of Flaco Guzmán and a fairly coherent, "personal" narrative.



### Chacales de la calle [Jackals of the Street]

(Metropoli Films, ©2004) *Exec Prod*: Javier Archundia R.; *Dir-Story*: Avinadain Bautista Nájera; *Photo*: Agustín Meza; *Asst Dir*: Luis Salinas; *Film Ed*: Arturo Bautista, Bernardo Larraguivel; *Sound*: Manuel Rincón

**Cast**: Jorge Reynoso (*Cmdte. Ramos*), Ariel Bautista (*Rodrigo*), Javier Rivera (*Toro*), Edna Bolkan (*Sandra*), Carlos Amador (*Kobi*), Arturo Iván (*Gato*), Avi Baiza (*Montero*), Raúl Rodríguez (*Rudy*), Norma Zavala (*July*), Andy Cortez (*Joki*), Moisés Lobato (*Tieso*), Erick Velázquez (*Toro as a boy*), Melissa Velázquez (*Melissa, Sandra's daughter*), Sandra Vera (*Adela*), Esmeralda Bautista (*secretary*), Juan José Negrete (*Tres*), Guillermina Orozco (*doña Lola*), José Juan Isla (*judicial*), Grupo Musical Ilusión

**Notes**: this is one of Bautista's better *videohomes*, with lots of martial arts action, a fairly large cast, a decent score (albeit canned, but generally appropriate), good production and technical values, and a fair amount of character



development and plot. There are some loose ends and a couple of scenes run on too long, but in general this is professionally made and reasonably entertaining.

In addition to his usual gang, Bautista has two "names" in the cast, Jorge Reynoso (in a supporting role) and Edna Bolkan. Bolkan, probably pushing 40 years of age, looks fine and at times reminds one of Isela Vega; she has a substantial role, including one admittedly uneven sequence in which her character is (a) revealed to be a single mother, and (b) is shown to be having an affair with her co-worker Rodrigo. The first part of this is well done, but when Rodrigo shows up and their romance is exposed, it just

doesn't feel right. In any case, Bolkan is an asset, particularly since some of Bautista's *videohomes* give rather short shrift to their female characters.

The rest of the cast is mostly good, although the flashback scene at the end of the film is not so well acted by the two juvenile performers, to put it kindly. Norma Zavala, who

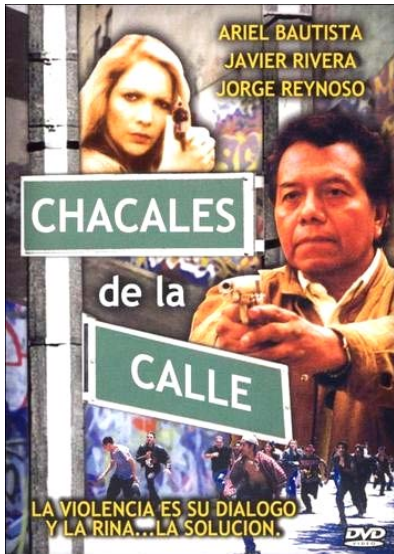
bears a distinct resemblance to Meche Carreño, has a "tasteful" shower scene which includes partial nudity. The



antagonists of the film--Bautista regulars Javier Rivera, Carlos Amador, and Arturo Iván--all act competently (and have a decent script to work with) and handle their martial arts chores effectively.

The film opens with a nice sequence in which two gangs (a total of around 20 people) dash through the streets, periodically stopping to kung fu-fight each other. The gangs are led by Toro and Kobi; as the police arrive to break up the brawl, Toro's men abduct July, the girlfriend of imprisoned gang leader Gato (Kobi is his lieutenant). Toro is attracted to July but says he's keeping her a prisoner just to irritate Kobi. Eventually July becomes Toro's girlfriend.

Toro and two henchmen, breaking into parked cars, are surprised one night by policemen Montero and González. The gang members attack the policemen using their martial arts prowess: González is killed and Montero is knocked out. He recovers in time to shoot at the fleeing



criminals, grazing Toro's arm. Police commander Ramos orders agents Rodrigo and Sandra to find the murderer of the policeman. Toro and Kobi are both picked up (after they have a one-on-one martial arts fight in the middle of the street, in broad daylight) but there isn't enough evidence to charge anyone with the

killing.

Rodrigo convinces the authorities to release Gato from prison early, if he will agree to help them solve the murder. Gato rejoins his gang; with information given to him by

his new girlfriend Adela (who happens to be Toro's old girlfriend, jealous about Toro's romance with July) he fingers Toro as the culprit. Toro and his gang barricade themselves in a building (it looks like a school, but is apparently intended to be their headquarters, since they keep their weapons in lockers there) and Rodrigo is captured when he tries to arrest Toro.

With Gato's help, Sandra and police rescue Rodrigo. Toro's gang is wiped out or captured, and Toro himself is caught and sent to prison. Gato changes his ways and becomes a force for good in the *barrio*.

*Chacales de la calle* isn't bad, but it has its flaws. There are some really extraneous or prolonged scenes. For example, we are shown a long card game in prison between Gato and two other convicts, which has no bearing on the plot or anything else. Late in the film, Toro and his gang visit the "Salón de Fiestas Betzy" (a real place) where a party is going on; contrary to expectations, the gang doesn't bust up the joint, they simply join the festivities, and this allows for a long sequence of people dancing to two songs performed by a live band. Gato and his crew show up as well, but the two gangs considerably go outside before they start to fight (I guess they didn't want to irritate Betzy). The aforementioned sequence featuring Sandra and her daughter (and then Rodrigo) is another scene that goes on too long (cutting the Rodrigo part would have helped). Also, July's shower is a pointless couple of minutes.



This brings up one of the loose ends or inconsistencies in the script. When Toro first brings July home, he slaps her around and later she's seen tied up and with tape over her mouth. He releases her when she promises not to escape. The next time we see her, July's in the apartment alone and unfettered, and she takes a shower. The next time we see her, she's Toro's girlfriend and is riding in the back of truck with him. Stockholm Syndrome? I don't know. The only explanation she gives Gato for her infidelity is "I had to eat."

Another issue is the actual criminal activities of the two gangs. They seem to spend most of their time fighting each other. The police say they're warring over "drug territory," but there's only one brief scene in which Toro collects some money from a shopkeeper for unspecified "merchandise" to be delivered later. Toro and his

henchmen are stealing things from parked cars when they clash with the police--there's no indication this is anything but petty theft, since they randomly select which autos to burglarise. The two gangs aren't especially distinguishable from each other--aside from their leaders--but there is at least some footage of each in their off (non-fighting) hours, helping the viewer see them as groups of individuals rather than anonymous mobs of dodgy-looking characters. [It should also be noted that these aren't "teen" gangs--at one point, a gang member tells the police he's 27 years old. The gang members dress in a wide variety of outfits, including black leather jackets, punk style, and a colourful tights/ black tanktop combination.]

These are not major issues, and they're offset by the plentiful martial arts action and by the fairly even-handed manner in which the narrative is split between Toro's gang, Kobi-Gato's gang, and Rodrigo-Sandra threads. Neither of the gangs is "the good one," although Toro has a scene near the conclusion where he condemns society for making him a criminal (complete with a flashback: young Toro and his sister live on the streets, eating from garbage cans; his sister eventually dies for lack of medical attention). This is too little, too late to make Toro a sympathetic character, but it's an example of the slightly deeper than usual characterisation in *Chacales de la calle*. There's not a lot, but there is at least some.

The acting is generally good overall, and the production values are fine. This was all shot on location and the photography, sound, and editing are slick.

*Chacales de la calle* is the most recent Avinadain Bautista film I have been able to identify (based on copyright dates). I'd like to think there are more out there waiting to be seen. I'm not a big fan of *videohomes* of the 2000s and beyond, but I'd be willing to watch more by Bautista.



## Ariel Bautista Loves Sunglasses



## Agustín Bernal Films

### El Castrado [The Castrated One] (Prods.

Buma/A.V. Video, ©1995) *Exec Prod:* Ericka Bernal; *Assoc Prod:* Jorge Aguirre, Agustín Bernal; *Dir-Scr:* Agustín Bernal; *Photo:* Manuel Tejada; *Music:* Juan Carlos Marelli, Claudio Brugger; *Prod Mgr:* Víctor Villa; *Co-Dir:* Enrique Murillo; *Film Ed:* Daniel Amado, Enrique Murillo R.; *Sound:* Rafael Resendes; *Makeup:* Lucha Álvarez; *Re-rec:* Rodolfo Gutiérrez

**Cast:** Agustín Bernal (*Sgt. Marcos Gómez Bucio*), Manuel Ojeda (*Cmdte. Rojas*), Roberto Ballesteros (*Johnny Ventura*), Rossana Sanjuan (*Lt. Azela*), Michaelle Mayer (*Nayura*), Alfredo Gutiérrez (*Francisco Luviano*), Ayleen [*sic* Aylin] Mújica (*doctor*), Lucha Álvarez (*nurse*), Stephanie Mejía (*Luviano's daughter*), Issis (*girl in hotel*), Jorge Almada (*Raúl*), Karina Puentes (*Johnny's prostitute*), Fernando Alfaro (*Abel*), Hugo del Valle (*Hugo, cop*), Walter Fuentes (*Many*), Luviano Jr. (*Luviano's son*), Ricardo Arturo (*rural cop 1*), Daniel Peña (*rural cop 2*), José Luis Marros (*Brochas*), Francisco Luviano (*Johnny's henchman*), Matías Salgado (*Johnny's henchman*), Sergio Velasco (*Johnny's henchman*), Silvia Bolaños (*Norma*)



**Notes:** this is a strange film, filled with violent action, bizarre circumstances, and a number of production bloopers. It's never dull, one can say that at the very least. [Note: Mario Quezada's *Diccionario del cine mexicano 1970-2000* and the DVD listing give a running time of 83 minutes, but the video copy I have seen runs 10 minutes less. There may be footage missing at the beginning--

since it starts rather abruptly--but it's also possible there were edits in the rest of the movie as well.]

Policeman Marcos tries to capture drug kingpins Johnny and Luviano, but is knocked out, tied up, and shot in his genitals by Johnny. Rescued by Cmdte. Rojas and Lt. Azela, Marcos is hospitalised. When he recovers consciousness and realises he's been castrated, Marcos exits the hospital and murders Johnny's wife and teenage daughter, leaving a note for the gangster. Johnny rapes and abducts

Nayura, Marcos' sister. Marcos tortures a man in a billiard parlor to get information about Johnny's whereabouts, shooting various other patrons



who try to intervene (he also stabs one man with a pool cue and punches numerous others). Rojas (unaware of this) discharges Marcos from the force. When the pool hall murders are discovered, Lt. Azela is sent to arrest Marcos but he escapes and continues his pursuit of Johnny.

Johnny takes Nayura to his country house (where she's presumably raped by his henchmen). Lt. Azela and her partner arrive at the house and are murdered. Johnny flees, taking Nayura with him. Marcos "questions" Luviano at the latter's video store, shooting various gunmen and threatening to kill Luviano and his children unless they tell him where Johnny is staying. He later beats a man for information and tosses him off a balcony even after he talks.

Rojas and his men confront Marcos but he shoots several agents and flees, wounded. A woman doctor and her nurse tend to his wound, but the nurse calls the police and agents are waiting outside the clinic when Marcos emerges. He takes the doctor hostage and drives off, later shooting her

because he thinks she called the police. He also tracks down one of his former colleagues-- in a hotel room with a prostitute--and gets information about Johnny's location (then he kills both the police agent and the woman).



Marcos arrives at the house where Johnny is now staying. Luviano also arrives. Johnny shoots Nayura. Marcos kills most of Johnny's men and Luviano. He and Johnny have a showdown and both are shot, but it's Johnny who dies. However, Rojas and his assistant show up and

order Marcos to drop his weapon: he refuses, and is shot to death by his former superior officer.

As you can tell from the synopsis, *El castrado* has a very high body count. Marcos shoots people a lot, some for no particular reason. Virtually every female character seen in the movie is beaten, raped, and/or killed (the only exceptions I can think of are two prostitutes seen briefly at Johnny's house), which seems a bit misogynistic. When Rojas finds the body of Lt. Azela, he says "killing a woman as beautiful as the lieutenant *no tiene madre* [is shameful]." What?! So it would have been less of a crime to kill her if she'd been unattractive?

Curiously, the titular premise of the movie--Marcos' castration--is not really dealt with: he's upset (of course), and the villains

constantly refer to him as *el castrado* and *capón* (a castrated rooster), but since everything occurs at breakneck speed, we don't get any sort of introspection about what this means to Marcos.

The film isn't especially gory--in fact, many of the shooting victims are not even shown, with the camera remaining fixed on the shooter rather than the victim.

Marcos has little or no character development, other than his rage-inspired dedication to killing Johnny. He is depicted, perhaps unintentionally, as a virtual superman. First, he's shot and castrated (when first seen in the hospital, a bloody bandage covers his groin, indicating he hasn't been there for very long), yet as soon as he awakes, he jumps out of bed and compels a police agent to surrender his clothes, then dashes out of the hospital. At no time during the rest of the movie does he exhibit any ill

effects from his wound, running, fighting, climbing effortlessly. Later, he's shot by Rojas (although Marcos is lucky, considering 3 or 4 policemen with automatic weapons are firing at him from about 10 feet away, and only one



bullet strikes him in the stomach): the bullet goes right through him (he has bloody holes in the front and back of his shirt), yet he easily drives himself to a clinic, is treated, then resumes his vigorous physical activities as if nothing had happened.

There are some humorous aspects of the production. Rojas is seen in his office early in the film: it looks nothing at all like a policeman's office, with a fancy wooden desk, numerous pictures on the walls, and white-and-blue curtains. Later, he's shown in a completely different, somewhat more professional looking office (it



still seems more like a lawyer's office than a cop's, though). Marcos first confronts Luviano in the latter's office in his video store (more about this later), but Luviano is later shown phoning Johnny from a different office that has the same white-and-blue curtains as Rojas (perhaps they shared a decorator). Another odd bit is the vintage automobile--clearly 1940s or early 1950s at best--used by the police who confront Marcos outside the clinic. There are also some random shots which are reused, some at widely separated times, others within a couple of minutes after they first appear.

In general, however, the technical aspects of *El castrado* aren't that bad. Everything was shot on location, but the locations themselves--including some very nice houses--are satisfactory. The photography and sound are professional enough, and Bernal's direction is workmanlike (the same can't really be said about his script, though). The performances are decent for the most part (Aylin Mújica isn't great but she's not horrible), with Roberto Ballesteros convincing as a sociopathic Johnny, Alfredo Gutiérrez doing his usual solid job, and Manuel Ojeda cast slightly against type as a police official. Scripter Bernal didn't give actor Bernal much to work with in terms of character development: he's just an angry, violent man who kills a lot of people.

The end credits of the movie thank Francisco Luviano, proprietor the video club "Jeymy," for his assistance. The Jeymy shop, as noted above, appears in the film, and Alfredo Gutiérrez's character is named "Francisco Luviano." I guess the real Luviano didn't mind being portrayed as a gangster and his shop being shown as the location of a violent shoot-out. In fact, Luviano himself (and his son) both have minor roles in *El castrado*.



Castration also plays a part in some other Mexican films. There are those in which the villain is castrated as part of his punishment--*La generala*, *Violación*, for instance--and others in which the protagonist is castrated (or has mutilated genitals) and this affects his life considerably (*Los cachorros* is the most prominent example; there is also one Jorge Reynoso *videohome* with this theme--the DVD title is *El federal capado*, but I don't recall the original title).

Trivia note: Bernal's full character name is given once as "Marcos Gómez Bucio"--in real life, the actor's name was Romualdo Bucio.

Outré but perhaps not outré enough.

## Rostro de piedra [Stone Face]

(Baja Films International Corp.--Video Distribuidora del Pacífico, ©1996)  
*Prod:* Delfino López; *Dir:* René Cardona III; *Scr:* Carlos Baldemar [*sic*= Valdemar]; *Photo:* Alberto Lee; *Music:* Juan Carlos Marelli, Claudio Brugger, Saburo Iida; *Film Ed:* Daniel



*Amado:* Óscar González "Pocahontas"; *Sound Engin:* Noé Rincón; *Prod Mgr:* Víctor Villa; *Makeup:* Guille Oropeza

**Cast:** Mario Almada (*Cmdte. Castillo*), Agustín Bernal (*Andrés Sierra aka "Rostro de piedra"*), Manuel Ojeda (*Senator José Luis Ochoa*), Guillermo Quintanilla (*Cmdte. Aguilar*), Luis Reynoso (*Cmdte. Rubio*), Alfonso Munguía\* (*Anselmo González*), Chucho Reyes (*Ray Furlong*), Ana Karina Guevara (*Rosita*), Víctor López Limón (*David Fernández*), Hugo del Valle (*Marcos*), Adalberto Menéndez "El Charro" (*Agent Magaña*), José Luis [*sic* = José Antonio] Marroz (*Agent Dino Fernández*), José Marroz Jr.\* (*Elias Ventura*)

\*end credits have the character names reversed for these two actors

**Notes:** this is a decent action film that unfortunately suffers from some technical defects that hamper its effectiveness. The photography varies from scene to scene (sometimes from shot to shot within the same scene!). Far



too much of the movie is washed out (while other scenes look fine), and much of the flashback footage in the first third of the picture was shot with a hand-held camera and the image constantly bobs around, as if all of the action was taking

place on a boat. The recording also has flaws, with some dialogue sounding extremely over-modulated and words having a distinct buzz or vibration. These flaws are annoying and draw attention to themselves and away from the film's narrative.

Despite his top billing, Mario Almada has (as so often occurred in the 90s and beyond) a supporting role. He doesn't appear until the 24-minute mark (the total running

time is 85 minutes), reappearing briefly every so often. The real star is Agustín Bernal, who gets the lion's share of the footage.

Two wealthy businessmen arrange to have ex-policeman Sierra--known as *Rostro de piedra* [Stone Face]--escape from prison. Sierra was framed for murder by corrupt Senator Ochoa, after Sierra and his partner Fernández witnessed the politician extorting money from another



businessman. Fernández was killed, but the criminals didn't get their hands on the videotape containing evidence against Ochoa. Sierra doesn't know where Ochoa's men hid his

partner's corpse (the murderers didn't--for some reason--search the dead man's pockets where the incriminating tape was hidden).

Ochoa sends hired assassin Furlong and corrupt cops Aguilar and Rubio after Sierra. In addition, police commander Castillo and his aide Magaña are also trying to recapture their former colleague. Sierra tracks down David, the adolescent grandson of Fernández, who ran away from reform school and is now dealing drugs. Sierra promises to take David to the USA to live on a ranch, but first they have to locate the body of the boy's grandfather (to retrieve the tape and to give the dead man a decent burial).

Ochoa's men murder the two businessmen who hired Sierra, but Sierra kills Furlong and forces Rubio to tell him where Fernández's body can be found (in an old mine).



Aguilar shoots Rubio as a snitch. In a final showdown at the mine site (where multiple victims of the criminals are hanging inside a cave, a nicely macabre touch), Sierra kills Aguilar.

Castillo and Magaña show up and arrest Ochoa, taking charge of the videotape (Sierra had gotten it from the body of his partner). However, Magaña is apparently on the politician's payroll, since he returns Ochoa's gun and sets him free. As the film concludes, Sierra, his sister, her husband, and David leave Fernández's funeral. They are confronted by Ochoa, who opens fire on Sierra [freeze frame].

The technical flaws aside, *Rostro de piedra* is a fairly decent *videohome* with good performances throughout (well, Hugo del Valle overdoes the "abusive drunk" act a bit). Víctor López Limón is an effective child actor,

performing in a naturalistic manner, and Agustín Bernal has a good time playing a tough cop with a sentimental side he only displays to his married sister and to David. The rest of the cast includes a number of veterans--Almada, Munguía, Quintanilla, Luis Reynoso--who are fine. Ana Karina Guevara (as Sierra's sister) and Chucho Reyes (as Furlong) are less well-known, but are still professional.

The pacing is generally good, and the plot is satisfactory (albeit with some illogical aspects, but most movies have their share of these). Not exceptional, but moderately entertaining.



## Rogelio Guerra Films

### **Pistoleros de la muerte** [Gunmen of Death]

(Películas Latinoamericanas--Víctor Films, 1974) *Prod-Dir:* Juan Manuel Herrera; *Scr:* Sergio Álvarez Acosta, Juan Manuel Herrera; *Photo:* Juan Manuel Herrera; *Music:* Albert Levy; *Assoc Prod:* SUPELSA (Bogotá); *Prod Chief:* Jaffeth Morales; *Asst Dir:* Franco Portilla; *Film Ed:* Jorge Rivera, Pedro Ramírez Calderón, Luis Manuel Bastida; *Decor:* Jorge Mazupier; *Camera Op:* Pedro Ramírez; *Makeup:* Maruja Orozco; *SpFX:* Sergio Jara; *Re-rec/Dialog:* Ramón Baena

**Cast:** Rogelio Guerra (*Alan*), Sasha Montenegro (*Estela*), Franky Linero (*Judás*), Maruja Toro (*mother of Judás*), León Pardo, Iván Soler, Luis Carlos Chiape (?*El Abuelo*)



**Notes:** *Pistoleros de la muerte* is a strange spaghetti-Western offshoot, set in the USA but shot in Colombia with two Mexican performers in the leading roles. Some of the locations are reasonable facsimiles of the landscapes of the American West, while others don't look "Western" at all. The guitar-based music score has a distinct South American flavour (the theme music is reminiscent of "El condor pasa"), which doesn't help the verisimilitude much.

The film is paced very badly, with interminable sequences spun out to 5 or 10 times what would have been a decent length. In the latter sections of the movie, there are long scenes of Judás in his car, Alan on his horse, and Estela following on her horse, which go on forever. But the most excruciating scene occurs when the fleeing outlaws and Estela camp for the night (separately). Wolf



howls can be heard on the soundtrack, and then the audience is treated to endless repeated shots of German shepherds--substituting for "wolves"--coming closer and closer to Estela, sometimes with

lion's roars over-dubbed, at other times barking like the dogs they are. This sequence is pointless at best and maddening at worst.

Rogelio Guerra and Sasha Montenegro (possibly) seem to have done their own dubbing (the Colombian performers probably not, since the dubbing was most likely done in Mexico). There is one glaring blooper: on the morning after the aforementioned camping scene, Judás awakes his two companions by firing his pistol--only there is no sound of a gunshot! This makes Alan's complaint about Judás wasting ammunition incomprehensible, unless you go back and see that Judás wasn't just waving his pistol around, he was supposed to have fired it.

These flaws aside, *Pistoleros de la muerte* does benefit from some production niceties. The posse that chases Judás and the others is quite large, possibly a dozen men on horseback, and when the outlaws dispose of their attackers using dynamite, the explosions, men falling off their horses, and so forth, are effectively depicted. Also, at the film's climax, the yellow jalopy that Judás has been driving goes off a cliff and (as expected) explodes in flames. Hopefully they didn't need to do any retakes of the previous auto scenes, because one can't imagine another auto exactly like this existed anywhere else in the world.

The producer, director, and cinematographer of *Pistoleros de la muerte* was Juan



Manuel Herrera, son of well-known Mexican cinematographer Víctor Herrera (hence the "Víctor Films" company name). Herrera admitted that he started directing his own films--in addition to shooting them--to save the salary of a director. He continued to photograph films for others, also producing movies under the Víctor Films banner. His earliest films were shot in Colombia but

Herrera would later direct features and *videohomes* in Mexico into the 1990s.

Judás, Alan, Dick and Ted plan to recover the proceeds of a bank robbery, hidden by a now-deceased outlaw.

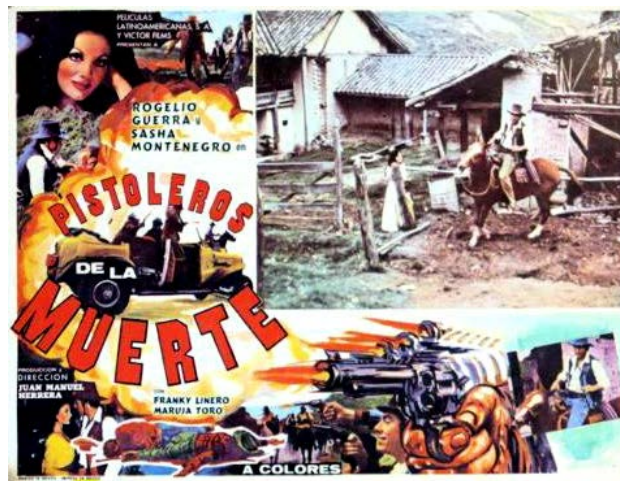
They dig up the man's grave and find a map hidden in his boot: Alan takes half and Judás takes half. Before they set off, Ted and Dick steal innkeeper El Abuelo's savings.



Alan had spent the night with El Abuelo's granddaughter\* Estela, and she thinks he was involved in the burglary. The four outlaws flee town with a posse in pursuit; El Abuelo is killed in an exchange of gunfire, and Estela straps on a pistol and rides after them herself.

\*[as García Riera notes, everyone in town calls him "El Abuelo," but Estela alternates between identifying him as her grandfather and her father. Maybe it's a *Chinatown*-like thing: "He's my grandfather and my father!" More likely, it's a dubbing error.]

The posse catches up with Judás and the others, but is massacred by the dynamite-tossing criminals. Ted, however, is killed. Alan, Judás and Dick press on, with Estela doggedly following. The loot is hidden halfway up a steep cliff; Dick recovers it, then Alan lets him fall to his death. As Judás and Alan depart, Estela rolls a huge boulder down a slope, causing Judás to wreck his car (which, as noted above, explodes for no reason). Judás is badly injured and the money is partially burned. Estela says she'll take Alan back to town to face trial, even though he protests his innocence in her grandfather's death. As they leave, Estela stumbles and mortally wounds Alan. She departs, leaving Judás to die.



Estela's attitude towards Alan is a bit difficult to understand. They had a previous relationship and she's cool at first, but then willingly sleeps with him and elicits an apparently sincere promise that he'll come back to marry her. They're together when news comes of the

robbery, but Estela immediately jumps to the conclusion that Alan was in on the plot, despite his protestations of innocence. He flees town with Judás, Dick and Ted, since the townspeople blame the whole gang. The hostility of the townspeople is understandable, but Estela has unique knowledge that Alan was not one of the actual thieves, and yet she still blames him. She wavers as Alan makes his case, telling her that he won't get a fair trial if she takes him back to town; it seems clear that Estela accidentally shoots Alan, so what her ultimate decision would have been is rendered moot.

Although Guerra and Montenegro are top-billed and perform in a satisfactory manner (Montenegro even does her own riding, and there is a lot of it), the flashiest role goes to Colombian actor Franky Linero. As Judás, he's overly attached to his eccentric mother, boasts about his outlaw status (gesturing at a "wanted" poster offering a \$500 reward for him, Judás says "it should have been triple that"), and is prone gesturing wildly and shouting to "Satanás!" Unfortunately, he's also given an annoying bit of "business," constantly wiping his sweaty face with a handkerchief.

While there's not much of an authentic "Western" vibe in much of the movie, *Pistoleros de la muerte*--the padding aside--is generally an entertaining oddity.



## Rogelio in Space



**Gigantes Planetarios** [Planetary Giants] (Estudios América-Pros. Corsa, 1965) *Prod:* Emilio Gómez Muriel; *Dir:* Alfredo B. Crevenna; *Scr:* Emilio Gómez Muriel, Alfredo Ruanova; *Story:* Alfredo Ruanova; *Photo:* Alfredo Uribe; *Music:* Antonio Díaz Conde; *Prod Mgr:* Daniel

Bautista; *Asst Dir:* Fernando Durán; *Script Clerk:* Javier Durán; *Film Ed:* Raúl J. Casso; *Art Dir:* Arcadi Artis Gener; *Camera Op:* Roberto Jaramillo; *Makeup:* Antonio Ramírez; *Dialog Rec:* Consuelo J. de Rendón; *Music/Re-rec:* Heinrich Henkel; *Recordist:* Víctor Rojo; *Union:* STIC

**Cast:** Guillermo Murray (*Daniel Wolf*), Adriana Roel (*Silvia*), Rogelio Guerra (*Marcos Godoy*), José Ángel Espinosa "Ferrusquilla" (*Taquito Kid*), José Gálvez (*El Protector*), Jacqueline Fellay (*Mara*), Carlos Nieto (*Tásilo*), Daniel Villarán (*Lupecio*), Irma Lozano (*Anis*), Mario Orea (*Professor Walter*), "Frankenstein" [N. León] (*alien spy*), Evita Muñoz "Chachita" (*Frijol*), Ethel Carrillo, Mario Sevilla (*doctor*), Ricardo Adalid (*man in mob*), Jorge Zamora (*African*), "Picoro" [Antonio Padilla] (*ring announcer*), Jorge Mateos (*professor*), Rubén Márquez (*emissary on Earth*)

**Notes:** Shot back-to-back with *El planeta de las mujeres invasoras*, *Gigantes planetarios* features Murray, Roel, Espinosa and Guerra in the same roles, some of the same special effects (alien flying saucers and Wolf's pointy rocket ship), and an almost-identical plot. Instead of women invaders from a "planet of eternal daylight," *Gigantes planetarios* features (mostly) male invaders from a "planet of eternal night" (in fact, that's what its inhabitants call it). After slow, earth-bound beginnings (the protagonists don't leave Earth until the 38-minute mark of the 87-minute *Gigantes planetarios*, and don't arrive on the Planet of Eternal Night until the 50-minute point), both films take place mostly on the other planets, where evil despots (José Gálvez here, Lorena Velázquez in *Planeta*), plot to conquer Earth, but are defeated by the earthlings with the help of the planets' good inhabitants.



Mysterious deaths have been occurring on Earth, with people randomly being vaporized by aliens from flying saucers (the faces of these aliens are never shown, just their hands holding a ray gun, and their feet). Scientist Daniel Wolf enlists the aid of Prof. Walter to figure out what is going on. Walter deduces that the evil "Protector" from the Planet of Eternal Night is paving the way for an invasion of Earth. Walter has constructed a rocketship of his own, but is murdered by the aliens (he's disintegrated by a ray gun--only his eyeglasses and a small pile of ashes

remain). Wolf's assistant Silvia suggests that Wolf pretend to be a spendthrift playboy and thus attract the attention of the alien spies. He does, meeting the beautiful Mara and a bald alien who has been posing as an earth scientist.

Wolf kills the bald alien (who falls into a bathtub of water and is electrocuted because he's wearing a communicator) and makes plans to take Walter's rocket to the Planet of Eternal Night, posing as an earth traitor. Silvia comes along (against his orders--fortunately there's a vacant seat for her), as do boxer Marcos (who urges his manager to bet on his opponent in a championship match, since he intends to throw the bout) and his comic-relief manager Taquito. In a very illogical sequence which is also ludicrously coincidental, Marcos and Taquito knock out two real astronauts, don the men's spacesuits to avoid an angry mob (enraged at Marcos losing the boxing match), and then are mistakenly drugged and taken to the rocket, waking up only when they are in space. Why would two astronauts have to be drugged before lift-off, and why wasn't Wolf also sedated?

The Planet of Eternal Night--in the "Romana" galaxy, which might explain why everyone wears togas (but not their antenna-festooned, football-helmet style headgear)--is ruled by the Protector and his minister of war, Tásilo. The Protector shows Wolf (via a television screen) his agents disintegrating random *campesinos* on Earth, and brags about the super-whistle he carries around his neck (do you think the Protector's whistle = Chekhov's gun?). Lupecio and his daughter Anis secretly oppose the Protector's plans, and plot with the Earth visitors to seize control of the government, but Mara's arrival\* exposes Wolf and his friends as enemies of the Protector. However, the Earthlings eventually gain the upper hand, capturing the Protector and foiling his attempt to conquer Earth.

\*[In a surprising "twist," Mara is identified as the Protector's wife, rather than simply one of his "agents" on Earth.]



*Gigantes planetarios* is not quite as entertaining as *El planeta de las mujeres invasoras*, since the latter film has the novelty of an all-female cast of villains (some might even think this is an "empowering" viewpoint, but it was probably inspired by *Queen of Outer Space*, *Cat Women of the Moon*, and other cheesecake laden Hollywood movies).

José Gálvez, who specialised in villainous roles on screen, has the chance to chew the scenery a bit, but the slipshod plot and pacing limit the entertainment value somewhat. García Riera suggests some of the sets--which resemble ancient Greek or Roman architecture--were left over from *El proceso de Cristo*, filmed earlier at the América studios. The production values aren't bad, with the América studios sets looking a bit less cheap in black-and-white than they would when production switched to colour.

The special effects are surprisingly adequate, and that's saying something, since the Mexican film industry had no technicians with extended experience making science fiction movies. The miniatures of the flying saucers and Wolf's spaceship are fine. Wolf even gets to do a slow and not very exciting, but technically adequate space-walk. The "disintegration" of ray gun victims is less impressive, accomplished with a smoke bomb and a quick cut rather than any sort of optical effect. [At the climax, Marcos utilises a very large, floor-mounted ray gun which would seem to have little practical use, being installed in the Protector's throne room.]

There are a few witty and/or odd bits. Wolf remarks it's odd to see soldiers of a race that possesses such advanced technology (ray guns, flying saucers, etc.) armed only with swords--he is told this is the Protector's way of keeping the population in check, since only he has access to the ray guns!

It makes sense (sort of), but also seems to be a pointed reference to many earlier "space operas" like *Flash Gordon*, where advanced technology



exists in an odd contrast to a feudal political situation and archaic costumes, sets and weaponry in an alien society. One bizarre and unintentionally funny pseudo-science scene: Silvia smashes the television screen by which the Protector communicates with his agents on Earth, and (somehow!) this causes an explosion on Earth which kills the group of agents!

In contrast, the comic byplay between boxer Marcos and Silvia--he tries to sweep her off her feet, she rejects him constantly--and the jealous behaviour of Silvia when (alien spy) Mara makes advances to Daniel (who isn't Silvia's boyfriend, but she wishes he was) is predictable movie banter. Ferrusquilla is the designated comic relief but isn't terribly intrusive. The total screen time given to Taquito's "romance" with alien woman Frijol and the "romance" of Marcos and Anis is about 2 minutes, and neither relationship has a bearing on the plot.

The performances are generally solid throughout, at least given expectations for this sort of film. Murray is the straight man, Roel the ingenue, Guerra is the loose cannon "muscle," Ferrusquilla the twitchy sidekick. José Gálvez

is given a couple of scenes to play the megalomaniacal dictator, and does so effectively, but is in general under-utilised. Jacqueline Fellay (a French singer who appeared in a handful of Mexican films in this era) is attractive and vampish, while Irma Lozano is just attractive. Mario Orea gives José Gálvez competition in the scenery-chewing sweepstakes, at least until his character is vaporised by a ray gun.

Oh, and by the way: the Protector's whistle, despite the build-up, has little or no function in the climax of *Gigantes planetarios*.



## El planeta de las mujeres invasoras [Planet of the Women Invaders] (Estudios América-Prods.



Corsa, 1965)  
Prod: Emilio Gómez Muriel;  
Dir: Alfredo B. Crevenna; Scr: Emilio Gómez Muriel, Alfredo Ruanova; Story: Alfredo Ruanova; Photo: Alfredo Uribe; Music: Antonio Díaz Conde; Prod Mgr: Daniel Bautista; Asst Dir: Fernando Durán; Film Ed: Raúl J. Casso; Art Dir: Arcadi

Artis Gener; Camera Op: Roberto Jaramillo; Makeup: Antonio Ramírez; Dialog Rec: Consuelo J. Rendón; Music/Re-rec: Heinrich Henkel; Recording: Víctor Rojo; Union: STIC

**Cast:** Lorena Velázquez (*Adastrea*; *Albunia*), Elizabeth Campbell (*Martesia*), Maura Monti (*Eritrea*), Guillermo Murray (*Daniel Wolf*), Adriana Roel (*Silvia*), Rogelio Guerra (*Marcos Godoy*), José Angel Espinosa (*"Ferrusquilla"* (*Taquito Kid*\*\*), Raúl Ramírez (*Toño*), Ethel Carrillo (*Fithia*), Graciela Doring (*kidnaped wife, Rosa*), Guillermo Alvarez Bianchi (*kidnaped fat man*), José Chávez Trowe (*Beto*), Enrique Ramírez (*Ramón*), Aaron Hernán (*kidnaped husband*), Mónica Miguel (*Desinea*), Felipe de Flores (*teacher*), "Picoro" [Antonio Padilla] (*ring announcer*), Lucía Guilmáin (*head guard*)

\*\*although García Riera credits him as "Taquito King," it sounds like he's saying "Taquito Kid," which would be a more likely nickname for an ex-boxer; printed sources occasionally list the name as "Taquito Rey" but this definitely isn't what he says.

**Notes:** *El planeta de las mujeres invasoras* is a sequel of sorts to *Gigantes planetarios*, filmed with some of the same cast (in the same roles) immediately before this film. However, *Planeta* really owes more to films such as *Queen of Outer Space*, *Abbott and Costello go to Mars*,

and the Flash Gordon serials--as well as to the television series "The Outer Limits"--since most of its plot elements were borrowed from these sources (although Maura Monti's character name was obviously borrowed from an atlas, since she is named after a region of North Africa). The film also strongly resembles 1966's *Santo el Enmascarado de Plata vs. la invasión de los marcianos*, directed by Crevenna the following year.

*Planeta* is a definite improvement over *Gigantes* in a number of ways. More time is spent on the alien planet; the "women invaders" are attractive and scantily-clad; the design of "Sibila" is more interesting than the "Planet of Eternal Night"--instead of *faux*-Roman architecture, Sibila is assertively futuristic, including abstract designs painted on the walls; the characters have somewhat more depth; the plot includes some mildly gruesome aspects and is thus more "adult" than its predecessor.

A flying saucer (a pretty good model) lands near an amusement park. Two attractive alien women leave the ship and enter a "space ride" which--coincidentally--looks exactly like their saucer. Dispatching the two operators of the ride with their ray guns, they substitute their ship for the fake one. The next night, a number of people board the ship, thinking it is part

of the carnival: included in the passengers are a man (Aaron Hernán, whose character was also kidnaped by aliens the following year in *Santo vs. la invasión de los Marcianos*--this guy



has terrible luck), his wife, and their young son; boxer Marcos and his friend Silvia; a fat man; Toño, a crooked gambler whom Marcos has just double-crossed, and his two henchmen Beto and Ramón. The "ride" begins, but as it turns out, the flying saucer is real! The two women aliens tell their unwilling guests that they are being taken to the planet Sibila.

[This is a neat beginning to the film, and was probably inspired by the "Second Chance" episode of "The Outer Limits," which originally aired 2 March 1964 (in the USA



--I don't know when or if it was shown in Mexico.]

Meanwhile, Marcos' friend Taquito tells scientist Daniel Wolf what happened. Wolf uses a tracking

device to follow the flight of the saucer to Sibila; a rocket is prepared so that they can follow. [This is one of the most ridiculous aspects of *Planeta*: Wolf has a magic television screen which miraculously locates the flying saucer and displays images of it, right down to its landing

on Sibila--a planet Wolf immediately identifies and knows the location of. Later, just before he arrives, he calls it "the planet of women without souls," something he could hardly have known.]

Sibila is a planet of eternal daylight; the visitors must wear special visors (which look like clear welders' masks) or they will go blind within minutes. Ruling Sibila is the beautiful but evil Adastrea (Lorena Velázquez gets the full star treatment, with soft-focus photography in all of her



closeups as Adastrea; as Albunia, she wears an ultra-short dress & high heels); her twin sister, Albunia, is good. When Ramón, one of Toño's men, is killed by the Sibilan guards, his body is used for an experiment. Similarly, when Beto tries to escape, goes blind in the sunlight, and is brought back, his body is used for Adastrea's evil plot: she wants to invade earth, but Sibilans can only breathe Earth's atmosphere for a day, before they eventually collapse and die. Using Ramón and Beto's lungs, the women scientists create temporary adaptors.

[The script is rather clever here, although the idea of using tissue extracted from humans to make mechanical breathing adaptors is dicey: they don't actually transplant human lungs into Sibilans. The Earth people cannot easily exist on Sibila, and the Sibilans cannot easily exist on Earth. On Sibila, the visitors wear visors to protect their eyesight, but the Sibilans have concocted a grisly means of living on Earth, one that requires actual lungs extracted from people! This isn't very logical but it reinforces the ruthless nature of evil Adastrea. The sequence in which Beto flees onto the surface of Sibila, goes blind, and wanders around in agony until he's eventually recaptured is rather shocking and well-done, helped in no small part by José Chávez Trowe's performance. However, this duality also raises a logical question: if Sibilans can't live on Earth for more than one day due to its atmosphere, then why can Earthlings breathe



the Sibilan atmosphere with no ill effects? The blindness thing is due to the rays of Sibila's sun which affect all.]

Albunia sends Fithia, one of her trusted aides, to Earth with a message for Wolf. Eritrea and Martesia follow in another saucer. Fithia can't locate Wolf, and eventually dies as a result of breathing the earth's atmosphere for too long.\* She can't deliver her message to Wolf, but Wolf and Taquito blast off for Sibila anyway [footage reused from *Gigantes planetarios*].

\*[Fithia's costume is too small for her: Elizabeth Campbell, Maura Monti and the other Sibilan warriors

wear similar mini-dress uniforms but most of these extend below their hips, whereas Fithia's space-panties are visible in her scenes. Fithia hides in the trunk of Murray's car and is discovered by Taquito, but dies before she can tell him anything significant. Taquito hails a cab, leaving the trunk wide open with her corpse inside, in plain sight.]

Eritrea and Martesia stay on earth; they report to Adastrea that their adaptors worked only for a few days. The evil queen has the little boy examined in her lab--



apparently, childrens' lungs are better suited for adaptors (the boy is spared, since Adastrea says, "why sacrifice just one when we need so many?"). She has a ray cannon that sends a beam to

earth (bouncing it off a satellite--impersonated by a gyroscope) which kills only adults; they use it on teachers at a school, and Martesia and Eritrea kidnap a bunch of children and take them to their saucer.

Wolf and Taquito arrive on Sibila and pretend to be escaped criminals who want to work with Adastrea. Toño, meanwhile, has really gone over to her side. The good Earthlings help Albunia switch places with Adastrea, thus gaining control of the ray cannon. Wolf uses it to blast Eritrea and Martesia on earth, freeing the children, then wipes out all of Adastrea's women soldiers (all ten or so, which apparently represents the entire population of Sibila --no mention is made of any male inhabitants, or the means by which the women reproduce). On their way to Wolf's spaceship to return to earth, Adastrea tries to regain the upper hand. Toño shoots Albunia, but when she dies, her evil twin also perishes. Wolf and his friends blast off for home.

The model spaceships (both the saucer and Wolf's pointy rocket) and miniature landscapes are fairly well done; a couple of shots of the saucer waiting in a "forest"

on earth look like they were done in someone's flower bed, but the Sibila landscapes are OK and match the actual rocky exteriors. In fact, these are probably the best such effects in Mexican cinema at least until the 2000s, when CGI came into usage. Most other Mexican science fiction movies (that is, the few that existed) in the 1950s-60s used



stock footage or simplistic opticals rather than miniature models. A full-size mockup of the ship was also built, as can be seen in a few exterior shots. The two characters

played by Lorena Velázquez share a fair number of scenes together, mostly via alternating shots and the use of a double (shown from behind), but there are several adequate split-screen shots (almost as if the Mexican filmmakers wanted to prove they could do it well).



There's even a little bit of animation for the Sibilan death ray.

The plot, as noted above, is a shameless compendium of elements swiped from

Hollywood B-films and serials (how much more entertaining it would have been if this film had been combined with *Santo y la invasión de los marcianos*, since each picture has complementary faults and strengths). Elizabeth Campbell and Maura Monti are basically wasted (they're on screen a fair amount and look great, but have no real personalities), with most of the footage going to Velázquez, Guerra, Ramírez and "Ferrusquilla" (who for some reason reminds me of Pee-wee Herman here).

Guerra's character Marcos gets more footage than he did in *Gigantes planetarios*: at the film's opening, he's urged by Wolf and Silvia to give up his cheating ways and vows to go straight, then immediately double-crosses some gangsters who paid him to throw a fight! Marcos tries to romance Silvia but she good-naturedly deflects his advances (and this after Marcos apparently "fell in love" with Anis in *Gigantes*, but I guess long-distance relationships are doomed to fail). Since Wolf is left behind on Earth for the first portion of the film, Marcos becomes the de facto hero of this section. Once Wolf arrives on Sibila, he becomes the center of attention with his feigned tough-guy persona.

Lorena Velázquez handles her dual role--evil Adastrea and good Albunia--effectively. Raúl Ramírez (shorn of his usual moustache) plays gangster Toño at first as a vain,

petulant, demanding and clumsy buffoon; later, he becomes more of an actual menace, betraying his fellow Earthlings without a qualm. The other performers are professional but don't have a lot of depth.

Trivia note: Antonio Díaz Conde recycled his musical themes in various films. The scene in which Beto goes blind is scored to music familiar to many from *Night of the Bloody Apes* [*El horripilante bestia humana*], among other pictures.

*El planeta de las mujeres invasoras* and *Gigantes Planetarios* are practically unique examples of the "space opera" in Mexican cinema, and as such should be given some credit for making the effort. They're not great, but *Planeta* especially is consistently fun and entertaining.



### Traigo la sangre caliente [I Have Hot Blood]

(Gazcón Films, 1975) *Prod*: Edgardo Gazcón; *Dir*: Gilberto Gazcón; *Scr*: Edgardo Gazcón, Ramón Obón [Jr.]; *Story*: Edgardo Gazcón; *Photo*: Fernando Colín; *Music*: Ernesto Cortázar Jr.; *Prod Mgr*: Antonio Merino, Carlos J. Pérez; *Sub-Dir*: Ángel Rodríguez; *Film Ed*: Francisco Chiu; *Art Dir*: Raúl Cárdenas; *Camera Op*: Agustín Lara; *Makeup*: Antonio Ramírez; *Dialog Rec*: Francisco Guerrero; *Re-rec*: Ricardo Zaldívar; *Union*: STIC

**Cast**: Valentín Trujillo (*Pablo Ballesteros*), Patricia María (*Susana Obregón*), Rogelio Guerra (*Emilio Obregón*), Sergio Barrios (*Reynaldo*), Alicia Juárez (*singer*), Dacia González (*Hortencia*), Fabián (*card player*), Bruno Rey (*doctor*), Arturo Martínez (*Robles*), Víctor Manuel Mendoza (*don Juan Altimirano*), Miguel Suárez (*Artemio*), Mario Cid (*Juan Domínguez*), Sara Montes (*Sra. Altimirano*), Ernesto Burgueño, Regino Herrera (*curandero*), Lily Landúa, Rodolfo Zaldívar (*Pablo hijo*), Luis Guevara (*man at race*)

**Notes**: Valentín Trujillo's acting career went through various phases. He appeared as a child actor in some films (mostly produced by the Gazcón family, of which he was a member--his full name was Valentín Trujillo Gazcón), and gradually grew into teen and young adult roles in both contemporary, urban pictures and rural-themed films. In the mid-1980s he switched to mostly contemporary action

pictures, with a few rural *videohomes* sprinkled in during the years before his death in 2006.

*Traigo la sangre caliente* is one of the *ranchera*-rural dramas Trujillo made in the '70s and early '80s--others included *El Diablo en persona*, *Mexicano hasta las cachas*, etc.--although it is set in the 1920s or 1930s, so it is also something of a hybrid (like *El hombre sin miedo*, which was directed by Edgardo Gazcón, who produced and co-wrote this one).

Professional gambler Pablo is accused of cheating by Reynaldo, but the argument is defused by Emilio, Pablo's friend. Emilio asks Pablo to stop courting his sister Susana, arguing that a gambler cannot be a good family man. Pablo agrees, but as he's leaving town Susana joins him. They're married and go on the gambling circuit. Emilio thinks Pablo is to blame, and starts hunting them.

Susana eventually grows tired of the gambling life and Pablo's dedication to it, which leaves her in second place in his affections. As she's leaving, Pablo vows to quit gambling if she'll stay; she agrees. Pablo starts working as a blacksmith. Even when he's publicly humiliated by Reynaldo, Pablo refuses to fight back. Susana becomes pregnant, and Pablo agrees to work for don Juan as an *amarrador* (the man who manages fighting cocks) to make extra money. Emilio spots Pablo at a cockfight and beats him mercilessly--since Pablo refuses to defend himself--and is only prevented from killing him by the arrival of don Juan. Emilio learns Pablo has changed his life, married Susana, and they will soon be parents. Emilio apologises and becomes friends with the couple again.

However, Susana dies giving birth to their son. Pablo finds himself unable to cope with caring for the infant, and gives the baby to the childless Emilio and his wife Hortencia to raise. Pablo returns to the life of a gambler. Two years go by. Gambler Robles cheats don Juan out of his money and *hacienda*; Pablo exposes the trick and recovers don Juan's losses, but the older man has already committed suicide. Pablo also avenges himself on Reynaldo, forcing the man to lap up liquor from the floor at gunpoint. A chance encounter with a singer--who says she works in *cantinas* and *palenques* [cockfight arenas] to support her young son--inspires Pablo to ask Emilio to return his son. The heartbroken Emilio and Hortencia agree, but Pablo changes his mind when the boy doesn't recognise him and clearly loves his adoptive parents. As Pablo rides away, he is ambushed and shot to death by Robles, Reynaldo, and another man. As the film concludes, a white-clad Pablo and Susana stroll off into the sunset...

*Traigo la sangre caliente* has a number of things to recommend it, including strong performances and a solid script that avoids a number of clichés. On the other hand, Gilberto Gazcón's excessively mannered direction intrudes on the drama, and not in a good way. The most noticeable aspect is Gazcón's frenetic editing, cutting rapidly back and forth for emphasis. He also occasionally cuts for contrast, sometimes in a puzzling manner. For example, he intercuts scenes of Pablo working at a cockfight and Susana giving birth, concluding with shots of Pablo

holding up a dead rooster and the doctor holding up Susana's (live) newborn son. Where's the parallelism there? Is Gazcón contrasting the blood sport of cockfighting--which results in death--with the birth of a baby? [As a side note, there are a number of fairly brief cockfight scenes, as well as one lengthy dogfighting sequence set in the USA. Other Mexican films contain longer and gorier footage of such events--there are numerous films that focus on cockfighting, and even a couple dealing with dogfighting--but in *Traigo la sangre caliente* these are simply opportunities for gambling, like horse racing, cards, roulette, etc.]

Oddly enough, Gazcón does sometimes go for long stretches without indulging in these filmic pyrotechnics (which also include "shock zooms" from time to time), but comes back to his hyperkinetic style at moments of high drama.

Also mildly annoying is the music score by Ernesto Cortázar Jr., which recycles canned themes he used countless times in the 1970s and 1980s. The music is not that bad, in and of itself, but if you see enough Mexican movies of this era, the cues are overly familiar. There are also 3 songs in the picture, two by Alicia Juárez and one by Valentín Trujillo (it's unclear if he was dubbed or not).

The acting is good throughout, never quite going over the line into full melodrama. While Sergio Barrios and Arturo Martínez are basically cardboard villains, the protagonists and main supporting players are given a fair amount of character development.

Production values are adequate, although there are some blatantly obvious stock shots of a *feria*, used several times to add "scope" to the picture. Most of *Traigo la sangre caliente* was shot on location in the state of Guanajuato. The vintage automobiles and costumes are satisfactory.

One interesting bit--but ultimately not very important to the plot as a whole--has Pablo and Susana joining an itinerant group of gamblers (and their wives and children) who travel around the country together. At one point they arrive at the U.S. border, and the men swim across the river to gamble on dogfights, carefully avoiding the "rangers" who are patrolling the other shore. The women remain with their automobiles on the Mexican side.

Trivia notes: An STIC production, *Traigo la sangre caliente* is probably one of the later films to carry "chapter" titles--a practice originally started to reinforce the fiction that the STIC films were "compilations" of shorts rather than purpose-built feature films--"Segundo tiempo" appears about one-third through the movie. Also, Valentín Trujillo married his co-star Patricia María in the fall of 1975, so it's possible they met while making this film (which was shot in March 1975).



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