

# THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN

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## Halloween Reviews



## Death Takes a Holiday



### **La Muerte enamorada** [Death in Love]

(Prods. Yazbek, 1950) *Exec Prod:* Alberto Zacarías & José Yazbek; *Dir:* Ernesto Cortázar; *Adapt:* Ernesto Cortázar, Jaime Contreras; *Story:* Ernesto Cortázar, Fernando Galeana [sic]; *Photo:* Jack Draper; *Music:* Manuel Esperón; *Prod Chief:* A. Guerrero Tello; *Asst Dir:* Jaime Contreras; *Film Ed:* Gloria Schoemann; *Art Dir:* Ramón Rodríguez G.; *Asst Photo:* Urbano Vázquez, Leobardo Sánchez, Miguel Arana; *Sound Engin:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Rodolfo Solís; *Music Rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Miroslava's Costume Des:* Armando Valdez Peza; *Studio:* Churubusco

**Cast:** Miroslava (*Tasia, la Muerte*), Fernando Fernández (*Fernando Rivas*), Jorge Reyes (*Jorge*), Esperanza Issa (*Minerva*), Eufrosina García "*La Flaca*" (*María*), Marcela Quevedo (*Lulú*), Salvador Quiroz (*Robles*), Manuel Sánchez Navarro (*Raúl Godínez*), Mauricio Morel [aka Mauricio Garcés] (*doctor on street*), Jorge Treviño (*Sr. Ramírez*), Pepe Nava (*man who falls from 5<sup>th</sup> floor*), Cuarteto América, Trío Los Cuervos, Eulalio González "*Piporro*" (*doctor for Godínez*), Héctor Mateos (*doctor for Lulú*), Emilio Garibay (*man in cantina*), Ballet Imperial de Óscar Norton

**Notes:** *La Muerte enamorada* is a highly entertaining film with some clever dialogue and situations. Perhaps the only major drawback is the

frenetic performance by Fernando Fernández, but some may actually find his over-acting entertaining rather than off-putting.

Fernando is a life insurance salesman whose clients always fall ill (and die?) after he sells them a policy; this does not endear him to his boss. But Fernando has bigger problems: he's visited by La Muerte, in the person of a beautiful woman. She says his habit of repeatedly saying things like "I'd give 5 years of my life for a new bicycle" has reduced his assigned life-span. He pleads for a postponement, and La Muerte gives him 15 days, saying she needs a holiday anyway, and wants to understand why humans cling to life and fear death. After all, they invent weapons of mass destruction such as the atomic and hydrogen bombs that threaten their lives, and life after death is peaceful and pleasant.

La Muerte insists she must live with Fernando for the 15 days, and he's forced to introduce her to his family--his suspicious wife Minerva, lazy brother-in-law Jorge, cynical maid María, and young daughter Lulú--as Tasia, his Greek cousin. Minerva wonders how Fernando can have a cousin from Greece "with that *Indio*...Fernández face" [an in-joke, referring to Emilio "Indio" Fernández, Fernando's real-life half-brother]. Fernando retorts that he never asked why her brother Jorge has an Argentine accent [actor Jorge "Che" Reyes was from Argentina].

Jorge flirts with Tasia and invites her for a tour of Mexico City.

He says he'd like to take her to lunch but doesn't have any money.

Tasia freezes time and "withdraws" a large quantity of cash from a



bank across the street. The next day, Jorge reads about a mysterious robbery of that very bank: the manager suffered a heart attack and the head cashier has been arrested.

Meanwhile, Tasia takes steps to fulfill Minerva's wish--"I'd give 20 years of my life to get out of this poverty"--by arranging to have Fernando sell many new policies and earn a promotion to sales manager. [How this would provide for his family since he's

supposed to die in 15 days isn't clear.] Fernando becomes frustrated and tries to commit suicide--taking poison, then trying to shoot himself--but Tasia informs him that he can't die until she permits it. Tasia and



Minerva become friends because Tasia is very fond of Lulú.

[At one point Tasia has a "dream" in which she returns to the netherworld. A death "ballet" turns into a death *mambo*, with numerous skeletal dancers and musicians (all wear leotards with skeletons painted on them, but the male dancers have skull-head masks and the female dancers still have their regular heads). This is a highly entertaining sequence with imaginative design, photography, and editing. Tasia is flanked by devils (on her right) and angels (on her left), which sort of equates Death with God (who isn't even referred to).]



Tasia "visits" the bank manager (only he can hear her, and she's invisible, represented by the flashing of a bedside lamp). If the manager replaces the missing 100,000 pesos with his own money and clears the cashier of suspicion, he'll get a "pardon" (later, we learn he's been given 10 additional years of life). He agrees, of course, and immediately leaps up from his "deathbed."

Tasia and Jorge go out on the town that night. Fernando, jealous, heads for a *cantina* himself. Tasia dances wildly [reminding one a bit of Greta Garbo in *Ninotchka* and *Two-Faced Woman*] and when she and Jorge wind up in the *cantina* "El Paraíso" (Heaven), they both get drunk. Afterwards, a trio of robbers attempt to relieve Jorge of his cash, but Tasia causes one man's gun barrel to curve so that he shoots his own accomplice! Meanwhile, Fernando (in a different *cantina*, this one called "El Infierno" or Hell) sings a great song but a brawl breaks out when he refuses to do another.

Back home, Fernando learns Lulú is gravely ill and there's "no hope." Tasia insists the child won't die but is told "science can't make a mistake." Nonetheless, Tasia heals the girl and the doctors leave in a huff. Fernando thanks Tasia and says he's ready to go, but she says "Death also has a heart." She's learned about having a home, life, and love. "We'll see each other later. That's the destiny of all mortals." As she departs the next day, Jorge petulantly insists he's coming along: Tasia kisses him and he drops dead! As the film concludes, Tasia escorts the angelic Jorge into the Great Beyond.



*La Muerte enamorada* is cleverly written, with the words "life" and "death" showing up in a lot of dialogue, illustrating how often people use these terms without even thinking. There are a number of contemporary references, including the aforementioned "atomic" and "hydrogen" bombs, as well as "*guerra de nervios*" (i.e., the Cold War?). The phrase "*increíble pero cierto*" (incredible but true, the Spanish version of Ripley's Believe It or Not) is repeated a number of times. There are also the in-jokes about "Indio" Fernández and Jorge "Che" Reyes, as well as Tasia's mention of "taking a holiday" (i.e., *Death Takes a Holiday*, a 1934 Hollywood film based on a 1924 Italian play).

The performances in *La Muerte enamorada* are variable. Some are more or less naturalistic--Esperanza Issa, Jorge Reyes, Miroslava--while others like Fernando Fernández and Eufrosina García are more mannered. García aka "La Flaca" was typecast as a smart-aleck, cynical servant and does her usual *shtick*, but Fernández's performance is bizarre to say the least. He was a competent dramatic and comic actor, but in this picture Fernández acts as if he has just imbibed a coffee/cocaine/speed cocktail, wildly gesturing, bugging out his eyes, stumbling around violently, shouting, crying, and otherwise chewing the scenery. This is fascinating to watch and mostly amusing, but he almost never slows down. Only at the very end, when he thanks Tasia for saving his child's life, does Fernández put on the brakes even slightly. The rest of the time Fernández makes Jim Carrey seem laid-back.



Miroslava looks great and does an excellent job as Tasia, combining *naïveté* with a sort of cosmic wisdom, although it's unclear why she's not familiar with everyday life on Earth, especially if she personally has to visit every person who dies and escort them back to the netherworld. Still, the scenes



in which she experiences "Earth life"--playing with Lulú, dancing with Jorge, getting drunk, chatting with Minerva--are charming and believable. The script does throw in a couple of odd and incongruous moments: for example, after she meets Jorge and he says "I'd give 15 years of my life to go on a long journey" and Minerva promises "20 years" to get out of poverty, Tasia seems almost sinister when she determines to fulfill their requests. Also, Jorge's death is mildly cruel: he longs for "peace, tranquility," but she kills him basically because his presence in Fernando's house contributes to the stress between Fernando and Minerva and Tasia wants them to be happy! [Speaking of incongruity, Minerva and María talk about having to pinch pennies, but Fernando's house is a huge mansion in a fine state of repair, so it's not exactly clear what "poverty" his wife and servant are complaining about.]



The production values of *La Muerte enamorada* are fine. There are a variety of sets, a few exteriors, and sufficient extras in a handful of scenes where required. There are only a couple of slow spots--the opening sequence as Fernando sells an insurance policy to a fitness fanatic, a sappy (but brief) song Fernando sings to Lulú, and the overlong scene in the

*cantina* with Tasia, Jorge, and a trio of *mariachis*. Otherwise, this is an amusing fantasy comedy and well worth watching.

One trivia note: the film marks the screen debuts of two future stars, Mauricio Garcés (aka Mauricio Férrez Yazbek, nephew of the movie's co-producer) and Eulalio González "Piporro." Coincidentally, both men play doctors.



### Cándido de día...Pérez de noche [Cándido by Day...Pérez by Night]

(Televisine-Prods. Carlos Amador, 1990, ©1991) *Prod:* Carlos Amador, Fernando de Fuentes [Jr.]; *Dir:* Jorge Ortiz de Pinedo; *Scr:* Fernando Galiana, Jorge Ortiz de Pinedo; *Story:* Fernando Galiana; *Photo:* Henner Hoffman [sic]; *Music:* Armando Manzanero; *Prod Dir:* Luis García de León; *Prod Mgr:* Antonio H. Rodríguez; *Asst Dir:* Mario Cisneros; *Film Ed:* Jesús Paredes; *Sound Ed:* Alejandro Liho; *Re-rec:* René Ruiz Cerón; *Union:* STPC



**Cast:** Jorge Ortiz de Pinedo (*Dr. Cándido Pérez*), Nuria Bages (*Silvina Pérez*), Alejandra Meyer (*doña Catalina*), María Luisa Alcalá (*Claudia*), Juan Verduzco (*Padre Camilo Pérez*), Lupe Vázquez (*Paula Cecilia*), Armando Manzanero (*Armando Mérida*), Diana Golden (*Siempre viva, La Muerte*), Jorge Arvizu (*Chanoy*), Mónica Prado (*Sra. Beteta*), Fernando Arau (*would-be suicide*), Gloria Alicia Inclán, Humberto Dupeyrón (? *cross-dressing patient*), Félix Córdova, Sebastián Hofmann (*mojado #1*), Yula Pozo, Elena Silva, América Gabriel, Rocío Prado, Leonardo Daniel, Karem Lara, Priscila Ortiz de Pinedo

**Notes:** Jorge Ortiz de Pinedo is the son of comic actor Óscar Ortiz de Pinedo and made his acting debut in the 1960s. In the 1980s he began getting more substantial roles and hit it big in 1987 with the television situation comedy "Dr. Cándido Pérez," based on the 1962 Argentine film *Dr. Cándido Pérez...señoras*. This show ran until 1993 and spawned two spin-off feature films, shot back-to-back in February-March 1990: *Cándido Pérez, especialista en señoras* and *Cándido de día...Pérez de noche*.

The films retain the the main cast and basic premise of the series: Cándido is a gynecologist who has an eye for the ladies but is ultimately faithful to his wife Silvina. He lives in an all-female household, which causes comic clashes. In addition to Silvina, he has an infant daughter, a stereotypical horrid



mother-in-law (doña Catalina) and a whiny servant (Claudia). Both movies also retain Cándido's brother (a priest), and his receptionist Paula Cecilia, adding

Armando Manzanero as a pediatrician and Cándido's best friend (although in the first film he attempts to break up Cándido's marriage because he loves Silvina himself; his role is minimised in the sequel). While the TV series was very stagey--shot before a live audience on limited interior sets--the films are fairly well-produced, with considerable location shooting and a much higher production gloss, even though they are still basically situation comedies relying on verbal and character humour with an occasional bit of slapstick.

*Cándido de día... Pérez de noche* is a remake of *La muerte enamorada* (1950), although it doesn't get around to the "main" plot until the film is halfway over. Prior to this, it's simply standard sitcom stuff, with several rather odd and out-of-place sequences. For example, there is a long scene featuring nuns playing *fútbol*. It's not really funny, unless you find the simple image of nuns in long habits kicking a ball around amusing. The sequence ends with a nun-goalie stopping a kick and being propelled backwards along the ground by the ball's power. This--much later--leads to a (pointless) scene in which the nun visits Cándido's office for treatment, and he mistakenly thinks she's pregnant. This is so out of place that one imagines it was intended to appear earlier in the film.

There's also a long and moderately offensive sequence in which a cross-dressing man visits Cándido's office, does a strip-tease, and eventually pleads for a sex-change operation. Again, this is only funny if you find the mere premise laughable, because there's nothing that occurs on-screen which is humorous. Slightly more in character is a scene where Cándido diagnoses a busty woman patient with "*pechuga oprimida*" and advises her to wear a larger bra size. This allows Cándido to make various not very professional comments, stare at her chest from close range, and so forth, which was essentially the

main *raison d'être* for half of the television show (the other half was his exasperating home life in a household full of women).

Halfway through the film (which has had no particular "plot" up to that point), Cándido wins the lottery and goes on a spending spree. He buys a fur coat for Silvina, finances a European vacation for doña Cata, gives Claudia a colour television for the kitchen, donates a large sum to his brother's orphanage fund, and showers his infant daughter with gifts. However, that night he's visited by La Muerte. According to the celestial "computer," he's been making "bargains" his entire life: "I'd give 5 years of my life to kiss that girl," and so on. His final comment--"I'd give 20 years of my life to win the lottery"--has reduced his allotted lifespan to ... now. Cándido convinces La Muerte to give him two days to wrap up his affairs; she agrees, but says she must be with him at all times (which she doesn't do--she moves into his apartment, but doesn't go with him when he leaves for work). He also cannot inform anyone of his impending death.



For unexplained reasons, while La Muerte (who introduces herself to Cándido's family as "Siempreviva") is waiting out Cándido's 2-day respite, no one on Earth can die (as in *Death Takes a Holiday*). Nothing is really made of this, except a running gag in which a man repeatedly attempts to commit suicide--leaping off a building (compared to *La Muerte enamorada*, in which a man accidentally falls off a building), hanging himself, stabbing himself, getting hit by a truck and a bus. Naturally, at the film's conclusion he really does die (slipping on a banana peel) and walks off to eternity with La Muerte.

Cándido's wife and mother-in-law are not pleased by the arrival of Siempreviva, who takes a liking to Cándido's little daughter. In a rather glum series of scenes, Cándido makes arrangements for his death: he gives his *compadre* Armando various legal documents, assigns his patients to other doctors, and so on. Finally, the moment of truth arrives, but Siempreviva changes her mind, having developed an affection for Cándido and his family. She arranges to have the winning lottery numbers changed so he loses his fortune but regains 20 years of life. She says she'll see him then, and he replies that he won't be afraid to go at that time. Cándido's family all claim they didn't want to live a life of luxury anyway, and they have a group hug at the conclusion.

*Cándido de día... Pérez de noche*'s second half includes a fair number of elements from *La Muerte enamorada*, placing them in the context of Cándido's family and professional life. For example, there is a brief speech by Claudia informing her employers of the "indemnity" they'll have to pay if they fire her (which is a shorter version of one from the original film), a dinner featuring inedible, over-cooked meat (in the original the meat is "off," although the family



cat and maid both eat it), and La Muerte's discussion of humans' irrational fear of death, which she sees as a passage to a better place

(again, there's much more detail and depth about this in *La Muerte enamorada*).

La Muerte, personified by the beautiful Diana Golden, has much less to do than Miroslava's Tasia in *La Muerte enamorada*--Siempreviva only ventures out of Cándido's apartment once, spending most of her time playing with the toddler and sunning herself on the balcony. The absence of the character played by Jorge "Che" Reyes in the original film removes La Muerte's escort (and thus her excursions to nightclubs, *cantinas*, etc.) from the plot, and changing the protagonist's grace period from 15 days to 2 days reduces the amount of time La Muerte has to interact with anyone.

The performances in *Cándido de día... Pérez de noche* are all fine. As noted, most of the cast repeats their television roles and know exactly what they're doing. The "new" actors, including Diana Golden and Armando Manzanero, are professional and their performances are solid. There are two brief musical interludes which are overly sentimental and boring but relatively brief.

The level of humour in the film is variable. Some of wordplay is mildly amusing, but as noted above, several of the sequences aren't funny at all, even objectively, and *Cándido de día... Pérez de noche* is basically two films in one: a fairly pointless and episodic situation comedy in the first half, and a fantasy plot (which isn't that funny--Cándido's reaction at the news he's going to die is realistically sad) in the second half.



## Heaven and Hell

**Un día con el Diablo** [One Day with the Devil] (Posa Films, 1945) *Dir-Scr*: Miguel M. Delgado; *Story*: Jaime Salvador; *Photo*: Gabriel

Figueroa; *Music*: Rosalío Ramírez; *Prod Chief*: Luis Busto; *Asst Dir*: Winfield Sánchez; *Film Ed*: Gloria Schoemann; *Art Dir*: Eduardo Fitzgerald; *Camera Op*: Ignacio Romero; *Makeup*: Ana Guerrero; *Sound Dir*: Howard E. Randall; *Dialog Rec*: Rafael R[uiz] Esparza; *Music Rec*: Manuel Esperón; *Studio*: CLASA

**Cast**: Mario Moreno "Cantinflas" (false "Juan Pérez"), Miguel Arenas (Colonel), Susana Cora (Colonel's daughter), Andrés Soler (Satanás; policeman), E. Schellinsky [sic] (Sgt.), Rafael Icardo (don Pedro [St. Peter]), Ángel T. Sala (real Juan Pérez), Roberto Corell (demon), Óscar Pulido (newspaper vendor); **soldiers**: Pedro Elviro "Pitouto," Juan García, Chel López; Salvador Quiroz (defense attorney at court martial), Manuel Noriega (man with cold), Humberto Rodríguez (radio producer), Manuel Dondé (Captain), Hernán Vera (Nero), Pepe Nava (partner of Juan Pérez), Roberto Cañedo (court martial board member), ?Mario Sevilla (officer), María Cecilia Leger (wedding guest)

**Notes**: despite its title and advertising, *Un día con el Diablo* is much more an "army comedy" a la *Buck Privates* than it is a fantasy comedy. The protagonist dies at the 63-minute mark of a 92-minute film, arrives in Heaven and spends a fair amount of time there, and only lands in Hell later for a relatively brief visit.



Films about the afterlife--Heaven or Hell--usually don't spend the majority of their running time in either place: often the protagonist dies and is then sent back to Earth to make amends, help someone, etc., since there's not much chance for drama or comedy in Heaven, and Hell is either played for laughs or (as in *Jigoku*, 1960, for instance) seems pretty grim. *Un día con el Diablo* slightly inverts the usual formula, spending most of its time on Earth until the protagonist dies, then having him spend time in Heaven and Hell but not getting a second chance at life (if you discard the "it's all a dream" ending, the film essentially ends with Cantinflas going to Heaven to spend eternity there).

Gangster Juan Pérez shoots a man and his accomplice advises him to join the army to hide out. However, when war is declared, Pérez decides to



desert. He knocks out a drunken newspaper vendor and dresses him in his army uniform. The vendor is assumed to be Pérez and arrested as a deserter. However, he successfully argues in a court martial that he's not Pérez and avoids being shot; he is, however, compelled to remain in the army until his identity is proven.

[As in most of his films until the 1960s, Cantinflas is not given a specific character name. It's assumed to be "Cantinflas," but no one uses that name in the film (in *Si yo fuera diputado*, this name appears on a campaign poster but isn't spoken aloud).



Similarly, in *Un día con el Diablo*, he only whispers his real name to the demon who

greeted him in Hell, but is referred to as "Juan Pérez" during his army activities. For the purposes of this review, we'll refer to his character as Cantinflas. As an aside, almost no one else in the film has a personal name, either.]

Cantinflas proves to be an incompetent soldier, ramming a tank through a house serving as an observation post and nearly killing a group of officers, and later firing an artillery piece and hitting the Colonel's house, to the exasperation of his Sergeant and the Colonel. The Colonel, to keep him out of mischief, makes Cantinflas his personal assistant in his house, where the rookie soldier develops an affection for the Colonel's daughter. A mixup results in a recorded "patriotic" speech by Cantinflas--instead of the Colonel's more conventional talk--being broadcast on the radio, but this impresses the high command and both Cantinflas and the Colonel are promoted. However, the Colonel is subsequently assigned to a different post and Cantinflas is given the "honour" of being sent to the front.



[*Un día con el Diablo* begins with a printed disclaimer that "the festive spirit of this work" depicts imaginary events and the army "not only of our country, but any other" doesn't appear.

Nonetheless, while Mexico isn't mentioned--although Cantinflas does identify himself as Mexican to St. Peter--there's no attempt to set the film in a fictitious country. The newspaper headline announcing "Our Nation Declares War" is from "Últimas Noticias" (the newspaper "Excelsior"), for instance.]

[Although Mexico joined the Allies in 1942, Mexican army troops were not sent overseas. Escuadrón 201, an air force unit, did serve in the Pacific theatre of war. *Un día con el Diablo* depicts Mexican ground forces fighting Japanese troops (albeit not in tropical settings), which was not historically accurate.]

Sgt. Cantinflas is not exactly an exemplary leader: he plays cards with his squad (and cheats), and reports to the Captain: "In the last battle, no one was wounded." Captain: "I congratulate you." Cantinflas: "All were killed." Nevertheless, Cantinflas and his men are sent on a dangerous mission: to destroy enemy installations, recover secret papers, and come back with 30 prisoners. "You'll have seven minutes." A not very enthusiastic Cantinflas leaves his squad behind and enters enemy lines. He tosses a grenade which fails to detonate but knocks a Japanese soldier unconscious! When the grenade does explode, it shreds Cantinflas' uniform so he has to don the enemy's outfit. Mistaken for a Japanese soldier, he infiltrates an enemy squad but gives himself away at mealtime, asking (in Spanish) "Please pass the chili sauce." [This joke is repeated almost exactly in 1978's *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes*!]

Cantinflas blows up several buildings and steals a truck, driving back to meet his unit. They discover numerous enemy soldiers in the rear of the vehicle and take them prisoner. As more Japanese troops approach, Cantinflas sends his men away and acts as rear-guard, but is shot and fatally wounded...awaking in Heaven. He's admitted on a probationary basis, but is subsequently ejected for entering the chamber of the "11,000 virgins." [Presumably a reference to the legend of St. Ursula and her 11,000 virgin followers, massacred by the Huns in the Middle Ages.]



He's tricked into visiting Hell after viewing (through a telescope) some scantily-clad dancing girls, but is disappointed to learn this was just "propaganda to attract tourists." The Devil is pleased to meet Cantinflas, and complains things aren't going

so well: not even children are frightened of Satan any more. Cantinflas advises him to close Hell and go into a different line of work, but the Devil says they're waiting for one final guest: Hitler. [His name isn't spoken aloud, but Cantinflas gives the "Heil" salute and makes a moustache gesture. "Hitler in Hell" was common motif in World War II popular culture.] An angel arrives, bringing a pair of wings for Cantinflas. They depart for Heaven, but...

Cantinflas awakes in a jail cell. A policeman--who looks just like the Devil--says the real Juan Pérez has been arrested, so Cantinflas is free. Also, the war is over. As the film concludes, Cantinflas is back on the street, selling newspapers.

The Heaven and Hell sequences are amusing, and Hell is particularly well designed, although very little



of it is shown. As with many (most?) films about the afterlife, the religious aspects of the premise are significantly downplayed.

Presumably "good" people go the Heaven and "bad" people go to Hell, but--aside from the "staff" of Heaven and Hell--only 3 people are shown: in Heaven, Cantinflas and a man who died of a cold, and Roman emperor Nero in Hell. [I guess the 11,000 virgins also count, although we only see 32 of them.]



In an earlier scene, as the Colonel and his daughter depart, the young woman gives Cantinflas a religious medallion to remember her by, but this is not referenced again. As an aside, a scene which was apparently shot (based on an extant still) but is not in current prints of *Un día con el Diablo* shows Cantinflas and the Colonel's daughter getting married. At exactly what point this would have occurred (even as a dream sequence) is not clear.

The production values of *Un día con el Diablo* are quite good. The filmmakers got access to actual tanks and howitzers, there are a reasonable number of extras in the military scenes, and the sets, while not lavish, are substantial and well crafted. Aside from

several scenes early in the movie setting up the "Juan Pérez" premise, Cantinflas appears in virtually every sequence. He gets a *faux* "courtroom" scene (the court martial), a sort of flashback to the famous conclusion of *Aquí está el detalle*, and his patriotic radio speech is another typical Cantinflas word-salad. His character is mostly sympathetic without being too cocky or self-centered.

Despite the misleading title, *Un día con el Diablo* is quite entertaining. Cantinflas, as noted above, is virtually the whole show but there are some additional clever bits (such as the sign on the gates of Heaven--"The First, the Only, the Real Heaven: Don't be fooled by Seventh Heaven and other imitations"--and the one on the sightseeing telescope for Hell: "Take a look at Hell and convince yourself that there's nothing better.") and the supporting performances are solid overall (although Óscar Pulido is somewhat wasted as a fellow newspaper vendor rather inexplicably dressed like a Parisian Apache dancer).



**Qué lindo cha cha chá** (Prods. Mier y Brooks, 1954) *Exec Prod:* Ernesto Enríquez; *Prod:* Felipe Mier, Óscar Brooks; *Dir:* Gilberto Martínez Solares; *Scr:* Gilberto Martínez Solares, Juan García; *Photo:* Domingo Carrillo; *Music Dir:* Manuel Esperón; *Prod Mgr:* Eduardo Vega Lavín; *Prod Chief:* Enrique Morfín; *Asst Dir:* A. Corona Blake; *Film Ed:* Carlos Savage; *Art Dir:* Jorge Fernández; *Décor:* Raúl Serrano; *Lighting:* Fernando Calvillo; *Makeup:* Carmen Palomino; *Choreog:* Julián de Meriche; *Dialog Rec.:* Eduardo Fernández; *Music/Re-rec:* Enrique Rodríguez; *Studios:* San Ángel



**Cast::** Ana Bertha Lepe (*Mónica aka “Estrella”*), José Venegas (*El Bronco*), Fernando Casanova (*Pancho Buenrostro*), Andrés Soler (*don Cándido Buenrostro*), “Borolas” [Joaquín García] (*Gárgaras*), Juan García (*Octaviano*), José Pardavé (*padrino*), Diana Ochoa (*madrina*), Lucha Palacios (*Toña, servant*), Manuel Sánchez Navarro (*Marcelo, man at Cándido’s house*), Leonor Gómez (*village woman*), Hernán Vera (*council man*), *cantina customers*: Emilio Garibay, José Luis Fernández; Julián de Meriche (*choreographer*), Carlos Bravo y Fernández “Carl-Hillos” (*demon*), Roberto Cobo (*dancer*), Trío Hermanos Samperio



**Notes:** *Qué lindo cha cha chá* is probably better known for its iconic Cabral poster image of a demonic Ana Bertha Lepe (Cabral also did the caricatures that appear behind the opening credits) than it is as an actual film. It's a reasonably entertaining fantasy-musical-comedy-ranchera but it seems odd there is no top-billed comedian co-starring with Lepe. Instead, we're given José “El Bronco” Venegas and Fernando Casanova as the romantic rivals for Lepe's hand: both men are fine, but they're not comic actors.

José Venegas was a Chihuahua-born singer and occasional actor who had a relatively brief film career, but went on to more success as a performer, music producer and head of Musart Records. His slightly sinister appearance is appropriate for his role in *Qué lindo cha cha chá* (he was also an unsympathetic character in *Platillos voladores* as the unscrupulous rival of Resortes for the affections of Evangelina Elizondo).

Don Cándido is the municipal president of Río Escondido, and rules the town with an iron fist, but benevolently (everyone gets up when he blows his trumpet in the morning, and scurries back into their houses when he blows it again at night). As part of his plan for public improvements, he orders the local *cantina* to shut down and boasts “We're beating the Devil!” In Hell, the Devil hears this and sends his minion Bronco to foil Cándido's plan.

Bronco buys the *cantina* from Gárgaras and wins a two-day reprieve by gambling with Cándido's son Pancho. He then rounds up various downtrodden young women and magically transforms them into sexy vamps, especially Mónica. He has Mónica--now dubbed “Estrella”--flirt with Cándido (in her previous, unattractive form, she had a crush on Pancho), and turns the shabby *cantina* into a swanky nightclub (excuse me, “Social Recreation Center”) complete with a band and a chorus line. Pretty soon, Pancho, Cándido, and Bronco all fall in love with Estrella, but she only cares for Pancho.

After Estrella does a dance number in the “She-Devil” outfit that inspired Cabral's poster art, Bronco loses control of himself and grabs her in her dressing room. Estrella is aided by the ghost of her godfather (although he becomes corporeal for some reason); Pancho and Bronco (and their fairly obvious stunt doubles) have a long fist-fight, but Bronco hops on a horse with Estrella and rides away. Pancho and the godfather pursue and the brawl resumes in a cave that's apparently a gateway to Hell. Bronco loses the fight (and the godfather smashes him in the head with a big rock, several times) and is carted off to Hell for disobeying Satan's orders. Pancho and Estrella/Mónica will be married.

*Qué lindo cha cha chá* is amusing enough, although there are a few too many musical numbers (Ana Bertha Lepe has 3 dancers and both Fernando Casanova and José Venegas sing) and the various characters don't act consistently throughout the film, making it hard to get a grasp on them. Cándido seems to have a good heart but he's something of a dictator, and he discards his principles when he falls for Estrella (it's suggested that in some way she bewitches him). Pancho is stern and unbending but his pride allows him to be tricked by Bronco into wagering on the *cantina*, and Bronco does a good job



putting Cándido against his own son. Mónica is the sole support of her sick godmother and asks Cándido to find her a job, but then magically becomes the sexy and confident Estrella: it's unclear if her personality has actually changed (she does Bronco's



bidding willingly, until later when her love for Pancho causes her to have second thoughts), or if she feels compelled to go along with Bronco's plan.



Aside from the four main characters, there are only a few supporting roles which are more than negligible. Borolas is quite good as Bronco's reluctant sidekick and gets to run through his extensive catalog of amusing facial expressions as he's alternately frightened and impressed by Bronco's power. José Pardavé and Juan García are fine but basically go through the motions as required by the script, and don't bring anything unique or noteworthy to their roles.

Production values are adequate, with almost the entire film shot in studio. The musical numbers are somewhat disappointing, flatly directed and edited. The final dance number, featuring She-Devil Estrella and a horde of male and female devils cavorting around, could have been a campy classic but is instead rather boring.

Moderately entertaining but really a missed opportunity overall.



### **Préstame tu cuerpo [Loan Me Your Body]**

(Productora México/Columbia Pictures, 1957) *Prod*: Emilio Tuero; *Dir*: Tulio Demicheli; *Scr*: Alfredo Varela Jr.; *Photo*: Agustín Martínez Solares; *Music*: Gonzalo Curiel; *Prod Mgr*: Alfredo Varela Jr.; *Prod Chief*: Antonio Guerrero Tello; *Asst Dir*: Jesús Marín; *Film Ed*: Carlos Savage; *Art Dir*: Jesús Bracho; *Décor*: José G. Jara; *Camera Op*: Andrés Torres; *Cam Asst*: Luis Herrera; *Lighting*: Juan Durán; *Choreog*: Ricardo Luna; *Makeup*: Felisa Ladrón de Guevara; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Sound*: Francisco Alcayde, Galdino Samperio; *Studio*: Churubusco

**Cast**: Silva Pinal (*Leonor Rivas Conde*; *Dr. Regina Salsamendi*), Manolo Fábregas (*Manolo*), Prudencia Grifell (*Simplicia*), Julio Villareal (*Dr. Meollo*), José Gálvez (*Romualdo*), Mauricio Garcés (*Gabriel Jiménez*), Gloria Mestre (*Gloria*), Alberto M. Simeón (*Casildo*), Lupe Carriles (*Marcela*), Elena

Contla (*Josefa*), José Luis Menéndez (*Julián de Mendoza*), Manuel Vergara "Manver" (*man sent to Hell*), *men in hospital*: Francisco Pando, Alfredo Varela Jr.; Rebeca Sanromán, Alberto Sacramento, Ballet de Ricardo Luna, Mariachi México

**Notes**: Tulio Demicheli worked regularly in the film industries of his native Argentina, Spain, and Mexico. In the latter half of the 1950s, he directed 10 films (mostly in Mexico, but several in Spain) starring Silvia Pinal (and contributed to the screenplay of another), and thus deserves considerable credit for elevating her



to stardom. She'd been gradually moving from supporting roles to female leads, but Demicheli's films cemented her position as a top star. Perhaps unfortunately, Demicheli is also well-known for directing the bizarre *Assignment Terror* (1970, aka *Los monstruos del terror*, aka *El hombre que vino de Umno* aka *Dracula vs. Frankenstein*, etc.) starring Paul Naschy and Michael Rennie. In 1980, Demicheli directed and co-wrote *Con el cuerpo prestado*, which has some similarities to *Préstame tu cuerpo* but is not a remake.

*Préstame tu cuerpo* was written by Alfredo Varela Jr., who also served as production manager and makes a cameo appearance. Varela, the son of a veteran character actor, had a very prolific career as an actor (often playing nerdy roles) and a screenwriter, in addition to non-film work in the theatre. Many of his film scripts were comedies, but he also wrote genre pictures such as *La marca del muerto* and *Calibre 44* and even some serious dramas. *Préstame tu cuerpo* was one of four Demicheli-Pinal films Varela wrote in this period.

Cuban dancer Leonor goes on vacation and is eaten by sharks when her small boat sinks. Arriving in Heaven, Leonor meets her guardian angel Simplicia. When Leonor's case is reviewed, it's discovered she isn't scheduled to die until 1997--Simplicia explains that she made Leonor faint so she wouldn't suffer as she died, but this actually caused Leonor to die when otherwise she'd have escaped. However, she can't return to her body on Earth

(because the sharks ate it). Leonor's spirit, accompanied by Simplicia, returns to Earth to find a new body to inhabit (someone who's recently died): they have 24 hours.



[One nice bit of dialogue: Leonor says she must inhabit an attractive body. It's not vanity: she's a singer, and an unattractive singer has to sing really well. Since Leonor can't sing really well, she needs an attractive body to keep her job!]

At the last minute, they spot her physical double, scientist Regina, who dies in a laboratory explosion. Leonor takes over the body. However, she discovers Regina is a frowsy, near-sighted, feminist nerd who is married to the wealthy Manolo but refuses to sleep with him. Pretending to have amnesia, Leonor pits Manolo against her handsome secretary Romualdo, and refers to fellow scientist Dr. Meollo as her father. The three men are confused, especially when the demure "Regina" insists upon shopping for a new wardrobe, then brings in Julián, a stage producer and choreographer to create her new show. [The name "Julián de Mendoza" is almost certainly an in-joke referring to Julien de Meriche, a comic actor and choreographer (who later married María Elena Velasco, "La India María").]

Manolo poses as the scientist's secretary while Romualdo--whom Leonor calls "Pepe"--pretends to be her boyfriend. Eventually, Dr. Meollo overhears Leonor talking to (the invisible) Simplicia, and figures out that Regina is possessed by another spirit. The three men try in various ways to bring Regina back: Meollo finally declares only another explosion will do it, but the others won't permit this.

Leonor's new show is a hit. In a confusing twist, Leonor now pretends Manolo is her boyfriend "Pepe," and accompanies him to his apartment (actually Romualdo's apartment) for a tryst. Leonor gets drunk and wakes up the next morning in a state of undress (well, she's still wearing a slip). She thinks Manolo "took advantage" of her. [Leonor makes it clear throughout the film that she's a virgin and intends to remain one until she can be married in a "white, white, white wedding gown."] However, Simplicia explains that Manolo merely kissed Leonor after she'd passed out and admitted he loves her

despite (or because of) her radically changed personality.

Leonor reconciles with Manolo and they'll be man and wife from now on. Meanwhile, Dr. Meollo and Romualdo accidentally detonate a bomb and emerge comically blackened and dazed: "We've won the Cold War...time to invade Mars!"

There are several interesting aspects of the film. The film begins in Havana, and Leonor is depicted with dark hair and dark(ish) skin, but has no particular Cuban accent. When she inhabits Regina's body, there is one peripheral reference to her skin colour (when Leonor orders her maid to buy makeup), but otherwise there is no racial commentary at all. It's amusing to note that Leonor was born in 1933 (subtracting 2 years from Silvia Pinal's actual age), and is scheduled to die in 1997 (whereas the actress herself is still going strong in 2019).



*Préstame tu cuerpo* contains three musical numbers: the first and third are large-scale production numbers, moderately entertaining but nothing special. The second musical sequence is quite interesting, however: "Regina" summons producer Julián to her house, as well as some *mariachis*, then does a song entitled "Elvis Pérez" about a Mexican performer who discards his folkloric roots to sing "rock and roll." Regina/Leonor sings parts of three Elvis Presley songs: "Hound Dog," "Heartbreak Hotel," and "Don't Be Cruel," all with Spanish lyrics.



There is actually one other, partial musical number. After her death, Leonor returns to Earth in search of a body, accompanied by Simplicia (who knows who's going to die soon). They visit the night club where Leonor had previously performed, and watch her friend Gloria dance with a male partner--who stabs Gloria to death during the number! Leonor turns away, horrified. This is rather shocking.



The performances are all good. Silvia Pinal plays a dual role, but is only seen briefly as Regina; otherwise, as Leonor and Leonor-in-Regina's-body, she's the same character with minor cosmetic differences in appearance. It requires a considerable "willing suspension of belief" to accept Leonor as a virgin (and raises the question as to whether Regina, although married, was also a virgin), though. Rather



unfairly, Regina's actual accomplishments (she has a doctorate, is doing important scientific work, and makes speeches on feminist issues) are depicted as unfeminine, even foolish. In

essence, *Préstame tu cuerpo* is a feature-length version of the stereotypical joke in which a "serious" young woman removes her glasses and lets down her hair, suddenly becoming fun-loving and popular.

It's interesting to see a young and handsome José Gálvez in a comedy role, when he's perhaps most remembered today for playing villains (even though he did appear in a fair number of comedies later on, and even co-starred in a television sitcom in the 1970s); Manolo Fábregas is his usual self, and Prudencia Grifell is satisfactory as guardian angel Simplicia. Mauricio Garcés has a brief, nothing role.



Production values are satisfactory. The Churubusco sets are substantial enough, but very sterile and anodyne. "Heaven" is represented by knee-deep dry-ice fog and a few sketchy benches, trees, walls, doorways, and an "elevator." God, or one of his high-level associates, speaks via a big-screen television showing images of clouds. [As an aside, guardian angels accompanying their recently-deceased clients are carefully matched: men have men angels, women have women angels, and blacks have black angels. Cuban boatman Casildo is pleased to see some little black angels who "didn't even have to be painted"--a reference to *Angelitos negros*.]

*Préstame tu cuerpo* starts off well but loses some steam later on, turning into a relatively conventional

romantic farce and ignoring opportunities for more outré plot twists and characterisation. In general it's pretty entertaining, though.

## Obón (Sr. & Jr.) Anthologies



**Cien gritos de terror** [One Hundred Cries of Terror] (Prods. México Films, 1964) *Prod*: Antonio del Castillo, Gerardo J. Welter; *Dir-Scr*: Ramón Obón; *Photo*: Agustín Martínez Solares (#1), Ignacio Torres (#2); *Music*: Rafael Carrión; *Prod Mgr*: Saíd Slim; *Prod Chief*: Antonio Guajardo; *Asst Dir*: Manuel Alcaide; *Film Ed*: Carlos Savage; *Art Dir*: Artis Gener; *Makeup*: Julieta Ladrón de Guevara; *Sound*: Francisco Alcayde; *Re-rec*: Salvador Topete; *Camera Op*: J. Antonio Carrasco  
\*U.S. release: *100 Cries of Terror*; *Prod*: K. Gordon Murray; *Dir*: Manuel San Fernando  
**Cast**: "Pánico"--Ariadne Welter (*María Luisa*), Joaquín Cordero (*Julio*), Ofelia Montesco (*Alejandra*); "Miedo supremo"--Jorge Martínez de Hoyos (*Dr. Javier Medina*), Alicia Caro (*the woman*), Enrique Couto (*cemetery director*), Patricia de Morelos and Rosalva Welter (*mourners*), Mónica Welter (*Graciélita*), Margarito Luna and José Pardavé (*cemetery workers*)

**Notes**: this film has been released several times on "budget" DVD labels in the United States. The East-West DVD not only lists the title incorrectly (*Cien gritos del terror*), it rather absurdly bills this as "Un film de Ramón Obón," as if that was going to impress potential buyers. [To be fair, the East-West Mexican DVDs all had the same sort of pretentious billing--"Un film de Miguel M. Delgado," "Un film de Vicente Orón," etc.] The East West print is faded and the sound is poor, but for \$1.00, I suppose one cannot be too demanding. Interestingly enough, the

K. Gordon Murray dubbed version (*One Hundred Cries of Terror*) was released on home video in the USA but is now out of print.



"Pánico" [Panic]: Julio brings his grumpy wife María Luisa to a large country house he has purchased. She wonders why it was such a bargain, and he admits the locals think it's haunted. After wandering around and talking too much, the couple goes upstairs to the bedroom and María Luisa is startled when a chain falls out of a closet. This affects her weak heart, and Julio rushes off to fetch a doctor from town. While he's gone, María Luisa hears laughter, screams, and the crashing of furniture, dishes, etc. Terrified, she tries to flee but the doors are locked. Confronted by a spectral figure, María Luisa has a heart attack and collapses, dead, on the dining room floor.



The "ghost" is revealed to be Alejandra, Julio's lover. However, when Julio returns to inspect her handiwork, María Luisa's body is missing! A hasty search turns up nothing. More scary noises, and Alejandra accidentally shoots Julio through a door, thinking he's a ghost or something (you'd shoot a ghost?). Trapped in the house just as María Luisa was, Alejandra winds up in the dining room and sees María Luisa's corpse on the floor! Alejandra drops dead. (I guess Julio had a thing for women with weak hearts) María Luisa wakes up, leaves a forged note

explaining the two corpses as the result of a lovers' murder-suicide pact, and departs.

"Pánico," which runs about 40 minutes, is rather confusing. Although the conclusion suggests María Luisa had planned to turn Julio's plot against him, there are also contradictory indications of real supernatural activity. If, for example, María Luisa really was dead (or dying) and was saved by the intervention of an actual ghost, then why would she use the letter "explaining" Julio and Alejandra's bodies? If it was all a non-supernatural set-up, this would imply some fairly sophisticated preparation by María Luisa, since the poltergeist-like activity and sounds are too elaborate to be "spur of the moment" improvisations.

Frankly, "Pánico" doesn't have enough plot or action even for its truncated length, and is rather boring overall.



"Miedo supremo" [Supreme Fear]. Dr. Javier Medina returns to Mexico from New York, and visits the tomb of his fiancée Elizabeth, who died in his absence. She is buried in a large crypt, where another interment is going on at the same time Javier is there. Javier passes out (from the emotion? It's not clear) and is overlooked when the cemetery workers close (and lock) the crypt for the night. Almost immediately, Javier hears noises coming from the niche where the coffin containing the newest "resident" of the crypt has been sealed. He frees the woman (who was entombed alive), but she is hysterical. Javier calms her down and explains she must

overcome the horror of her ordeal or risk losing her mind. The night



drags on, and suddenly the improvised lamps they created--using flower vases, rags, and tar--begin to falter for no apparent reason. The woman believes the powers of darkness are trying to reclaim her; Javier insists the rags are simply too damp to burn, but cannot reason with his companion. When the woman attacks him with a pointed object, Javier disarms her and



then, enraged, strangles her. The next morning, the crypt is reopened by employees. Javier is there and confesses he spent the night a prisoner in the tomb, but nothing else is amiss. He departs.

"Miedo supremo" is interesting but is talky and seems padded with extraneous scenes. The frantic jazz on the soundtrack also detracts from the gloomy atmosphere, although (thankfully) it is shut off about half-way through the episode. The ending is slightly ambiguous, but is clever either way: either Javier dreamed the whole thing (as the dialogue suggests--also, the crypt shows no signs of the previous night's activity) or, ironically, he got away with murdering a woman (who'd already been declared dead).



While "Pánico" is fairly conventional in form, "Miedo supremo" includes some curious montage sequences, most notably the woman's attack on Javier and her subsequent death at his hands, done in a series of very rapid cuts. There are also shots of high tension lines and some modern architecture, perhaps to reinforce Javier's comments about the sterility of modern society, or something.

One of the most interesting things about "Miedo supremo" is its (uncredited) connection with *Till Death*, a Hollywood film made in 1972 but not released until 1978. In this picture, a man visits the crypt where his late wife is entombed, gets locked in overnight, frees her "alive" from her casket, only to (accidentally) kill her before the night is over. The two films are quite different in tone--*Till Death* is a supernatural film with romantic overtones as opposed to "Miedo supremo," which is basically a psychological thriller--but there are many similarities. In addition to the basic plot, mentioned above, both movies contain--

- a) an animal in the crypt (a turtle in "Miedo," a cat in *Till Death*)
- b) a pair of cemetery workers who lock up the crypt and reopen it the next morning
- c) a downed electrical wire
- d) a scene in which the lighting inside the crypt begins to go out for no apparent reason
- e) the suggestion that the protagonist merely dreamed or imagined all of the events that occur

*Till Death* has a minor cult reputation and is frankly a bit more interesting than "Miedo supremo," if only because the main characters are husband and wife, rather than complete strangers.

*Cien gritos de terror*, the first and only feature directed by Costa Rican-born screenwriter Ramón Obón--who died of a heart attack in December 1965--is of some interest but is not a major work. Shot independently--possibly over a period of time, since different cinematographers worked on the two stories--and on a low budget, the film is visually unimpressive and, while the main performers are satisfactory, the script of "Pánico" gives no one a chance to shine and Martínez de Hoyos and Alicia Caro (who were married in real life) are saddled with a lot of existential claptrap in "Miedo supremo."

reprinted with minor revisions from MFB 14/7 (2008)



**Pánico** [Panic] (Prods. Enríquez, 1970) *Prod:* César Santos Galindo, Ernesto Enríquez; *Dir:* Julián Soler; *Scr:* Ramón Obón Jr.; *Photo:* Gabriel Torres; *Music:* Luis

H. Bretón;

*Prod Chief:*

Antonio

Guajardo;

*Asst Dir:*

Felipe

Palomino;

*Film Ed:*

Gloria

Schoemann;

*Art Dir:*

José

Rodríguez

Granada;

*Set Decor:*

Carlos

Granjean;

*Camera Op:*

Andrés

Torres;

*Lighting:* Miguel Arana; *Makeup:* Margarita Ortega;

*Sound Ed:* Abrahan[sic] Cruz; *Sound Rec:* Ángel

Trejo; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec:*

Jesús González "Ganzi" [sic: usually spelled

"Gancy"]; *Union:* STPC; *Studio:* Churubusco-Azteca

**Cast:** "Pánico"--Ana Martín (young woman), Ofelia Guilmáin (the nurse), Antonio Zubiaga (rapist); "Soledad"--Joaquín Cordero (Carlos), José Gálvez (Abel), Susana Salvat (María); "Angustia"--Alma Delia Fuentes (Melody), Aldo Monti (doctor), Carlos Ancira (Tiberius Hansen), Pilar Sen (cousin Vilma), Eduardo MacGregor (don Elías)

**Notes:** although dramatic & comedic anthologies were a thing in Mexican cinema--especially in the Sixties and Seventies--fantasy anthology films were



not as prevalent. *Cien gritos de terror* (written and directed by Ramón Obón, father of the scripter of *Pánico*), *La puerta* y *La mujer del carnicero*, and *El charro de las calaveras* (although the latter two were comprised of episodes of unsold Mexican television series) preceded *Pánico*. In the 1980s and beyond there were a few more (*Un paso al más acá*, *Masacre nocturna*, *La zona del silencio*, etc., not counting the faux “movies” released on video cobbled together from episodes of “La hora marcada”), and there have been a few since (notably *México bárbaro*, 2014).



*Pánico*, like some other Mexican anthologies, has no framing story and no specific links (even thematic) between the individual stories, unless you consider them representations of certain psychological states: panic, solitude, anguish. Only the third story (a black comedy) has any fantastic content (and even that is minor)—the other two fall into the category of psychological thriller or suspense.

It's interesting to note some (possibly coincidental) similarities between *Pánico* and *Cien gritos de terror*. Both films have one episode entitled



“Pánico”; both have an episode dealing with premature burial (and some of the visuals of the burial look somewhat alike); both feature

Joaquín Cordero in an unsympathetic role (in *Cien gritos de terror* he cheats on his wife with another woman; in *Pánico* he has an affair with another man's wife). A coincidence? Or was Ramón Obón Jr. paying subtle homage to his late father?

“Pánico” [Panic] runs about 17 minutes and has no dialogue and a minimal plot. A young woman flees through a forest, pursued by an older woman with a knife. The young woman remembers being assaulted by four men. When the other woman

catches up with her, the young woman fights for her life and strangles her pursuer. She's then captured and last seen in a mental hospital in a straitjacket. A narrator says she was raped, became pregnant, lost her baby, and was then institutionalised. The woman chasing her was a nurse and the “knife” was a hypodermic syringe containing sedatives.

This section is mostly a showcase for director Soler, cinematographer Torres, and editor Schoemann. It goes on too long for the “plot,” which is essentially a brief anecdote with a twist ending.

“Soledad” [Solitude] is not quite 40 minutes in length, and is again a minimalist tale with 2 main characters (plus one seen only in flashback without speaking, and one dead person). After the death of Abel's wife María and others in a yellow fever outbreak, survivors Abel and Carlos set off for civilisation in a canoe, but are stranded when it capsizes in a swamp. Abel knows how to cope with adversity, but Carlos is convinced they're going to die. He confesses that he had an affair with María, and urges Abel to kill him. However, when Abel hits Carlos, the latter fights back and “accidentally” stabs his companion to death. Carlos buries Abel's body but it begins to reappear periodically. Carlos discovers he has contracted yellow fever and goes mad.



“Soledad” contains a line about loneliness & solitude being the worst things a person can suffer, and this sentiment is verbalised in the third story as well. No particular back-story is given for either Carlos or Abel: why are they in the jungle? Are they planters, scientists, missionaries? Unlike the first story, at least the protagonists have some sort of personality and a “goal” (to reach civilisation) in response to a specific threat, as opposed to the main character in “Pánico,” who's merely trying to escape from her pursuer rather than heading for some place in particular. Again, Julián Soler tries to spice up the footage with giant closeups, quick editing, a jump scare, and a few inscrutable, “surrealistic” images.

“Angustia” is about 30 minutes long and rather different than its two predecessors. It's a black comedy with a lot of dialogue and multiple characters



and locations. Scientist Tiberius invents a chemical to be used as an anaesthetic: whoever takes it will appear to be dead for a few hours, although they remain conscious (why you'd want to be conscious during an operation is unclear). He accidentally drinks some of the drug (his cat knocked over a



container and it spilled into his cup) and collapses. His wife Melody discovers him and he's declared dead by a doctor, although his cousin Vilma is convinced

Tiberius is in a state of catalepsy. The funeral is scheduled for the next day. Tiberius frantically attempts to alert everyone that he's alive, but is buried (ironically, just as he's recovering the ability to move and speak). Some time later, Melody visits his grave to drop off some flowers, and Tiberius--reincarnated as a worm--emerges into the sunlight...and is promptly squashed by his widow!

Carlos Ancira was a well-regarded actor and acting teacher who worked in cinema for four decades (in addition to television and stage work). He played a monster, mad doctor, mad doctor's assistant, or similar roles in *Misterios de la magia negra*, *Misterios de ultratumba*, *Señora Muerte*, *Orlak el infierno de Frankenstein*, *Santo y Blue Demon contra los monstruos*, among other films. Although he is mostly immobile as Tiberius in "Angustia," Ancira narrates throughout in voice-over.

One problem with "Angustia" is that Tiberius has no back-story and the film fails to work up either much audience sympathy for his mortal peril or, alternately, a feeling that he's such a terrible person that he deserves his ironic "death" and even more ironic actual death. The script does, however, avoid the simplistic twist that Melody and the doctor are having an affair, and/or that Melody hated Tiberius. The doctor is clearly interested in Melody, but there is no preexisting romantic relationship, and Melody seems honestly upset by the death of her husband (she might be faking it, but a film will usually contain enough clues to tip off the audience and "Angustia" doesn't have any of these).

The film intercuts between Tiberius and the cat, who also consumed some of the formula and is similarly in a comatose state. As the cat gradually regains the ability to move, so does Tiberius. No one seems to notice the dead cat on the floor of the lab, by the way.

"Angustia" only works due to very specific circumstances: there is no autopsy, Tiberius isn't

embalmed, and he's buried just a few hours after his "death." Any variation in these and he'd either be killed horribly or returned to normal when the drug wears off. This applies to virtually all "premature burial" tales, although those set prior to the 1800s can be partially excused since embalming wasn't prevalent then. Another minor irksome detail is the fact that Tiberius keeps his eyes open at all times, although he's dead (there's even a running joke in which various people close his eyelids, only to have them pop open again): wouldn't your eyeballs dry out if you couldn't blink? (answer: yes)



The direction, cinematography and editing are less flashy than the previous two stories. There are a fair number of extreme closeups of Tiberius and some subjective-camera shots from his point of view (although the familiar "shot from inside the grave as dirt is being shoveled on the coffin" is sort of a cheat here, since Tiberius doesn't have a window in his coffin's lid). In general, however, this is a much more conventional story--in filmmaking terms--than its predecessors. It compensates for this by being rather more entertaining.

The performances in all of the episodes are satisfactory. As noted, the first two are essentially two-character tales; "Pánico" doesn't even give its actors any dialogue, but Ana Martín does her usual waif-ish turn, and Ofelia Guilmáin--seen through the eyes of Martín's character, as the twist ending reveals--looks appropriately crazed and sinister. Joaquín Cordero pulls out all the stops in "Soledad," chewing the scenery as the guilt-ridden Carlos, while José Gálvez (usually a villain) is fine in a sympathetic role. One should mention the presence of Susana Salvat as the object of the two men's affection. Salvat (real name Susana Esther Selinger Watstein) had a very brief career in Mexican cinema (fewer than a dozen films in 1968-70); she's quite beautiful (slightly resembling U.S. actress Paula Prentiss) but has nothing to do in this particular film. The final story has 5 performers (Ancira, Fuentes, Monti, Sen, and MacGregor); each is given some "business" to do, and they're all fine.

*Pánico* is somewhat entertaining, although the pace of the first two segments is (the frenetic film notwithstanding) rather slow.



## K. Gordon Murray Was Here

**El pantano de las ánimas** [The Swamp of the Spirits] (Alameda Films, 1956) *Prod:* Alfredo Ripstein Jr.; *Dir:* Rafael Baledón; *Scr:* Ramón Obón; *Photo:* Raúl Martínez Solares; *Music Dir:* Gustavo C. Carrión; *Prod Chief:* José Alcalde [Gamiz]; *Prod*



*Mgr:* Carlos Ventimilla; *Asst Dir:* Jesús Marín Jr.; *Film Ed:* Juan José Marino; *Decor:* Manuel L[adrón de] Guevara; *Lighting:* Carlos Nájera; *Camera Op:* Cirilo Rodríguez; *Makeup:* Concepción Zamora; *Dialog Rec:* Rodolfo Solís; *Music/Re-*

*rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Spec FX:* Benavides; *Color Tech:* Francisco Gómez; *Union:* STPC; *Eastmancolor;* *Studios:* Churubusco-Azteca



\*English-dubbed version: *The Swamp of the Lost Monsters* (Young America Prods./Trans-International Films, 1965) *Prod:* K. Gordon Murray; *Dir:* Stem [sic = Stillman] Segar; U.S credits list "Raphael" Baledón, "Raymond" Obón, and "Raoul" Martínez Solares and mistakenly credit "Salvador Rodríguez" rather than Godínez. U.S. character names, where different, are shown in brackets below. The 1988 Genesis Home Video release of the K. Gordon Murray version (with the American International Pictures Television logo) has great box art but mistakenly credits Gastón Santos as "Gaston Sanos" and incorrectly cites the film's title as *The Swamp of the Lost Monster* (singular).

**Cast:** Gastón Santos (*Gastón*), Manola Saavedra (*Julieta* [Julie]), Manuel Dondé (*Ignacio Mendoza*), Sara Cabrera (*María*), Pedro D'Aguillón (*Espergencio* [Squirrel Eyes]), Salvador Godínez

(*henchman*), Lupe Carriles (*Carmela*), Arturo Corona (? *Doctor Morales*), Hernán Vera (*cantinero*), Gabriel Álvarez (? *Adrián*), José Dupeyrón (*henchman*), Vicente Lara (*henchman*), Antonio Sandoval (*henchman*)

**Notes:** *El pantano de las ánimas* has a somewhat worse reputation than it deserves, possibly due to the K. Gordon Murray version that (until recently) was widely available (in faded Eastmancolor prints and with the usual grating English dubbing). Although the plot has a number of holes and, as with all of the Gastón Santos Westerns, the "supernatural" aspect is revealed to be false, the film is well-directed by Rafael Baledón, the settings (possibly the *hacienda* "La Encarnación," where so many other Mexican films were shot in this era) are quite good, and the technical aspects (including the colour photography) are fine.

After the death of Fabrique Mendoza as a result of "the plague," his body is interred in a remote location in the *Pantano de las ánimas*. His son Adrián arrives and asks that the coffin be opened so he can see his father one last time--and the coffin is empty! Adrián's uncle Ignacio, the grave-diggers, and Dr. Morales agree on a vow of silence, not wishing to alarm the local population. Adrián disagrees and rides off to see his friend Gastón, but is mortally wounded on the way. He gives Gastón some information before dying.

Gastón and his pal Espergencio head for the Mendoza *hacienda*. Espergencio runs into a "big animal" (*animalote*) in the swamp and barely escapes; Gastón is ambushed and wounded by a sniper. At the *hacienda*, Gastón renews his friendship with the dead man's niece Julieta. He discovers Fabrique's wife María has gone blind but kept this a secret. He also learns Fabrique was insured for a large sum of money, payable to Ignacio (María admits Fabrique only married her for her money and she didn't love him, either).



Eventually the plot is revealed (not that it was much of a mystery): Fabrique faked his death with the assistance of Ignacio, Dr. Morales, and their henchmen in order to collect the insurance. The swamp monster is Fabrique in a costume and scuba gear. Gastón and Espergencio expose the scheme and defeat the criminals. María will regain her sight after an operation, and Julieta kisses Gastón before he rides off.



Ramón Obón's script is competent but more or less a typical Western/mystery plot, with various narrow escapes, sinister lurking, abductions, and so forth. Obón and director Rafael Baledón had collaborated on the "Sombra Vengadora" films in 1954, and the second pair--*El tesoro de Pancho Villa* and *El secreto de Pancho Villa*--were shot in August of that year on the hacienda "La Encarnación," which may very well have been where *El pantano de las ánimas* was made. There are numerous buildings and exterior locations that look familiar, although I haven't made an effort to review the films and compare them exactly. The general tone of the narratives is also similar, although *El pantano de las ánimas* is more simplistic.

There are a number of logical flaws and production gaffes (or "goofs" as IMDB calls them) in the film. They're more annoying than serious, but still...

(1) Gastón gets shot in the shoulder. His buckskin shirt is stained with blood but there's no hole in it. Later, his shirt is miraculously clean again. Also, Gastón is patched up by the doctor, but later we see him shirtless and there is no bandage or wound or scar.

(2) after the the first man is dragged into the water by the monster, no one seems to notice he's missing. Espergencio later fishes him out of the lagoon, but is this the same guy or is it the corpse of the man who ambushed Gastón and swam away?

(3) although Gastón's horse "Rayo de Plata" (or "Moonlight" in the English version) gets star billing, it doesn't really do much. Julieta's horse "Duque," on the other hand, is exceptionally smart: it understands when she sends it for help, hides from a pursuer, and responds to Gastón's command when he says "Take me to where [Julieta] is, quickly!"

(4) the whole purpose of the fake monster is unclear. It's not as if he's scaring people away from the swamp (for example, to hide a gold mine or oil well or something), and he isn't murdering specific people to further his insurance fraud scheme. Indeed, Gastón points out that the absence of Fabrique's body prevents the plotters from collecting on the insurance (although this is only because Adrián saw the open coffin--otherwise, no one would be the wiser--except this still doesn't explain the monster impersonation). The monster isn't very deadly, either. He grabs one guy by surprise and drowns him, but flubs his chance to kill Espergencio and Gastón in the lagoon (he also merely scares Espergencio at the hacienda, and misses Gastón with a spear-gun there as well).



The monster suit is rather nice; the head is oversized, the body is bulky (to hide the scuba tank), and its arms and legs are spindly, so it actually looks more like a giant frog than (for example), the Creature from the Black Lagoon (which is more humanoid in its proportions). The final confrontation between Gastón and the monster is one-sided: Gastón delivers three flying drop-kicks and finishes off the "creature" by pounding it with a wooden table leg, making the viewer feel sorry for the poor guy in the suit.

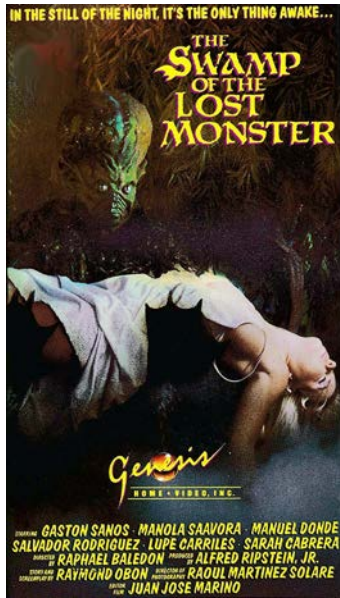
On the positive side, it's amusing to see Lupe Carriles--playing a servant--(a) free herself from her bonds, (b) clobber the sinister Dr. Morales with a flower vase, and (c) do the same thing to villain Ignacio. Why wait around for the hero when you can take matters into your own hands?

Gastón Santos, the wealthy son of a powerful San Luis Potosí politician, was a horse breeder and *rejoneador* (mounted bullfighter--he made an appearance in 1960 on the U.S. television show "To Tell the Truth" in this capacity: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUGMm0XUF0U>) in addition to his part-time acting career. *El pantano de las ánimas* was his second film, and he demonstrates considerable athleticism here, running, climbing, swimming, jumping, fighting, riding, and so on. He even kisses Manola Saavedra in the final scene. He doesn't sing, which is not a fatal flaw for a Mexican cinema hero, but puts him in the minority.



As mentioned above, Rafael Baledón's direction is quite good. Baledón was a very underrated director, who made efficiently stylish films. *El*

*pantano de las ánimas* is generally slick and professional. One interesting if not entirely relevant



aspect is the prevalence of mirrors in the *hacienda*, with a fair number of shots including characters' reflections. As García Riera notes, the opening sequence of the arrival of Fabrique's coffin via boat is reminiscent of the work of Emilio "Indio" Fernández, complete with big close-ups of the faces of the villagers witnessing the event. This style persists right up through the "burial" of the coffin in a remote church in the swamp.

There aren't many negatives (other than the implausibility of the premise), but the inclusion of footage of a local *charreada* (sort of like a rodeo) is pure padding, although it's intercut with "plot" scenes to avoid a total dead spot in the narrative.

Better than its reputation, although in general I'm philosophically opposed to "fake monster" movies.



**Chief:** José Alcalde G.; **Prod Mgr:** Roberto G. Rivera; **Sub-Dir:** Jaime L. Contreras; **Film Ed:** Jorge Bustos; **Art Dir:** José Rodríguez Granada; **Décor:** Ernesto Carrasco; **Makeup:** Felisa L[adrón] de Guevara; **Special FX:** Luis Enrique Gordillo; **Sound Supv:** James L. Fields; **Dialog Rec:** Eduardo Arjona;

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**Espiritismo**  
(Cinematográfica Calderón, 1961)  
**Prod:** Guillermo Calderón Stell;  
**Dir:** Benito Alazraki; **Scr:** Rafael García Travesí; **Story:** Rafael García Travesí, Guillermo Calderón Stell;  
**Photo:** Enrique Wallace; **Music:** Gustavo C. Carrión; **Prod**

**Re-rec:** Galdino Samperio; **Sound Ed:** José Liho; **Union:** STPC; **Studio:** Churubusco-Azteca

**English-language version:** *Spiritism* (Young America Prods.) **Prod:** K. Gordon Murray; **Dir:** Manuel San Fernando; some credits Anglicised-- "William" Calderón Stell, "Joseph" L. Jiménez, "Henry" Wallace, "Gustav" C. Carrión, "Alice" Caro, "George" Mondragón & "George" Russek, "Mary" Eugenia "Saint" Martín, "William" Zetina, "August" Benedico, "Anthony" Bravo [character names that were changed are listed below in brackets]

**Cast:** José Luis Jiménez (*Luis Fernández* [*Louis Howard*]), Nora Veryán (*María* [*Mary Howard*]), Beatriz Aguirre (*Estercita* [*Stella Jean*]), Alicia Caro (*Carmen* [*Amy*]), Carmelita González (*Alicia* [*Alice Lewis*]), Antonio Bravo (*Carlos Paz y Fuentes* [*Dr. Charles Pierpoint*]), Jorge Mondragón (*Guillermo* [*Henry*]), Augusto Benedico (*priest* [cut]), Guillermo Zetina (*Ormuz-Arimán*), Jorge Russek (*Eduardo Aguirre* [*Larry Grey*]), María Eugenia San Martín (*Aurora*), René Cardona Jr. (*Rodolfo* [*Rudolph*]), Diana Ochoa (*Elvira, medium*), Julisa [sic] Macedo (*Rosario* [*Rosalie*]), Manuel Dondé & Victorio Blanco (*spiritualists*), ?Elvira Lodi (*wife of Brother Carlos*)

**Notes:** *Espiritismo* is a curious, uneven film which meanders around for two-thirds of its running time, then crams a quick version of "The Monkey's Paw" into the last few minutes.

One interesting aspect of *Espiritismo* is the fact that currently extant versions of the film have significant cuts. It's unclear if the omitted scenes were present in the original theatrical release print, although the fact that the K. Gordon Murray version is the same as Mexican copies suggest the cuts were made before the movie's original release.

The cuts include all scenes of Augusto Benedico as a priest to whom the protagonist tells his story. Benedico receives on-screen billing but can only be glimpsed for a split-second in the release print: the priest's face can be seen when the flashback begins with a dissolve to a closeup of a ouija board. After





Luis meets the priest and begins to tell his story, there were at least two additional sequences featuring the priest. (1) after the first meeting at the spiritualists' house (in which María learns her sister Carmen has died), María and Luis are seen in their house using



the ouija board to receive messages from her. There is then a rather abrupt cut to a second meeting with the spiritualists. This transition is clumsy because a scene was cut in which the priest says everything Luis saw in the séance

could be explained, and gives him a copy of "Los fraudes espiritistas" by C.M. de Heredia (an actual book).

(2) The priest then reappears at the conclusion of the film, reassuring Luis that "there was nothing supernatural" in the deaths of his son and wife, and reminds him "God knows all the answers." [The cut scenes appear in the foto-comic adaptation of *Espiritismo* from "Revista Figuras, Su Película Favorita" #77 (February 1962).]

These omissions change the tenor of the film: the priest constantly tells Luis that the events he witnessed weren't supernatural (even if this isn't logical, given what Luis--and the audience--has seen), and cutting out these scenes reinforces the status of *Espiritismo* as a fantasy film. The film's concluding narration differs from that of the foto-comic: in the movie, the narrator says "if this film prevents anyone from getting involved in the dangers of occultism, we have achieved our purpose," but the foto-comic reads "if some of you in your soul have a tendency towards forbidden things and with this story we have managed to prevent you from practicing them, we have achieved our goal."

Despite the removal of the wise priest character, *Espiritismo* still contains a fair amount of commentary on religion. The spiritualists have portraits of Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, etc. on the walls of their meeting room, professing admiration for all religions (but Jesus is obviously the best, they say). Later, when María summons Satan during a séance, they're saved by Brother Carlos appealing to Jesus, who sends a beaming cross to banish the evil entity. María turns to spiritualism

after failing to get satisfaction from the Church, then gives up on the "good" spirits when they can't deliver what she wants (financial security). When María admits to Luis that she's been attending a spiritualist center, he says: "So a religion that for centuries has inspired with the teachings of Our Lord is now inferior to spiritualism, that instead of leaving the dead in peace, has converted them into demi-gods that predict the future!"

Luis and María have been married for 25 years, and have a grown son, Rodolfo. Attending a séance led by her friend Elvira, María scoffs at spiritualism; her sister Carmen believes it's not just a fraud, it's blasphemy. Elvira passes along a message received via the ouija board: life for María and Luis will take a turn for the worse on 8 April, their wedding anniversary.



Later, at their anniversary party, Luis gives María the deed to their house, the mortgage having finally been paid in full. However, the couple almost immediately has to take out another loan, to help Rodolfo start a crop-dusting business. Time passes, and Rodolfo cannot repay the loan. Worried about losing her home, María goes to a church to pray and sees Carmen there--this is a surprise, because Carmen is supposed to be on vacation in Veracruz. Carmen tells María she feels ill, and then vanishes.



At home, María learns Carmen died of a heart attack in Veracruz. She starts going with Elvira to a spiritualist center led by Brother Carlos. When Luis protests, María offers him a deal: if he accompanies her to a meeting and is not convinced of the validity of spiritualism, she'll never go there again. Luis and Carmen's husband Guillermo attend a séance with María. During the séance, recent widow Alicia speaks to her late husband and Carmen's spirit also appears; she doesn't know she's dead, but is finally

convinced and can now move on to another plane of existence.

María and Luis become devout spiritualists, but María grows impatient due to the impending foreclosure of their mortgage. At their next meeting, María invokes Satan and dark spirits, summoning frightening beings. Brother Carlos asks God for help and a shining cross banishes the evil ones, but one of them gives María a key on a chain. María is ejected from the group for her rash behaviour. That night, as Luis sleeps, María is visited by a strange man who brings her a wooden box, "something like Pandora's



box." Luis wakes up and says they must return to their own religion and forget about spiritualism; he locks the box in a cabinet.

However, Rodolfo shows up

and says he needs even more money because his farmer-clients can't pay their bills. Later, María opens the box and sees a human hand inside; she picks it up and says "I want 100,000 pesos!" (the amount Rodolfo needs to get out of debt). Luis arrives in time to watch the disembodied hand crawl across the floor and back into the box.

The next day, Luis and María are visited by Eduardo, a pilot who works for Rodolfo, and a man from an insurance company. Rodolfo was killed in a plane crash the night

before; he had 100,000 pesos in life insurance! After Rodolfo's funeral, María picks up the hand again and says "I want my son to return!" And, of course, he does, as a horribly mutilated corpse! Luis uses the hand to demand that Rodolfo "return to the grave!"



and he does (or at least he vanishes from the house). María drops dead, horribly aged.

His story complete, Luis leaves the church and shambles away.

*Espiritismo* has a number of loose ends,

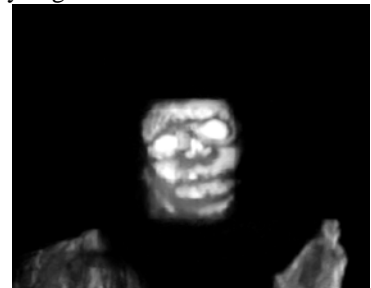
or, more accurately, aspects which are never clear and have only peripheral relevance to the plot. The focus of the film is on Luis, María, and (to a lesser extent) Rodolfo, but there are numerous other characters who appear from time to time but do

almost nothing: Rodolfo's fiancée Aurora, Carmen, her husband Guillermo, Elvira, medium Estercita, widow Alicia, don Carlos (and his wife and his daughter), and so on. They all presumably have back-stories but we're not privy to them. Ormuz-Arimán vaguely discusses his past when he delivers the wooden box to María, saying there's something in the box "that belonged to me a long time ago." Presumably then it's his hand? But when he brings the box in, he uses both hands. Perhaps he was just a previous beneficiary of the hand's power? And is now cursed to wander through eternity, delivering it to those who invoke Satan's assistance?

The casting is curious. José Luis Jiménez was a veteran character actor (aged 61) but the film's structure means he has to play a younger man (wearing an obvious toupee) for most of the running time--were there no middle-aged performers available who could be made up to look old for the framing sequences? Nora Veryán, on the other hand, was only 32 years old but looks somewhat older. She mostly played supporting roles and given the presence of 3 other "leading" actresses in the cast (Beatriz Aguirre, Alicia Caro, Carmelita González, all who have relatively small parts), it's puzzling why Veryán got the plum role of María. She's fine, but it still seems odd. Julissa, who'd become a very popular actress shortly, appears here, billed as "Julisa Macedo" (her full name was Julissa del Llano Macedo); her first two film roles were in horror movies made in 1961, *Espiritismo* and *La maldición de la Llorona* (with her mother, Rita Macedo).

The film's special effects are variable in quality and effectiveness. The spirits in the séance sequences are mostly vague and hard-to-see double-exposures, which

is perhaps logical. When Satan arrives, there are several out-of-focus shots of what seems to be a giant spider flying through the



air, and medium-shots of figure in a robe with an odd (and effective) face traced in light. The floating cross causes this figure to disappear in a little pinwheel effect.

More effective is the scene in which medium Estercita is possessed by Carmen's spirit: she's given a mirror and first sees Estercita's face, replaced by Carmen's image, and finally a skull, helping Carmen realise she's dead. The twitching and crawling disembodied hand is also a decent effect (although you can see a rod attached to the wrist in one shot), used sparingly. René Cardona's horror makeup is very good: he really looks like he was chewed up



badly (the U.S. lobby cards use this as one of their key images, tinting parts of his wounds red for extra gruesomeness).

Trivia note: the K. Gordon Murray English-dubbed version looks like it was released in sepia-tone prints, but it's possible this is just an artifact of the video versions currently available. The original film was in regular black-and-white, as far as I can tell.



Trivia note 2: I never noticed until I re-viewed the film this time, but the title screen of *Espiritismo* uses a cute "ghost font."



## Spurious Spooks



### Un par... a todo dar [A Fine Pair]

(Filmadora Chapultepec, 1960) *Exec Prod*: Pedro Galindo Jr.; *Dir-Adapt*: Jaime Salvador; *Story*: Roberto Gómez Bolaños; *Photo*: Agustín Jiménez; *Music*: Antonio Díaz Conde; *Prod Chief*: Enrique Morfín; *Asst Dir*: Moisés M. Delgado; *Film Ed*: Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir*: Francisco Marco Chilet; *Camera Op*: Manuel Santaella; *Lighting*: Gabriel Castro; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec*: Salvador Topete; *Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed*: Pepe Li-O [sic, Lihó]; *Spec FX*: Juan Muñoz Ravelo; *Union*: STPC; *Studio*: Churubusco-Azteca

**Cast**: Viruta [Marco Antonio Campos] (*Viruta*), Capulina [Gaspar Henaine] (*Capulina*), Dacia González (*Lolita*), Raúl Meraz (*Cmdte. Felipe*), Quintín Bulnes (*cemetery caretaker*), Arturo "Bigotón" Castro (*Lolita's father*), Harapos [Mario García] (*hobo on train*), Trío Imperial, Lupe Carriles, Diana Montes, José Luis Fernández (*Fulgencio, deputy*)

**Notes**: *Un par... a todo dar* is a mediocre Viruta & Capulina vehicle. This may be partly due to the lackluster direction of Jaime Salvador—one of the least distinctive directors in Mexican cinema—who had helmed several of the pair's previous pictures (including their first starring vehicle in 1957; he'd direct all 4 of their 1961 productions). The picture is also cheaply made, has a small cast, and the script is weak. Viruta and Capulina were in danger of becoming over-exposed, making 14 movies in 1959-1961! Some of these were tolerable, but the team's Chapultepec pictures were on the whole much weaker than their work for Prods. Zacarías.

Roberto Gómez Bolaños, years before his television fame as "El Chavo del Ocho," worked on the Viruta-Capulina tv series "Cómicos y canciones," and contributed to the scripts of 24 of their feature films. There are a few mildly amusing bits in *Un par... a todo dar*, although some were reminiscent of the later (and somewhat similar) *El camino de los espantos*—there is a sequence where everyone hits everyone else with large wooden clubs, and when Bigotón Castro complains afterwards that he isn't feeling well, Capulina says: "How about a nice glass of water?" and pulls one out of his coat! [In *El camino de los espantos* it's a lit candle.] The two stars have their act down pat, but aren't given a lot to work with.

As noted above, the film looks quite cheap. The cast is quite small, only 6 significant characters, 2 others who appear in isolated sequences only, and a handful of extras. The film was shot on a couple of studio sets and the exterior "Western" street at the Churubusco studios shows up briefly.

Viruta and Capulina travel to the latter's hometown to purchase some land, using money they've saved from their "career" as singers on public transportation. They remember how difficult it was, facing hostile criticism and harassment by bus drivers, conductors, the police and...the other passengers. They're traveling in a boxcar, and a fellow passenger—a hobo—tries to rob them of their thousand pesos at knife-point, but the two comedians fool him using sleight of hand and then toss him off the train. However, since Capulina's hometown has no station, they're also forced to jump off the moving train.

They buy a parcel of land from the local *cantinero* but discover it's not a farm, it's a cemetery, complete with elderly caretaker. The *cantinero*'s daughter Lolita thinks the cemetery holds the clue to the identity of El Esqueleto, a bandit who wears a full-body skeleton suit. Viruta and Capulina return to the *cantina* to demand the refund of their money and run into El Esqueleto; the outlaw vows to abduct Lolita that night. Meanwhile, the local police commander always arrives just after El Esqueleto has vanished.



El Esqueleto doesn't capture Lolita, no thanks to the incompetent Viruta and Capulina acting as her bodyguards. Later, Viruta and Capulina discover El Esqueleto has constructed various false tombs in the cemetery which lead to an underground chamber. The next morning, in the cemetery office, Viruta finds El Esqueleto's costume; Capulina sees him with it, and thinks his partner is the outlaw. [This is completely illogical, since (a) the bandit was operating before Capulina and Viruta came to town, and (b) Capulina and Viruta had previously confronted El Esqueleto while they were together.] After considerable pointless running around, the villain is (finally) unmasked as...the caretaker. This is no surprise to anyone (and the film plays fair for once--Quintin Bulnes apparently wore the costume and did his own dialogue, unlike the films which have a "mystery" villain's voice dubbed by someone else).

*Un par...a todo dar* isn't offensively bad, but it's not very special. A young Dacia González gets to sing (or lip-sync) one song (Capulina and Viruta do one as well, then reprise it at film's end), and as noted the two main stars are veteran comedians who occasionally generate a laugh out of almost nothing. However, watching this is not really a good use of 90 minutes of one's time.



**Después de la muerte\*** [After Death] (Cine Falcón Prods., ©1996) *Exec Prod*: Laura Tovar Pérez; *Dir*: Alejandro Todd; *Scr*: Carlos Valdemar;

*Story & Re-adapt*: Laura Tovar Pérez; *Photo*: Mario Becerra; *Music*: Music & Images; *Musicalizador*: Ricardo Mancilla S.; *Asst Dir*: Rubén González; *Film Ed*: Miguel Larraguivel; *Sound Engin*: Abel Flores; *Re-rec*: Miguel Larraguivel Jr.

\* aka *La sombra de la muerte* [The Shadow of Death]

**Cast**: Jaime Moreno (*Gerardo Cabral*), Lina Santos (*Dr. Karen*), Laura Tovar (*Margarita*), Ivonne Govea (*Ana María Soler*), Juan Gallardo (*comandante*), Martha Elena Cervantes (*Sara*), Luis Reynoso (*Solís*), Fernando Sáenz (*Erick*), Alex Rodríguez (*Andrés*), Miriam Zárate (*Gerardo's secretary*), Raúl Tovar (*sound engineer*), Benjamín Islas (*Fernando*)

**Notes**: I don't know that Patrick Hamilton's 1938 play "Gas Light" was the first example of the "make someone think they're crazy" story, but it's certainly the most famous, having spawned stage, screen, television and radio adaptations over the years. *Después de la muerte* is a Mexican cinema version of this; one story in *Cien gritos de terror* is similar (although it's more "scare someone to death" than "drive them insane"), as is *Noche de fieras* (which more closely resembles *Después de la muerte* in that it uses high-tech effects to terrify the victim). The film concludes with about 10 seconds of actual supernatural content.

Ana María is a wealthy woman married to Gerardo, who manages her businesses. Ana María is "nervous," and has nightmares in which she's being pursued by an axe-wielding man. Gerardo urges her to take her medicine and drink her "tea," prescribed by sexy psychiatrist Dr. Karen. Ana María's niece Margarita and her husband Fernando--Gerardo's chauffeur--also live on the property, as does servant Sara.

The plot is revealed pretty quickly. Everyone except Margarita is trying to drive Ana María insane so Gerardo will have complete control over her fortune. [Or are they eventually planning to kill her? At one point Gerardo insists to the police that he doesn't want his wife institutionalised. Although that could be because then she'd be free of Dr. Karen's "treatments" and might actually recover. However, her death is definitely depicted as an unforeseen accident.]





However, one night when the ax murderer (revealed to be Gerardo in a ski mask) chases Ana María around her house, she trips, hits her head, and dies. Gerardo inherits everything but is almost immediately blackmailed by Dr. Karen (formerly his mistress, but who also has another boyfriend, Erick). The police are suspicious but have no clues. Servant Sara takes her pre-arranged payout and departs.

However, Sara doesn't even make it to the bus station before she's run down by a pickup truck. Karen and Erick are axe-murdered in their apartment. Gerardo drinks heavily, starts seeing spooky poltergeist stuff and his dead wife's ghost (didn't he realise this was exactly the kind of thing Ana María had been seeing, caused by his own tech equipment?), and then dies of a heart attack from fright.

Chauffeur Fernando inherits Gerardo's money; Margarita is puzzled, because she was Ana María's nearest relative, but Fernando says he "did things" for Gerardo to earn the money. He finally confesses he was in on the plot to drive Ana María insane and Margarita decides to leave him. Fernando leaves the room briefly and returns wearing Ana María's



nightgown and a blonde wig! Presumably this is how he "impersonated" Ana María's ghost to scare Gerardo to death, but it's a blatant cheat. First, the audience clearly

saw Ana María's face in the "ghost" scenes. Furthermore, Fernando's wig doesn't resemble her hairstyle at all and he has a giant black moustache that he doesn't even try to hide!

Before Fernando can murder Margarita, a bureau drawer pops open and Margarita seizes a pistol from inside, then follows Ana María's voice-over instructions and shoots her husband to death. Before he dies, Fernando strangles Margarita (with one hand, while dying of multiple gunshot wounds) but she's revived by the police when they arrive. As Margarita is taken away on a stretcher, Ana María's ghost appears briefly by her side.

As noted above, it's not clear what Gerardo's original end-game was, but even setting this aside,

the plot of *Después de la muerte* is convoluted and illogical. As in *Noche de fieras*, there is a scene where the evil husband consults with a special effects expert who provides spooky audio/visuals to frighten the wife, but some of the "effects" are clearly not within the capabilities of an actual system (such as figures vanishing and reappearing), let alone fooling anyone into thinking they're real. Also, the drawers and cabinets in Dr. Karen's apartment open and close and the lights flash before the axe murderer shows up, and there's no indication Gerardo (or Fernando) had access to the apartment to set up these gimmicks. It's also unclear who this killer is: Gerardo was revealed to be the masked axe-man when Ana María died, but there's a suggestion that the deaths of Sara, Karen, and Erick were Fernando's doing, since Gerardo appears shocked and worried by the news. (Indeed, Sara's death may have been a real accident for all we know--she wasn't going to squeal on the plotters, she was satisfied with her money and was leaving town!)

The performances in *Después de la muerte* are adequate. Ivonne Govea really chews the scenery as Ana María, but perhaps this is intended to illustrate her precarious mental state. Everyone else is fine. Jaime Moreno, who ran third place behind Jorge Rivero and Andrés García in the 1970s-80s "hunk" sweepstakes, has an odd looking cleft chin that became more prominent as he aged. It literally looks like a real-life version of Peter Griffin's chin from "Family Guy."



Trivia note: one wonders if Ivonne Govea's actual house was used for the shooting of this film, since two portraits of her can be seen on the walls. If so, she had a nice house!

Far too much time is spent in *Después de la muerte* showing Ivonne Govea running around looking agitated (one risible scene, which goes on forever, shows her frantically "fighting" her invisible--to us--attacker). Once she dies, the pace picks up with numerous other deaths in a relatively short period of time, but the film as a whole is technically adequate but not very interesting or entertaining.



## Skunks with Swords!



### La marca del Zorrillo [Mark of the Skunk]

(As Films\*, 1950) *Exec Prod:* Eloy Poiré H.; *Assoc Prod:* Ana María Escobedo; *Dir:* Gilberto Martínez Solares; *Scr:* Gilberto Martínez Solares, Juan García; *Photo:* Jorge Stahl Jr.; *Music:* Federico Ruiz, Rosalío Ramírez; *Song Arr:* Juan Bruno Tarraza; *Prod Chief:* José Alcalde Gámiz; *Asst Dir:* Valerio Olivo; *Film Ed:* José W. Bustos; *Art Dir:* Manuel Fontanals; *Camera Op:* José Carlos Carvajal, León Sánchez; *Lighting:* Horacio Calvillo; *Makeup:* Elda Loza; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Manuel Topete; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Asst Ed:* Manuel Guerrero; *Asst Art Dir:* Javier Rodríguez; *Studio:* Churubusco

\*opening credit reads "Felipe Mier presents"; end title reads "Distributed by Mier y Brooks-Dyana S.A. and As Films"

**Cast:** Germán Valdés "Tin Tan" (*don Martín, Vizconde de Texmelucan*; *don Tin*), Silvia Pinal (*Lupe*), Marcelo Chávez "Marcelo" (*don Marcelo de Toluca*), Rafael Alcayde (*don Gaspar de Cadereyta*), Hortencia Constance (*doña Leonor de Tijuana*), Juan García (*Pitaya*), Lupe Inclán (*doña Verónica, the witch*), Rafael Banquels [sic] (*officer*), José René Ruiz (*squire*), Joaquín G. Vargas "Borolas" (*cook*), Letie H. Carroll Dancers, Hermanitas Julián [Araceli, Elena, Rosalía] (*servants*), Humberto Rodríguez (*governor's clerk*), Guillermina Téllez Girón & Ángela Rodríguez (*party guests*), Ramón Valdés (*officer*), soldiers: Regino Herrera, Jorge Arriaga, Gregorio Acosta & Emilio Garibay; José Luis Fernández (*inn guest*), Magdalena Estrada & Leonor Gómez (*inn guests*), Joaquín Roche (*notary*), Manuel "Loco" Valdés (*employee*), Hernán Vera (*innkeeper*), Stephan Berne (*inn guest; torturer*)

**Notes:** *La marca del Zorrillo* is a well-produced *pastiche* of the Johnston McCulley's "Zorro" story, especially as seen in *The Mark of Zorro* films (1920 & 1940).

In colonial California in the early 1800s, corrupt governor Marcelo orders the elderly Viscount Martín to pay his taxes a second time (because he has no receipt for the first payment). Martín's son Tin returns from Italy after 10 years: he was supposedly learning sword-fighting, but instead studied *bel canto* and dance! [don Martín complains: "I have a son who's a *mari* -- *mariachi*!"] He was presumably going to say *maricón*, an anti-gay slur.] When Marcelo and his men crash the party don Martín has thrown to welcome Tin home, Tin insults the governor and clashes with Captain Gaspar (cakes are smashed in faces).

Marcelo has don Martín and his entire household ejected from the property (they take refuge in the local inn), but Tin and his "squire" escape. They rescue an old woman who's been tied to a tree by Gaspar and his men (were they intending to burn her at the stake? It doesn't seem so), taking her to the inn. This proves fortuitous: the woman is *bruja* doña Verónica, and she saves Tin from Gaspar and the governor's soldiers by causing a "blackout" in the inn.

Taken to Verónica's home (in a cave), Tin meets her son (a cyclops) and her parents (two skeletons). In gratitude for his kindness, Verónica gives Tin a magic salve made from skunks. Each time it's used, the salve (a) gives him a "new" face, (b) makes him an invincible swordsman, and (c) makes him stink. The effects last only one hour, and the salve can only be used 3 times.



[Tin's "new" face which makes him unrecognisable to his friends, consists of...a set of goofy false teeth. That's it. Although he's once described as "hairy," this isn't the case. One would think he could have been given some more makeup, even a white stripe in his hair? Perhaps Tin Tan didn't want to do this, even though he wears old-age makeup and crosses his eyes as don Martín. Also, the other restrictions are not really crucial to the plot.]

Tin uses the salve and visits the inn. His right hand, daubed with the salve, has a mind of its own and picks a fight with Captain Gaspar. Tin displays prowess with his sword but has to flee when his



power fades. Finally, he (this time dressed like Robin Hood) confronts Marcelo, Gaspar and their soldiers at the governor's ball and--when he reverts to his normal self in mid-battle--discovers he has the power to defeat them after all. Don Martín is proud of his son at last and Tin wins the hand of servant girl Lupe.

Tin Tan is extremely athletic in *La marca del Zorrillo*, leaping and jumping and running, and (it appears) doing most of his own sword-fighting (as does Rafael Alcayde, for that matter). If anything, the film contains a bit too much "action," with multiple sequences essentially showing Tin fighting Gaspar and the others, but none of them coming to a specific resolution until the climax.

Additionally, the first 50+ minutes of the 93-minute film are basically a set-up: Tin doesn't become the Zorrillo (who, instead of carving a "Z" on his opponents, imprints a cartoon of a skunk) until the 55-minute mark. The "plot" is simple: Tin versus Marcelo's forces, with few if any twists or surprises.



This is not to say the film isn't entertaining because it is, very. The comedy is largely restricted to Tin Tan as don Martín and Tin, with most of the rest of the cast playing it straight (well, Lupe Inclán as doña Verónica is *outré*, practically a blueprint for the later Hermelinda Linda). Silvia Pinal lays the accent and mannerisms on a little thick as Lupe, but she's generally quite cute. [Pinal's husband at the time, Rafael Banquells, has a minor role in the picture. Tin Tan's future wife Rosalía Julián appears in the film as well, as part of the Hermanitas Julián singing group; he was married to someone else at the time, and she didn't marry Tin Tan until 1956. Tin Tan got his brothers Ramón and Manuel bit parts in the picture, and his frequent co-stars Borolas and Tun Tun also appear.]

There are a few anachronistic jokes in *La marca del Zorrillo*--references to the atomic bomb, the hydrogen bomb, the Cold War, don Martín wishes "they'd invent machine-guns" so he could shoot Marcelo's soldiers, the modern musical instruments used for the "La Paloma" musical sequence--but for

the most part the film plays it straight in terms of its historical setting. The film is very well-produced, with numerous extras, nice sets, and appropriate costumes.

In general, one of the better Tin Tan vehicles of his classic period.



**Los espadachines de la reina** [Swordsmen of the Queen] (Películas Rodríguez, 1961) *Prod:* Aurelio García Yevenes; *Dir:* Roberto Rodríguez; *Scr:* Roberto Rodríguez, Manuel R. Ojeda; *Photo:* Alex Phillips; *Music:* Sergio Guerrero; *Songs:* Herminio Kenny; *Prod Mgr:* Manuel R. Ojeda; *Prod Chief:* Ricardo Beltri; *Asst Dir:* Carlos Villatoro; *Film Ed:* José W. Bustos; *Art Dir:* Roberto Silva; *Camera Op:* Leobardo Sánchez, Hugo Velasco; *Lighting:* Mariano García; *Special FX:* León Ortega; *Optical FX:* Ricardo Sainz; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Ernest Caballero; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed:* Raúl Portillo G.; *Union:* STPC; *Studio:* Churubusco-Azteca; Eastmancolor

[U.S. version: *The Queen's Swordsman* [singular] aka *The Happy Musketeers*]

**Cast:** Elmo Michel (*El Lobo Feroz*), Enano Santanón (*El Zorrillito Apestoso*), Ariadne Welter (*Princess Christiane*), Marina Torres Banquells (*Alondra*), Ofelia Guilmain (*Cornelia the Cruel*), Antonio Raxel (*King Wilfrido*), Miguel Manzano (*Chancellor Belmar*), Quintín Bulnes (*Prince Michel*), Xavier Loyá (*Prince Eugenio*), Antonio Brillas (*Chancellor Othón*), Armando Gutiérrez (*Rubial*), Elvira Lodi (*Alondra's mother*), Victorio Blanco (*plotter who kills Cornelia*), Edmundo Espino (*innkeeper*), Roberto Porter, Rubén Márquez (*Alondra's father*), Eugenia Avendaño (*voice of El Zorrillito*), Nothanael León (*torturer*), Rafael María de Labra (*Intendant*), Jesús Gómez & Salvador Terroba (*Rubial's men*), Vicente Lara (*asst. torturer*), Chel López (*villager & man who reads proclamation*), *villagers:* Blanca Marroquín, Carlos Robles Gil

**Notes:** Roberto Rodríguez had a long (50+ years) and prosperous career in the Mexican film industry as a writer, director, and producer (after getting his start in the 1930s, operating the Rodríguez family sound



system) but--aside from a handful of Pedro Infante vehicles in the Forties--the movies for which he's most remembered are his five "fairy tale" pictures.

Rodríguez "discovered" young María Gracia [born Margarita Aldecoa] and put her in a

couple of dramatic films (*La sonrisa de la Virgen*, *Los hijos ajenos*) before getting the idea of making a movie version of "Little Red Riding Hood." 3 popular films resulted: *La Caperucita Roja*, *Caperucita Roja y sus tres amigos*, and *Caperucita y Pulgarcito contra los monstruos*. After this, María Gracia disappeared from the screen, but Rodríguez realised that his "funny animal" characters El Lobo Feroz (The Ferocious Wolf) and El Zorrillito Apestoso (The Little Stinky Skunk) were bankable on their own. The duo was plugged into *Los espadachines de la reina* (filmed in February 1961) and a more or less equivalent pair (a cat and a chicken) starred in *El Gato con botas* (shot in October 1960). Then, for reasons unknown, he completely abandoned the fairy tale genre for the rest of his career as a producer, director, and writer.

[K. Gordon Murray resurrected the characters of Wolf and Skunk for a handful of bizarre shorts like *Santa's Enchanted Village*, which need to be seen to be believed.]

Elmo Michel replaced Manuel "Loco" Valdés as the Wolf this time, without a noticeable drop in quality, although he's been given a weird, Woody Woodpecker type laugh. The Wolf mask is generally immobile, with a lolling tongue, but in at least one scene it displays a bit of articulation (the Wolf's lip curls in a sneer). Santanón repeats as the Skunk, although his dialogue was once again post-dubbed by Eugenia Avendaño. [Was it an in-joke that the two rival princes in this film are named "Michel" and "Eugenio"?]

It might be 21st century thinking, but perhaps it's not too much of a stretch to view Wolf and Skunk as

a gay couple with an adopted daughter. The Skunk is male but is voiced by a woman, and early in the film says he's like "a mother" to Alondra. The relationship between the Wolf and Skunk isn't exactly loving: the Wolf is a braggart who verbally and physical abuses the Skunk, although when they're faced with death the Lobo admits "I always cared about you" and apologises for his actions.

The Skunk is the intelligent one of the duo; when the Lobo boasts about everything he learned from reading books on knighthood, the Skunk says "You can't read--I read them to you!" It's the Skunk who rescued the infant Alondra from a crocodile, but he's "Uncle Skunk"

whereas the Wolf is "Papa Wolf." However, the Skunk accepts his role as servant, referring to the Wolf as *mi amo* (roughly, "my boss" or "my master"). The final shots of the film make it clear that the Wolf and Skunk are analogous to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.



Wolf and Skunk are the foster parents of Alondra, rescued by them as an infant. The trio sets off to find adventure, and runs into good King Wilfrido and his entourage, who are making a grand tour of his kingdom. Wilfrido's daughter Christiane loves Prince Eugenio, but neighbouring queen Cornelia the

Cruel wants Christiane to marry her son, Prince Michel. Wolf and Skunk demonstrate their swordfighting prowess in a friendly competition with the King's men. When Wilfrido is later abducted by Cornelia's troops in an attempt to coerce him into agreeing to the Michel-Christiane marriage, Wolf and Skunk volunteer to rescue him (and do so, killing various people).



However, Cornelia's forces then kidnap Christiane and attempt to force her to consent to the marriage, torturing her when she refuses. Wolf and Skunk, accompanied by Alondra (who'd been left behind in Wilfrido's castle on their first rescue mission, but escapes and joins them for this one--arriving in time to prevent her adoptive parents from being burned at the stake by Cornelia's men) penetrate Cornelia's castle, followed by Prince Eugenio and Wilfrido's soldiers. A battle royale breaks out. Eugenio kills Michel and Cornelia is stabbed to death by one of her



subjects, tired of her oppression. Eugenio is revealed to be the real heir to Cornelia's kingdom anyway.

Eugenio and Christiane will wed. Wolf and Skunk are shocked when Alondra's real parents show up to claim her. They sadly depart (as Alondra screams and cries), in search of new adventures.

*Los espadachines de la reina*, aside from the characters of Wolf and Skunk, is not a fantasy film at all, and replacing Wolf and Skunk with two human characters would have required little revision of the script. Furthermore, although there is some slapstick and situational humour and a couple of sappy songs, the picture isn't exactly what one would call a "children's movie." Numerous people are graphically stabbed to death on-screen (many by Wolf and Skunk), not counting those who are struck with clubs or big rocks. King Wilfrido is starved and abused, Princess Christiane is abducted and tied to the rack, her nightgown strategically torn; Cornelia the Cruel says "Torture her without mercy until she dies!" Prince Eugenio is flogged.



As a "fairy tale" film, one doesn't expect *Los espadachines de la reina* to take place in a recognisable world, and it sure doesn't. Everyone speaks with an archaic Spanish accent, but at least one scene takes place in an Asian garden (!), and in the scene where Wolf and Skunk first meet Alondra, there is a lot of stock footage of African animals (hippos, giraffes, etc.). Later in the movie, Alondra encounters an actual lion cub and pets it. The costumes are a mix of Three Musketeers-style and Camelot-style, and in the final battle sequence numerous soldiers wearing conquistador-like helmets join the fray.

The production values aren't bad, with several fairly large castle sets (the exterior shots of the castle are clearly of a miniature)--although much of the film takes place on exterior locations--and numerous extras in the fight scenes.

The performances by the cast are fine. Ofelia Guilmáin has less to do than she did as the evil witch in *Caperucita y Pulgarcito contra los monstruos*, but she seems to be having a good time as the evil queen. Quintín Bulnes can't seem to decide if he's supposed

to be foppish or a more *macho* villain, although he leans toward the latter in the climax, fighting and dying rather than running away. Antonio Raxel, Miguel Manzano, Xavier Loyá and Ariadne Welter are satisfactory as well. María Gracia having "retired" from the screen, she's replaced here by Marina Torres Banquells, who manages to deliver her lines accurately and even acts a bit in a scene or two.

A bit more fantasy content would have been welcome, but *Los espadachines de la reina* is moderately entertaining nonetheless.



## What a Night!



**La noche de la bestia** [Night of the Beast] (Churubusco--Impulsora Mexicana de Películas, 1988) *Exec Prod*: J. David Agrasánchez L.; *Prod*: Rogelio Agrasánchez Linaje; *Dir-Scr*: Gilberto de Anda; *Orig Idea*: Sergio Goyri; *Photo*: Fernando Colín; *Music*: Jorge Castro; *Assoc Prod*: Ana Lilia Tovar, Rafael Goyri; *Prod Mgr*: Norberto Jaime Nava; *Film Ed*: Ángel Camacho; *Beast Design*: Paco Guerrero; *Action Co-ord*: Bernabé Palma; *Camera Op*: José Luis Chavollo; *Re-Rec*: René Cerón; *Union*: STIC

**Cast**: Sergio Goyri (*Ramón*), Jorge Reynoso (*El Ronco*), Lina Santos (*Ana Martínez*), Hugo Stiglitz (*Willi*), Arsenio Campos (*Mario\**), Manuel Capetillo (*engineer*), Abril Campillo (*Willi's wife--cut*), Paco Sañudo (*worker*), Arturo García Tenorio (*Alfredo*), *workers*: Juan Moro, Marco Antonio Sánchez & Tito Guillén; Blanca Lidia [Muñoz] (*cook*), Sergio Goyri Jr. (*boy with guitar*)

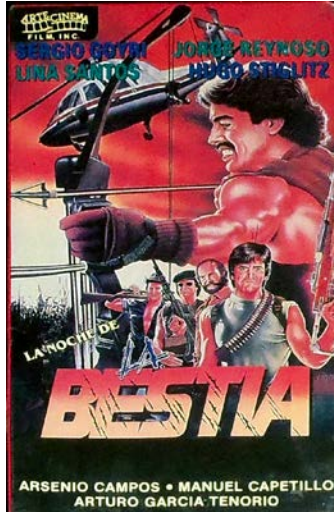
\*billed as "Marco"

**Notes**: this is not a very good film, chiefly because nothing happens for the first half hour. Some scientists are searching for uranium. Five guys set out for a hunting trip. That's it. The last 43 minutes is an improvement, but then again, anything would be. However, the real action doesn't occur

until literally the last 10 minutes of the film, which ends rather abruptly.

*La noche de la bestia* on DVD and television runs only 73 minutes, and all of the profanity has been censored (which is very annoying). It's also clear that many of the special effects have been truncated severely or removed entirely. The sequence in which Lina Santos takes a shower and feels something move in her stomach, then seduces Hugo Stiglitz and passes what looks like a fish to him via mouth is practically incomprehensible.

Some sources cite an 80-minute running time, and the 2006 Brentwood "Cine de Epocas" DVD box and



the "Diccionario del Cine Mexicano 1970-2000" both list 98 minutes! [But the Brentwood DVD version is the same 73-minute cut; the book also indicates the film was released direct to video, but lobby cards exist which prove a theatrical release was at least contemplated.] The credits contain the name of actress Abril

Campillo (as the wife of Hugo Stiglitz's character) but she doesn't appear in the 73-minute version.

Gilberto de Anda almost single-handedly kept the fantasy film alive in Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s (alright, the Galindos and René Cardona III helped). His fantasy directorial credits include: *Cazador de demonios*, *Mi fantasma y yo*, *Un paso al más aca*, *Masacre nocturna*, *Santo: la leyenda del enmascarado de plata*, *El chupacabras*, *Colmillos de furia*, and *El ángel de la muerte*. He also wrote *El trono del infierno* and *El arma secreta* (directed by Sergio Goyri), *La zona del silencio*, *El macho biónico* and *Abriendo fuego* (directed by his brother Rodolfo). *La noche de la bestia* is one of his lesser movies, but--as noted above--it seems clear that the version we're seeing is considerably truncated from de Anda's original, so perhaps it's unfair to judge too harshly.

Workers at a scientific institute, searching for uranium deposits, discover a long-buried meteorite, which turns out to not be an actual rock, but a "container" for...something. Meanwhile, friends Ramón, El Ronco (a policeman), Mario, Willi, and Arturo (an alcoholic actor) arrive at their cabin for an annual hunting trip. There is some male bonding, and--curiously--the men are mostly portrayed as incompetent rather than *macho*: Mario refuses to shoot a duck because it has cute ducklings with it,

Ronco uses an AK-47 to kill a rabbit, Willi and Ramón argue and both miss a deer, and Arturo just sits under a tree and drinks. Ronco does, rather implausibly, kill a bear with a knife.

After seeing an "atomic" explosion in the distance, the friends later spot a young woman fleeing from 3 armed men in a jeep, and are forced to kill the men to save her life, although Arturo is wounded. The woman, Ana, eventually recovers enough to tell them (in flashback) that the "meteorite" contained something alien. Arturo disappears

(killed by something underwater in the lake). Ronco and Ramón visit the institute and find bodies which have been ripped apart.



Mario has his foot ripped off by the creature in the lake. Ana takes a shower, then seduces Willi, transferring a slug-like creature to him in a kiss. Ana dies, Willie goes berserk and is killed by Ramón and Ronco. The slug leaves his body and is blasted to bits. This apparently enrages the monster, which leaves the lake and emerges through the cabin's floorboards. Ronco and Ramón shoot it to death and drive away from the cabin. The end.

*La noche de la bestia* is incredibly lop-sided. The first 30 minutes are more or less a buddy comedy with zero suspense or foreboding, the next 30



minutes set the stage with a sort of mystery (why were Ana's co-workers trying to kill her, what happened to her? what happened at the lab?), and last 10

minutes are the only legitimate fantasy-film action. Even given the probable existence of a longer cut of the movie, the first half-hour is unconscionably long and boring. For example, we're introduced to Sergio Goyri's character thusly: he's in bed, and wakes up when his alarm goes off. He takes a shower, gets dressed, makes himself a cup of coffee, grabs his hunting stuff, hunts for his keys, and finally leaves and gets in his truck. Of course, we then have to see every minute of him stopping to pick up (separately) Ronco, Mario, Willi, and Arturo. Then there's a long sequence at a roadside café, where a little kid (Sergio Goyri's son) demonstrates his guitar prowess. When the group finally gets to the cabin, they have dinner and go to bed. Then the next day, we get interminable scenes of them "hunting." And so on.



You'd think that the 30 minutes of male-bonding would provide plenty of opportunities for character development, but each of the 5 friends gets some minor trait, except for Sergio Goyri's Ramón, who's the main



protagonist by default: Ronco is a policeman, Mario plays the guitar, Arturo is the drunk buffoon, and Willi is married (although as noted above, his wife's scenes were cut, he does mention her). At least most of the actors get to do their own dialogue, which isn't true of Lina Santos (at least most of the time, but she doesn't have that much dialogue in any case) or (certainly) Manuel Capetillo. When the workers discover the meteorite, they pretty quickly agree to keep it a secret from their employer so they can profit personally--it's a bit of a surprise that Capetillo and Santos agree, but the other four people we see are veteran shifty-eyed performers (Tito Guillén, Paco Sañudo, Marco A. Sánchez and real-life convicted murderer Juan Moro) so we wouldn't expect them to be honest characters.

Which begs the question, why do the workers try to kill Ana? Do they know she's been "possessed" by the alien slug? For that matter, what's the relationship between the slug and the giant green worm monster? Where did the latter come from? That meteorite was awfully small (about the size of a beach ball) to contain a creature that size. Were there any answers in the longer version of *La noche de la bestia*?



The production values are adequate. The monster design is credited to Paco Guerrero, who might be Francisco Guerrero, a director, writer and assistant director. It's only seen once, when it emerges from the floorboards of the cabin, and is a green, snaky creature with a beaky head that has a couple of things (an eye? tentacles?) inside the "mouth." It rises up, gets shot, then sinks back down, all in the space of a few seconds. Not bad, but not awesome and utilised all too briefly.

*La noche de la bestia* was probably never going to be really good, but in its current form it's rather bad.



## **La noche de los muertos** [The Night of the Dead] (R. Rodríguez B., ©2002) *Exec Prod:*

Raymundo Calixto Sánchez; *Prod:* R. Rodríguez B.; *Dir-Scr:* Raymundo Calixto Sánchez\*; *Photo:* Ciro Cabello, Manuel Tejada\*; *Music:* Network Music; *Prod Mgr:*

Víctor Moctezuma B.; *Film Ed:* Adrián Castro B.; *Makeup:* Inés Mayo; *Sound:* Alejandro Velázquez  
\*these are



opening credits, may refer to framing sequence only?

### Individual story credits:

#1: "Los cuatro tumbas del muerto" (The Four Graves of the Dead Man) *Dir-Scr:* Raymundo Calixto Sánchez; *Photo:* Luis Lemus Sánchez; *Sound:* Alejandro Velázquez Islas

#2: "El pozo" (The Well) *Dir:* José Antonio Medina Hernández; *Scr:* Gloria S. Vera Alamillo; *Sound:* Noé Rincón, Leonel Durán; *Photo:* Eliseo Orozco

#3: "El zombie" *Dir:* Arturo Arellanos; *Orig Idea:* Ana María Juárez Rocha; *Scr:* Arturo Arellanos, Amador Arellanos; *Photo:* Amador Arellanos; *Sound:* Martín Mercio

**Cast:** Guillermo Quintanilla (*Andrés*), Carlos Ignacio (*Eduardo Morales*), Eva Garbo (? *Sra. Morales*), Gloria Barandela, Zahira de Quevedo, Hugo del Valle, Cheryl Mackey G.; Manuel Pavia, Samy Ortiz, Jesús Ojeda, Nayely Sarmiento, Itzel Valdez, Claudia Reyna, Graciela Sánchez, Luz María Ramírez, Erika García, Ray Harris

**Notes:** *La noche de los muertos* is a strange horror-anthology with no particular linking theme, but at least it has a framing story, and characters from all 3 sections appear in it, indicating the three "episodes" weren't just picked up from other sources for inclusion (although I'm not totally sure the "Santiago" in the framing story is the same actor from "El zombie"). They were, however, obviously made by different casts and crews and shot in different locations; the first two are ghost stories, but the third has no supernatural content despite its title, and it's difficult to understand why it was included at all.

The framing story features a stereotypical gypsy fortune teller (head scarf, hoop earrings, etc.) who apparently also holds séances. One of her clients is a woman who wants to contact her deceased parents to apologise...

#1: 1979 (which has no relevance to the story) in a small Mexican town: Michelle and her parents have moved here from Mexico City. Michelle thinks her new school is weird, and she's picked on by a group of girls. She also has nightmares and/or hallucinations about someone chasing her through a cemetery. The other students tell Michelle the legend of José, who was murdered but returns every May 9<sup>th</sup> to claim a new victim. Michelle decides to leave town but winds up in the cemetery where her classmates throw her a birthday party! But then they change into zombie-ghosts (well, their clothes get dirty & torn and some of them have minimal makeup on their faces).



Meanwhile, although it's midday, the town is plunged in darkness. Michelle's parents visit the local priest, who says everyone in town is a ghost and they lure people there to kill them. Meanwhile, Michelle is grabbed by zombie-ghost José, who drags her into his tomb. End of flashback.

At the séance, Michelle is suddenly hanging from a rope, dead. But wait--wasn't she already dead (in 1979)? Also, she never did get to apologise to her parents.

"Los cuatro tumbas del muerto" (the title is not explained, or perhaps I just missed it) is largely pointless and protracted (running nearly half an hour), and the "twist" ending in the framing story makes it even worse. The production values aren't horrible (most of the scenes were shot on location) but the acting is, for the most part, poor. Carlos Ignacio and Eva Garbo are pros and they handle their roles adequately, but no one else is very good (and some are very bad). The actress playing Michelle has a few decent moments but the script has her verbalise her every thought (annoying) and most of the time she's pretending to be frightened so it's a one-note performance.

#2: Andrés and his wife lost their young son and want to talk to him and learn if there was anything they could have done differently. We're plunged into another flashback...Andrés, his wife, and his son Samuel relocate to Morelia and move into a big house. Samuel makes friends with a little girl ghost, Angelita. Since both Andrés and his wife work,

housekeeper Carmela is hired to care for Samuel. Carmela is obsequious to the adults but mean to Samuel (we see about 10 seconds of this). Angelita tells Samuel she's a ghost because she was never properly buried: she fell into a well in the garden and drowned and her body was never found. Desirous of having a forever-friend, Angelita pushes Samuel into the well. Andrés climbs into the well to save his drowning son (honestly, there is about one foot of water there, although I suppose Samuel could have hit his head when he fell). His wife pulls Samuel up with a rope, and Andrés tells her to take the boy to a doctor (he stays in the well). Back at the séance, Andrés suddenly vanishes, having changed history so Samuel is alive but he's dead? His wife says "I want them both." Well, you can't have everything, can you?



"El pozo" runs just under 30 minutes. The plot is very superficial and certain aspects--such as the mean housekeeper--are introduced and then discarded. Samuel quickly accepts the fact that Angelita is a ghost, and even thinks it's kind of cool, which is a nice concept. The conclusion is puzzling, particularly in the context of an alleged séance--so the flashback was actually a revision of past reality, and Andrés now sacrifices himself for his son? Even though we don't see Andrés drown, I guess that's what is supposed to have happened while his wife was taking his son to a doctor. This is a "time paradox" story nipped in the bud, I guess. Overall production values (again, shot on location) are satisfactory. The performances are adequate.

#3: this story is bizarre and distasteful, although it actually generates some actual emotional impact at



the conclusion. Santiago is a person with an intellectual disability who lives with his mother doña Conchita, who uses a wheelchair. They live in a working-class *barrio*. Santiago is child-like and is mocked by some of his neighbours, who call him "El Zombie." Santiago also has a habit of peeking at young women while they're bathing or undressing, which doesn't sit well with their husbands. One day, doña Conchita has a heart attack and dies. Santiago doesn't understand this, and continues to talk to her, brush her hair, etc., even as she decomposes. Santiago invites his neighbours to a birthday party for



his mother (complete with cake, balloons, decorations, and so on) at which time they discover her death. She's buried and Santiago throws himself on her grave in grief. The end. The end? That's it? Yes. How and why Santiago is there with the gypsy at the séance isn't



clear. I guess he wanted to talk to his mother? The gypsy says the moral of these stories is "don't try to contact the dead. Leave them in peace, as God planned."

"El Zombie" is a troubling story in several ways. The acting playing Santiago goes way over the top in his depiction of Santiago's disability, but that's not to say it couldn't be "realistic" in some circumstances. Still, it's probably not politically correct. However, in the final scenes he really does convey the sorrow and pain of the character who's lost the only person who ever cared about him. The scenes of life in the *barrio* are pretty believable, another positive aspect, but on the negative side there are some distasteful shots of doña Conchita decomposing, with worms and mice crawling around.

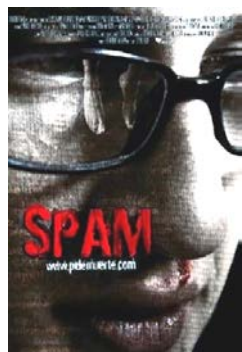
All of these things aside, "El Zombie" certainly doesn't fit, thematically, with the rest of *El noche de los muertos*.

Overall, this is a sub-par *videohome* with little to recommend it.



## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Tech Terror

**Spam** (Corazón Films, 2007) *Exec Prod*: Vance Owen; *Prod*: Elisa Salinas, Fernando Sariñana, Eckehardt Van Damm; *Dir*: Charlie Gore [Carlos González Sariñana]; *Scr*: Carolina Rivera; *Orig Idea*: Fernando Sariñana; *Photo*: Carlos Hidalgo; *Music*: Haggai Cohen Milo; *Music Supv*: Claudia Arias; *Prod Dir*: Pedro Cueva; *Prod Mgr*: Humberto Domínguez; *Asst Dir*: Marcel Ferrer; *Film*



*Ed*: Óscar Figueroa; *Art Dir*: Marina Viancini; *Spec Makeup*: Fernando Legarreta; *Audio Design*: Miguel Ángel Molina, Talía Ruiz

**Cast**: Sebastián Sariñana (*Tobías Romano*), Gloria Navarro (*Natalia Briseño*), David Ostrosky (*Ismael Romano*), Verónica Merchant (*Dr. Susana Duarte*), Jorge Zárate (*professor*), Zaide Silvia Gutiérrez (*professor's neighbour*), Luis Gatica (*Ramón Arocha*), Lili Gorette, Antonio de la Vega (*Ramiro Osoy*), Fernando Sansores (*Dino Sanabria*), Aldo Escalante (*Alejandro*)

**Notes**: a number of reviews of *Spam* are critical of its "unoriginality," indicating it rather slavishly imitates various Hollywood "teen slasher" films. Having seen few if any of these movies, I was not especially bothered by this aspect of *Spam*, although I had quite a few other issues with it.

*Spam* was apparently made in 2007 under the working title "Sr. Pánico," although some online sources give differing plot synopses and casts for the two titles (for example, Agustín Tapia gets a writing credit in one source). Fernando Sariñana began making films in the early 1990s, directing *Hasta morir*, *Todo el poder*, and *Niñas mal*, among other films. He produced *Spam*, directed by his nephew Carlos González Sariñana under a pseudonym and starring his son Sebastián (Sariñana's wife and presumably Sebastián's mother Carolina Rivera gets a "screenplay supervision" credit as well).

In a pre-credits sequence, a priest stabs a young man to death in a church. This seems entirely unrelated to the rest of the plot until the very end, but the final resolution is extremely confusing and annoying (and not consistent with the pre-credits scene).



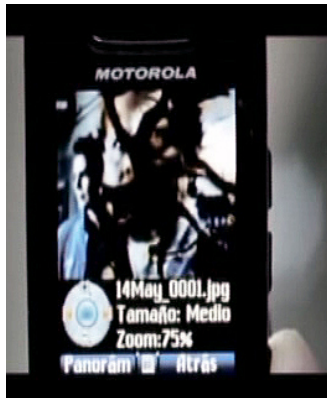
Psychiatrist Dr.

Duarte meets with teen client Tobías, who draws images of people who've been murdered in extremely gory fashion (and has repeated nosebleeds, a pointless "character trait"). Dr. Duarte sees a hysterical young woman on a stretcher, and jots down the URL written on her hand: [www.pidemuerte.com](http://www.pidemuerte.com) [don't bother to look it up, it's not live now]. Duarte's daughter Natalia sees the URL and looks it up on her laptop, but it's "temporarily out of service."

[Although made in 2007, the rapid changes in technology have made some aspects of *Spam* rather dated. Everyone uses flip-phones, for instance--although in essence they use them like smart phones--and Natalia visits [mx.myspace.com](http://mx.myspace.com).]

She later gets a reply: "Congratulations, Natalia! You tried to get into [pidemuerte.com](http://pidemuerte.com). To complete your death desire, forward this e-mail to those you hate the most. If you don't do it, you'll be the one who suffers a horrible death."

Natalia thinks it's a joke and sends it to various classmates, including Tobías (who's kind of an outcast because, face it, he's weird) and the teacher



who gave her detention. The teacher deletes the message, then goes home and is murdered (and the photo she took of him with her cell phone is "shattered"). This sequence sets the pattern for the subsequent deaths: the teacher

remembers a guilty incident from his past (when he and some other children locked another child in a discarded freezer), and the earlier victim returns in zombie/ghost form to wreak revenge (off-screen). The teacher's corpse (stuffed into his refrigerator, also not shown) is found the next morning by a neighbour.

Director "Charlie Gore" reaches into his catalog of film-clichés in this sequence: the teacher drops his tea cup and it shatters (in closeup), the stove burner goes out at the moment of his death, and his neighbour drops (again in close-up) the plate of pancakes she'd brought him when she discovers his body. Symbolism!

Natalia's friends half-jokingly blame her for the professor's death. Her classmate Sofía says she forwarded the email to her mother. Sure enough, Sofía's mother is murdered by a ghost-child (apparently she was in a previous auto accident and her other daughter died?). Another student, Alejandro, is murdered in the woods by a gang of ghost-children (after a flashback in which he recalled participating in the murder of a cat).



Tobías opens the email and calls the phone number shown in the enclosed animation, but it's a psychiatric help-line. He and Natalia visit the organisation (run by nuns), but are told they don't use computers there any more after...an incident. Through a highly coincidental process (Tobías is obsessed with true crime, his father is a police detective, his father's assistant Ramón gives Tobías

case files, one of which leads to serial killer Víctor Osoy, now dead) Tobías and Natalia think they've "solved" the case: Víctor Osoy, through his brother Ramiro, is using a computer to kill people. What? Tobías: "It's like the film about Chucky. But instead of a doll, Víctor possessed his brother's computer."

Time for another murder: a cheerleader at the high school hangs herself in the shower room after recalling an incident in which she and some other girls mocked a "fat" cheerleader who then hung herself. The connection to this and Natalia's forwarding of the chain email is tenuous at best. I'm not even sure we'd seen this character before, but maybe she was one of the generic high school students.

When high school jock Dino--who got the email but didn't open or delete it, yet is still alive (for some reason--perhaps he had no fatal incident in his past)--tells Tobías's father Sr. Romano that his son is responsible for sending the death "meme," the older man questions Tobías. Tobías deletes the email and says "I'm going to die and it's going to be your fault." Sr. Romano has Tobías committed to a mental hospital which coincidentally (a) is the one where Natalia's mother works, and (b) also houses Ramiro Osoy!

Tobías confronts Ramiro and is nearly strangled before his father arrives and shoots Ramiro to death. It seems Ramiro is seeking revenge because Sr. Romano was

the one who killed his brother Víctor? Or was it just a coincidence, and Ramiro was punishing people who did bad things in



their past (this would be a pretty big project, if so). The first supposition makes little sense because--remember--the whole chain of events was prompted by (a) Dr. Duarte seeing the URL on a patient's wrist, and (b) Natalia entering the URL on her laptop and getting the subsequent email. At this point Tobías was not even acquainted with Natalia.

To top it off, as the film concludes Tobías has a flashback/premonition/hallucination of the opening church murder, except now he's the killer priest (which he certainly wasn't in the pre-credits footage). Dun, dun, DUN.

*Spam* isn't a terrible film but it has a lot of plot holes (admittedly, I was rather bored and may have missed some explanations because I wasn't paying close attention). It's also curious that the gore is downplayed (and there's only very brief nudity in the shower-suicide scene): there is a lot of spilled blood, but the actual kills are not shown (except in the pre-



credits scene, and that's just one guy stabbing another). The production and technical aspects are slick and professional, with good locations and especially nice photography by Carlos Hidalgo (*Cantinflas*, *El fantástico mundo de Juan Orol*, etc.).

The performances are generally satisfactory, although the script doesn't always give the actors much to work with. David Ostrosky, for example, is forced to play the father of Tobías as an unpleasant fellow who bullies his assistant and belittles his son. Luis Gatica, on the other hand, is quite good as Ramón, who befriends Tobías and enables his obsession with murder by giving him case files! The two leads are also fine. Sebastián Sardiña hasn't done much more acting since *Spam*, he's been following in his father's footsteps as a producer-director-writer. Gloria Navarro doesn't have many screen credits either, but she's perfectly natural here in a reasonably good role.

Trivia note: It's unclear where *Spam* was shot, but in one early scene featuring high school cheerleaders, a "Go Bears" sign appears in the gymnasium. This would not seem to be consistent with a Mexican location, but who knows.

Generally moderately entertaining even if the script gets annoying at times.



### **Espectro [Spectre]\*** (Itaca Films-CTT\*\*, 2013)



*Exec Prod:* Guillermo Arriaga, Joceline Hernández, Rodolfo Márquez, Daniel Posada, Armando Lozano, Gabriela Maire, Andrés Tagliavini, Araceli Velázquez, Eugenio Villamar; *Prod:* Alex García, Santiago García Galván; *Assoc*

*Prod:* Bertha Álvarez Kaim; *Line Prod:* Joceline Hernández; *Dir:* Alfonso Pineda Ulloa; *Scr:* Carlos Esteban Orozco, Juan Felipe Orozco, Alfonso Pineda Ulloa; *Based on 2006 Colombian Film "Al final del espectro":* Carlos Esteban Orozco [co-scr] & Juan Felipe Orozco [co-scr, dir]; *Photo:* Marc Bellver; *Music:* Camilo Froidvel, Daniel Zlotnik; *Prod Mgr:* Omar Arias González; *Asst Dir:* Carlos Manzo; *Film Ed:* Jorge Macaya; *Prod Des:* Bernardo Trujillo; *Set Décor:* Noyolotl Orrante Mata; *Makeup Des/Spec FX*

*Makeup:* César Perlop; *Sound Des:* Alejandro de Icaza; *SpecFX:* FXShop; *Stunt Coord:* Julián Bucio; *Union:* STIC [credits taken from screen, IMDB credits differ in a number of instances]

\* U.S. release as *Demon Inside*; a trailer on YouTube indicates the film was released in some locations [Colombia, for instance] as *Espectro del mal*.

\*\* ©Prods. Sapos

**Cast:** Paz Vega (*Marta*), Alfonso Herrera (*Mario*), Johanna Murillo (*Mónica*), Maya Zapata (*Yolanda*), Marco Treviño (*doctor*), Gala Montes (*young Marta*), Camila Selser (*previous tenant of apartment*), María de Orduña (*Marta's mother*), Roberto Hoyas Calvo (*Marta's father*), Yolanda Corrales (*ghost 3*), Dana Karvelas, Arnulfo Reyes Sánchez, Antonio de la Vega (*Álvaro*), Claudia Marisol Díaz (*Yolanda's lover*), Diego Manzano (*Baldo*), Silvina [? Cannini] (*ghost; stand-in and stunt double for Paz Vega*), Inés de Tavira (*ghost 2*), Armando Resendez (*devil*), Arnulfo Reyes Sánchez (*delivery man*)

**Notes:** *Espectro* is a Mexican remake of a Colombian film (the rights to which were allegedly purchased for a Nicole Kidman remake which has so far not developed). Coincidentally, the protagonist in the original is named "Vega," and the Mexican producers hired Spanish actress Paz Vega for their version (and changed her name to "Marta").

*Espectro* is slick and generally entertaining, but

breaks no new ground and serves largely as a showcase for Paz Vega (who, unlike in many of her previous roles, keeps her clothes on for the bulk of the film) and for Alfonso Pineda Ulloa's fancy filmmaking.



Pineda Ulloa is a graduate of the UCLA Film School and IMDB credits him with directing the English-language comedy *Going Down* (2003) under the name "Joseph A. Pineda," but...who knows? Prior to *Espectro*, he'd made *Violanchelo* (aka, *Amor, dolor y viceversa*, 2008), a romantic thriller, and *Restos* (2012), which seems to be a romantic drama (and does not appear to have gotten much if any release). He contributed one section to *La habitación*, a multi-director anthology, and has completed the action film *The Jesuit* (written by Paul Schrader). He's also done television work. *Espectro*, as noted above, is very slickly made, with lots of quick edits, arty camera shots, and so forth, which--to be fair--are not at all out of place considering the genre.

Marta is a psychic who uses Tarot cards in her work. She meets architect Mario and has a good



(romantic) feeling about him, but for some reason her "gift" deserts her in this case: he savagely beats and rapes her. When she's

released from hospital, Marta moves into an apartment in the Edificio Victoria, obtained for her by her friend Mónica. Marta thinks she spots Mario on the street outside, and discovers via the Internet that Mario has been released from custody, denies his crimes, and blames her for ruining his life.

Terrified, Marta refuses to leave her apartment. She sets up surveillance cameras covering the street, the hallway, and various rooms in the apartment. Although she doesn't spot Mario again, she begins to see odd things in person and on the cameras. Her neighbour Yolanda is apparently a violent lesbian. Even more disturbing, Marta has visions of a woman being murdered in the apartment. Doing research, she discovers the Edificio Victoria has been the scene of various crimes over the years, and believes the previous tenant--some of whose belongings appear to have been left behind--was the murder victim. [Mónica contacts her uncle, who recommended the apartment; he tells Marta the previous tenant moved away and is fine, and the apartment's been empty for a while.]

Intercut with these scenes are flashbacks to Marta's life as a child, where she discovered her gift and interacted with ghosts, helping them.

Marta sneaks into Yolanda's apartment and finds nothing, but drops a bracelet and Yolanda finds out about her intrusion. She

attacks Marta but Marta manages to force her out into the hallway. Marta later discovers a peephole in her bathroom, apparently leading to Yolanda's apartment. She rams a stiff wire into the hole, badly injuring whoever's looking at her. [Nothing ever comes of this.]



Mario suddenly appears and attacks Marta, stabbing her and trying to drown her in the bathtub. Marta survives and eventually stabs Mario to death. She realises all of the visions she had were not things

that happened in the past, they were forecasts of the future. "It was me." She dies.



*Espectro* juggles its multiple sub-plots--Marta's fear of Mario, Marta's unpleasant neighbour Yolanda, the murderous "history" of her apartment, Marta's childhood experiences--more or less effectively, at least in technical terms. That is, they aren't confusing to the viewer despite the seeming lack of any connection between them (one wonders if Yolanda killed the previous tenant, for instance, and not until the final twist does Mario's murder of Marta turn out to be linked to her previous visions). The flashback scenes to Marta's experiences with unhappy ghosts in her youth are rather irrelevant: she doesn't communicate with any "ghosts" in the present, and there's no clear link between her ghost-talking, her Tarot reading, and her (as we learn) precognition while in the apartment. Do psychic powers work that way? (As noted, Marta's initial impression of Mario is dead wrong.)

A viewing of the Colombian *Al final del espectro* reveals a number of changes made by Pineda Ulloa for *Espectro*. The multiple sub-plots of *Espectro* are missing: the film focuses solely on Vega's paranoia and her relations with her neighbours. There is no violent rape and no Mario: Vega doesn't withdraw from the world after being raped, she is reacting to the tragic death of her boyfriend.

The supernatural flashbacks of *Espectro* do not exist in the original. Vega is a documentary filmmaker, not a psychic; it's true she does "see" things which later come true, and there's a brief, vague reference to her having "premonitions," but not to the extent of *Espectro*.

Vega's father in the original is replaced by Mónica in *Espectro*, and the weird Tulipán's role is split into angry Yolanda and murderous Mario. In both films the protagonist uses surveillance cameras and computers (although Marta spends more time using her tablet and does more research on her laptop than Vega, and Vega doesn't have a smartphone, perhaps due to the rapid escalation of technology in the 7 or 8 years between the productions). Significantly, Vega survives at the end of *Al final del espectro*, while Marta does not.

There are some scenes in *Al final del espectro* which have corresponding--but different--analogs in *Espectro*. For example, in *Al final del espectro*



Tulipán openly drills a hole between her bedroom and Vega's, nearly injuring Vega (who's heard the noise), whereas in *Espectro* the peephole in the bathroom already exists, and it's Marta who injures Yolanda through the opening. In *Espectro* Marta dons a black gown for no particular reason; this mimics a shot in *Al final del espectro* in which Vega puts on a gown that she believes belonged to the previous resident of the apartment. There are some scenes which are nearly identical in both versions: in both movies there is an effectively creepy scene in which the protagonist, looking at the video monitor, sees a ghost creeping up next to her, but when she looks around in real life, there's nothing there.



Both *Espectro* and *Al final del espectro* bear some similarity to Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965). In *Repulsion* there are no suggestions of supernatural or psychic phenomena, with the protagonist's mental illness causing her hallucinations, and this makes *Al final del espectro* feel closer to *Repulsion* than *Espectro*: the Colombian version depicts a drastic deterioration of the protagonist's mental state over the course of the film, whereas in *Espectro* Marta does not undergo such a significant change in personality.

*Espectro* is a well-made movie with a few jump-scares and a reasonably "logical" conclusion. The marketing misleadingly tried to sell it as a demonic possession film (especially the U.S. version *Demon Inside* and the Colombian release as *Espectro del mal*) using images reminiscent of *The Last Exorcism*, et al. As noted, the flashback scenes of young Marta and actual ghosts seem rather out of place and don't really tie in to the "precognition" explanation for what Marta experiences in the apartment. Changing the flashbacks to something more conventional (Marta foresees someone's death, for instance) would



have made the narrative tidier, but perhaps they were written as they were to show that Marta was fooled: she thought she was dealing with ghosts, as she had done as a child, but she was really seeing the future, and this miscalculation eventually costs her her life.

Not exceptional but moderately entertaining.

## Obituaries

### José José

Singer and occasional actor José José died on 28 September 2019; he was 71 years old and had been suffering from cancer for several years. José Rómulo Sosa Ortiz was born in Mexico City in February 1948. His father was an opera singer and his mother was a concert pianist; Sosa began his own recording career in 1965. During the 1970s and beyond he was dubbed "The Prince of Song" for his numerous hits (a 2018 television mini-series about his life was entitled "José José: El príncipe de la canción").



José José starred in 3 1970s films: *Buscando una sonrisa*, *Un sueño de amor*, and *La carrera del millón*. In the 1980s he appeared in a fictionalised biography of his life (*Gavilán o paloma*) and played real-life composer Álvaro Carrillo in *Sabor a mí*, as well as making a guest appearance in the all-star *Siempre en Domingo* film. The following decade he co-starred in the romantic drama *Perdóname todo*.

During his life, José José suffered from various health issues, some of them exacerbated by alcohol abuse: diabetes, emphysema, Bell's palsy and, finally, pancreatic cancer.

José José was married three times: to actresses Natalia "Kikis" Herrera Calles and Anel (Ana Elena Noreña), and Sara Salazar, who survives him. He had three children.

### Beatriz Aguirre

Beatriz Aguirre, one of the few surviving actresses of the Golden Age of Mexico, died on 28 September 2019; she was 94 years of age. Beatriz Ofelia Aguirre Valdéz was born in the state of Colima in March 1925. She made her screen debut in 1944, and continued to work in films, on television, and in the dubbing industry until the 2010s.

Aguirre played relatively few leading roles during her career. When young, she seemed sweet and vulnerable, and wound up portraying daughters, younger sisters and other "sensitive" types; later, she gravitated to parts as sympathetic mothers, aunts, nuns and so forth.



She won the Best Actress Ariel in 1993 for *Los años de Greta*, a film about senior citizens (Meche Barba and Luis Aguilar won Best Supporting Arieles as well).

Aguirre was married to Guillermo Romano, who passed away in 2018; the couple had two children.



## Sonia Infante

Actress Sonia Infante died of a heart attack on 16 July 2019; she was 75 years old. Sonia Angélica Infante López was the daughter of Ángel Infante, singer and actor and the brother of famed star Pedro Infante (her brother Toño Infante also became an actor).

She made her film debut in 1959 and acted in numerous films throughout the 1960s, including roles in *Mi alma por un amor*, *Las lobas del ring*, *Crisol*, *Su excelencia* (with Cantinflas), and *La vida de Pedro Infante*. In 1967 she married businessman and occasional filmmaker Gustavo Alatraste (ex-husband of Silvia Pinal) and retired from acting (she and Alatraste had two children) except for occasional roles in Alatraste's films (he began directing in the 1970s). After her divorce from Alatraste (she later married Andrés García; they were divorced in 1989), Infante returned to acting, eventually retiring again in 2007.



## María Idalia



Actress María Idalia passed away on 1 July 2019; she was 87 years old. María Idalia García was born in Mexico City in October 1931, the daughter of a Cuban journalist and a Mexican actress. She studied at the Instituto de Bellas Artes and made her professional debut on stage in 1950. In 1958, she appeared in the first *telenovela* broadcast in Mexico, "Senda prohibida." María Idalia had a long career in television, on the stage, and in films such as *Puños de roca*, *Senda prohibida*, and *Rostro infernal*.

She was married to actor Lorenzo de Rodas (who died in 2011); her son Leonardo Daniel is also an actor.



## Vicky Palacios

Actress, dancer and model Vicky Palacios died on 1 August 2019. Her son indicated her death was caused by complications after an April operation. Palacios, born in Veracruz, made her screen debut in the 1980s and appeared in numerous films, television programs, and *videohomes*, including *La casa que arde de noche*, *Rudo y cursi*, *Salvando al soldado Pérez*, and *Gloria, víctima de la fama*.



## Peter Fonda

Actor Peter Fonda passed away on 16 August 2019; he had been suffering from lung cancer. Peter Henry Fonda was the son of actor Henry Fonda and Frances Seymour Brokaw. He made his acting debut in 1961 and went on to appear in numerous films prior to his death, notably *Easy Rider* (Best Original Screenplay Oscar nomination, with Dennis Hopper and Terry Southern), *Escape from L.A.*, and *Ulee's Gold* (Best Actor Oscar nomination). He also directed 3 feature films.

Peter Fonda's only excursion into Mexican cinema was a leading role in Paul Leduc's *Cobrador: In God We Trust* (2006).

Fonda was married 3 times and had 2 children, including actress Bridget Fonda.



## Flavio

Comedian and voice actor Flavio Ramírez Farfán passed away on 18 September 2019 in a Mexico City hospital. He had been suffering from prostate cancer. Flavio (the name he used artistically) was born in November 1937, and began his career in the 1950s as an emcee and comedian as a teenager. He was "discovered" by Paco Malgesto and hired for the radio program "Variedades de medianoche," which led to additional work including dubbing foreign films such as the animated *The Jungle Book*, *Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree*, and *The Aristocats*.

Flavio was the "official" imitator of the voice of Mario Moreno "Cantinflas," and worked in this capacity on the "Cantinflas Show" animated cartoon series produced in the 1970s. He also narrated at least 7 editions of the *La risa en vacaciones* series (starting as theatrical films and concluding as *videohomes*), using a variation of his Cantinflas voice.

Flavio retired in the 2000s.



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