

# The Mexican Film Bulletin

Halloween 2022 issue

## Halloween Issue!

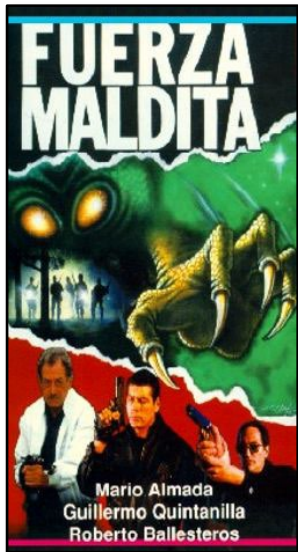
We're back with our traditional Halloween issue. In addition to reviews of fantasy-oriented films, we've also got (too) many obituaries and the results of the 2022 Ariel Awards. We'll be back in 2023 with at least 2 issues of **MFB** and perhaps some surprises!



## Halloween Reviews

### Mario Almada Sci-Fi

**Fuerza maldita** [Accursed Power]\* (Spicer Producciones- Million Dollar Video Corporation, © 1995) *Exec Prod:* Luis Rojas; *Prod:* Homero Guadarrama D.; *Dir:* Christian González; *Ser:* Homero Guadarrama D., Luis Rojas; *Photo:* Alberto Lee; *Music:* Richard Cuervo; *Assoc Prod:* Miguel Kahan, Carlos Salazar; *Prod Coord:* Luis Rojas; *Film Ed:* Cuauhtémoc Ponce; *Sound:* Noé Rincón  
\* aka *La bestia*, aka *Amenaza maldita*, aka *El depredador voraz*  
**Cast:** Mario Almada (Senator Rustegui),



Roberto Ballesteros (*Prof. López*), Luis Reynoso (*Loco*), Andreas Pears (*Chavito*), Guillermo Quintanilla (*Capt. Álvarez*), Carlos Mora, Jimmy Hefner, Luis Diaz, Emilia Fisher, Pablo Moreno, Genoveva

**Notes:** Pretty blatant imitation of *Predator*, with really only two points of interest--the attractive forest locations (Michoacán) and a couple of oblique political references

(and if anyone is interested in looking at Luis Reynoso's butt--not me, however--this is the place to see it) The film makes some very veiled allusions to the Zapatista insurrection in the state of Chiapas--although it is careful to change things around enough to avoid any direct comparison--but this is hardly a reason to watch the picture, which is decently paced but not very entertaining.

Guerrillas assault the home of Senator Rustegui and

kidnap one of his teenage daughters. They take her into the mountainous area they control. López, a college professor who also works for the intelligence service, pursues with a small group of mercenaries. The Senator tells his military aide, Capt. Álvarez, that he wants his daughter back, but he also sees this as a springboard to the presidency, if he can turn the situation to his advantage.



The guerrillas--led by a woman named "Stalin" (two of her associates are named "Mao" and "Lenin"): this is obviously a ploy to distance the group from the indigenous-based Zapatistas in Chiapas)--begin to fall prey to an alien creature which has apparently crash-landed in the forest (a "meteor" falls to earth at the film's outset, but later--after the alien has already been at work--another "meteor" falls; it's possible this is a continuity error). The creature can

blend into the foliage and--when visible--has long pointy claws and a lava-like, featureless face with two shiny black eyes but no mouth. It apparently hypnotizes or stuns its victims with flashing lights, and makes a roaring noise like a lion.



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López and his men rescue the Senator's daughter and begin to make their way back to civilization, but the alien kills off most of the mercenaries. López and the young woman escape when the professor hands the alien a bag containing a bomb that promptly blows up. However, when López delivers the former hostage to the Senator and Álvarez, Álvarez shoots and kills the girl, apparently because he 's in league with the guerrillas, or is opposed to the Senator's political aspirations, or something. He flees into the forest, and as the film ends is being stalked by the alien (who wasn't blown up after all--or maybe it's a second alien, from the second "meteor"?)

As mentioned above, the film is paced decently but everything else is on the poor side: characterisation, plot, dialogue, special effects, continuity, and so on. The fall of the "meteor" is accomplished by a very cheesy effect (a light moving across a still picture of the skyline); a couple of times there are decent "morphing" effects as the alien appears from the background foliage, but otherwise the makeup and effects are uninspired.



It is worth noting that there are two bits of nudity in the picture: an early sequence (unrelated to anything) in which a woman is pursued by the alien, caught, stripped to her panties, has her bare breasts fondled by the pointy claws, and is then killed by having a claw thrust through one breast; later, Luis Reynoso does some "tai chi" sort of exercises in the buff, a strange scene if there ever was one (note to Luis—work on those love handles).

Top-billed Mario Almada has some scenes where he tries to sound earnest, but he really shouldn't be doing these "action" films anymore if he isn't going to be participating in any real action. [Note: the previous comment was relevant when this review was first published in 1998!] He is a good actor but hasn't had a decent role in a serious film since *Pueblo de madera* (1990), and even then he'd been making dozens of low-budget action pictures for years and years. As he grows older, his roles have gradually diminished, cf the "Fiscal de hierro" series, where he was always top-billed but gradually relinquished most of the screen time to younger performers. Ballesteros and Quintanilla are OK, everyone else is marginally adequate.

*Fuerza maldita* is not offensively bad, but it shows a definite lack of imagination and originality, and--what is

worse--appears to indicate that the filmmakers really didn't care about making a better picture.

Originally published in **MFB v.5 #2** (1998) and revised for this issue.



**Asrael: La Bestia\*** [Asrael: The Beast] (Spicer Prods., ©1998) *Prod/Dir/Scr:* Homero Guadarrama;

*Photo:* Alberto Lee Sánchez; *Assoc Prod:* Marcos Almada Ruiz, Alberto Lee Sánchez; *Prod Mgr:* Javier Segura Torres; *Asst Dir:* Óscar González, Tania; *Asst Photo:* Alejandro Martínez; *SpecFX:* Javier Segura Torres; *Direct Sound:* Noé Rincón

\*aka *El regreso de la bestia*

**Cast:** Mario Almada (*Carlos Rustegui* [footage from *Fuerza maldita* only]), Luis Reynoso (*Arturo Córdoba*), Roberto Ballesteros (*Lt. Col. José Luis López Escobar*), Guillermo Quintanilla (*Capt. Álvarez* [footage from *Fuerza maldita* only]), Perla Jasso (*Sofía*), Lucía Muñoz (*Dr. Elizabeth Hastin*), Marcos Almada Ruiz (*Cmdte.*), Edmundo Galeasy (*Carlos Figueroa*), Carmen Moreno, Carlos Figueroa, Benito, Javier Sánchez, César Ontiveros, Erica Bernal, Gerardo Martínez, Andreas Pears (*Chavito* [footage from *Fuerza maldita* only])

**Notes:** although not technically inept, this is a very unsatisfactory film that will leave viewers bored and angry.

First, top-billed Mario Almada doesn't appear until the 78-minute mark (of an 83-minute film, although there is a "preview" of the next film that takes up a few more minutes) and every bit of his footage comes from *Fuerza maldita*. The same goes for Guillermo Quintanilla (and Andreas Pears, who isn't credited at all).

Second, nothing happens in this film. It begins with footage from *Fuerza maldita*, then picks up after a "massacre" at a scientific institute (which is not shown: a



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few minutes appear later in a dream sequence in negative-video, but even these scenes include some recycled footage from *Fuerza maldita*). The rest of the film is nothing but people talking (or, occasionally, using a computer). There is no conclusion, just an on-screen message reading “End of Chapter One,” followed by a preview of the next movie.



The “stars” of the film are Luis Reynoso—wearing rimless eyeglasses and a moustache that make him look

like a young Teddy Roosevelt, if a young Teddy Roosevelt had a mullet and chain-smoked constantly -- and Edmundo Galeasy (you would be justified in saying “who?”). Marcos Almada appears for about 2 minutes, and Roberto Ballesteros for about 5 minutes. Neither Reynoso nor Galeasy is bad, but (see above), they have nothing to do but talk: to each other, to the occasional other person, or (in the case of Reynoso) to himself via voiceover. [Reynoso’s character is not the same one he played in *Fuerza maldita*.]

The plot, such as it is, picks up a year after the events of *Fuerza maldita*. Senator Carlos Rustegui is now President of the fictional Republic of Valverde (where the film is set,



presumably to avoid offending the Mexican government). Someone anonymously sends investigative reporter Arturo documents

proving Rustegui is corrupt, and it later develops that he staged the “guerrilla” raid on his home, the abduction of his daughter, and her subsequent death, to advance his political career. Related or not is information sent to Arturo about the Asgrael, an alien race which has been searching for a new home planet; they’ve chosen Earth.

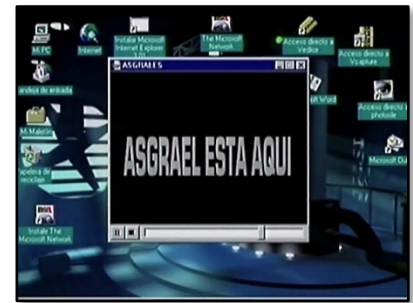
There’s at least one Asgrael alien on Earth—he’s the one who wiped out most of the guerrillas in *Fuerza maldita*. Now, apparently (since we never see him except in flashback footage for about 10 seconds), he attacks a scientific institute and kills a bunch of people. The only

survivor is scientist Dr. Elizabeth Hastin, who claims she can’t remember anything. Police Lt. Figueroa falls in love with Dr. Elizabeth and they have an affair, despite her extremely odd manner of speaking and acting. Her job involves something to do with satellites. Do you think this is leading somewhere? Yes, to another film. Which you presumably have to rent or buy (if you can: I’ve been unable to find it to view. I’d kind of like to see it, just to get closure—so I guess their marketing plan worked?).

*El regreso de la bestia* (the title by which this film is usually referenced) is a blatant scam. It’s not a monster film (it’s more of a political thriller if anything, although “thriller” is giving it more credit than it deserves, as it’s extremely boring), it doesn’t “star” Mario Almada, it’s not even a self-contained story. It’s not as if the filmmakers had such a unique, epic tale that was so gripping and detailed that they couldn’t include all of the great stuff in 90 minutes so they split it into two feature films: *El regreso de la bestia* could be edited down to 15 minutes without losing a thing.

*Fuerza maldita* was a *Predator*-ripoff; *El regreso de la bestia*, if anything, might be considered “X-Files”-inspired, including some very “X-Files”-ish music.

[Arturo also watches “Star Trek” (the original series) on television in one scene.] Speaking of the music score, there are several sequences where very bombastic, “dramatic” music is played excessively loud in an attempt to convince the viewer that something important is happening (or, more likely, to wake us up). There’s no action, no special effects (except some cartoony computer animation), nothing.



There are only two tiny positives about this viewing experience. First, the performance by Lucía Muñoz as Dr. Elizabeth, whose attempts to play an alien in human form (spoiler—although this isn’t revealed until the sequel, it’s obvious from the first 5 seconds of her screen time here) are extremely entertaining. Second, if you’d like to see some images of mid-1990s computer screens, your desire will be amply fulfilled.



### Guardianes de la dimensión prohibida\*

[Guardians of the Forbidden Dimension] (Prods. Tobari-Spicer Prods. ©1996) *Exec Prod*: Mónica Guadarrama; *Prod*: Marcos Almada, Homero Guadarrama; *Dir-Scr*: Homero Guadarrama; *Photo*: Alberto Lee; *Music*: Energética Music; *Assoc Prod*: Miguel Kahan; *Prod Chief*:

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Javier Segura; *Film Ed*: Javier Jiménez, Bernardo Larraguivel; *Digital FX*: Javier Jiménez C.; *Direct Sound*: Noé Rincón

\*aka *Apocalipsis (Guerreros de la muerte)*

**Cast:** Mario Almada (*Guardian*), Luis Reynoso (*Juan*), Marcos Almada (*Carlos*; *Morton*), Elizabeth Macari



(*Kaslawa*; *Ambionic*), Mario Almada Jr. (*townsman*), Rosy García (*Lucy*), Carlos Ruiz, Charly Ruiz, Francisco Martínez (*Yorko*)

**Notes:** *Guardianes de la dimensión prohibida* is, in a number of ways, better than *Mientras la*

*ciudad duerme*, Homero Guadarrama's other 1996 science-fiction film. Mario Almada has a larger role that's actually relevant to the plot; *Guardianes...* has a narrative (whereas *Mientras...* was just a bunch of action scenes resting on a premise), and it accepts its limitations and works with them, while *Mientras...* tried to emulate Hollywood action films on a tiny fraction of the budget needed to do so.

This is not to say *Guardianes de la dimensión prohibida* is really good. The biggest problem is its pacing: the 98-minute running time really drags, and almost every scene goes on much longer than it should. 10-15 minutes could be trimmed with almost no effort and the final result would be a significant improvement. While the Sonora locations (the film was shot in Huatabampo, Mario Almada's home town) are nice, the budget didn't allow for any non-digital special effects, or even many actors (not exactly sure if there was a significant philosophical reason for having Marcos Almada and Elizabeth Macari play dual roles, or if it was just cheaper than hiring two more people).

Carlos lives in Sonora, on the shore of the Gulf of California, and works as a mechanic. Since childhood, he has had premonitions or visions. He repairs a pickup truck owned by Kaslawa, a stranger to the area. Later, he has visions of a red sky, and of being hit by various lights. The next day, after experiencing more visions, Carlos walks (for a long time) and reunites with Kaslawa. She

says she summoned him. There are parallel dimensions, and a portal which allows beings to travel from one to another; a "Guardian" prevents sinister beings from crossing over. However, the Guardian needs their assistance, and Kaslawa can help Carlos develop his powers.



Meanwhile, in a long sequence of tinted footage, people in a small town are under attack. They dash about frantically, and many are killed. In Lucy's café, Carlos's friend Juan and the other customers hear a radio broadcast about a "wave of blood, death, and destruction" that hit a small town nearby, with more than 40 victims. Ambionic,



a woman warrior wearing a black jumpsuit, with a painted face and two knives, and a male figure\* with some sort of helmet and a laser-gun arm, enter the café.

Ambionic: "We come from Dimension 8." She briefly morphs into Kaslawa and says, "We're looking for this woman." Lucy tries to flee but is stabbed to death by Ambionic (who then licks the blood on her knife!); Juan resists and is also murdered by Ambionic.

\*[this may be the character billed as "Yorko," but it's unclear. I'll just call him RobotMan, although Air-Filter Face is also acceptable.]

Carlos and Kaslawa arrive at the café and spot Ambionic and RobotMan. Instead of driving off (or ramming them with the truck), Carlos and Kaslawa flee on foot. RobotMan shoots some police and blows up their truck. He then tracks down Kaslawa and captures her.

Carlos is beaten up and stabbed by Ambionic. Mother of mercy, is this the end of Carlos?

Nope, Carlos wakes up in a shack where the Guardian says "your cosmos is weak."

Kaslawa is a prisoner in Dimension Zero [later changed to Dimension Limbo], and evil being Morton is going to try to open the portal and invade the Earth dimension (it's unclear if it was Morton's



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army who killed the townspeople, and why Ambionic and RobotMan could come through the portal but the rest of the army has to wait). Guardian is too weak to resist Morton alone, so he trains up Carlos, doing what appear to be *tai chi* exercises, for “days.” Carlos is sent to a green-tinted forest dimension where he battles someone who looks like RobotMan but who’s wearing fatigues instead of a black spandex suit. Back on Earth, Carlos can now shoot energy bolts from his hands. His love for Kaslaw has powered him, but more *tai chi* is needed to perfect his power. Finally, in a very unclear scene (Carlos basically waves his arms a lot in front of a green-screen showing



lightning bolts, etc.), Carlos “rescues” Kaslaw and returns her to his dimension.

Guardian, Carlos, and Kaslaw separate to battle

Morton’s minions. Well, Guardian fights a relatively small group of Power Rangers-like soldiers, shooting them with a rifle & pistol, and finishing off the last one with a knife. RobotMan appears and he and Guardian have a Wild West duel, with RobotMan losing. Then Ambionic shows up, and Guardian battles her, his wooden staff against her two knives. They fight for a long time, then go into a clinch: Guardian pulls the pin on a grenade, blowing them both up (“Go to Hell!”). Kaslaw contributes her bit: sitting in the lotus position and meditating real hard. Carlos dives into the Gulf of California and swims for a long time, finally arriving in Morton’s headquarters. Carlos and Morton fight, Morton using Darth Vader-ish “remote strangle” powers, Carlos shooting lightning from his palms.

Morton removes his mask: he looks just like Carlos. Carlos wins, I guess? Carlos swims back to Sonora, and embraces Kaslaw. The end.



*Guardianes de la dimensión prohibida* is vague in spots (I’m not going to watch it again to see if I can figure it out), but the basic premise—the portal to the Earth dimension has to be guarded to keep out undesirable

aliens—is understandable, even if the execution isn’t always perfect. There is a fair amount of spacey jargon, lots of digital effects (some good, some OK, some not great), and adequately-performed action (clearly, Mario Almada isn’t doing all of his own fighting, but his double is professionally obscured so the illusion isn’t spoiled).

Marcos Almada is one of Mario Almada’s sons, and has more credits as a producer and director than an actor, but he’s fine in this film.

He spends half of the movie shirtless and isn’t exactly cut but he’s not flabby, either. Both Mario Almada and Elizabeth Macari are also satisfactory:



Mario doesn’t have a lot to do in the acting realm, while Macari is given a dual role and handles it well. Luis Reynoso and Rosy García were also in *Mientras la ciudad duerme* (in much smaller roles), and handle their limited footage in a satisfactory manner.

*Guardianes de la dimensión prohibida* is moderately entertaining, especially if you’re watching it with software with which you can fast-forward through the slow parts.

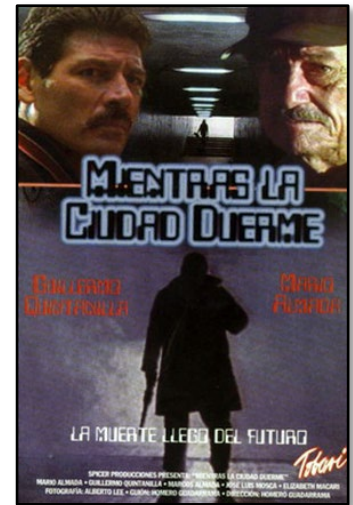


### **Mientras la ciudad duerme\*** [While the City Sleeps] (Spicer

Prods.-Prods. Tobari-Million Dollar Video Corp., ©1996) *Exec Prod*: Blanca Moreno; *Prod-Dir-Scr*: Homero Guadarrama D.; *Photo*: Alberto Lee; *Music*: Ramiro Pastrana; *Assoc Prod*: Marcos Almada, Miguel Kahan; *Prod Mgr*: Javier Segura; *Film Ed*: Javier Jiménez Cedillo, Bernardo Larraguivel; *Digital FX*: Javier Jiménez Cedillo; *Re-rec*: Miguel Larraguivel

\*aka *Ciborgtec*

**Cast**: Mario Almada (*prisoner 1*), Guillermo Quintanilla (*Carlos*), Luis Reynoso (*street fighter*), Marcos Almada (*prisoner 2*), José Luis Mosca (*Cyborg 1 and Cyborg 2*), Elizabeth Macari (*Sandra*), Yuriria Zavala (*Antrio*), Edmundo Galeasy (*Jaime*), Pilar Ferrer (*Susana*), Marisa Cortez (*Insulerma*), Rosy García



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(*mother*), Jerónimo Almada (*boy*), José Antonio Marros (*police official*); In footage from *Fuerza maldita* (Prod: Luis Rojas, Dir: Christian González): Roberto Ballesteros (*Lt. López* [sic: in original film he's *Prof. López*], Andreas Pierse [sic] (*Chavito*), Jimmy Heftner (*Güero*), Luis Reynoso (*Loco*), Luis Díaz (*Ramírez*), Emilia Fisher (*guerrillera*)

**Notes:** take scenes from *Fuerza maldita*, add a couple of minutes of new Mario Almada footage, then fill out the rest of the running time (about 78 minutes, of which about 6 is opening/end credits) with a mash-up of *The Terminator* and *The Running Man* (and since *Fuerza*



*maldita* is a *Predator* rip-off, we've got a Schwarzenegger-homage trifecta).

Homero Guadarrama has only a handful of credits on IMDB, and while he seems to have a social media presence (although his name is not unique enough to be sure it's always the Homero Guadarrama), I don't have a lot of

info on his career. According to IMDB (which isn't always correct and in fact erroneously dates *Mientras la ciudad duerme* as 1991: this can't be accurate, since it includes footage from 1995's *Fuerza maldita*), Guadarrama worked on several films in 1995, including *Venganza mortal* (production manager, actor), and *Fuerza maldita* (producer, screenwriter). His 1996 films included *Mientras la ciudad duerme* and *Guardianes de la dimensión prohibida*, followed by *El regreso de la bestia* and its sequel (1998?), and then the 3-film "El rey del mundo" trilogy (according to Guadarrama's YouTube channel, made from 2006-2011): *Los motivos de Alexa*, *Alto riesgo*, and *Pasión extrema*. *Pasión extrema* and *Pasión extrema 2* seem to have been released on DVD, presumably part of this "series," which does not necessarily feature the same people or themes in multiple films. IMDB also includes *Lobo* (1999) in Guadarrama's filmography, but provides minimal information.

There is an online review of *Mientras la ciudad duerme* (<http://www.oltretomba.net/cinema/cyborgtec.html>) which displays a video box under this title but then cites the name as "Cyborgtech—Guardians of the Forbidden Dimension," mashing up 2 Guadarrama films—that

describes the basic premise of the film in an amusing fashion (translated from Russian):

**The plot of this film is rather primitive and not always traceable. The idea is that in the far future, namely in 2035, humanity has a new fun game called Cyborgtech. Its participants must destroy each other in order to collect some bracelets. From 2035 to 1996, our heroes get to Mexico City: two prisoners, two cyborg killers and two female killers. They all begin to fight each other for possession of these bracelets. But two bracelets still remain lost on the streets of the city, and they accidentally end up with the main characters of the tape - a street fighter Carlos and a girl Sandra. Now this whole pack will hunt for a man and woman who do not understand anything ...**

Before we get to this plot, we're treated to footage from *Fuerza maldita*, apparently being shown on television. Watching it is a young boy (who, for some reason, is also wearing a headset with an eye-piece and holding one of those TV/video-game "ray guns"). He's a sci-fi fan, as evidenced by (a) trading cards, (b) comic books, and (c) "Star Wars" memorabilia on shelves in his room. Then we're treated to a completely unexplained and unmotivated scene of a man fighting a spandex-clad woman in a forest: this is footage from the end of the movie, included here because--? (to give us an early "action" scene?)

The rest of the film intermittently returns to footage of the boy (with his stilted voice-over narration), reading an "X-Force" comic book, complete with close-ups of the story's panels (which have no relation to the narrative of the film: would it have been too difficult to create a new, fake comic book? Apparently so.).



Finally, the actual plot gets under way, sort of. The participants in the "game" are twin Cyborgs dressed more or less like Keanu Reeves in *The Matrix*, and two cyborg



women dressed in spandex outfits, Antrio and Insulerma. Their prey: two prisoners, one of whom is almost immediately killed by a Cyborg. The second convict slugs a man on the street, stealing his clothes and gun (the guy

was trying to rob the convict, so he deserved it). A few scenes later, the prisoner is attacked by Insulerma, then by a Cyborg, but escapes. After a couple more intervening

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scenes, the prisoner cuts off his own hand so he can remove the tracking bracelet. Mario Almada, his day's work complete, exits the film.



Carlos, who makes his living in amateur street fights, visits a local pharmacy one night to buy pain medicine, and spots the green-spandex-clad Antrioc strolling down

the street. He follows, and sees her accosted by two men. Carlos intervenes, but Antrioc doesn't need his assistance, thrashing both hoodlums. After she's gone, Carlos retrieves a metal bracelet from the sidewalk. The next day, he sees an attractive young woman and—as is his wont—follows her (to be fair, she's also being followed by a Cyborg). The Cyborg confronts the woman (Sandra) and Carlos—as is also his wont—intervenes. Knocked out by his own weapon, the Cyborg vanishes. As it turns out, Sandra had found a bracelet on the street as well. The police are no help, choosing to devote their resources to combatting actual crimes where the perpetrators don't

vanish into thin air.



The rest of the film is one long chase scene, with the baffled Carlos and Sandra wondering why the

Cyborgs, Antrioc, and Insulerma are all trying to kill them. Along the way, Insulerma is “killed” by a Cyborg, and in turn a Cyborg (after being hit by a car and knocked off the upper level of a parking garage) is apparently killed by Antrioc (who takes his bracelet). Carlos and Sandra drive into a forest but still can't catch a break. Repeating the opening sequence, Carlos is attacked by Antrioc but manages to strip off her bracelets. She vanishes and a hard-to-understand voice says “the game is over,” or something like that. The next day (?) Carlos gets a call from his “agent” Jaime, setting up a new fight. As it turns out, his opponent will be...the remaining Cyborg! Sandra also calls to invite him over. Curiously, both Jaime and Sandra's roommate, murdered earlier in the film, are now alive and kicking: this surprises Carlos and Sandra because it makes no sense.

As *Mientras la ciudad duerme* concludes, the boy goes for a bike ride and is confronted by the Cyborg. Who...looks at him and walks away.

A few bits of trivia: (a) Carlos wears a Miami Heat warm-up jacket; (b) Sandra says “Hasta la vista, baby!” as she runs over a Cyborg; (c) the “X-Force” comic being read by the boy changes back covers during the film—first it's an ad for the 1996 film *Joe's Apartment* (Sex, Bugs Rock 'N Roll), then it becomes a house ad for “Neil Gaiman's Mr. Hero”;



(d) in one scene, huge graffiti on a wall refers to the FZLN (the Zapatista Liberation Front); (e) Carlos tells Sandra he's

originally from Huatabampo, Sonora, which happens to be Mario Almada's hometown, and is the location where *Guardianes de la dimensión prohibida* was shot.

There are some aspects of *Mientras la ciudad duerme* which are not good, but can be excused or at least understood (the *Fuerza maldita* scenes and the repeated scene between Carlos and Antrioc = padding the run-time), and others which are simply bad. For example, the Cyborgs (male and female) are poorly conceived: are they invincible, super-strong, or what? Gunshots knock them down but cause no wounds of any kind, while at other times the Cyborgs can be stunned by simple blows; Insulerma is “killed” by having her neck broken by a Cyborg, and one of the Cyborgs is maybe killed by a combination of a high fall and Antrioc. Also, as the aforementioned online review notes, the Cyborgs use “a **strange laser weapon, which for some reason never hits the target, and if it does, it rarely does harm. I don't know what the director wanted to show with this, but these scenes look extremely stupid.**”

The interpolated scenes with the boy (possibly the son of co-producer Marcos Almada, and thus presumably Mario's grandson) are too frequent and serve only to slow the narrative (and his stilted narration—in the context of the film, he's reading the comic book text—is awkward). The film could have done something meta with this concept (other than the final scene) but doesn't, and the fact that he's reading what is obviously a completely-different story than the one we're seeing is just insulting.

The digital effects are rudimentary but, to be fair, mostly satisfactory, given our modest expectations. Some of the morphing is decent (Antrioc emerging from a tree, Sandra's roommate morphing into Antrioc), but there are

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various green-screen atrocities. Most ludicrous is the sequence of Insulerna, “surfing” on a hoverboard, pursuing Carlos and Sandra as they drive a (car-jacked) auto.

Another less than ideal aspect of the film exposes the inherent contradiction between its conception and its execution. *Mientras la ciudad duerme* is an action film,



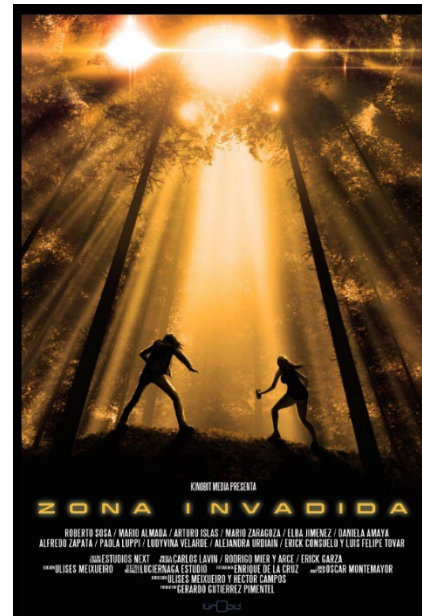
and consists almost entirely of action sequences: fights and chases, primarily. The film’s budget and personnel simply can’t

support either fights or chases, at least compared in any way to mainstream movies, and given that audiences could presumably rent a VHS tape of *Predator* or *The Terminator* for the same price as *Mientras la ciudad duerme*, this comparison inevitably turns out badly for the Mexican production. Head-to-head competition is not the way to go.

Guillermo Quintanilla and Elizabeth Macari are really the only people who have to “act” in *Mientras la ciudad duerme*, and they’re both fine: Quintanilla was a *videohome* stalwart (he has well over 250 credits on IMDB) who might have become a bigger star had his career begun a decade earlier, when theatrical action films were still viable. I remember him as the personable host of a Telemundo talk show in the late ‘90s (“Él y Ella”), something completely the opposite of his usual tough-guy film roles. Macari had a relatively brief film career, and while her name isn’t unique enough to be sure, there is an Elizabeth Macari in Mexico City on LinkedIn. She’s attractive, distinctive, and plays a reasonably assertive and “normal” character, although she’s given one terrible, insulting scene, distracting Carlos by screaming when she sees some rats. Killer Cyborgs, that’s one thing, but rats, ugh.

*Mientras la ciudad duerme*, despite its rough spots, is still reasonably entertaining, for what it is.

**Final note:** Buyer beware! The audio on the Unicorn DVD of this film I purchased is very out of sync. Fortunately, the VLC video program allows you to do “track synchronization,” and that allowed me to screen this without extreme annoyance.



**Zona Invasada [Invaded Zone]** (Kinobit-Media, ©2015) *Exec Prod:* Sahara Patricia Yépez, Gerardo Gutiérrez Pimentel; *Prod:* Gerardo Gutiérrez Pimentel; *Assoc Prod:* Ramiro Gerardo Luna Cavazos, Félix Genaro Payán Loya; *Dir:* Ulises Meixueiro Peláez, Héctor Campos; *Scr Adapt:* Gerardo Gutiérrez Pimentel, Óscar Montemayor Chapa; *Lucca’s Narration:* Óscar Montemayor, Gerardo Gutiérrez Pimentel; *Orig Story:* Héctor Campos Benavides; *Photo:* Enrique de la Cruz Motte; *Music:* Carlos Lavía, Erick Garza Salinas, Rodrigo Mier y Arce; *Prod Mgr:* Miguel Cinco Zamora; *Film Ed:* Ulises Meixueiro Peláez; *Prod Des:* Gerardo Gutiérrez Pimentel; *Extraterrestrial Prosthetic:* Jorge Siller; *Visual FX Supv:* Aizar Velázquez

*Additional Scenes Co-Prod/Dir/Scr/Photo/Film Ed:*

Ramiro Gerardo Luna Cavazos

**Cast:** Roberto Sosa [Jr.] (*David Castillo*), Mario Almada (*Cmdte. Lucio Peña*), Elba Jiménez (*Diana Arizmendi*), Arturo Islas (*young forest ranger*), Luis Felipe Tovar (*Ray Castillo*), Mario Zaragoza (*Carlos Villa*), Paola Lupi (*Lucca Vitti*), Elena Vellico (*voiceover of Lucca Vitti*), Luis Felipe Ibarra (*Edson*), Alfredo Zapata (*Rogelio, ranger*), Daniela Amaya (*Gabriela Garza*), Alejandra Urdaín (*ATV girl*), Ludyvina Velarde (*Ray’s asst*), Mayté Carranco (*Silvia*), Erick Israel Consuelo (*alien*), Raschid Marcos (*Pablo, camper*), Carlos Nevarez (*Neto, camper*), Hernán Ramírez (*mechanic*), Pablo Baca (*ranger Pedro*), Vanessa Beltrán (*Annie Castillo*), Perla Saldivar (*office worker*)

**Notes:** *Zona Invasada* is a mildly interesting but also frustrating film which bears clear evidence of post-production tampering. There is a special credit for “Additional Scenes,” but even without this evidence, it’s quite obvious that the “Lucca Vitti” footage and voice-



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over was added later, possibly to “clarify” the story, or perhaps just to pad the running time. These scenes add nothing, but (mentally) removing them does expose certain gaps in the original narrative, which might indicate why they were deemed necessary (unless some original footage was removed to make room for the new scenes, as opposed to never having existed in the first place).

The film opens with a pre-credits sequence featuring (as we’ll later find out) David and Diana preparing to enter a cave in search of something. This is confusing, because we’re not introduced to David until later, when we learn his daughter has been abducted. We



don’t know if this was what we saw in the opening scene (is Diana his daughter?)—but it wasn’t, it was just a gratuitous teaser of a scene that occurs much later in the story.

The added scenes are sprinkled throughout the film: Lucca Vitti is a UFO investigator, and we see her doing some research, and hear\* her discussing the various characters from the original footage. \*[actually, someone else does the narration—actress Paola Lupi has no dialogue of her own.] The original story, not necessarily in the order it appears in the film:

In the remote Mesa del Oso forest (a real place, in the state of Nuevo León), veteran forest ranger Lucio supervises the ranger station. He is involved in a custody



dispute with his daughter-in-law Gabriela regarding his late son’s children: she was declared an unfit mother (possibly for alcoholism), but now wants to regain custody.

Gabriela sets out for the ranger station to confront Lucio, but her car breaks down. She’s given a ride by Carlos, a television producer on his way to meet visual effects artist Diana, who lives in a cabin in Mesa del Oso, and is overdue with an assignment. Diana’s infant nephew is dropped off by her brother, who’s leaving on a business

trip. Meanwhile, David’s young daughter was abducted by aliens several years before, and he has become an obsessed hunter who still prowls the mountains hoping to find the aliens and recover his daughter (or at least avenge her).

Carlos’ car is buzzed by a flying saucer (more like a flying triangle) and stops running. Carlos gets out but Gabriela is in a trance and she (along with the car) is snatched up by the UFO. Diana’s baby nephew is stolen by an alien, helpfully captured on a video camera Diana left running while she took a shower. Lucio doesn’t believe her story—he thinks she’s working for Gabriela to try and kidnap his grandchildren--so she leaves on her own and meets up



with David. Later, Lucio reviews video footage on a camera he’d confiscated from a young woman who’d been taking sexy selfies in the forest: he spots an alien lurking in the background (as we’d seen earlier, the woman herself was abducted after fleeing from Lucio on an ATV). Lucio grabs a rifle and sets off to hunt him some aliens. In somewhat disconnected footage, a young forest ranger rescues a young boy who’s about to be snatched, shooting an alien to death. Lucio himself blasts an alien who attacks him: “You picked the wrong planet!” David and Diana track the aliens to a cave and rescue the baby. As the film concludes, David gives Diana his daughter’s teddy bear for the baby, saying he’s going to stay in the forest and wait for the aliens to return.

Lucca writes a book about alien abductions (oddly, when we see it and advertisements for it, they’re in Italian). She visits the cave in the mountains, finds a dead alien, and is abducted herself. We last see Lucca in a tank of fluid in an alien spacecraft, being probed (a scene also shown earlier as her nightmare).

*Zona Invasida* is technically fine, with some very good visual effects and a decent alien man-in-a-suit. The photography varies: the added sequences definitely look different than the original footage, which is generally superior. However, the original footage has a bit too much “floaty” camera for my taste, suggesting they forgot the tripod on some shooting days (or the film was actually shot on a gently rocking boat). The performances are also satisfactory, although most of the heavy lifting goes to Roberto Sosa, Elba Jiménez, and—to a lesser extent due to the size of their roles—Mario Zaragoza and Daniela Amaya. Luis Felipe Tovar has a minor part. As noted above, Paola Lupi doesn’t really “act,” she walks around

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but has no dialogue and interacts with nobody else. It's nice to see Mario Almada in a decent (albeit relatively brief supporting) role, and he shows a flash of the old Mario when he goes gunning for the alien abductor(s). Another plus is the absolutely spectacular scenery at Mesa del Oso (cabins available for rent!).



On the down side is the fact that the film is a patchwork hash, and even if you disregard the added sequences, there are considerable gaps in the back story and continuity, not to mention the basic premise: if the aliens have been abducting people in the same area for years, why hasn't anyone taken it seriously? The alien spaceships fly around in broad daylight, you'd think someone would have taken a photo. Also, it's unclear what's going on with the aliens abducting people two different ways: some of them are sucked up into the air and into the spaceship, while others are apparently grabbed and taken to the cave by the alien creatures, presumably to be exported later.

Overall, *Zona Invasida* is slickly produced and not boring, but the narrative is borderline incoherent.



## Roger Cudney Cinema

**Ghost Fever** (Infinite Prods., 1984/©1986) *Exec Prod:* Kenneth Johnson, Wolf Schmidt; *Prod:* Edward Coe, Ron Rich; *Poemandres* [Rich]; *Dir:* Alan Smithee [Lee Madden]; *Scr:* Oscar Brodney, Ron Rich, Richard Egan; *Photo:* Xavier Cruz Ruvalcaba; *Music:* James Hart; *Exec in Charge of Prod:* Miguel Rico; *Prod Supv:* Eric del Castillo; *Prod Mgr:* Jorge Camargo, Cassius Weathersby; *Prod Coord:* Teresa Toegemann; *Prod Asst:* Kate del Castillo, Agustín Gómez; *Asst Dir:* Richard Espinoza, Román Hernández Córdova; *2d Asst Dir:* Alejandro Todd; *Supv Film Ed:* James Ruxin; *Film Ed:* Earl Watson; *Prod Des:* Dora Corona; *Set Construction:* Raúl Cárdenas; *Makeup:* Tony Ramírez; *SpecFX:* Miguel Vázquez; *Cam Op:* Xavier Cruz Jr.; *Script Supv:* Mario Cisneros, Víctor Martínez; *Choreog:* Carleton Johnson; *Stunts:* Ángel de la Peña, Sammy Ortiz; *Sound Engin:* Víctor Rojo; *Sound*

*Mixer:* Manuel Rincón; *Boom Op:* Noé Rincón; *Animation:* Jorge Pérez; *Boxing Staged by:* Ron Rich

### Cast:

Sherman Hemsley (*Buford Washington*;  
*Jethro*), Luis Avalos (*Benny Álvarez*), Jennifer Rhodes (*Madame St. Esprit*), Deborah Benson (*Linda*), Diana Brookes (*Lisa*), Myron Healey (*Andrew Lee*), Pepper Martin (*Beauregard Lee*; *Sheriff Clay*), "Smokin" Joe Frazier

(*Terrible Tucker*), Kenneth Johnson (*Terrible Tucker's mgr*), Roger Cudney (*TV boxing announcer*), Patrick Welch (*ring announcer*), Steve Stone (*reporter*), Ramón Berumen (*referee*), George Palmiero (*Terrible Tucker's trainer*), George Sámano (*bearded zombie*), Carlos Suárez (*corner man*), Eduardo Bonada? (*bearded boxing commentator*)

**Notes:** filmed in Mexico in 1984 (under the title *Buford and Benny Meet the Bigoted Ghost*) with a mostly Mexican crew, *Ghost Fever* has almost no Mexican presence on the screen (chiefly Roger Cudney—who has a decent cameo, with dialogue, which is more that can be said for Carlos Suárez and George Sámano). However, it's amusing to see production credits for Eric del Castillo, his daughter Kate, cinematographer Xavier Cruz Ruvalcaba, etc.. Released theatrically by Miramax in April 1987, the film was poorly reviewed and apparently not successful at the box-office, since it was available on video as early as October 1987. This was bad news for Sherman Hemsley, who reportedly invested \$3 million of his own money in the production (and presumably lost most of that).

Mario A. Quezada's *Diccionario del Cine Mexicano 1970-2000* has an entry for this film (as *Benny and Beauford*) based on contemporary Mexican newspapers, which contains the following interesting points:

- This is cited as a Mexican-USA co-production, with the producers cited as "Miguel Rico Tavera," "Enfoque Films," and "Madden Productions," with only Rico credited on the final film (as Executive in Charge of Production)
- Production dates are given as 15 April-2 June 1984, at the América studios



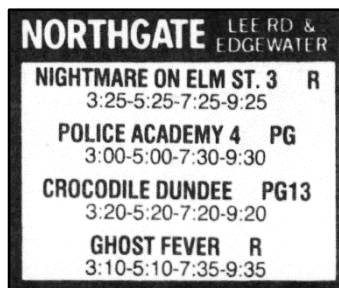
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- Cuban-born actor André Pavón is cited as a cast member, although Luis Avalos and Sherman Hemsley are also listed, so it's not as if Avalos replaced Pavón
- The synopsis deviates significantly from the final film's plot: "Two black policeman making a routine investigation are surprised by a storm that obliges them to take shelter for the night in an old house in the southern USA. The spirit of the founder of the Ku Klux Klan appears; he torments them with his appearances and puts them in traps that place the ghost and the protagonists in ridiculous situations. The motives of this racist organisation to carry out their various punitive actions are recreated from a satiric point of view." [The biggest differences are the apparent mis-identification of the two protagonists as Black, and the reference to the KKK.]

In a syndicated USA newspaper article that appeared in May/June 1984, it was mentioned that the boxing sequence featured "150 vacationing Shriners" who earned 400 pesos a day as extras.

A curious note: at least one newspaper review (in May 1987) and multiple newspaper ads (between April and September 1987), claim *Ghost Fever* was rated

"R," yet the majority of newspaper listings indicate it was rated "PG" (which was also the rating listed



on the Charter Entertainment VHS issued in October 1987). In Canada the film was recommended for "Mature" audiences specifically because of its language: Hemsley's character says "bullshit," "holy shit," "goddamn," and "bitch" (at least), in the film's first half. It's possible the picture was cut and re-submitted to the MPAA to get the PG rating, although as noted above, the newspaper listings show both "PG" and "R" at various times, with no chronological demarcation. Since the VHS running time was 86 minutes and the version on YouTube is 92 minutes, this does partially support the theory that cuts were made.

[Note: filmratings.com shows *Ghost Fever* received certificate 27523 with a PG rating. Films that are "re-rated" after being edited would apparently show this change, so who knows where the "R" rating for *Ghost Fever* came from?]

Credited to the DGA pseudonym "Alan Smithee," *Ghost Fever* was directed by Lee Madden, who directed only a handful of features and some television; his most recent work prior to *Ghost Fever* had been *Night Creature*,

made in Thailand in 1977. Even more puzzling are the writing credits. Producer Ron Rich was an African-American actor who was in *Throw Out the Anchor!* (shot in 1972) with actor Richard Egan, who also gets a writing credit on *Ghost Fever* (apparently the only writing credit for either man). Oscar Brodney was a screenwriter who'd worked in Hollywood on films and television shows from the early Forties through the Sixties. His last credit prior to *Ghost Fever* was *Fun and Games* aka *1,000 Convicts and a Woman*, shot in the UK in 1970. One wonders if Brodney (who passed away in 2008) had an old script in his files and sold it to Hemsley, who turned it over to Rich and (bizarrely) Egan for "updating." There are various attempts to give the picture some contemporary touches, with references to racism, marijuana ("a magic African herb"), and "the feminist movement," etc.

In 1880, Andrew Lee is buried outside his family's Georgia mansion, Magnolia House. Jethro, the ghost of a former slave, resurrects Andrew's spirit so he can haunt his former home. 100 years later, Sheriff Clay sends detectives Buford



(Jethro's great-great-grandson) and Benny to deliver eviction papers for non-payment of taxes on the mansion. Jethro and Andrew, fearing the house will be bulldozed and replaced by a freeway, team up to scare off the two intruders. Living in the house are Linda and Lisa, who say their great-great-grandfather Beauregard Lee (Andrew's father), a cruel slave-owner killed in 1860 during a slave revolt, is haunting the house.

Buford and Benny, along with Linda, Lisa, and medium Madame St. Esprit, are trapped in the house by



Beauregard's spirit. Madame tells the two young women that Beauregard will materialise during a séance at midnight and will save the

house from being condemned. Lots of nothing happens in the meantime, including a long dance sequence (!), before Beauregard appears as a vampire!?! (Seems he was the

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victim of a voodoo curse) He says Buford and Benny will serve as spare parts for his zombie factory in the basement (where 3 surgeons are assembling zombies from skeletons and miscellaneous organs, which is not how zombies are created). After a bit of running around, Benny stabs Beauregard with a sharpened stick, and the vampire is dead. Oh wait, it's only the 70-minute mark, we've got 20 more minutes to fill!



Benny and Buford want to help Linda and Lisa find a new place to live, but the young women reveal that they're sort-of dead, and if they leave the mansion they'll age rapidly and die for real (conveniently, they can take "ectoplasm pills" that allow them to survive for a few hours outside). Under the influence of weed smoke blown in by Jethro, Benny is convinced he's a great boxer, and can win enough money to pay the back taxes on Magnolia House by fighting Terrible Tucker. [To give credit where credit is due, the ensuing boxing sequence is well-



produced, with a large crowd of extras and decent cinematography and editing; it still isn't really that funny, but it does not look cheap.] With Jethro's

supernatural help, Benny wins the bout. The sheriff is angry because he wanted to buy Magnolia House at the tax auction, and he fires his two detectives.

Benny and Buford bid Linda and Lisa farewell. Since they're mortal, Benny says he and his partner will grow old and "after a while, it wouldn't be fun anymore." Buford: "We'd be better off dead." Jethro takes the cue and causes the men's car to crash, killing them both. [Shades of *El caso de la mujer asesinada* and *El fantasma se enamora*, and numerous other fantasy films.] As the film concludes, Benny, Buford, Lisa, and Linda celebrate their new "life" in Magnolia House. And Sherman Hemsley sings "Ghost Fever" over the end credits.

*Ghost Fever* isn't as bad as the contemporary reviews suggest. The biggest problem is that the writers included virtually no "jokes." Instead, there are countless scenes of supernatural mayhem inflicted on the two protagonists,

which are not slapstick-funny, and the reactions of Hemsley and Avalos are more serious than amusing. The two men were actors, not comedians, and one can imagine similar sequences being at least mildly funny if Benny and Buford were played by Abbott and Costello, or the Three Stooges, or even Bob Hope and Bing Crosby (or, dream on, Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder). Additionally, most of these sequences play out in master shots, and are not edited in a humorous fashion. The exception is the boxing sequence, which—although it's not hilarious—is at least decently shot and edited, and gets a boost by the enhanced production values. The majority of *Ghost Fever* takes place on the large, moderately luxurious "mansion" set, which is too bright and cheerful for the ghostly goings-on to be effective. The special effects are adequate but not impressive.

One other thing that contemporary reviewers frequently mentioned was the film's alleged racist tone. Aside from



one subliminal touch that probably no one even noticed in 1987 (a Confederate flag in the sheriff's office), the

complaints center around the character of Beauregard, a former slave-owner who tortured his slaves and retains his racist attitudes even after death. Beauregard is the film's villain, and his racism is certainly portrayed in an unfavourable light, so it's difficult to understand the negative comments of 1987. There are several, apparently deliberate, tasteless bits--Buford is strapped in a torture machine intended to teach slaves "rhythm," and at one



point he picks up Beauregard's picture book entitled "Groins of the Darker Species"—but these are still intended to poke fun at the stupidity of

racists, not racist in and of themselves. [Admittedly, people of colour might disagree.] Also, a film which features two blonde women having romantic relationships with an African-American man and a Puerto Rican man

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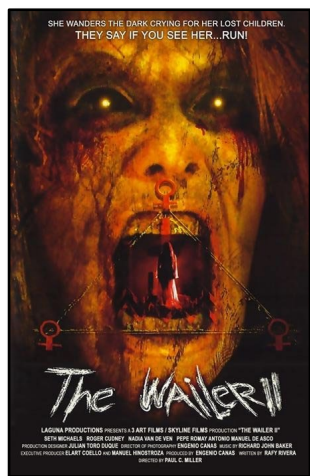
doesn't seem that racist to me. [Again, your opinion may vary.]

None of the performers embarrass themselves. It's nice to see familiar face Myron Healey in a decent, sympathetic role. While Hemsley's dual role is understandable (playing a ghost and his own great-grandson), having Pepper Martin play the unrelated Sheriff Clay and Beauregard Lee makes little sense (except, perhaps, budgetary). Martin overdoes it in both parts, but this is acceptable considering the roles and the genre. Hemsley and Avalos are both fine and have some chemistry, but their characters are colourless and playing their roles so straight kills a lot of potential fun.

*Ghost Fever* isn't very entertaining, but it's not horrible. Still, a movie that features multiple ghosts, a vampire, zombies, and undead blonde women shouldn't be as bland as it is.



**The Wailer II (La Llorona 2)** (3ArtFilms-Skyline Films/Laguna Productions, 2007) *Exec Prod:* Elart Coello, Manuel Hinostraza; *Prod:* Eugenio Cañas; *Dir:* Paul



Miller; *Scr:* Rafy Rivera; *Photo:* Eugenio Cañas; *Music:* Richard John Baker; *Assoc Prod:* Rafy Rivera, Al Bravo; *Prod Mgr:* Felipe Núñez; *Asst Dir:* Nayeli Robles; *Film Ed:* Michael Amundsen; *Prod Des:* Julián Toro Duque; *SpecFX Makeup:* Luis Horcasitas; *Audio:* Hugo Noriega

**Cast:** Seth Michaels (*Chava*), Roger Cutney [sic = Cudney] Erlen Meyer (*Prof. Thomas*

*McBride*), Nadia Van De Ven (*La Llorona*), Pepe Romay (*Gordo*), Antonio Manuel de Asco (*don Félix*), Susana Kaminitz Zelaya (*Chaman*), Mayté Carol (*old lady*), Dulce Alvarado (*La Llorona*), Alfredo "Pelón" Solares (*police officer*), José Sosa & José Rojas (*drunks*), Jesús García Ra (*monk*), Elsa Marín (*taquera*), Andrea Alarcón (*Sosha* [sic = Socha] *beer girl*), Edmundo Mosquera (*man whose finger is bitten off*), Xavier Loyá (*Padre Augusto*), Lucía Fernanda, Gastón Manuel Melo Contreras (*policeman in station*), Cristian Fernández (*Internet café manager*), Rafael Jorge Negrete (*Officer Rivera*), Lupita Adriana (*police woman*),

[filmed in Papalotla Texcoco, state of México]

**Notes:** ostensibly a sequel to *The Cry* (2005, aka *The Wailer*) and ostensibly the prequel to *The Wailer 3* (aka *La Llorona 3*, 2012), *The Wailer 2* has nothing really in

common with the other two films, other than the basic "Llorona" concept (and Laguna Prods., which financed and released the "series" on DVD). *The Wailer II* is the only one of the trilogy actually shot in Mexico, and features a surprising number of "familiar faces" in the cast, including Susana Kaminitz, aka Susana Kamini, who'd previously been seen with Roger Cudney in *Mary Mary Bloody Mary*. Also appearing are Gastón Melo, Xavier Loyá, Alfredo "Pelón" Solares, Pepe Romay, and Mayté Carol, presumably hired for their English-language skills. [At least one online review of the English-language version--*The Wailer II* was obviously shot in English but I've been unable to locate the English-language version, settling instead for a print dubbed into Spanish—criticises some of the Mexican actors for their heavily-accented dialogue.]

*The Wailer II* picks up with the father of "Julie"--the protagonist of *The Cry*--searching in Mexico for his missing daughter, who at the end of the first film apparently gets converted into a monster? (I watched just



the end of that film and her monstrous face is briefly shown, although she doesn't act like a monster). [Note: *The Wailer 3* apparently jettisoned any narrative connection with the first two pictures, although this is only based on a viewing of the trailer.] Prof.

McBride believes Julie is still alive, but is possessed by the spirit of La Llorona. La Llorona, meanwhile, wanders the streets of a small Mexican town, killing men. Although the first three victims we see are lecherous men who try to rape the seemingly-attractive Llorona (only to have her turn into a monster and kill them), this motif is abandoned as the creature later murders a priest, Chava's middle-aged uncle, and Prof. McBride, who are not sexually aggressive. It could be argued that the priest and McBride threaten the Llorona by their actions, but Chava's uncle is minding his own business when he's stalked and eviscerated.



Hearing of the first murders, McBride hires cabbie Chava to take him there, but the police are aware of this

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meddling *gringo* and take him into custody, stuffing Chava for the fare. When McBride is released the next day, Chava collects his money but for some reason agrees to help McBride in his quest. A couple of not exactly logical or connected steps later—they visit a *bruja* who warns Chava that La Llorona is dangerous but provides little advice, a local priest blesses a couple of crucifixes for protective purposes—and finally, pretty much out of nowhere, McBride concocts a ritual that will lure La Llorona out of the local river (where she legendarily drowned her children, thus commencing her career as a haunting, murderous spirit) and free his daughter Julie from the curse.



But something goes wrong and McBride is killed by La Llorona. Chava, who discovers his uncle Félix was also a victim of the creature, later learns that the priest (who's been killed by La Llorona in the meantime) only blessed 2 crucifixes, not three, and thus McBride was not protected. Some of the town's elderly ladies say the priest told them about the demonic presence, and they—along with Uncle Félix's *compadre* Gordo—unite with Chava to re-do the ritual; Julie is freed from La Llorona's spirit. However, in an epilogue, La Llorona possesses another young woman during a *limpia* (spiritual cleansing) administered by the Chaman.

*The Wailer II* is technically quite slick and professional, with nice photography & direction, decent special effects



makeup, a satisfactory score, and good locations. The acting is difficult to judge in a dubbed version, but most of the performers are satisfactory. It's nice to see Roger Cudney get a major role, Seth Michaels is pretty convincing as a Mexican, and veterans Susana Kamini (billed under what was apparently her real name of Kaminitz), Gastón Melo, "Pelón Solares" (in a very small

role), Pepe Romay, Mayté Carol, and Xavier Loyá give this a real *cine mexicano* flavour.

As a horror movie, it's bland and unexciting. There's no explanation as to why La Llorona just happens to be plaguing this particular small town. While it's suggested that this is where she began her existence, that makes little sense: even the film admits that the legend of La Llorona is widely known (with various "origin" stories), and if this was her home town, has she been murdering people here for years? You'd think someone would notice. Perhaps she travels around and kills people, and is just back for a vacation (the film takes place around El Día de los Muertos, so maybe that's her favourite holiday).

Additionally, there is little or no excitement or suspense generated by the plot. We don't even get any fake scares—La Llorona shows up, kills someone, and then disappears until the next time, and there are no scenes where Chava or McBride or anyone else is stalked (or thinks they're being stalked), hence very little build-up and little pay-off. In fact, not much at all really happens during the course of the film, and the pacing is very slow, with some essentially irrelevant footage (notably the domino tournament sequence which is far too long).

*The Wailer II* is professionally put together, but the chief reason to watch it is to see the aforementioned Mexican cinema veterans in action: if they'd been replaced by other performers, this would be a real time-waster.



### **Guardián de las Ánimas (Soul Walker)** (Laguna

Prods., ©2011) *Exec Prod:* Elart Coello, Manuel

Hinostrroza;

*Dir/Scr:* Jean

Dubois

[Morfin];

*Photo:* Diego

Arizmendi

[López];

*Music:* Richard

Baker; *Prod*

*Mgr:* Araceli

Arozqueta; *Asst*

*Dir:* Iván

Cuevas; *Film*

*Ed:* Roberto

Bolado;

*Additional*

*Editing:*

Michael

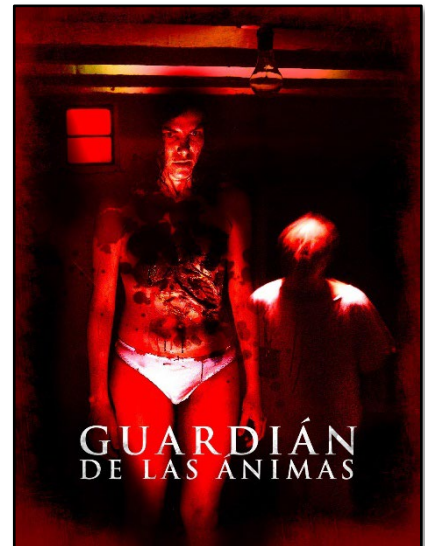
Admundsen; *Art Dir:* Fernando Acevedo García; *Digital*

*Post-Prod:* Ignacio Rinza, Luis Edgar Cano; *Sound Engin:*

Gustavo Patiño; *Sound Design/Mixing:* Andrés Erazo,

Alexander "Sasha" Panich; *Makeup:* Maribel Horcasitas;

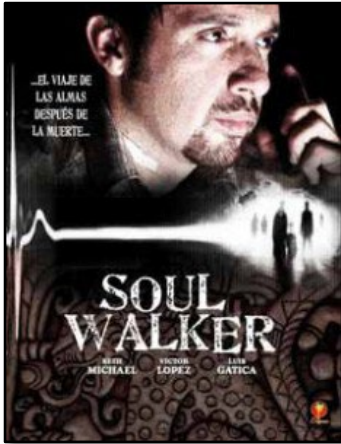
*Special Makeup:* Luis Horcasitas



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**Cast:** Seth Michaels (“Xolotl” aka Gerzael Acalhua), Luis Gatica (*Miguel Bermúdez*), Víctor López (*Justino Barrios*), Roger Cudney (*Donato Acalhua*), Juan Antonio Edwards (*Franco Leyva Morales*), Alexa Castillo (*Gloria Santos*), Eduardo Negrete (*hospital receptionist*), Elizabeth Margain (*reporter*), Napoleon Glockner (*doctor*), Víctor Manuel Duroc (*policeman*), Sergio Castillo (*patient*), Edgar Reyna & Arturo Morfin (*victims*), Margaret Joffi (*old woman*), Alejandro Galán (*Emilio*), Ignacio Tlatelpa (*resident*), Alberto Zeni (*television anchor*)

**Notes:** a few years after *The Wailer II* (2007), Laguna Productions reunited Seth Michaels and Roger Cudney for



*Guardián de las Ánimas*, another made-in-Mexico/shot-in-English horror movie. The rest of the cast and crew were entirely different, so the teaming of Michaels and Cudney is probably just a coincidence, a result of their status as English-speaking actors in Mexico. [Seth Michaels,

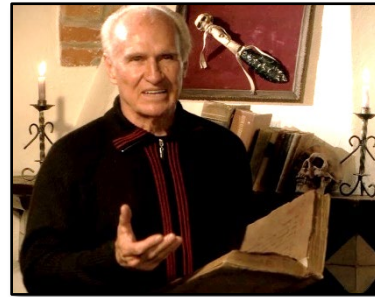
although a native English speaker born in California, is fluent in Spanish and convincing as a Mexican in both *The Wailer II* and this film. I was trying to figure out who he physically resembles in these two movies, and decided it’s a combination of comedian Tom Green and a young Ray Romano.] However, as occurred with *The Wailer II*, it’s nice to see some other familiar *cine nacional* names in the cast, in this case Luis Gatica and Juan Antonio Edwards.

Director Jean Dubois has only a few credits on IMDB, and *Guardián de las Ánimas* appears to be his only feature directorial work to date. He’s apparently a film school graduate (CUEC) and has done writing, editing, and production design on various projects (notably the 2013 horror film *El edificio*). His directing here is fine, in the flashy modern style (hand-held camera, lots of giant closeups, quick cuts, etc.) and the script—while confusing, at times illogical, and not entirely satisfying—delivers a couple of twists at the end.

A serial killer has been active in Merced, a *barrio* of Mexico City. Police detectives Miguel and Justino discover an injured man and a video camera: the tape shows the man being assaulted by a masked figure. Justino (who, it’s later revealed, was in love with Gloria, one of the killer’s previous victims) decides the man—Xolotl, a videographer who shoots “ghost hunter” footage—must be the murderer’s accomplice. He abuses and threatens Xolotl, and has to be restrained by Miguel.

Xolotl, hospitalised due to his injuries, is informed by a doctor that he has a brain tumour that will soon prove fatal. Xolotl is visited by Francisco Leyva, who gives him a purchase receipt for the video camera so he can claim it; Leyva subsequently vanishes. “Donato” and a telephone number is written on the receipt.

Xolotl goes to see Donato, who’s apparently an amateur historian and discusses Aztec sacrifices (the connection:



the Merced killer removes his victim’s hearts). The sacrificial subjects accepted the inevitability of their death, which allowed their souls to ascend to heaven; in contrast, people who struggle against

death are doomed wander as ghosts for eternity. Donato says his son suffered from the same health problems that afflict Xolotl, but was receiving experimental treatment in a hospital before his recent disappearance.

The rest of the film—until the last 15 minutes or so—is a vague mishmash of (a) Xolotl being attacked by Justino and rescued by Miguel; (b) Xolotl watching ghosts and images of the Merced murders on his video camera viewfinder; (c) Xolotl visiting Donato, drinking special tea, and gradually getting clues. Finally [spoilers], things are (more or less) explained.

Xolotl is really Donato’s son Gerzael, and his father is the doctor



who was treating him in the hospital. Francisco Leyva was Gerzael’s hospital roommate, and a former pornographer, who gave Gerzael the video camera. [This is bit confusing: Xolotl is apparently well-known as a “ghost hunter”—in one sequence, a hospital employee turns out to be a big fan and gives him access to Gerzael’s old room—but this doesn’t seem to make temporal or logistical sense.] Xolotl goes back to Donato’s house and finds “proof” that the older man is the Merced killer; he’s tied up and menaced by the masked murderer, who he assumes is Donato. However, just as the killer is slicing into Xolotl to remove his heart, Justino appears and kills the villain. Donato then appears and the killer is exposed as...Miguel! [So: Justino wanted to accuse/frame Xolotl as the Merced murderer, but Miguel defended Xolotl...because? There’s some rushed dialogue from Justino about faking his

hostility to compel the real killer to expose himself, and Donato deliberately withheld his identity from Xolotl/Gerzael so his son would recover his suppressed memories, but none of this makes much sense.]

Although clearly a low-budget production—small cast, limited locations, few special effects--*Guardián de las Ánimas* doesn't look particularly cheap. Some picture degeneration/pixelation is visible on the version I saw, but most of the time the image is satisfactory (although the audio is at times low and indistinct, again possibly the fault of cramming 4 features on a single DVD).



As noted above, the cast of significant characters is relatively small: Miguel, Justino, and Xolotl are the main roles, with Fernando Leyva appearing in a couple of scenes, and Eduardo Negrete (as a smarmy hospital employee) getting one major scene; all of the other parts are minor. Michaels, Gatica, López, and Cudney are all fine: Cudney has a rare role in which he plays a Mexican character rather than a *gringo*.

*Guardián de las Ánimas* (*Soul Walker*) was released on DVD as *Soul Walker* (in English) by Laguna and also appears in its English-language version on the "Midnight Chills" 7-film DVD set. [The other titles include *La Hacienda* (made in Peru) and *Silent Lady* (aka *La Mataviejitas*, directed by Christian González), along with various other shot-on-video horror movies.] The English version appears to have been streamed on Amazon and Hulu, although it's not currently available there (for me, anyway). It seems to have also been released in a Spanish-dub on DVD.



## Mucha lucha: El Santo

**El puño de la muerte** (*The Fist of Death*) (Victor Films--Cin. Jalisco, 1981) *Exec Prod*: Víctor Herrera; *Dir*: Alfredo B. Crevenna; *Adapt*: Alfredo B. Crevenna, Sergio Álvarez A.; *Story*: Ramón Obón [Jr.]; *Photo*: Juan Manuel Herrera; *Prod Mgr*: Eduardo Martínez; *Camera Op*: Fernando Fernández; *Makeup*: Ma. Luisa Carrasco; *Dialog Rec*: René Cerón; *Union*: STPC

**Cast**: Santo (*Santo*), Grace Renat (*Kungyan*; *Quería*); César Sobrevals (*Raguri*), Steve Cheng (*Prince Ching-Ka*), Gilberto Trujillo (*Niña's servant*), Carlos Suárez (*Cliff*), Tinieblas [Manuel Leal] (*Tinieblas*),



Sandra Duarte (*Niña de la selva*), "Franky," Ismael Ramírez (?*beast-man*), Fishman (*wrestler*)

Mexico City release -- 9 December 1982,  
Authorization: B

**Notes**: Santo's final two starring films were shot back-to-back in Florida, beginning on 17 September 1981. *El puño de la muerte* and *La furia de los karatecas* aren't horrible—they're outright fantasy films, which are a change from Santo's horror, science-fiction, and crime movies, and the unusual locations (the Vizcaya Museum in Miami, the Coral Castle in Homestead, and the Everglades) are a novel touch. Certainly the films are slow and cheap, but they're not boring.

Kungyan benevolently rules her land through the power of the "Star of Great Power," a glowing crystal than can heal sick people and do other magical things. However, her jealous twin sister Quería perverts the Star's power and is banished, along with her henchman Tinieblas. Tinieblas



seduces one of Kungyan's female subjects and they steal the Star. Kungyan and her chancellor (or

something) Raguri consult the Oracle, who says "the man without a face" will help them.

This is, of course, El Santo, who at the moment is participating in a tag-team match (one of his partners is Fishman). This match is actually rather good, with Santo



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doing quite a bit of strenuous action, despite carrying visibly more weight than he did in his earlier years. After the bout, he tells his assistant Cliff that he received a telepathic message and they must leave immediately on an important mission.

[Santo and Cliff's journey is intercut with other sequences, but we'll recap it here. First they take a private jet from Mexico; next, they travel through a swamp in an airboat. After walking for a while, they reach a grass airfield and fly off in a small, single-engine airplane. When it lands, then they get in a little boat with an outboard motor and travel for a long time, finally reaching their destination around the 42-minute mark of this 86-minute movie.]

Meanwhile, Prince Ching-Ka arrives to wed the Niña de la Selva. She and the Star of Power arrived from outer space years earlier; her presence caused a rift between Kungyan and Quería. Quería sends Tinieblas to abduct the Niña, but the Prince intervenes. To protect the Niña, she, the Prince, Kungyan, and some retainers are sent to the "House of Meditation" deep in the jungle. A short time later, Santo and Cliff arrive and meet Raguri; they then also set out for the House of Meditation.



Quería has been alerted to the arrival of Santo. She uses her Star-enhanced magic to change into a hairy beast-man (Santo beats him with a club and throws him into an alligator-infested river) and a tiger (Santo...tires it out? It isn't dead, it just gives up). Quería also sends Tinieblas to try again to kidnap the Niña, and this time he does. For some reason, sacrificing the Niña will give Quería more power, or something. Quería also changes into a snake that fatally bites Niña's bodyguard at the House of Meditation, where Kungyan is tied up. Santo and the others show up, learn what's occurred, and arrive at Quería's headquarters just in time to rescue Niña. Quería and Tinieblas escape, but the Star of Great Power is returned to its rightful place. "Thanks to Santo, peace has returned."

*El puño de la muerte* (the title means nothing, really) is ambitious, and the filmmakers do the best they can with the resources they had. Most of the "special effects" are rudimentary, but two are worth mentioning. First, as Santo and Cliff are preparing to board the second airplane,

they're attacked by Quería's men. One of the guys has a sword and lunges at Santo, only to run right into the airplane's spinning propeller and...he's literally cut in half.



We don't see it happen, but we do see the severed halves of his body on the ground (more than once)! The other notable moment isn't quite so good. In the flashback showing the arrival of the Niña de la Selva and the Star of Great Power, Raguri,



Quería, and Kungyan are the ones who discover the arrivals. Most of the shots of the two sisters in this sequence (and throughout the film) use alternate-shots and/or body doubles shot from behind. But one shot in this sequence gives us the worst split-screen effect in cinema history: a large black line is clearly visible between the two halves of the screen! It's inconceivable that someone thought this looked "good enough."

Despite Santo's energetic performance in the arena wrestling sequence, his other "action" scenes in the film aren't very exciting. His final battle against Tinieblas is mostly the two men pushing each other around in a half-



hearted fashion, and Santo seems to really be straining when he lifts up the (much larger) Tinieblas to slam him to the ground. The rest of

the action—Steve Cheng, Tinieblas, and assorted nondescript extras—is marginally adequate but at no time impressive.

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The performances are adequate: most of the dialogue seems to have been post-dubbed, but no one is really embarrassing. Grace Renat as the evil sister wears a black fur bikini, and as the good sister wears a white fur bikini; she also frowns and sneers a lot as Quería and smiles benignly as Kungyan. [One of the best things about *El puño de la muerte* is that it allows one to contemplate a world in which there are two Grace Renats.]

Trivia note: Santo is very briefly seen driving a 1975 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray when he arrives at Intervuelos S.A. (an actual company) to take a Learjet on the first leg of his journey.

Imaginative, not wholly successful, but still worth a look.



**La furia de los karatecas** [The Fury of the Karate Experts] (Victor Films- Cin. Jalisco, 1981) *Exec Prod:* Victor Herrera; *Dir:* Alfredo B. Crevenna; *Adapt:* Alfredo B. Crevenna, Sergio Álvarez A.; *Story:* Ramón Obón [Jr.]; *Photo:* Juan Manuel Herrera; *Prod Mgr:* Eduardo Martínez; *Camera Op:* Fernando Fernández; *Makeup:* Ma. Luisa Carrasco; *Dialog Rec:* René Cerón; *Union:* STPC

**Cast:** Santo (*himself*), Grace Renat (*Kungyan; Quería*); César Sobrevals (*Raguri*), Steve Cheng (*Prince Ching-Ka*), René Cardona Sr. (*Prof. Williams*), Edgardo Gazcón (*Prince Tegal*), Carlos Suárez (*Cliff*), Tinieblas [Manuel Leal] (*Tinieblas*), Sandra Duarte (*Niña de la Selva*), "Franky," Ismael Ramírez (*?beast-man*)

Mexico City release -- 7 April 1983. Authorization: B

**Notes:** *La furia de los karatecas* is not quite as entertaining as *El puño de la muerte*—the general novelty of the premise and the settings has worn off, and the narrative is rather fragmented and confusing. The nihilistic ending does come as a surprise, however.

Quería and Tinieblas, who escaped at the end of the previous film, return and are greeted by the High Priest as if they'd merely been away on vacation. Quería's schemes this time are varied and somewhat more mercenary than the mystical power struggle of the first movie.

Santo and Cliff return to Kungyan's palace, this time parachuting in for the wedding of the Niña de la Selva and Prince Ching-Ka. [You have to give the filmmakers credit, they went to the trouble of having parachutists dress up like Santo and Carlos Suárez and actually sky-dive!] Quería sends her henchmen and Tinieblas to steal the wedding presents?! Kind of petty on her part.

Meanwhile Prof. Williams of the University of Nova Scotia and his daughter/assistant Sylvia arrive to investigate mysterious "magnetic forces" in the area. They spy on Quería, who's dancing up a storm (a very frequent occurrence in this film). Her dance-magic re-creates the polka-dotted beast-man from *El puño de la muerte*: whereas in that movie, Quería actually became the beast-man, here she conjures him out of nowhere and sends him to attack Williams and his party. They flee, and now it's Santo's turn to peek at Quería's dance. Santo fights Tinieblas, but is overcome when the beast-man joins in. Quería bewitches Santo and sends him to fetch the "blonde woman" from the palace.



In an unintentionally hilarious scene, Santo shows up the palace, punches Cliff, Sylvia, Williams, and a bunch of

guards before abducting Sylvia (who happens to be blonde)! Wouldn't you know it, Quería says "not that blonde woman, I meant the Niña de la



Selva!" and sends him back again! Santo grabs the Niña but Ching-Ka defends her: Santo whups Ching-Ka then passes out himself. He's back to normal when he awakes.

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He and Williams visit Quería's hideout and (with very little effort) rescue Sylvia.

Quería has another plan. Prince Tegal is coming to the wedding. Tinieblas abducts him and Quería creates a magical double to take his place. She also visits the palace, knocks out Kunyang with incense, and takes her place. [Another terrible split-screen effect.] Quería (posing as Kunyang) tells the Niña that she shouldn't marry Ching-Ka, she should marry Tegal at the Temple



that night. Niña says sure, why not. Meanwhile, Santo, Cliff, Ching-Ka, and Raguri (and a couple of men) show up at Quería's hideout: they're attacked by the beast-man, some gorillas, and Tinieblas. Shockingly, Raguri, Ching-Ka, and Tinieblas are all killed! The real Tegal is freed, and everyone who's still alive heads for the Temple.

Quería changes her mind about having Niña marry the fake Tegal (unless it was just a trick to get her to the Temple): instead, Niña will be sacrificed so Quería gets super-magic powers. Just as in *El puño de la muerte*, Santo arrives at the last second to prevent the High Priest



from stabbing Niña. Fake Tegal and Quería vanish in bursts of flame. Suddenly, the voice of the Oracle is heard: Niña's mission to bring peace and love to Earth has failed, so

(like Poochie) she must return to her home planet. The end. Wait, what?

The conclusion of *La furia de los karatecas* is admittedly quite a surprise. After the shocking deaths of Raguri and Ching-Ka, I thought, well, the Niña will marry

the real Prince Tegal, but noooo. This *denouement* comes out of nowhere, literally in the last minute of the film.

There isn't much "fury" or "karate" in *La furia de los karatecas*: Santo and Tinieblas clash 3 times, none of which is very exciting (Santo loses the first 2 confrontations, but only because someone else helps Tinieblas; he makes up for it by killing Tinieblas in the last battle); Santo briefly battles (and defeats) Ching-Ka; and there are a couple of minor tussles between Tinieblas and miscellaneous characters, but that's it.

The script is rough. Tossing in new characters is fine, but Prof. Williams and his daughter Sylvia (played by an unbilled actress I can't identify) serve very little purpose, and Prince Tegal doesn't appear until quite late in the film. The idea that the bewitched Santo kidnaps Sylvia instead of the Niña is rather clever; this is an example of the "double" theme that appears repeatedly in the film--the good/bad Santo (although they're the same person), the two blondes, the fake Tegal and the real Tegal, and Quería impersonating Kungyan. But there's too much running to and fro between the palace, the Temple, and (confusingly) a third location that's apparently Quería's headquarters. Even the script gets mixed up at one point: the Star of



Infinite Power is kept at the Temple, but later someone says Quería has stolen it (which she did in the first film, but not in this one).

*La furia de los karatecas* is a strange combination of adequate production values (the parachute sequence, a decent number of extras in various scenes) and shoddy filmmaking (cross-cutting between sequences occurring at the same time, yet having one clearly daytime and the other clearly at night). This film not only repeats the terrible split-screen shot from *El puño de la muerte* (as part of the Niña de la Selva "origin" story, which is shown again), it adds another horrible example (and repeats the shot twice just so we see how bad it is). The perplexing

thing is that neither of these shots (and especially the new one here) is crucial and could have easily been omitted.

It has been said that *Misterio en las Bermudas* (1977) could be considered the end of the *lucha libre* film genre: it's the last feature film of Blue Demon, Mil Máscaras would not have another starring role for more than a decade, and at the end of that movie the masked *luchadores* vanish from the face of the earth! Santo appeared in 4 more features (plus one in a cameo only), and it's true that his role—or at least his screen personality--is considerably diminished in all of these. In his two films for Pérez Grovas, Santo co-stars with Gerardo Reyes, who gets a lot of screen time. *El puño de la muerte* and *La furia de los karatecas* devote a lot of footage to the other characters (especially Grace Renat as the evil Quería), and while Santo is still heroic, he is definitely not the center of attention.

*El puño de la muerte* didn't set a very high bar, but *La furia de los karatecas* manages to not exceed it. However, as with the first movie, this one at least has more or less constant movement (especially of Grace Renat's hips, \*badum-tish\*) and might be watched once without serious negative consequences.



## Blue Demon Sci-fi

**Blue Demon contra cerebros infernales** [Blue Demon vs. Infernal Brains] (Estudios América/Cinematográfica RA, 1966) *Exec Prod:* Reynaldo Puente Portillo; *Prod:* Rafael Pérez Grovas; *Dir:* Chano Urueta; *Scr:* Antonio Orellana, Fernando Osés;



*Photo:* Alfredo Uribe; *Music Dir:* Gustavo C. Carrión; *Musical Numbers:* Ernesto Cortázar, Germán González F.; *Asst Dir:* José Luis de León; *Film Ed:* Sergio Soto; *Art Dir:* Octavio Ocampo, José Méndez; *Camera Op:* Carlos Morales; *Makeup:* María Eugenia Luna; *Script Clerk:* José J.

*Delfos G.;* *Sound Op:* Víctor Rojo; *Union:* STIC; Eastmancolor

**Cast:** Blue Demon, David Reynoso (*Lt. Reyes*), Ana Martín (*Marta*), Noé Murayama (*Dr. Sanders*), Víctor Junco (*Dr. Kadar*), Dagoberto Rodríguez (*Randall*), Bárbara Angeli [*sic= Angely*] (*Katia*), Víctor Alcocer (*Dr. Jiménez*), Fernando Osés (*lab asst Vircos*), Burdette Zea, Jesús Velázquez (*Oso; himself*), Julie Janssen, Martha Arlett, Reyes Oliva, Iliano Urieta, Mario Texas, Lina Marín ("*robot*"), Gloria Chávez, Jorje [*sic*] Casanova (*medical examiner*), Linda Renger, Carlos Suárez ("*robot*"), Margarito Luna (*Dr. Robles*), Gerardo Zepeda and Pedro Ortega ("*robots*"), José Álvarez V., Alejandro Cruz "Black Shadow," Eduardo Bonada, Rodolfo Galindo "El Cavernario," Juan Garza ("*robot*"), Eduardo MacGregor (*doctor in hospital*), Mirón Levine (*man in Jiménez's office*), "Picoro," El Klan (*musical group*), Leonor Gómez (*wrestling spectator*)

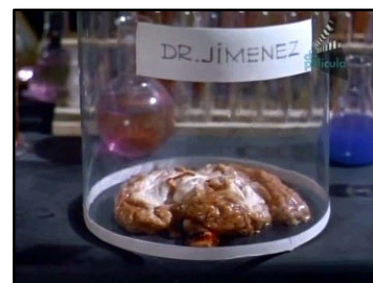
**Notes:** After making his debut as a leading player in 4 Vergara films, Blue Demon signed with Cin. RA, something of a step up. The Santa and Blue Demon Vergara productions were true independents, mostly shot outside of the studio system, and in black-and-white. By the time *Blue Demon contra cerebros infernales* and *Blue demon contra las diabólicas* began shooting (in November 1966),

Mexican cinema had almost entirely converted to colour, and these two pictures were made in colour at the América studios.



The production values still aren't great. The América sets are bare-bones and unimaginative, raising the question: is it better to have a "hospital" set that consists of several blank walls and a doorway, or to film in some actual (if shabby) location that may or may not be an actual medical facility? The penurious nature of the production does have a slight upside: *Blue Demon contra cerebros*

*infernales* is clearly a product of the 1960s, and the minimalist set decor seems to be influenced by pop art, with walls in both the villains' lab and Reyes' lab constructed of large, brightly-colored, geometrically-



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shaped panels. [Also timely: Ana Martín wears a variety of "mod" outfits, there is a long go-go dance sequence, the yellow-tuxedoed band El Klan does several instrumental numbers as young people dance, and a desire to emulate aspects of the popular James Bond films contributes to the overall plot and to the employment of various gadgets by both heroes and villains.]

A group of scientists led by Dr. Sanders, Randall, and Katia has developed a process by which they extract the brains of eminent scientists, replace the missing brain with a brain taken from somebody else, seal up the skull so trace of surgery is evident, and dump the scientist on the street. The scientist's brain is put into a glass case where its secrets can be extracted electronically. The villains also have some zombies (referred to as "robots") to do their

bidding: the female robots wear Supergirl-like miniskirts and capes, while the male robots are clad in silver suits. Dr. Kadar, the representative of an un-



named foreign power that is bank-rolling the experiments, shows up to monitor progress. Special Agent Reyes, his annoying assistant and would-be girlfriend Marta, and Blue Demon try to solve the case. Reyes poses as a scientist and is captured by the villains, but before his brain can be removed Marta and Blue Demon crash the laboratory. Things blow up real good, and the menace is ended.

One annoying aspect of the first two Cin. RA Blue Demon movies is the relatively small role played by Blue Demon himself: much more footage is allotted to the



villains and to "special agents" David Reynoso and Ana Martín. The conclusion is especially noteworthy in this regard:

Reynoso is a prisoner of the mad scientists, and Martín races to his aid, periodically communicating with Blue via radio. However, Blue Demon is never seen during this sequence (and only heard once on the radio), and when he suddenly pops up in the secret lab for the final fight, it is

completely out of left field. Blue Demon demonstrates a strange power in this movie: in one scene, he apparently dematerializes and walks right through a wall. He only does it once, but it is certainly weird. He also "pops" (teleports?) around a park briefly in his first action scene (and never does this again, either).

There are several curious aspects of the production. First, the arena wrestling scenes are fairly well done in terms of ring action, cinematography, and editing, but if you look carefully, you will note that there are only four rows of actual spectators, and the other seats are filled with cardboard cut-outs of people. Once you see it, you can't un-see it. An irritating point is the presence of Jesús Velázquez in both a dramatic role (as a police informer, "Oso") and then later in a wrestling scene as himself: did the producers think audiences were blind? It's not as if Velázquez had some minor, non-speaking bit part, he shares a major dialogue scene with David Reynoso! (He's also billed twice on the opening credits)

It's also curious that there are only two wrestling sequences in the film—Blue Demon vs. Cavernario Galindo, and then vs. Velázquez—yet Alejandro Cruz "Black Shadow," Eduardo Bonada, and ring announcer "Pícoro" are prominently billed, but don't appear (as far as I can tell). Juan Garza gets "luchador" billing but is only briefly seen as a "robot." And *luchador* Mario Texas is credited twice, once as Mario Tejas. Existing prints of this film are 82 minutes, but García Riera gives only an 85-minute running time, which doesn't suggest a whole ring-action sequence was cut.



The film devotes a fair amount of time showing brains (probably cattle brains from a butcher shop), and there are a couple of bloopers involving these soggy masses (it might have been better to freeze them a little so they would keep their shape). We see Dr. Randall carrying Dr. Jiménez's brain after the operation, but when it's put under a glass cover, a woman's hands are shown in closeup. Towards the end of the film, when the detached brains of Dr. Jiménez, Robles, and Calvin "talk," one of the brains (Robles) is just sitting on the table (not under a bell jar); however, midway through the sequence it's suddenly under the glass.

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There are few notable Chano Urueta stylistic touches in *Blue Demon contra cerebros infernales*, unless one wants to give him credit for Blue's teleportation and wall-passing abilities. The laboratory/operation sequences do feature a lot of quick cutting between skulls being opened/closed, brains being

removed/inserted, video screens showing abstract images, what appear to be cut-outs of graphs with lights passing behind them, etc., but none of



Urueta's trademark opticals are on display.

The film contains a lot of pseudo-scientific dialogue, most of it pointless. There are the 2 aforementioned nightclub scenes featuring El Klan and various dancing young people (plus a slower number that Reynoso and Angely dance together), but these are at least more or less integrated into the plot via cutaways to dialogue and so forth. Less valuable is a 2-minute scene of a solitary go-go dancer, useful only because it reinforces the characterisation of Junco's Dr. Kadar as a very (very) lecherous villain. Kadar tells his companion that he must have the dancer for himself that night, and is firmly reminded to keep his mind on business for the moment!

Kadar does so

grudgingly, but a running theme throughout the whole film is



Kadar repeatedly

and fulsomely praising efficient villain Katia; his sleazy obsequiousness is hilarious, but Katia seems to like it (while Dr. Sanders and Randall, her employers, are uncomfortable and slightly disgusted).

This middle-aged lechery motif is repeated to a lesser extent with the Lt. Reyes character. His cute aide Marta clearly wants to be more than just his assistant, and is jealous when Reyes ogles the young people dancing, flirts with Katia, etc.

*Blue Demon* has little to do (in one sequence he's shot in the butt by a paralysing ray but still manages to defeat Murciélago Velázquez!), but the rest of the cast is generally satisfactory. Bárbara Angely seems to be doing her own dialogue and has a rather heavy French-ish accent, but she gets a lot of screen time and her character is

interesting. David Reynoso, although referred to as a "special agent," is hardly a James Bond type, but it's fun to see him with a fake beard and wearing goofy scientific headgear in the climax. Noé Murayama mostly plays it straight until the very end when he gets to



rant and rave as the mad scientist. One wonders if Fernando Osés, who co-authored the script, wrote himself the role as the mute, hunch-backed lab assistant Vircos, who rouses himself from his torpor at the very end and attacks Reyes, only to be restrained by his superiors.

*Blue Demon contra cerebros diabólicos* is colourful, wacky, weird, and has great theme music, but it is also disjointed, cheap-looking, and doesn't have enough *Blue Demon* footage.

Originally reviewed in MFB 14/7 but almost completely revised, updated, expanded, and corrected.



HOY EMOCIONANTE ESTRENO

**BLUE DEMON MIL MASCARAS**

EL RAYO DE JALISCO  
EL FANTASMA BLANCO  
EL AVISPO ESCARLATA

LA MASCARADA CONTINUA EN  
**YOLANDA LIEVANA**  
Y **MARTHA ANGELICA**

**VUELVEN LOS CAMPEONES JUSTICIEROS**

ADAPTACION ESPECIAL DEL SIGLO  
**JULIO CESAR**  
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**Vuelven los Campeones justicieros** [The Champions of Justice Return] (Prods. Filmicas Agrasánchez-Cin. Tikal Internacional, 1972) *Prod:* Rogelio Agrasánchez L. (uncredited); *Dir:* Federico Curiel; *Adapt:* Ramón Obón [Jr.]; *Story:* Rogelio Agrasánchez; *Photo:* Antonio Ruiz; *Music:* Bernardo Serrano; *Prod Mgr:* Hebert Dávila Guajardo; *Prod Coord:* Rafael Lanuza; *Asst Dir:* José Luis Urquieta; *Film Ed:* Jorge Rivera; *Dialog Rec:* Roberto Muñoz; *Re-rec:*

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Ricardo Saldívar; *Camera Op*: Lorenzo Contreras; *Makeup*: Victoria Celis; Eastmancolor; *Union*: STIC

**Cast:** Blue Demon (*Blue Demon*), Mil Máscaras (*Mil Máscaras*), Yolanda Liévana (*Sandra*), El Rayo de Jalisco [Máximino Linares], El Fantasma Blanco [Coloso Colosseti], El Avispón Escarlata, Martha Angélica (*Gatusy*), Julio César [Agrasánchez] (*Julio*), Carlos Blanco (*singer*), Santa Oviedo (*Laura Jordán*), Alba Lety & Lucía Méndez (*Laura's friends*)

**Notes:** *Vuelven los Campeones justicieros* was a sequel to *Los Campeones Justicieros*, albeit with a slightly different line-up of masked *luchadores*. Blue Demon and Mil Máscaras returned, but La Sombra Vengadora was replaced by lookalike El Rayo de Jalisco (whose mask from the side looks like a long snout or beak), El Médico Asesino was replaced by another white-masked wrestler (El Fantasma Blanco), and Tinieblas stepped aside for El Avispón Escarlata. *Vuelven...* is a transitional film for



Agrasánchez, which shifted its production from Mexico to Guatemala and Texas in this period: although shot in Guatemala, the crew was still chiefly Mexican. By the

third film in the series, *El Triunfo de los Campeones justicieros*, the direction and some crew responsibilities were out-sourced to Rafael Lanuza's Cin. Tikal (although post-production continued to be done in Mexico), and the supporting cast was almost entirely Guatemalan.

This is a goofy film that has some entertainment value despite the rather slapdash nature of the production, plenty of boners in the script, and the clumsiness of the direction. The opening sequence is quite good: very large "Emir Farouk" from the Middle East arrives in Guatemala (unnamed in the movie). The Emir and his bodyguards go to their hotel suite, but a short time later they're attacked by a horde of rat-men, who crawl in through the air vents. [One nice touch: instead of the Emir being assaulted while sitting down, or in bed, he's in the process of brushing his teeth in the bathroom when attacked.] The police arrive to find all of the guards slain and the Emir missing. [One wonders how the rat-men extricated the obese Farouk, he certainly couldn't have squeezed through the air vents!] This sequence is nicely done, shot and edited for maximum suspense, with some good, jazzy music. The rat-men costumes aren't that effective (they look like pajamas and the zippers are pretty obvious), but they're rarely seen clearly and are occasionally effectively weird.

The Campeones Justicieros are called in. Sandra, their female associate (who apparently lives at CJ HQ, along with little kid Julio, identified as Blue Demon's godson) and Blue Demon put out a call for the other members. Mil Máscaras helps the police catch some smugglers (in a long, boring boat chase scene); El Avispón fights some masked henchmen of villainess Gatusy\*, then chases her down and captures her (which makes no sense: not only has Gatusy not been introduced, no reference is made later about how she apparently subsequently escaped custody—or perhaps this is not actually Gatusy, but a lookalike?); El Rayo de Jalisco battles four bank robbers on a rooftop and is getting his butt kicked, so Blue Demon and Sandra come to his assistance via helicopter.



\*[*Gato/gata* means "cat" in Spanish, and "Gatúbela" is what Batman's Catwoman is called in Mexico, so "Gatusy" is probably a riff on that (her costume is also similar to Catwoman's). Gatusy also rhymes with "Watusi," but this is probably not relevant.]

Back at CJ HQ, the team—which also includes El Fantasma Blanco, who didn't get an introductory action sequence—reviews the case. Everyone gets vague assignments (Fantasma Blanco is apparently a scientist, doing something in a lab) but first, time to wrestle! Riding their motorcycles (a nice bad-ass touch), the Campeones show up at the arena for a battle royale (their opponents include Príncipe Inca and Zorro Sentado) but the match is interrupted when Sandra pages Blue Demon on his radio-wristwatch: robbery in progress at the museum! All the Campeones depart mid-match, irritating their opponents.

The rat-men have stolen some moon rocks. Mil Máscaras and Blue Demon are shot with tranquilizer darts and are nearly run over by Gato Negro (whose goofy mask has whiskers and a permanently-lolling tongue), but flees when the police draw near. The next day, Blue Demon foils an attempt by Gato Negro and his henchmen to abduct Laura, daughter of a famous archeologist, and her two friends (one of whom is "Lucía Méndez," but she certainly does not look like the Lucía Méndez, future TV star, so I suspect it's a Guatemalan actress who has the same name). El Avispón Escarlata is



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not so successful, since singer Carlos Blanco (“winner of the Tokyo Song Festival”) is kidnaped by rat-men during a show in the Follies Bergere Grill. El Fantasma Blanco is nearly killed when his lab is blown up, but El Rayo de Jalisco’s timely warning saves him; Fantasma tells the other Campeones that the rat-men have poison fangs. Later, a booby-trapped toy robot shoots bullets, injuring Fantasma.

Blue Demon, Laura, and her friends visit some archeological ruins and the women are promptly snatched. Blue runs around looking foolish, then bumps into Gato Negro and a



henchman: they roll around in a dirt pile for a while. The villains flee in an auto, with Blue clinging to the luggage rack. This sequence is well shot: the car seems to be travelling at a decent rate of

speed, and when Blue jumps off—after planting a tracker bug—he apparently really leaps from the moving car.

Gatusy demands the country’s entire platinum reserves in exchange for Farouk, Carlos, and Laura (Laura’s 2 friends are not mentioned, possibly they were fed to the rat-men?). While delivering the platinum, Blue Demon, Mil Máscaras, and El Avispón are captured and put in a cell with a big glass door. Gatusy send Gato Negro to eliminate the other Campeones. Meanwhile Gatusy,



claiming to be the descendant of a Mayan prince, chooses Mil as the next victim to be converted into a rat-man. But Mil detonates a small bomb, a fight breaks out, lights flash,

flames erupt, and Gatusy and the rat-men are destroyed. Blue and the others return to CJ HQ in time to assist the others in defeating Gato Negro and his gang. Gato Negro plummets to his death from a window. Hooray for the Campeones Justicieros!

*Vuelven los Campeones Justicieros* is generally fun and campy. Five heroes are really too many: Blue Demon is allotted the lion’s share of the action, with the other 4 *luchadores* given little to do. The action scenes are rather clumsy and the plot is rudimentary, but—taken in the right spirit—*Vuelven los Campeones Justicieros* manages to deliver some entertainment.

Trivia: El Fantasma Blanco, who also appeared in *El triunfo de los Campeones justicieros*, was played by Argentine wrestler Coloso Colosseti, who shows up in a number of Mexican films around this time (such as the borderline “Huracán Ramírez” picture *De sangre chicana*).



Colosseti apparently did wrestle in the ring under this identity for a time. El

Avispón Escarlata, on the other hand, is a mystery. He’s wearing a mask that resembles one formerly worn by Mil Máscaras, and which Mil later gifted to one of his brothers, who wrestled as El Sicodélico (although El Avispón Escarlata’s mask is coloured slightly differently and he wears horizontally-striped tights to complement his “hornet” persona). However, it does not appear that this was an actual wrestling identity (there’s a YouTube video from Bolivia dated 2000 which features the character but it’s obviously an impostor, and I’ve found no other references to a real ring career). Some sources suggest Alfonso Mora, aka “Superzán,” played the role (although since Agrasánchez seemingly had the rights to Superzán it’s puzzling why he wouldn’t wear that costume here).



This review originally appeared in *SantoScene* 9 (March 2001), but has been considerably revised, corrected, and enlarged here.





**El triunfo de los Campeones Justicieros [The**

**Triumph of the Champions of Justice]**

(Prods. Filmicas Agrasánchez, 1973) *Dir-Scr:* Rafael Lanuza; *Photo:* Javier Cruz; *Prod Mgr:* Carlos Lanuza; *Asst Dir:* Damián Acosta; *Film Ed:* Nacho Chiu; *Makeup:* Antonio



Castañeda; *SpecFX:* José Amezcuita; *Dialog Rec:* Hugo Sánchez; *Re-rec:* Enrique Rodríguez

**Cast:** Blue Demon (*Blue Demon*), Superzán [Alfonso Mora] (*Superzán*), Elsa Cárdenas (*Venus*), El Fantasma Blanco [Coloso Colosetti] (*El Fantasma Blanco*), Claudio Lanuza (*Guillermo Herschel aka Farolito aka Ali Mustafa*), Carol Lanuza (*Lila*), Carlos Figueroa (*Rago Credmore aka Mendoza*), Jorge Abauza (*Quisisarél*), Amado Mérida, Alfonso Milián [sic?] (*Inspector?*), Jorge Luis de León, César García Cáceres, Tony Lagar, Carlos Barrios, Romeo Orellana, César Váldez, Ricardo Durán, Samy Samperio

**Notes:** the 3<sup>rd</sup> “Campeones Justicieros” film whittles down the Champions’ roster to just three masked luchadores, Blue Demon, Superzán, and El Fantasma Blanco. Just as well, as *Vuelven los Campeones Justicieros* was over-loaded with five heroes. However, even with only three protagonists, *Triunfo...* has a hard

time finding enough to keep them busy. Superzán is the odd man out this time, with almost nothing to do. Blue Demon has more footage than his associates but



is not a developed character; El Fantasma Blanco has one neat trick (he turns into smoke and can sneak in and out of rooms this way), but is otherwise a non-person. The filmmakers trimmed the fat even more for *La mansion de las siete momias*, which only had Blue Demon and

Superzán, and *El Hijo de Alma Grande* features only Blue Demon and non-wrestler (albeit still technically a costumed hero) El Hijo de Alma Grande.

*El triunfo de los Campeones Justicieros* has a lot of imaginative ideas which aren’t too badly executed. The special effects—practical and optical—are unusually audacious and reasonably well-executed, considering the film was shot in Guatemala, which had no real film “industry” and thus few dedicated film technicians. Late in the film, clown Farolito grabs a ray gun and shoots some “robots,” whose chests smoke and then explode. There are other, similar makeup and mechanical effects, and while the opticals are pretty simplistic, the “negative dimension” is effectively—albeit briefly—depicted.

Alien beings from Uranus (now living in an alternate dimension since Uranus became a “dead planet” 100 years earlier) want to conquer Earth. In order to accomplish this, they must obtain some sort of mathematical formula (this isn’t clear at all) developed by scientist Rago Credmore, who now goes by the name of Mendoza and runs a small circus. Sure, why not. Lila, Mendoza-Credmore’s assistant, is later revealed to be his daughter.

Coincidentally, a clown-magician (Farolito when he’s a clown, Ali Mustafa when he’s a magician) at the circus is actually “Guillermo Herschel,” the “discoverer” of Uranus, given eternal life by the aliens in 1825. [The script correctly identifies William Herschel as the man who discovered Uranus in 1781, although I think Lanuza made up the part about Herschel visiting Uranus and receiving immortality.] However, Herschel ran off to join the circus rather than help them with their nefarious plot to conquer Earth.



The aliens are led by Quisisarél, whose minions include little person Biris, burly wrestlers wearing black outfits, and a few robots (also dressed in black, but wearing red masks). If the aliens run out of energy while on Earth, they dissolve into piles of green jelly (a rather nicely done idea and effect). The Champions—including



Venus, a female member—stumble around but eventually, with the help of a device that transports them to the other dimension, turn the aliens into piles of green goo with glowing red eyes

and send them into the “negative dimension” where they’ll fly around forever.

[Want a **much** longer, more detailed synopsis?

Go here: <https://www.braineater.com/campeones.html>]

Towards the end of the film, the aliens and the



Champions face off under the big top at the circus. The circus audience watches the wrestlers fight the “robots” and aliens as if it was just another act. This sequence—while the action is not very well-staged—is interesting because it works on a number of levels. First, in the context of the film’s narrative, the audience is unaware that the battle is “real” (they think everyone is just a circus performer doing an act). But in real-life,

this was an actual circus with an actual audience who are watching performers do a fictional fight as part of a movie scene.

Special mention should be made of the uncredited music score

for this film: the opening music and the first sequence are both raucous “garage band” style instrumentals.

Not to oversell *El triunfo de los Campeones Justicieros*,

but it is ambitious and outré in its conception, and if the execution doesn’t quite live up to the ideas, it’s still pretty

entertaining. Kudos to Rafael Lanuza for both his incredible, wacky screenplay and his willingness-to-try anything direction.

[Extensively revised from the original review in *SantoScene* 9 (March 2001).]



## Jaguar de Colombia & Pals



**Karla contra los Jaguares** [Karla vs. the Jaguars] (Victor Films, 1973) *Prod/Dir:* Juan Manuel Herrera; *Scr:* Sergio Álvarez Acosta; *Photo:* Víctor Manuel Herrera; *Music:* Albert Levy; *Music Rec:* Ingeson Ltda.; *Orchestra:* Meteor Future; *Assoc Prod:* Enrique Ponce T.; *Prod Mgr:* Jafth Morales; *Asst Dir:* Franco Portilla; *Film Ed:* Arturo Vázquez; *Co-Ord:* Álvaro Tavela; *Asst Camera:* Pedro Ramírez; *Dialog Rec:* Elías Campos; *Re-rec:* Salvador Topete; *General Co-ord:* Víctor Millete; *Color Dir:* Jules Haquette; *Negative Cutter:* Tere de Saldívar

**Cast:** Marcela López Rey (*Karla*), Gilberto Puentes (*Comandante Alberto*), María Eugenia Dávila (*Verónica*), Wayne Jerolaman (*Karla’s boyfriend*), King Bryner (*Prof. Max*), Los Jaguares, Jaguar de Colombia

**Notes:** El Jaguar de Colombia reportedly made his professional *lucha libre* debut at the age of 15 (!) in 1961, and eventually became a popular figure in South, Central, and North America. His website (<http://eljaguardecolombia.com/historia/>) states he “played” (*interpretó*) El Santo in five films (with Santo’s permission) in 1968\*, which led to the production of the two Jaguares films in 1973. El Jaguar also became a wrestling promoter with his own stable of *luchadores* from North and South America (one of these, King Bryner from Argentina, appears in both Jaguares films).

\* [Wait, five films with El Jaguar de Colombia as El Santo? (Let alone five in 1968, given that only 4 features were apparently produced in Colombia in that year, and none of those were *lucha hero* films) The esteemed *lucha* historian Bruno



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Bernasconi\* suggests four possibilities: *Santo frente a la muerte*, *Santo en el misterio de la perla negra*, *Anónimo mortal*, and *Misión suicida* (the latter two not made in Colombia, and Bernasconi says “there’s no trace of him in the last two titles”). Watching the first two films, it’s rather obvious that it isn’t the real El Santo in some scenes—El Jaguar was much thinner than Santo, for example.]

\*<http://elazotevenezolanoelblog.blogspot.com/2016/07/santo-desafia-la-muerte-1969.html>

In a long opening sequence, 4 zombie-like men wearing bike helmets and GoPro-like cameras on their heads use high-tech gadgets to enter and loot a jewelry store. This is fairly well shot and edited, but goes on forever. An unexpected auto accident alerts the police, but the criminals escape, leaving one wounded comrade behind.



The “autómatas” are remote-controlled by villain Karla, who has a large number of the men training at her country estate. She

also has non-brainwashed henchmen who wear a giant golden “K” on their shirts to show their allegiance, and numerous young women aides, who wear white halter tops and red miniskirts. Professor Max is in charge of the brain-washing operation.

Police Cmdte. Alberto and his assistant Verónica are pressured by the governor to solve the crime, and they



decide to use the Jaguares (who finally appear at the 29-minute mark, riding motorcycles in pursuit of some car thieves). Since the police learn—

by identifying the injured *autómata* left behind at the first robbery—that the robotic henchmen are decent young men who’ve been abducted and brainwashed, the Jaguares are asked to try and avoid killing them.

Meanwhile, Karla is planning for a big robbery, but one of the *autómatas* goes rogue and she has to machine-gun him. The robbery—shown in excruciating detail—requires 4 of her *autómatas* disguised as workmen to ascend to the top of a huge skyscraper under construction, take control of a crane, and lower 3 of the men in a cage to the top of a

bank next door (in broad daylight). Then they just walk inside, slowly melt a hole in the vault, steal a bunch of cash (leaving behind a lot of gold bars), return to the roof and climb back into the cage, and are lifted up by the crane. However (finally) this is spotted by a police helicopter carrying Jaguar de Colombia, who is dropped on the roof, but not in time to prevent the 3 *autómatas* (and the loot) from landing on the street level and escaping in a van. The zombie crane operator leaps to his death. On the ground, the Jaguares and the police battle a handful of *autómatas* left behind. “We’ve lost some men, but the loot is safe,” Karla remarks as she observes this from her lab.



The Jaguares and the Jaguar de Colombia search for the fleeing criminals (it’s unclear where Jaguar de Colombia got his motorcycle, since he arrived via helicopter), who are spotted by a policeman arriving at Karla’s hideout (what a break!). The Jaguares (finally) reach the country house and attack, followed closely by the police. Karla and her boyfriend run to a helicopter to escape; he’s wounded and Karla ignores his pleas for help. The Jaguares all grab the copter to prevent it from taking off. The remaining *autómatas* and their miniskirted minders are rounded up. “This isn’t the end!” shouts a voiceover, “there will soon be more adventures of Los Jaguares!” And he was right! *Los Jaguares contra el invasor misterioso* would follow (of course, the same voiceover is heard at the end of that movie, and he was wrong then).



*Karla contra los Jaguares* looks pretty slick, with a reasonable number of actors and extras, some nice locations, and a certain amount of imagination in the props. The library music is not bad in and of itself, but it starts and stops with no rhyme or reason, suddenly blaring on the screen for a few seconds and then falling silent.

Juan Manuel Herrera’s direction & cinematography are actually decent, with various “modern” stylistic touches (quick cuts, fisheye lens, etc.). He didn’t do so well on overall pacing: *Karla contra los Jaguares* is pretty darn slow.

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Sergio Álvarez Acosta scripted *El puño de la muerte* and *La furia de los karatecas* and a number of other



pictures for Víctor Films in the '70s and '80s, and seems to have only worked for them. His script is the biggest problem here: the Jaguares have no personalities [they're almost indistinguishable--the Jaguar de Colombia's mask is ever so slightly different, his shorts are a different colour,

and he's marginally the leader], don't appear until the film is more than one-third over and even then have relatively little to do. Far more time is spent in depicting the activities of Karla and her minions in detail, at great length. It might also be noted that while El Jaguar de Colombia and Los Jaguares were professional wrestlers, they're not identified as such in this film: instead, they're either police department employees, or free-lancers associated with the police who're assigned to combat car thieves (!) and other criminals.

*Karla contra los Jaguares* suffers from the same basic flaws that appears in numerous films (and novels and comic books, etc.). First, rather than make money exploiting some inventions which would seem to have obvious, lucrative applications in business and other legitimate areas, Karla and her associates prefer to direct their energy towards crime. Additionally, their criminal schemes are consistently more complex and illogical than necessary, making failure almost inevitable.

Marcela López Rey was an Argentine actress who appeared in a number of Mexican films (and co-productions) in the late '60s and 1970s. She's the main attraction of *Karla contra los Jaguares* (as the title might suggest): consistently ruthless, sexy, and



domineering. Puentes and María Eugenia Dávila were popular and well-known television actors in Colombia who also occasionally worked in the few films produced in Colombia in this era, and they're both professional and

satisfactory in their roles. Wayne Jerolaman, who plays Karla's boyfriend, was born in New Jersey in 1948 and was apparently living in Argentina teaching English and acting when *Karla contra los Jaguares* was produced. He spent the last 20 years of his life (passing away in 2020) teaching Spanish in a Florida high school. He's fine in his role, as is wrestler King Bryner as the German-accented Professor Max (the film was post-dubbed in Mexico).

Trivia note: at least one version of this film (available on YouTube) does not have the opening credits, for some reason. It's too bad, because otherwise this is a nice, clean copy.

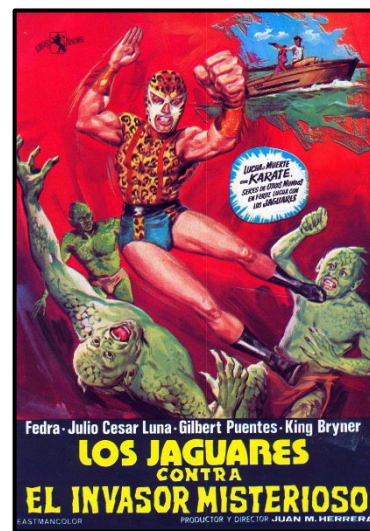
*Karla contra los Jaguares* could have been much better, although a major overhaul on the script would have been required. This is too bad, because the production values are surprisingly decent.



### Los Jaguares contra el invasor misterioso

[The Jaguares vs. the Mysterious Invader] (Victor Films, 1973)

*Prod/Dir:* Juan Manuel Herrera;  
*Scr:* Sergio Álvarez Acosta; *Photo:* Víctor Manuel Herrera; *Music:* Albert Levy; *Music Rec:* Ingeson Ltda.; *Orchestra:* Meteor Future; *Assoc Prod:* Enrique Ponce T.; *Prod Mgr:* Jafth Morales; *Asst Dir:* Franco Portilla; *Film Ed:* Arturo Vázquez; *Co-Ord:* Álvaro Tavela; *Asst*



*Camera:* Pedro Ramírez; *Dialog Rec:* Elías Campos; *Rec-rec:* Salvador Topete; *General Co-ord:* Víctor Millete; *Color Dir:* Jules Haquette; *Negative Cutter:* Tere de Saldívar

VHS title: *Karatecas asesinos*

**Cast:** Julio César Luna (*Arturo*), Fedra (*Érica*), Los Jaguares, Jaguar de Colombia, Gilberto Puentes (*Comandante Alberto*), King Bryner (*Dr. Bruno*), Víctor Alcocer? (*voice of the Master*)

**Notes:** it's unclear, but it appears *Los Jaguares contra el invasor misterioso* was shot immediately after *Karla contra los Jaguares* (if not simultaneously). The credits are identical; the casts feature the same supporting actors (replacing Marcela López Rey and Wayne Jerolaman with Julio César Luna and Fedra); the canned music is mostly the same (the "samples" include some Black Sabbath),

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although at least the music clips last longer than 15 seconds this time.

Voiceover narration informs us that aliens came to Earth years ago with “terrible plans to take over Earth’s economy.” They now have numerous people working for them in their mountaintop stronghold, most of whom wear identical whole-head masks with yellow goatees. Why? Alien reasons, I guess. Among the unmasked are scientists Dr. Bruno, Bruno’s daughter Érica, and Arturo, who are creating artificial diamonds.



In *Karla contra los Laguares*, the jaguar-costumed heroes didn’t appear until about the 30 minute mark; they beat that here, showing up about 17 minutes in (after what feels like a six-hour stock-footage montage of parachutists). Cmdte. Alberto tells the spotted trio that mysterious diamonds, untraceable to any known diamond mine, have been appearing on the world market: Bogotá is where they first appeared, “that’s all we know.” The police official admits no crime has been committed, “we just need to know where they’re coming from. There has to be something odd about this!”

Wouldn’t you know it, Arturo and Érica come into the city to sell some diamonds, but diamond merchant Rosenberg contacts gangsters to steal them, and Arturo has



to karate-chop him. This attracts the Jaguares, who are randomly patrolling the streets on their motorcycles, but Arturo and Érica are already gone. The couple is sent to the

Molino Rojo nightclub to meet a new buyer (but first, they listen to a singer performing—from start to finish of course--a Spanish cover of “Killing Me Softly With His Song”). Coincidentally (?), Rosenberg’s 2 gangster friends are also at the club and they immediately recognise Arturo and Érica, even though they’ve never seen them before. Arturo hands over a diamond to their contact, cigarette girl Margarita, but the gangsters see this and a brawl breaks

out. The Jaguares are on nightclub duty it seems, and they arrive promptly and immediately join in the battle, more or less randomly beating up people.



Arturo, Érica and Margarita have, meanwhile, escaped, but left one diamond behind.

Margarita’s contact delivers the cash so Arturo and Érica can purchase “Ácido 130” for their alien masters. The resident alien Master tells Prof. Bruno that Ácido 130 is needed so they can create “tons” of diamonds and flood the world market, thus making them essentially worthless. Because--? However, getting the acid is easier said than done: a skeezy guy on a sailboat has a gallon jug of it, but it’s a trap—a bunch of guys start shooting. Luckily, the harbour police arrive (and kill all the bad guys) so Arturo and Érica are able to escape in a speedboat with the acid and the money, eluding police pursuit. They hide out in an abandoned house, do some kissing, and are picked up the next day by a helicopter. However, Jaguar de Colombia and one of the Jaguares follow in an airplane and discover the alien headquarters. Now the previous “parachute” sequence pays off, as the heroes bail out and land nearby. The other Jaguar and a horde of police are dispatched to help.

The alien Master—revealed to have a gorilla face—tells Dr. Bruno that unless the Jaguares—now fighting their



way into the headquarters against the yellow-bearded guards-- are stopped, he’ll blow up the entire installation to prevent his alien secrets from falling into Earth hands. Bruno agrees, but later tells Érica to

escape, because she has the “secret to Earth’s salvation.” (What? The ability to make diamonds?) “Do it for the whole world!” Érica and Arturo agree. A battle royal ensues, with the police attacking from the outside, and Jaguar de Colombia and Jaguar #1 attempting to subdue the Master. However, he easily defeats them and vanishes with his two long-haired, little-person associates. Dr. Bruno goes down fighting, finally shot to death by the police. The Comandante thanks the Jaguares for their assistance. Narrator (not the woman who narrated the opening): “This isn’t the end! More adventures of the

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Jaguares will follow!” (Hint: it’s been 49 years, so I think he’s wrong)

There are so many things wrong with the story of *Los Jaguares contra el invasor misterioso* that it’s easy to



overlook the good parts: decent production values (no real special effects, though), and some weird things which aren’t explained (why do the alien’s guards wear those goofy masks, who are the long-haired little people, why do the aliens want to destroy the value of diamonds, etc.). It’s also absolutely unclear why Dr. Bruno, various other people, Arturo, and Érica are working for the aliens—at the very end of the film, Dr. Bruno makes some vague



statements about “saving the Earth,” but this has no basis in anything we’ve seen or heard up to this point. First, the aliens’ plan is described as “terrible” in the opening narration (and a voiceover narrator would never lie); second, all we see the aliens doing is create diamonds. They don’t have advanced weapons, it’s not obvious that they’re compelling Earthlings to work for them, and, frankly, destroying the market for diamonds would affect only a very small part of Earth’s economy.

The whole “alien” thing could have been changed to just “scientists learn how to create diamonds” and *Los Jaguares contra el invasor misterioso* would be more or less the same: criminals trying to get the diamonds, and the police dealing with the collateral damage (since, as

explicitly stated early in the movie, no crime is being committed).

*Los Jaguares contra el invasor misterioso* is at the same time better and worse than *Karla contra los Jaguares*. We aren’t subjected to a repeat of the first film’s

protracted, step-by-step depictions of robberies, so there’s slightly more “action” in this one. On the other hand, there is blatant padding here—

the skydiving sequence, the musical sequence—not present in the first movie. The Jaguares themselves may have slightly more to do in the second film (in terms of action), but they still have no backstory, no personality, and really do nothing that non-costumed heroes couldn’t have done. The main characters are Arturo and Érica who, as far as we know, are willingly working with an alien who is antagonistic towards the Earth! *Los Jaguares contra el invasor misterioso* is more disappointing than *Karla contra los Jaguares* because its premise—aliens invading Earth!—raises audience expectations that are unfulfilled.

Julio César Luna was born in Argentina but worked extensively in television in Colombia, later writing and directing in addition to acting. Fedra

(sometimes credited as Phedra) appeared in a number of Mexican films in the first half of the 1970s. Apparently, her actual name was Phaedra Carlina Johnson and—according to her



daughter, Phaedra Guerra—she was from Dallas, although there were outlandish claims that she was of royal British blood, graduated from Oxford, etc. (all of which her daughter denies). Johnson—who died in 2006-- had a relationship with actor Rogelio Guerra which resulted in the birth of Phaedra Guerra, who in August 2022 went public with stories of an abusive mother and absent father.

Trivia note: 85 minutes is cited as the original running time, but most extant copies (including the Mexcinema *Karatecas asesinos* VHS) are just short of 80 minutes.



## Armed and Dangerous

**Échenme al Gato** [Throw Me to El Gato] (Cin. Jalisco, 1957) *Prod:* Valentín Gazcón; *Dir:* Alejandro Galindo; *Adapt:* Pancho Córdova; *Story:* Valentín Gazcón;



*Photo:* Ignacio Torres; *Music:* Gustavo C. Carrión; *Prod Chief:* Armando Espinosa; *Asst Dir:* Américo Fernández; *Film Ed:* Carlos Savage; *Art Dir:* Salvador Lozano; *Lighting:* Regino Cárdenas; *Camera Op:* José A. Carrasco; *Makeup:* María del Castillo; *Choreog:*

Ricardo Luna; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec:* Nicolás de la Rosa

**Cast:** Resortes (*Margarito*), Ariadne Welter (*Celita*), "Piporro" (*Hipólito Villareal*), Pancho Córdova (*Dr. Pastrana*), Arturo Martínez (*El Gato González*), Pepe Hernández (*Moro*), Nemorio Chávez (*Nemorio*), Arturo Castro "Bigotón" (*Fernández*), Federico Curiel (*intern*), Carlos Suárez (*doctor*), Rodolfo de Anda (*Margarito's teenage friend*), Rogelio Jiménez Pons "Frijolito" (*Polvorón*), León Barroso (*Sr. Joya*), José L. Murillo (*bank employee*), Celia Manzano (*doña Remigio*), Francisco Reiguera (*president of science congress*), Manuel Vergara "Manver" (*don Carlos*), Enedina Díaz de León (*Rita*), Cecilia Leger (*shopper*), Mario Chávez [Cid] (*police agent*), Jesús Gómez and Emilio Garibay (*policemen*), Pepe Nava (*bank customer*), Carlos Bravo "Carlillos" (*Japanese scientist*), Rubén Márquez (*man in theatre*)

**Notes:** this is a strange and not very successful comedy, but it has a few bizarre and entertaining moments. Alejandro Galindo is not really known as a comedy director, but between 1955 and 1959 he made 6 films with Resortes (the actor also appeared in a number of Galindo's other pictures, including his last, *Lázaro Cárdenas* in 1985), plus a Clavillazo vehicle and one starring Loco Valdés. *Échenme al Gato* isn't the best of this bunch--in addition to several absolutely failed slapstick sequences (a scene in which Resortes tries to climb through a window carrying a large crock, and the "laughing gas" climax, the basic premise (Resortes gets a job and inadvertently robs his employer) is merely repeated in different settings, without really advancing the plot.

Margarito is the deliveryman for a pharmacy, and has a crush on Celita, a nurse in a local clinic. Making a delivery for Celita, Margarito meets eccentric scientist Dr. Pastrana, who has been experimenting with cross-species transplantation. [The limits of the budget or perhaps imagination of the film are clear in this scene: Pastrana exhibits some of his experiments to Margarito, and frustratingly these are described but not shown to the audience--a miniature bull, a rabbit with "goat's horns and fish eyes," and so forth.]

Meanwhile, gangster El Gato and his men rob a bank. They speed through the streets with the police--led by El Gato's nemesis, Hipólito--in hot pursuit. The criminals' car plows through a street football game, injuring Margarito, then crashes.

Both Margarito and El Gato are taken to the hospital. Margarito's left arm is badly damaged, while El Gato is near death.

Celita contacts Dr. Pastrana, who decides to replace Margarito's arm with one from a "cadaver"--however, a drunken orderly's mixup results in El Gato's arm being cut off and transplanted onto Margarito. El Gato recovers consciousness and escapes (but he isn't dangerous, because he's now "armless," get it?).



The first interpolated dance scene occurs during the operation. Depicted as an anesthesia-induced dream of Margarito's, the sequence is set in a bizarre, fog-shrouded landscape.



Margarito, in his hospital gown, plays football and dances with a mini-skirted Celita, but Dr. Pastrana repeatedly leaps on him and cuts off

his arm with a saw! The scene ends with Margarito--missing both arms--dancing!

Margarito isn't told he received a new arm (he thinks his old one was miraculously cured). However, his arm has a "mind" of its own--it pinches women's butts, picks pockets, and so forth. This embarrasses Celita (Margarito is unaware of his arm's proclivities) and results in

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Margarito losing various jobs--in a market, a jewelry store, and a bank. In the latter case, Hipólito becomes convinced Margarito is El Gato, and arrests him, but Margarito's criminal arm gets the drop on the cops and he forces them to take him to Dr. Pastrana, who will explain everything.

However, the vengeful El Gato (who now has a powerful artificial arm) and his men have captured the scientist and are prepared to "operate" on him. Margarito, Celita, and the police arrive, and there is a violent confrontation, although the release of various gases



(first, everyone moves in slow motion, then laughing gas causes them to guffaw hysterically) makes this less dangerous than it might have been. The crooks are arrested and Margarito is cleared of suspicion. As the film concludes, Pastrana exhibits Margarito at a scientific congress, and Margarito clinches with Celita.

*Échenme al Gato* has a few amusing bits but overall is too disjointed and repetitive to be really entertaining. There are too many extraneous scenes and others which go on much too long. In addition to the dream sequence described above, another irrelevant dance scene is inserted into the picture (Margarito and Celita dance in a jewelry store where he is the night watchman). Resortes plays his usual ingenuous character: in some scenes this is amusing, but in others Margarito is so clueless that he seems mentally challenged.

Piporro isn't very subtle as the *norteño* police official (although the movie is set in Mexico City) and Martínez is his usual villainous self, but Córdova



and Welter are pretty good. In one cute scene, Celita is describing Margarito's strange behavior to Pastrana, and she blushes when she gets to the part about the "liberties" his left hand has been taking with her!

The production values are up and down. For example, as noted above, the filmmakers didn't even try to show the weird hybrids created by Pastrana, and the film's sets are rather sterile and flat, yet there is some location shooting, and when El Gato's car crashes into a shop window, this is

shown from inside the window (the car crashes straight into the camera), a nice shot.

Trivia notes: Resortes has a very short haircut and an odd moustache (reminiscent of some of his stage makeup) in this movie. When Margarito and Celita go to the movies, they watch scenes from Cinematográfica Jalisco's 1951 production *La justicia del Lobo*, starring Dagoberto Rodríguez (only seen as the masked Lobo Solitario), Flor Silvestre, and José María Linares Rivas (Federico Curiel, who has a small role in *Échenme al Gato*, played the hero's sidekick in the Lobo Solitario movies). Finally, a teenaged Rodolfo de Anda (recognizable, although he has a fat face) has a bit part as one of Margarito's friends.

[This review originally appeared in *MF9/2*, revised here.]



### **El brazo mortal** [The Deadly Arm] (Cine Falcón

Prods., ©1996) Exec

Prod: Laura Tovar;

Prod: Orlando R.

Mendoza; Dir:

Fernando Durán Rojas;

Scr: Carlos Valdemar;

Photo: Mario Becerra;

Asst Dir: Rubén

González; Film Ed:

Bernardo Larraguivel;

Sound Engin: Abel

Flores; Makeup:

Carmen de la Torre;

Re-rec: Miguel

Larraguivel Jr.; SpFX:

Toshiro Hermanos



**Cast:** Jorge Reynoso (*Cmdte. Guerra*), Jaime Moreno (*Capt. Durán*), Guillermo Quintanilla (*Dr. Roberto Landa*), Alejandro Ruiz (*Adrián Landa*), Martha Ortiz (*Guerra's wife*), Elizabeth Arciniega (*Maribel*), Tito Guillén (*Luis Miranda*), Jorge Beckis [*sic* = Bekris] (*Luciano, servant*), Yolanda Solares, Alfredo Ramírez, Miriam Zárate, "Victorel," Roberto Vargas, Gustavo Romo, Ernesto Ramírez, Raúl Tovar, Arturo Albó, Alma Rosa, Trío "Sol" (*nightclub performers*)

**Notes:** the basic premise of *El brazo mortal* is identical to that of *Échenme al Gato*—a criminal's arm is transplanted onto some else's body, and continues to perform criminal acts. Perhaps the original idea can be traced to the 1920 novel "Les Mains d'Orlac" (officially adapted to the screen in 1924, 1935 and 1960), although to some extent this book and the films suggested the "murdering hands" motif was mostly in the mind of the recipient of the transplant. Perhaps a more immediate inspiration for *El brazo mortal* was *Body Parts* (1991), which specifically deals with someone receiving an arm from a deceased murderer, although the plot of the



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Hollywood picture goes off on a wacky tangent in the latter sections.

*El brazo mortal* is technically satisfactory, but the script is bare-bones and literally no attempt was made to make it the least bit interesting. None of characters have any depth; for example, we're not given any information about the accident that cost Adrián his arm, it's a long time before we learn he's a medical student, his fiancée suddenly appears (she was "studying in Europe") about one minute before their wedding, etc. Police commander Guerra (who doesn't have a first name—and his wife doesn't have any name) repeatedly wakes up complaining about a recurring nightmare which is never shown.

A serial murderer with a super-strong arm—hence his nickname, "El Brazo Mortal"—has been murdering women in Mexico City. Cmdte. Guerra shoots the man (Joel Carrera) to death before he can claim his next victim. Meanwhile, Dr. Landa's son Adrián's right arm has been amputated after an accident. Landa orders Adrián



transferred to his plastic surgery clinic, then calls coroner Miranda and offers \$20 thousand dollars for a suitable arm. Miranda just happens to be in charge of the murderer's corpse and

delivers the body part, which is then attached to Adrián. "10 Months Later," Adrián is recovered: he complains the arm feels "odd," although it functions perfectly.

Adrián marries Maribel but on their wedding night he starts to strangle his wife and is barely able to contain himself. This casts a shadow over their relationship (you think?). "Someone" strangles the family dog. Adrián goes out with

some school friends—which gives us a chance to sit through an entire musical number by an old-



school singing trio—picks up a hooker, then murders her in a hotel room. Cmdte. Guerra is told "only El Brazo Mortal could have killed her, but he's dead."

Adrián takes a job in his father's clinic, assisting on a nose job for an actress. That night, he returns to the clinic

and murders the woman in her room. Guerra investigates and discovers a trench coat left (presumably) by the killer—but he doesn't bother to look at it closely, and only later discovers it's got a monogrammed label with Adrián's initials! That's some good detecting, right there. Guerra does get inspired to have El Brazo Mortal's corpse exhumed and sure enough, the right arm is missing.

Meanwhile, Dr. Landa suspects his son is the killer.

Miranda confesses that the donor arm belonged to El Brazo Mortal, and Landa angrily stabs him to death. Adrián gropes (at her invitation) another patient



(who just had a boob job, you'd think they'd be sore?), then visits her home, gropes her again, and murders her. A pattern is emerging. Dr. Landa finally confronts his son and offers to amputate the killer arm, but Adrián punches him and is only dissuaded from murdering his father by his wife. Adrián forces his wife to accompany him to the family "cabin" (actually a luxurious country house). For some reason, he returns to the city and abducts Guerra's wife, leaving a message in lipstick on a mirror: "You'll never see your wife alive again." (It appears Guerra never even discovers this, however.)

Dr. Landa figures out where his son is hiding. Landa, Guerra and Guerra's assistant Durán travel to the rustic



lodge, where Adrián has just murdered his wife. He's in process of killing Durán when Dr. Landa hacks off the offending arm with a machete!

Guerra then shoots Adrián to death. As the film concludes, the killer arm twitches...

*El brazo mortal* is quite superficial, and it's not as if the 83-minute running time wouldn't allow for character development or plot twists, given that there are a number of pointless and/or extraneous scenes which could have easily been removed to make space for more interesting footage. For instance, Guerra and Durán roust a guy sleeping on a park bench, and pressure him for information

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on an arms' dealer they've been assigned to catch: this is never brought up again. Adrián has two scenes with Miriam, the post-boob job patient, once in the hospital and once in her apartment. In both scenes she urges him to feel her "new" breasts, and moans in pleasure; the first sequence ends abruptly, the second concludes with her murder. There was absolutely no need for both scenes. Late in the film, Guerra visits Landa's clinic and reviews Adrián's medical file, learning for the first time that the young man has a killer's arm—this makes no difference to the resolution of the plot. And, as mentioned earlier, Adrián and his friends' visit to a nightclub includes an entire musical number, pure run-time padding. [As an aside, early in the film Landa and Miranda—which sounds like a comedy team—go out to lunch. In an obvious nod of thanks to the establishment's owners, both men rave about how nice the (real-life) restaurant is, and "the food is excellent."]

The performances are mostly adequate, given the minimal demands of the script, although Alejandro Ruiz appears to have gotten little direction about his role. Is he an innocent man under a murderous compulsion, is he possessed by the dead killer's spirit during the killings and then remorseful afterwards, or is he fully caught up in



murder-lust and embraces it while still being cognisant of who he is? Ruiz's performance alternates between all of the above alternatives, not only from scene to

scene, but within scenes as well. As the police agent, Jorge Reynoso could have done this type of role in his sleep, and may very well have done so here. However, he's at least given a minor bit of characterisation (a wife, bad dreams), whereas Jaime Moreno is a total cipher in a role that I could have played. Guillermo Quintanilla is satisfactory but as noted above, the script gives him nothing to work with. The two female leads are similarly professional in limited exposure. [Martha Ortiz, who presumably plays Guerra's wife, does have one unintentionally-funny line early in the film. After reading a newspaper article indicating serial killer El Brazo Mortal was killed by her husband the previous night, she says "Congratulations, my love!" Congratulations on killing someone? We'll give her the benefit of the doubt, and assume she's congratulating him on solving the case.]

*El brazo mortal* is, as mentioned above, fairly slick in terms of its direction, cinematography, sound, etc., but is not sleazy or outrageous or interesting at all.



## Ghosts, Demons and Such



**Narda o el verano** [Narda, or the Summertime] (CLASA Films Mundiales, 1968) *Exec Prod:* Héctor López; *Dir/Adapt:* Juan Guerrero; *Orig. Story:* Salvador Elizondo; *Photo:* Gabriel Figueroa; *Music:* Joaquín Gutiérrez Heras; *Arrangements/Playbacks:* Alicia Urreta; *Theme Song sung by:* Monna Bell; *Prod Chief:* Enrique L. Morfin; *Asst Dir:* Winfield Sánchez; *Film Ed:* Carlos Savage; *Art Dir:* Manuel Fontanals; *Decor:* Jorge Grandjean; *Makeup:* Ana Guerrero; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Sound:* Javier Mateos, Galdino Samperio; Eastmancolor; *Union:* STPC

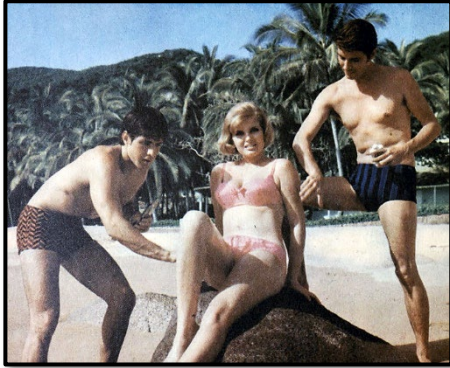
**Cast:** Enrique Álvarez Félix (*Max*), Amedee Chabot (*Narda aka Elise*), Héctor Bonilla (*Jorge*), Lázaro Patterson (*Prince Chomba*), Pixie Hopkin (*Mariana*), Lourdes Guerrero (*Joyce Proust*), Martín Guevara, Francisco Meneses, Beatriz Sheridan (?*dubs Amedee Chabot*), Claudio Obregón (*voiceover*)

**Notes:** although this film wasn't critically well-received, and was even disowned by the author of the story on which it was based, *Narda o el verano* is an entertaining if enigmatic film and as an added bonus features Amedee Chabot. In fact, Chabot--although her dialogue was dubbed by a deeper voice than usual, which seems a bit out of place--looks as good as she ever did on screen, with her hair cut in a modified page-boy style.

Still photographer Jorge and his friend Max are going to spend the summer in an Acapulco beach house. They decide to "share" a woman for the season, partially "because it's cheaper," but also for philosophical reasons not entirely elucidated. After various false starts (at a

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disco, Jorge's choice says she is a virgin, and Max's partner balks at the prospect of a *menage a trois*; later, they cruise the airport but one candidate has several small dogs who soil Jorge's shirt, and another--called "Lolita"--is greeted by an older man), they hook up with two vacationing *gringas* on the beach and make a date for later that night.



But on the way to meet the women, Max and Jorge stop at an African restaurant for dinner. The host (who is also the owner, waiter, and in charge of

entertainment) is Prince Chomba (who plays "Für Elise" on a marimba made of human skulls). He introduces them to the only other customer, a beautiful blonde. She says her real name is Elise, but this summer she wants to be called "Narda," like the girlfriend of comic strip hero Mandrake the Magician. The previous summer, Narda was Chomba's lover, but now she has moved on. She agrees to Jorge and Max's proposition, although she says: "I'm not yours--you're mine." Max replies, "Either way, it's the same," but Narda disagrees: "No, it's completely different."

In any event, the first night both Max and Jorge get drunk and pass out on the beach without even touching Narda. However, she doesn't back out of their deal. Max and Narda make love on a sailboat in the middle of the bay. While they are offshore, Chomba

appears and asks Jorge--who is snapping photos on the beach--to take a nude photograph of



Narda, offering to trade pornographic photos of Marilyn Monroe and Rudolph Valentino for it! Jorge agrees.

After Jorge and Narda sleep together, Max becomes jealous and calls Narda a whore, but they reconcile. One evening, Narda proposes they go swimming in the nude, but Jorge suggests she dance for them first. After Narda has stripped, Jorge takes a photograph. Narda is shocked and angry, and drives off. The two young men follow her to town, and find her kissing another man in a nightclub.

She tosses their car keys on their table, but refuses to speak to them. Later, Jorge gives Chomba the roll of photos he took, but discovers the pictures he got in return were fakes (instead of Valentino, it is a photo of Chomba in an Arab headdress!).

Time passes, and the summer comes to an end. Max has been most affected by Narda's absence. He and Jorge are brought to the police station to identify a body found on the beach; it is Mariana, an old acquaintance of theirs, but Jorge says it is Narda. Back at the beach house, Max tells Jorge he's taking a cab to the airport--their friendship is over.



When Jorge develops the photos he took, Narda's image is blurred and indistinct in every picture, while everyone else--even in the same photo--is perfectly clear. As the film ends, Jorge is heard in voiceover: he came back to Acapulco several times after that summer, but it wasn't the same. Sometimes, he says, "I'm fed up and life is just shit."

*Narda...* is reasonably entertaining, although it starts from a false premise--Max and Jorge agreeing to share a woman--or at least this idea isn't developed logically. There could be a homosexual undercurrent here, although it's possible this is more noticeable in hindsight, based on 21<sup>st</sup>-century sensibilities and Enrique Álvarez Félix's rather androgynous screen image.

There is a strong suggestion that Narda is some sort of supernatural being: she is first shown emerging from the sea and is last seen walking back into it; she "magically" appears in the empty restaurant when Chomba plays "Für Elise" on his skull-xylophone; and the fact that her image won't show up on film is also a tip-off (and probably the reason Chomba wants Jorge to take a picture of her, since his efforts were unsuccessful). In one scene, Narda befriends a kitten, but suddenly changes her mind and chases it away; this is the only scene (other than her arrival and departure from the ocean) in which Narda appears

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alone and--while vague--suggests she is afraid of inadvertently harming the cute animal.

On the whole, a worthwhile film on a number of levels.

Trivia notes: A video version with English sub-titles was released of this film on the Condor label. *Narda...* was the third and last feature film directed by Juan Guerrero—the second was *Mariana* (1967) and the eponymous protagonist (played by Pixie Hopkin) makes a “cameo appearance” in *Narda o el verano* as a corpse! Guerrero died of cancer in 1970.

In a 2019 interview, actor Héctor Bonilla said working on *Narda o el verano* prevented him from attending the protest at the Plaza de Tlatelolco in October 1968, which turned into a government massacre of the protesters:

“[*Narda...*] was filming in Acapulco on 2 October, thus I didn’t go to Tlatelolco [otherwise] I would have surely been there.” Bonilla later appeared in *Rojo amanecer*, a film about the Tlatelolco Massacre.

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**La segua** (Cin. Costarricense—CONACINE—Estudios Churubusco-Azteca, 1984) *Exec Prod*: Álvaro Sancho; *Prod*: Óscar Castillo; *Dir*: Antonio Yglesias; *Scr*: Alberto Cañas, Antonio Yglesias, Óscar Castillo, Sidney Field; *Orig. Play*: Alberto Cañas; *Photo*: Mario Cardona; *Music*: Benjamín Gutiérrez; *Serenade & Guitar Arr*: Orlando García; *Prod Mgr*: Carlos Castillo; *Asst Dir*: Guillermo Munguía; *Film Ed*: Rafael Ceballos; *Art Dir*: Jean Moulart; *Décor*: Pilar Quiros; *Makeup*: Lorena Mora; *Sound*: Luis Fuentes, Rafa Chinchilla; *Sound Ed*: Javier Patiño

**Cast**: Isabel Hidalgo (*Encarnación Sancho*), Blanca Guerra (*Petronila Quesada*), Ana Poltronieri (*María Francisca Portuguesa*), Óscar Castillo (*Camilo de Aguilar*), Fresia Astica (*Manuela*), Rafa Rojas (*Lt. José Corona*),

Alfredo Catania (*Félix Fernández*), Carlos Catania (*rider who sees La Segua*), Fernando del Castillo (*José Manuel Sancho*), Luis Alberto Chocano (*Fray Diego* [mistakenly listed as Fray Félix on end credits]), Ana María Barrio Nuevo [Barrionuevo on end credits] (*Baltasara*), Ana Serrano (*Ana*), Marcelo Jhonson [Johnson on end credits] (*Marcelo*), Orlando García (*Antonio, guitar player*), Germán Silesky (*Germán*), William Zúñiga (*Miguel*), Macedonio Quesada (*Eustaquio*), Ivonne Brenes (*Eduviges*), María Steiner [Steiner on end credits] (*Inés*), Katarina [Katherina on end credits] Anfossi (*Clemencia*), Emilia Prieto (*grandmother*), Nandayure Harley (*dancer*), Arnoldo Herrera (*governor*), Álvaro Marengo (*man on stilts*), Luis A. Villalobos (*Abel*), Miguel Ruiz (*Captain*),

**Notes**: The “Segua” is a Costa Rican legend about a spirit who takes the form of a beautiful woman and accosts lone male riders, only to suddenly reveal itself to have a horrible horse/skull-like face which drives its victims mad. The film *La segua* is based on a play by Alberto Cañas which utilises this legend as a basis for its story, although whether La Segua actually exists or is imaginary is ambiguously presented.

After fruitlessly searching for a copy of *La segua* for quite some

time, I discovered that it had been uploaded to Vimeo a number of years ago, and can be rented online for \$1.50. The print is sourced from a video copy but is certainly watchable (albeit in the wrong aspect ratio); it has burned-in English sub-titles which might make it more accessible to a wider audience.

Relatively few films were made in Costa Rica in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—it’s possible *La segua* was the only feature-length, fictional film produced there in the 1980s. Some co-productions and international films were shot in the country (such as *Morirás con el sol*, 1972), however. Director Antonio Yglesias had previously worked on documentaries and at least one fiction film made in Nicaragua and El Salvador. His work on *La segua* is quite good, smooth and professional and with a certain style.

Although *La segua* was co-produced by CONACINE and the Estudios Churubusco-Azteca, Blanca Guerra is the only Mexican in the cast. Guerra appeared in a number of co-productions shot in Latin America in the ‘80s and ‘90s, including *Walker*, *Sandino*, *Sabor latino*, etc. Post-production was apparently done in Mexico, as Mexicans including Rafael Ceballos (film editor) and Javier Patiño (sound editor) are credited.



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In the Costa Rica city of Cartago in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (a printed prologue says the story takes place in the final years of the colonial period, which ended with



Costa Rica's independence in 1821), beautiful, young Encarnación Sancho is courted by Lt. José Corona, a soldier stationed in the city. However, José has also been having an affair with bar-owner Petronila; he fights a man who had propositioned her, and is slightly injured. María Francisca, who has a reputation as a witch, washes José's wound with a special potion; He sees an image of Encarnación, and hurriedly rides off. José meets a young woman in the forest who looks like Encarnación, but

she suddenly reveals her monstrous identity as La Segua. José goes mad, and upon his return to Cartago he accuses Encarnación of being La Segua; he's later subdued and sent to a mental hospital.

Camilo de Aguilar arrives from Spain to search for the legendary Tisingal gold mine. He and Encarnación fall in love; this upsets Petronila, who has also fallen for him. Petronila asks María Francisca if she can use witchcraft to separate Camilo and Encarnación; María Francisca says this isn't possible, but she later buries a voodoo doll in Encarnación's image, and plants the idea in the young woman's mind that she could be La Segua. Encarnación rejects Camilo's profession of love.

Camilo and a group of men set off to find the gold mine, accompanied by Petronila. Encarnación locks herself in her darkened room, becoming deeply depressed and unstable. Camilo's group discovers the lost gold mine, but Camilo is injured when an earthquake causes a cave-in. Petronila sees that a vein of gold has been uncovered, and when the dazed Camilo says he can now marry Encarnación, Petronila kills him.

Don Félix, a wealthy man and an old friend of Encarnación's family, visits when he hears of her illness.

Félix has gone blind, and in an earlier scene he told Encarnación that he'll always "see" her in his mind the way she was as a girl: her beauty will never fade for him. He convinces Encarnación to open her door, and says he wants to marry her. She agrees.

*La segua* is moderately long (about 100 minutes) and rather slow paced, but it's very well-produced and acted (apparently many of the performers were from the stage, including Ana Poltronieri,



probably the most famous Costa Rican actress of her generation). As noted above, the existence of La Segua is left up in the air. The local priest and others consider the creature a superstition or legend, and it's fairly clear that Encarnación just becomes obsessed with the idea that she might be La Segua, but actually isn't. However, in at least two instances (the pre-credits sequence and the José Corona sequence) people actually encounter La Segua—although in the first instance the audience doesn't see what the victim is screaming about, and later José Corona might be drugged and thus we're seeing what he thinks he sees. Both of these sequences are well done, with a nice shock reveal of La Segua's monstrous face (which is shown twice more, in another good shock scene in a dream sequence, and towards the end of the film when the disturbed Encarnación is looking in a mirror and sees her face change to La Segua).



There's a nice bit of foreshadowing early in the film, during a town festival featuring various performers and people in costumes. One person is wearing a large horse mask (which today evokes the famous Horse Head Mask meme) and at one point sneaks up on José Corona.

*La segua* is not a horror movie, and it's debatable if it even contains actual fantasy elements (María Francisca may or may not be a real "witch" or be performing magic, the Segua may or may not exist). However, it's a good film in many ways, and worth seeking out.





**Bésame en la boca** [Kiss Me on the Mouth]

(Diseño Fílmico-Televisivo, ©1994) *Exec Prod:* Georgina Terán; *Prod:* Humberto Zurita, Christian Bach; *Dir:* Abraham Cherem; *Scr:* Ricardo del Río, Abraham Cherem; *Photo:* Alex Phillips [Jr.]; *Music:* Omar Guzmán; *Project Coord:* Gerardo Zurita; *Prod Mgr:* Pablo Buelna; *Asst Dir:* Adrián Grunberg; *Film Ed:* Óscar Figueroa; *Art Dir:* Ana Solares; *Direct Sound:* Miguel Sandoval; *Sound Supv:* René Ruiz Cerón; *Sound Des:* Thalía Ruiz, Miguel Molina; *Re-rec:* Jaime Baksht; *Makeup:* Ricardo de la Mora; *Action Coord:* Margot Gaviolondo; *Union:* STIC

Shooting started: 7 Sept 1994; released 23 June 1995

**Cast:** Paulina Rubio (*Claudia Romero*), Charlie Massó (*Eduardo*), Fernando Colunga (*Arturo*), Delia Casanova (*Consuelo*), [Moisés] Iván Mora (*Juan*), Kenia Gascón [sic] (*Elvira*), René Pereira [sic] (*Alejandro*), Dolores Beristáin (*doña Gilda*), Jesús Reyes (*barman*), Sara Cherem (*Teresa*), Daniel Havid (*Benjamín*), Claudia Ortega (*Mónica González*), Alejandra Prado (*Andrea*), Miguel Ángel de la Cueva (*Diablo*), Javier Ruiz (*priest*), Alejandro Bracho (*doctor*), Humberto Zurita (*don Miguel Gómez, record company mgr*), Susana Dosamantes?, Leonardo García Vale, Armando Lara (*Tony*)

**Notes:** *Bésame en la boca* was a relatively late entry in Televisivo’s long-running “series” of feature films starring television actors and/or singers (the line between the two was pretty blurred). Paulina Rubio, the daughter of actress Susana Dosamantes and her first husband, was born in 1971 and was attending Televisa’s acting school when she was chosen to be part of the musical group Timbiriche in 1982; she remained with them until becoming a solo artist in 1990. Rubio appeared in several *telenovelas* and in 1994 starred in *Bésame en la boca*, but her primary career was as a singer. She’s paired in *Bésame en la boca* with ex-Menudo Charlie Massó and popular *telenovela* actor Fernando Colunga.

*Bésame en la boca* is one of a number of films—dating back to at least *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* in 1941—with the same basic premise: someone dies “before their ordained time” and is sent back to Earth to inhabit the body of a recently-deceased person. In Mexico, film versions of this

plot included *Préstame tu cuerpo* with Silvia Pinal, and *Con el cuerpo prestado* with Sasha Montenegro.

The wealthy and spoiled Claudia gets drunk at the “Resistencia” nightclub after discovering her boyfriend and singing partner (and the club’s owner) Arturo has signed a solo contract. She leaves on her motorcycle and wakes up dead in God’s Museum in Heaven, greeted by adolescent angels Benjamín, Teresa, and others. Benjamín shows her the crash that ended her life, but they discover that her “case number” (1995) was confused with her pre-ordained date



of death (2040). Claudia says she wants to sue, but Benjamín says “to sue, you need a lawyer, and all the good ones are in Hell.” They agree to try “the Buddhist alternative”—first offering her reincarnation as a lizard, a cross-dresser, or a *campesina* (all rejected), before discovering Mónica, a young woman in Mexico City at that moment receiving the last rites. Claudia possesses Mónica’s body, but through an error on Benjamín’s part, she retains the memory of her prior life.

[When others look at Claudia (or when she sees herself in the mirror), they see Mónica. However, the film audience sees Claudia (because, after all, Paulina Rubio is the star). This is mildly problematical for the rest of the movie, because the audience has to remember that Mónica’s family “sees” Mónica (even though we see Claudia) and accepts her as such, and those who knew



Claudia also “see” Mónica and thus reject her protestations that she’s Claudia (and we’re still seeing Claudia). In *Préstame tu*

*cuerpo*, this conflict was eliminated by having Silvia Pinal play both characters in slightly different makeup, but that’s not really feasible here, given the differences in the plot: Claudia interacts with both Mónica’s family and Claudia’s acquaintances, whereas Pinal’s “new” life (in Mexico) is physically separated from her old existence (in Cuba). *Bésame en la boca* adds one more confusing twist, when

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Claudia-as-Mónica meets Arturo and he recognises her...as Mónica (apparently they had a prior relationship, but it takes a little while for the audience to grasp this).]

Claudia's new family is nominally "working class" (they live in a *vecindad*, etc.)—although this is not really emphasized in the film—and, coincidentally, Claudia's new brother Juan also works at the nightclub. Law student and club bartender Eduardo formerly had a crush on



Claudia, which makes the reincarnated Claudia sad, but pretty soon she and Eduardo are an item. Various things happen: Claudia's new grandmother dies; Claudia gets a job at

Resistencia and makes an unauthorised appearance as a singer (and is a huge hit); Claudia discovers her evil (but sexy) stepmother Elvira (she even has "evil" in her name!) is having an affair with Arturo (isn't everyone) and paid Arturo to tamper with the brakes of Claudia's motorcycle, causing her death (in order to collect the insurance money). Claudia tries to gain Arturo's confidence so she can investigate the murder plot, which results in a typical (albeit brief) romance-movie misunderstanding with Eduardo.

Claudia convinces Eduardo (and Juan) that she's Claudia-in-Mónica's body. They visit Claudia's former home and Claudia confronts Elvira and Arturo, demanding the \$4 million insurance pay-out in exchange for her silence. Elvira and Arturo agree, then Eduardo and Juan appear, having recorded the entire conversation. Eduardo is accidentally shot. He's rushed to the hospital and recovers. Arturo flees on Claudia's old motorcycle and it's vaguely suggested that he crashes (we don't see it and there is just a short bit of soundtrack that sounds like squealing brakes and an impact before there's a quick cut to Eduardo being shocked with a defibrillator).

*Bésame en la boca*, despite starring 2 well-known pop singers and dealing at least peripherally with the recording industry, is not music-heavy. There are 3 on-screen musical numbers which run back to back for just over 10 minutes (beginning at the 63-minute mark): two consecutive songs by "Mónica" and one by Arturo (curiously, ex-Menudo Charlie Massó as Eduardo doesn't get to sing at all).

The script has basically one "focus," and that's "Paulina Rubio," which sort of explains why there are multiple threads that aren't developed much at all. 1. Claudia wants to be a singing star. 2. Claudia the rich,

spoiled girl learns to be humble by living with a working-class family. 3. Claudia is murdered by her evil stepmother and womanising boyfriend. 4. Claudia falls in love with a guy who was in love with the character she used to be. Literally only the last one has much of an arc, but it still periodically alternates with the other sub-plots/themes.



The performances are generally good. No one has a lot of depth, but no one embarrasses themselves, either (well, Humberto Zurita is rather bad in his cameo role). Although many sources indicate Susana Dosamantes has an unbilled cameo in this film, I couldn't spot her (but I wasn't looking too hard).

*Bésame en la boca* is a slickly-produced, mildly entertaining film that is perhaps slightly too long—even though there are aspects of the plot which still seem truncated or rushed. Although apparently successful at the domestic box-office, it didn't pave the way for more Paulina Rubio-starring vehicles, but that may have been her choice. Televisine produced or co-produced at least 23 films in 1994, but never reached double figures again, and in 1999 was merged with Videocine.



### Embrujo de rock [Rock Enchantment]

(Televisine, ©1994) *Exec Prod*: Ignacio Sada Madero; *Dir*: Rafael Montero; *Adapt-Scr*: Óscar Montero; *Scr Story*: Guillermo Seguí; *Photo*: Arturo de la Rosa; *Music*: José Antonio "Potro" Fariás; *Prod Supv*: Carlos Gallardo Ruiz; *Prod Coord*: Pablo Martínez de Velasco; *Prod Chief*: Jorge Méndez; *Prod Mgr*: Arturo Hernández; *Asst Dir*: Iván Ávila; *Film Ed*: Rafael Montero, Luis Valdés; *Art Dir*: Marisa Pecanins; *Decor*: Martha Papadimitriou; *Sound*: Antonio Diego; *Camera Op*: Ciro Cabello; *Makeup & Puppet Construction*: Javier de la Rosa; *Union*: STPC

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Cast: Gaby Ruffo (*Gema*), José Suárez (*Beto*), Sergio Sánchez (*agent*), Alejandra Procuna (*Lucrecia*), Ana Bertha Espín (*Záfiro*), Romina Castro (*Selene*), Lorenia [aka Lorenia Burrue] (*Luxury*), Roberto “Puck” Miranda (*Mr. Puck, café owner*), Sergio Jurado (*Pepe*), Joaquín Bissner (*Joaquín, concert stage mgr*), apprentice witches: Florencia Ferret, Dinorah Cavazos, Euridice Hernández, Pilar Espín; Jorge Gallardo & Alfredo “Tarzan” Gutiérrez (*Puck’s assistants?*), Rosa María Murga (*Luxury’s secretary*), Mariana Rivera (*Luxury’s employee*), José Márquez (*bar mgr*), Tomás Leal (*door mgr*), Martín La Salle (*don Carlos, landlord*), Abigail Martínez & Angélica Martínez (*young women*), Gonzalo Rosas & Jorge de Bengochea (*police*), Arminius Arzate (*Luxury’s chauffeur*), Elizabeth Reyes & Jimena Piedra (*Luxury’s chorus girls*), Luxury’s musicians: Carlos García, Ulises Ariel, Edgar Estrada, Ricardo Navarro; Georgina Pedret (*radio announcer’s voice*), Alberto Pedret (*voice of the Water Mirror*); Musical Group “Ancor”: Sergio Jurado, Alberto Meixueiro, Vicente Nadal, Martina Ávila, Jorge L. Meixueiro, Jorge Jurado; Poly Romero (*dubs Luxury’s song*), Martín Ávila (*dubs Beto’s songs*), Martín Gaytán (*guitar solos*)

**Notes:** Gaby Ruffo, the younger sister of actress Victoria Ruffo, began appearing in telenovelas in the early



‘80s, and made a handful of film appearances in that decade as well, but became better known as a TV show presenter in the 1990s. Televisa’s television stars who headlined Teleciné films in 1994 included Ruffo, Paulina

Rubio, Itatí Cantoral, and María Antonieta de la Rivas (as “La Chilindrina”).

In a fantasy world, the latest class of apprentice witches is informed that since people of Earth don’t believe in witches anymore, there will be only one opening for a new witch—everyone else will have to wait at least 100 years. Teacher Záfiro hopes apprentice Gema will be chosen. However, Gema’s rival, the sinister Lucrecia, does her best to sabotage Gema, secretly causing Gema to change her fellow student Selene into a piglet, and then taking credit for undoing the transformation. Záfiro informs the aspirants that the student with highest grades will be sent to Earth and will have one lunar cycle to grant 3 wishes to a human: if they fail, they’ll be trapped on Earth without

powers for 100 years. Lucrecia continues scheming, sending Gema to Limbo with a magic pocket mirror.

Meanwhile on Earth, Beto and his band have fallen on hard times, fired from a gig and behind in their rent. Beto accidentally finds the mirror and hears Gema calling. She tells him she’s a witch and needs to get out and grant 3 wishes.

“Oh, like *Hechizada* [Bewitched] or *Mi bella genio* [I Dream of Jeannie],” he says. Beto’s

first wish is to “Become a rock star!” but Gema doesn’t know what “rock” is. When his landlord pounds on the door (with the police) to evict Beto, he drops and breaks the mirror, allowing Gema to emerge in a cloud of pink smoke. Beto changes his first wish to “money!” and coins rain from the ceiling to pay the rent. Gema remains invisible to everyone except Beto.

Without using up any of his wishes, Beto (with Gema’s help) plays guitar for rock star Luxury on one song during her concert. Luxury is later informed by her agent that



she’s losing popularity, and decides to exploit the smitten Beto’s talent. However, Luxury intends to steal his songs and—inspired by a nocturnal visit from the evil Lucrecia—orders Beto

eliminated during their next concert. Beto refuses to listen to Gema’s warnings, and uses his second wish to banish her from his presence until he’s ready for his third and last wish.

Gema poses as Beto’s bandmate Pepe and shows Beto contracts of his predecessors who were used and discarded by Luxury. Beto denounces Luxury as a fraud during an interview session. He and his original band go on stage in her place. Záfiro rescues Gema from Lucrecia’s attack. Beto announces his third wish: that Gema will be with him forever, since they’ve fallen in love. Gema becomes visible and as the film concludes they sing a duet on-stage.

*Embrujo de rock* is a mildly entertaining, inoffensive film. It seems odd that a film dealing with musicians and the music industry would not feature actual singers in the leading roles: although Gaby Ruffo did some recordings, this appears to have been a case of Televisa’s policy of





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making singers out of actors, and vice-versa, in order to maximise the performers' exposure. José "Pepe" Suárez (who looks a lot like Seth Green to me) apparently neither sings nor plays the guitar in the film (there are credits to others for his singing and "guitar solos"), and Lorenia (who might be Lorenia Burruel, Miss América Latina 1987-88) is similarly dubbed.

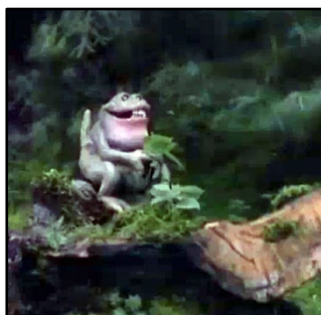


The script references both "Bewitched" and "I Dream of Jeannie," and *Embrujo de rock* is certainly a clear mashup of both of these (witch + character who grants wishes) with the rom-com genre. The "rules" of the film are confusing and contradictory: originally it's said that after the "final exam," one witch will be sent to Earth on probation, and has to grant 3 wishes to someone; later, it appears that multiple witches will be given this trial, and then Gema gets to Earth not because she's been chosen, but (more or less accidentally) through a malfunction of Lucrecia's scheme to trap her in Limbo. However, the "3 wishes" set-up, deadline, and outcome are still in place.

Gema is invisible to everyone except Beto (until the very end), but after a few scenes early in the film where Beto is shown "talking to himself" as others stare, the film dispenses with this and Gema is perfectly visible to the audience but is ignored by characters other than Beto.

There's one strange, early sequence where Beto and Gema are walking down the the street. It cuts between two angles: Gema is

visible in one, and invisible in the other, but there's no suggestion that this represents two points of view, and there aren't any of the aforementioned reaction shots of other people gawking at Beto.



*Embrujo de rock* begins in the witch-world (mostly a big forest), with a couple of nice touches: there are (very brief) glimpses of some little-people (hobbits? Dwarves?)

strolling along, and a couple of strange creatures (apparently puppets) are shown for a few seconds. It's interesting that the filmmakers cared enough to add these, even if they appear only in passing. The special effects are adequate and effective, if fairly simplistic. Overall production values are fine but not really elaborate or expansive.



The performances range from decently naturalistic to fairly broad. Although Gaby Ruffo is the star, she isn't the whole show, with José Suárez getting almost as much screen time (including a number of scenes in which Ruffo doesn't appear). Ruffo is sympathetic and handles her role effectively; Suárez—who goes by Pepe Suárez now—appeared as a child actor in the 1970s kid-gang films *La Palomilla al rescate* and *La Palomilla en Vacaciones misteriosas*, then seems to have had almost no credits until the 1990s and beyond, when he's taken various television and film roles.

Trivia notes: there are several copies of this on YouTube, but the video quality is not very good and for some reason the end credits are flipped (?). A better-quality copy can be found on Vimeo: this is from the same original source (a TV broadcast?) as the YouTube copies but is definitely sharper (and the credits are OK).

Sergio Jurado, who plays one of Beto's bandmates, is an actor and musician, the son of actors Sergio Jurado and Aurora Molina. Jorge Jurado, who also appears, is Sergio's brother. Director Joaquín Bissner has a small role as the concert hall stage manager: he's oddly credited as "*sujeto*" (subject) but is referred to once as "Joaquín," so that's how I have him listed above.

Inoffensive and mildly entertaining, although I confess I fast-forwarded through most of the musical numbers.



### **Fuego negro [Black Fire] aka Dark Forces**

(Biznaga Films/Labo/Corazón Films/Netflix, 2020)\* *Exec Prod*: Bernardo Arellano, Alina Rojas, Gustavo Montaudon, Javier Salgado, Carla Farell Benet, Eckehardt Van Damm, Sandro Halphen; *Co-Exec Prod*: Charles Bartha; *Prod*: Federico Cecchetti; *Dir-Scr*: Bernardo Arellano; *Photo*: Damián Aguilar; *Music*: Darío Arellano; *Prod Dir*: Pablo Lebrija Urrea; *Prod Mgr*: Héctor Zubieta, Yair Ponce; *Asst Dir*: Alina Rojas; *Film Ed*: Rodrigo Ríos Legaspi; *Prod Des*: Ana J. Bellido; *Creature Des*: León Delgado; *Makeup/FX Design*: Rodolfo García; *SpFX*:

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Eduardo Rodríguez; *Direct Sound*: Víctor Navarro; *Fight Coord*: Nano Ilianovich; *Stunt Coord*: Adrián Vilchis  
\*©2020 Biznaga Films



**Cast:** Tenoch Huerta (*Franco*), Eréndira Ibarra (*Rubí*), Dale Carley (*Jack*), Ariane Pellicer (*Helga*), Johana Blendl (*Julia*), Dai [Daiana] Liparoti (*Diva*), Mauricio Aspe (*Max*), Eglé Ivanauskaitė (*Molly*), Pedro Prieto (*Man in Black*), Ángel Garnica (*hotel employee*), Marina Vera (*hotel*

*receptionist*), María Guadalupe (*Lupe*), Fernanda Rivera (*Sonia*), Nick Zedd (*demon*), Marco Antonio Treviño (*Man in Black 2*), Klaudia García (*hostess*), *assassins*: Arena Ibarra, Yessica Ortega, Alfredo Ruelaz, Daniel Salas, Hugo Lezama, Nadia Vera

**Notes:** I don't remember how *Fuego negro/Dark Forces* came on my radar—although I subscribe to Netflix, I rarely look at it, and I didn't read any reviews online that led me to this film. I think I looked up director Bernardo Arellano for some reason, and saw this listed on IMDB. Heck, it's only 81 minutes long, I said to myself. And in point of fact, it's not even that long: subtract 9 minutes total for opening/closing credits, and this clocks in at about 72 minutes of actual narrative. If *Fuego negro* had been made in the 1980s and released direct to video, I'd be wondering if it had been severely cut, given the extremely sketchy nature of the "story." Perhaps it was trimmed, or perhaps director/writer Arellano (it doesn't appear he's credited for the screenplay on the film itself, although I may have missed the credit) deliberately made a vague, oblique, perplexing movie.

After watching the entire film, the plot seems to be: Franco was a member of Max's criminal organisation, but quit. However, Max now has Franco's sister Sonia in his clutches. Franco visits a weird hotel in search of Julia, a psychic, and eventually—with the aid of Julia, eccentric author Jack, and a mysterious woman named Rubí who claims to have fallen in love with him—tracks down Max's hideout, kills Max, and rescues Sonia. Over the course of this journey, Franco is possessed by a slimy parasite (Max has one too) and passes it on to the treacherous Rubí as he dies.

Things happen without much explanation. How did Sonia become a prisoner of Max? How did Franco learn about Julia and where she was staying? What does Jack's

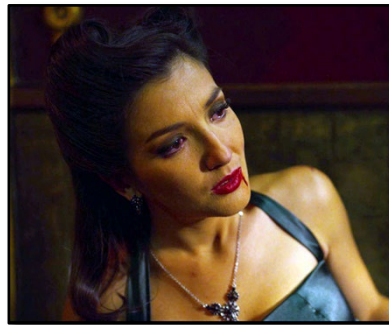


book "Fuego Negro" have to do with anything? (Other than give the film its title) Why do Franco and Rubí rob a restaurant? (To get money to pay Julia's mother for her services?) What is Max's business—prostitution, murder-for-hire, etc.? What's the giant worm creature and why does Max also have one?

(Franco doesn't until Jack passes his along to him, in an unpleasant scene) [If one wanted to write their own back story for *Fuego negro*, it might speculate that the parasites were aliens or something of the sort, who take over human bodies for nefarious purposes, a la *The Hidden* (1987)—except that Franco acts no differently after he's "possessed" and apparently has the ability to expel the slimy slug at will (or maybe not—maybe the creature knows Franco is mortally wounded and vacates the dying man's body on its own, and Rubí just happens to be the closest potential host).]

There are also questions which are more "normal" for a film, such as what's a dream and what isn't? What's

Rubí's deal? And so on.



The 72-ish minute running time of *Fuego negro* is composed in equal parts of fight scenes, dream sequences, shoot-outs, driving through the city at night (on a

motorcycle or in cars). The look of the film is excellent: the cinematography, production design, makeup, and so forth are extremely stylish. The overall directorial style incorporates the now-standard quick cuts, hand-held camera, lots of close-ups technique which enhances some sequences but grows tiresome after a while.

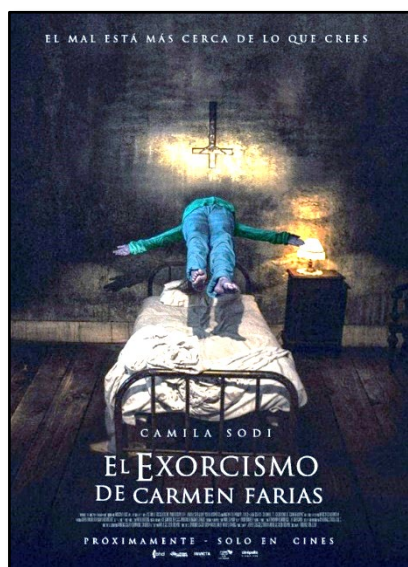
Tenoch Huerta has a lot of screen presence and charisma and Eréndira Ibarra is attractive, and they do the best they can with the limited script. Most of the other performers are "picturesque" but have little depth.

*Fuego negro* is slick and stylish but feels incomplete rather than enigmatic or intriguing.



**El exorcismo de Carmen Farías** [The Exorcism of Carmen Farías] (Invicta Films-Eficine/Cinépolis Distribución, ©2020) *Exec Prod:* Ximena Calvo, Leonardo

Cordero, Miguel Mier, Miguel Rivera; *Prod:* Molo Alcocer Délano, Javier González-Rubio, Enrique Latapí Silva; *Line Prod:* G. Pekas Lozano; *Assoc Prod:* Fernanda Medina; *Dir:* Rodrigo Fiallega; *Scr:* Molo Alcocer Délano; *Photo:* Carolina Costa; *Music:* Jordi Bachbush, David Rodríguez; *Prod Mgr:* Iván Muñoz; *Asst Dir:* Miguel Lima;



*Film Ed:* David Torres; *Prod Des:* Fernanda Contreras Ramírez; *Art Dir:* Elizabeth Medrano; *Direct Sound:* Raúl Locatelli, Pablo Manzanares; *Makeup Des:* Mari Paz Robles; *VFX Supv:* Roberto Ham; *Sound Des:* Alejandro de Icaza, Enrique Fernández Tanco; *Stunt Coord:* Balo Bucio

**Cast:** Camila Sodi (*Carmen Farías Hinojosa*), Juan Pablo Castañeda (*Julián*), Juan Carlos Colombo (*Padre Juan*), Ana Silvia Garza (*woman at funeral*), Lucy Páez (*young Carmen*), Patricia Martínez (*Rocío, Carmen's mother*), Patricia Morgado (*nurse*), Rubén Strempler (*Doctor*), Víctor Báez (*lawyer*), María del Carmen Farías (*Consuelo, grandmother*), Manuel Cruz Vivas (*Camilo, sacristan*), Ian Monterrubio (*possessed boy*), Elia Domenzain (*possessed woman*)

**Notes:** *El exorcismo de Carmen Farías* came to my attention because it was nominated for a couple of Arieles (Makeup—which it won--and Visual Effects), which prompted me to view it rather than another recent “possession” movie, *Karem, la posesión*, directed by



Henry Bedwell. (I may still get around to watching that one, someday.) Director Rodrigo Fiallega had

previously directed 2020's *Richochet*, but his earlier credits are mostly for digital effects on international films like *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol* and *The Expendables 3*.

Carmen, a reporter, inherits her grandmother's house in the countryside after her mother dies. [Although the house has been vacant for years and is boarded up, conveniently the electricity, gas, and water are all still connected and working.] Carmen and her husband Julián move in and literally nothing suspicious or spooky goes on for the first 33 minutes of this 92-minute film (which includes 4 minutes of end credits, so that leaves 88 minutes for the plot).

While Julián is away, Carmen (who is pregnant, dun dun DUN) discovers a box of VHS tapes (fortunately, the house also has a working television and VCR). Some of the tapes are typical home movies featuring Carmen as a young girl having a birthday party, opening Christmas presents, etc. However, many of the tapes are recordings of a series of exorcisms (of various people) over a period of years. She tracks down the priest seen in the recordings, Padre Juan, now retired and blind. A few more spooky things happen (we're now past the 60-minute mark): a portrait of Carmen's grandmother falls off the wall and is shredded, Carmen's dog is mysteriously killed, a baby is heard crying, lights flicker, etc. Carmen watches a VHS of her own exorcism—she floats in the air and spits something in Padre Juan's eyes—then (finally) she decides to get the hell out of the house, but...the doors are all locked! And the windows too! She finally jumps from a second-floor window into a driving rainstorm and goes to Padre Juan. He says she still has the devil within her, so they return to the house together. Things go sideways, Padre Juan doesn't make it, Carmen confronts the ghosts of her grandmother and mother, then coughs up a wad of something. She staggers outside, it's daytime, Julián arrives.



They seal up the lock of the house with wax (as it was when they arrived) and depart (inexplicably leaving one door wide open so a moth can fly in). Then there's a sort-of twist ending, or a spooky sting, or--? Let's just say the memory of the impact of the conclusion of Brian DePalma's *Carrie* is not seriously threatened.

*El exorcismo de Carmen Farías* has extremely good cinematography and production design, and the performances are fine (Camila Sodi carries the lion's share of the burden, with Juan Carlos Colombo a distant second

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in terms of screen time), and there's even a tiny kernel of a good story premise (mostly wasted), but the pacing is off. This isn't a slow burn, with gradually building suspense culminating in a cathartic conclusion, it's a film where the first half hour is devoted to setting the scene, something that could have been done in 10 minutes or less. The next half hour picks up the pace ever so slightly, then the last 15 minutes becomes a traditional, predictable emulation of *The Exorcist* and every other "exorcism" film since then.

It isn't exactly boring, but it's not not boring, either. The viewer keeps waiting for spooky stuff, but it's a long wait for a short and not particularly novel payoff.

Trivia notes: although Carmen explicitly says she's married to Julián, she apparently didn't take his last name (or it's some sort of family thing), since her mother's last name is also Farías (normally it's Given Name, Father's Last Name, Mother's Last Name, and—this may be outmoded—a Carmen who marries a "Mendoza" is "Carmen de Mendoza"). This confused me, and further confusing is that the real name of the actress playing Carmen's grandmother is "María del Carmen Farías."



## Obituaries

### Adriana Roel

Actress Adriana Roel passed away from complications of Alzheimer's disease on 4 August 2022; she was 88 years of age. Rosa María Gordeas (some sources spell it Gorbea) Osorio was born in Monterrey, Nuevo León in July 1934. She studied acting in France and in Mexico (at INBA) and made her professional acting debut in 1957. Roel appeared in numerous films, *telenovelas*, and plays during her long career. She won the Best Actress Ariel for *Anacrusa* and *No quiero dormir sola*, and was nominated as Best Supporting Actress for her role in *Renuncia por motivos de salud*.



### Anabel Gutiérrez

Anabel Gutiérrez died on 21 August 2022 at the age of 90. Anabelle Rafaela Gutiérrez (her first name was spelled various ways during her career) was born in September 1931 in Mexico City. She made her screen debut in a bit part in *El Diablo no es tan diablo* (1949), and became a popular



young actress in the 1950s. Gutiérrez reportedly had a dispute with ANDA (the actors' union) which led to her absence from films for most of the 1960s and '70s. She later resumed her TV and film work and was active into the 2000s.



### Axel Cristóbal Jodorowsky

Axel Cristóbal



Jodorowsky Trumblay, one of director Alejandro Jodorowsky's 4 sons, died of heart failure on 15 September 2022 in Mexico City.

Jodorowsky was born in July 1965 and worked as an actor in films like *Pubertinaje* and *Santa Sangre*; he was also a writer, poet, and "shaman." He is survived by his father and his brothers Brontis and Adán (Teo, the 4<sup>th</sup> brother, passed away in 1995).



### Burdette Zea

[A belated obit for Burdette Zea, whose passing I learned of while reviewing *Blue Demon contra cerebros infernales*]. Dancer, actress, and acting coach Burdette Zea passed away in Mexico City on 15 January 2015. Burdette Joan Wilson Gustafson was born in Seattle, Washington in April 1927, and arrived in Mexico with her sister Carole as "The Wilson Sisters" in 1948. Burdette married actor/dancer Salvador Zea and remained in Mexico for the rest of her life, appearing in a number of films, *telenovelas*, and stage presentations from the late Forties through the 1980s, also working as an acting coach in later years.



### Diego Bertie

Singer, composer and actor Diego Bertie died on 5 September 2022 after falling from the 14<sup>th</sup> floor of his apartment in Lima. Bertie was born in Lima, Peru in September 1967, and began working professionally in 1987 as a singer and actor. He appeared in a number of films, television programs, and musical plays. Bertie's connection with



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*cine mexicano* was his role in the Peruvian-French-Mexican co-production *Sin compasión* (1994).



### Eduardo MacGregor

[another belated obit that came to light while reviewing *Blue Demon contra cerebros infernales*] Actor Eduardo MacGregor passed away on 16 December 2018; he was



88 years of age. Eduardo MacGregor Correa-Nieto was born in Madrid, Spain in March 1930. He was a Spanish Civil War exile and grew up in Mexico; he studied acting at UNAM. Although his career began on the stage, MacGregor added television and film acting to his resumé in the mid-Sixties, appearing in a number

of films and *telenovelas*. MacGregor returned to Spain in the 1970s and acted in Spanish television and cinema, as well as working as a radio announcer and voice actor for dubbing. MacGregor's son Emilio MacGregor was a film/tv director in Spain until his death in 2008 at the age of 45.



### Fernando del Solar

Television host and actor Fernando del Solar died of cancer on 30 June 2022; he was 49 years old. Fernando Martín Cacciamani Servidio was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in April 1973. He began hosting Mexican TV shows such as "Sexos en guerra" and "Venga la alegría" in the 2000s, and also appeared as an actor in films



such as *Don de Dios* and *La familia de mi ex*.



### Henry Silva

Actor Henry Silva, who appeared in scores of films and television shows from the 1950s until his retirement in 2001, passed away on 14 September 2022. Silva was born in Brooklyn in September 1926, the son of an Italian father and Spanish mother, and began acting professionally while still a teen. In the 1960s he relocated to Europe and had a long career in international cinema, returning to the USA in the Seventies. One of



Silva's roles was in *Day of the Assassin*, a Mexican-Spanish-USA co-production shot in Mexico in 1979.



### Jorge Fons

Director Jorge Fons died on 22 September 2022; he was 83 years of age. Fons was born in Tuxpan, Veracruz, but grew up in Tlalnepantla, in the state of México. Fons began his career working in theatre, but enrolled in film school CUEC in 1963. After directing some shorts, working as an assistant director, and contributing to some screenplays, Fons made his first feature in 1969, *El quelite*. He then worked on several anthology films—*Fe, esperanza y caridad* and *Tú, yo, nosotros*—winning a Best Director Ariel and earning 2 writing nominations for his contribution to the latter, and receiving a Best Direction nomination for his episode in the former. He would later earn Best Director Ariels for *Rojo amanecer* and *El callejón de los milagros*, and a Best Documentary Short Ariel for *Así es Vietnam*, as well as the lifetime achievement Ariel de Oro in 2011. His final feature film was *El atentado* (2010), although Fons subsequently worked steadily television in the 2010s.



### Karina Castañeda

Karina Castañeda, who appeared for a number of years on the popular 1980s Mexican children's TV program



"Chiquilladas," passed away on 4 October 2022. Castañeda, born in 1975, was part of the cast of child actors that also included at various times Carlos Espejel, Lucero, Aleks Syntek, and Anahí. She also appeared in the program

"Muchachitas," then apparently retired from show business in the early 1990s.



### Lourdes Grobet

Photographer Lourdes Grobet passed away at age 81 on 15 July 2022. María de Lourdes Grobet Argüelles was born in Mexico City in July 1940. She originally studied to be a painter, but switched to photography and performance art in the late 1960s. She gained international fame with her visual documentation of *lucha libre*, but did not limit herself to this subject. She directed, co-



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produced, and co-scripted *Bering. Equilibrio y Resistencia*, which was nominated for a Best Feature-Length Documentary Ariel. Two of her 4 children worked on this film, cinematographer Xavier Grobert and composer Juan Cristóbal Pérez Grobet.



### Luis Echeverría

Luis Echeverría Álvarez, president of Mexico from 1970-1976, died on 8 July 2022; he was 100 years of age.



Echeverría had considerable influence on Mexican cinema while president: he notably made a speech urging filmmakers to address social issues, helped revive the Banco Cinematográfico and the Ariel awards, and was involved in the creation of CONACINE and CONACITE UNO y DOS,

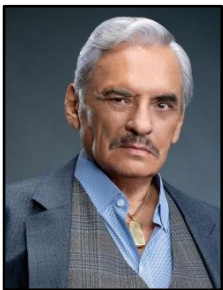
government-backed production companies. Echeverría's brother was Rodolfo Echeverría, who had a long film acting career as "Rodolfo Landa," and held a number of executive positions in film unions.

However, Echeverría was accused of complicity in the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre (when he was Secretary of Gobernación under Gustavo Díaz Ordaz)—recounted in *Rojo amanecer*--and "El Halconazo" or the Corpus Christi Massacre of 1971 (as seen in *Roma*), among other repressive acts. Echeverría was charged in 2006 and sentenced to house arrest, but the charges were dropped in 2009.



### Manuel Ojeda

Manuel Ojeda, one of the most prolific Mexican actors of the past 6 decades, died on 11 August 2022 at the age of 81.



Manuel Salvador Ojeda Armenta was born in La Paz, Baja California Sur, in November 1940. He began acting as a teenager and moved to Mexico City where he enrolled in the Instituto de Bellas Artes acting school. Ojeda made his screen

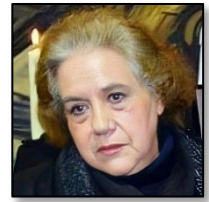
debut in *Calzonzín inspector* (1973) and earned more than 250 film/videohome/tv credits over the next 6 decades.

Ojeda was nominated for 8 Arieles, winning the Best Actor prize for *El infierno que todos han temido* (1979).



### María Montejo

Actress María Montejo passed away on 14 June 2022. María González Sánchez was the daughter of actress Carmen Montejo, and began acting professionally in the mid-Sixties.



She worked in *telenovelas* from 1967 until 2001, and also appeared in a number of films. Montejo worked with her mother in *La verdadera vocación de Magdalena* and *Ni Chana ni Juana*. She retired from acting in 2003. She is survived by her son, actor Radamés de Jesús.



### Marta Aura

Actress Marta Aura died on 8 July 2022; she was 80 years of age. Marta Aura

Palacios was born in Mexico City in 1942—her younger brother Alejandro Aura also became an actor, as well as a writer--and began acting professionally in 1959. She had a long career in the theatre, but also worked in radio, in *telenovelas* and in films, winning a Diosa de Plata as Best Supporting Actress for *Escrito en el cuerpo de la noche*. Her final film was *Coraje* (shot in 2018), directed by Rubén Rojo Aura, the son of Marta Aura and actor Rubén Rojo Pinto.



### Meche Carreño

Meche Carreño, an iconic actress of 1960s-70s Mexican cinema, passed away on 21 July 2022; she had been suffering from

cancer of the liver. María de las Mercedes Carreño Nava was born in the state of Veracruz in September 1947. As a



teenager, she became a model and then attended the Andrés Soler acting school sponsored by the actors' union ANDA. Carreño made her screen debut in the mid-'60s, and in 1966 married José Lorenzo Zakany, who produced her initial starring films like *No hay cruces en el mar*, *Damiana y los hombres*, etc. She subsequently married director Juan Manuel Torres in 1975, for whom she made

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movies like *La otra virginidad*, *El mar* and *La mujer perfecta*.

Carreño specialised in playing innocent but sexy young women, winning a Best Co-Starring Actress Ariel for such a role in *La Choca*. Her film career faded in the early 1980s, although she did return briefly to the screen later in the decade, and officially retired in 2005.



### Miguel Gurza

Actor and animal trainer Miguel Gurza died on 28



August 2022. Gurza and his brother Humberto began working in the film and television field in the 1960s, providing animals for Mexican and international productions. Both brothers also had occasional acting roles (Humberto even took over the role of “Chanoc” for 2 films): Miguel’s most

famous role was probably as “Count Frankenhausem” the vampire in *Chanoc contra el tigre y el vampiro*.



### Rosa de Castilla

Singer and actress Rosa de Castilla passed away at age 90 on 1 August 2022. María



Victoria Ledesma Cuevas was born in May 1932 and grew up in Aguascalientes, where she started performing at the age of 14. She began appearing in Mexican cinema in the early 1950s, working with major stars such as Jorge Negrete, Tin Tan, Antonio Aguilar, Luis Aguilar, and Resortes. She was nominated for a Best

Supporting Actress Ariel for her role in *Tal para cual*. De Castilla’s screen roles dwindled after the 1960s, but she continued to work as a singer, and made a few film and TV appearances in the 1990s before retiring.



### Susana Dosamantes

Actress Susana Dosamantes passed away on 2 July 2022; she was suffering from pancreatic cancer. María del

Perpetuo Socorro Guadalupe Susana Dosamantes Rul



Riestra was born in Guadalajara in January 1948. She made her screen debut in the late 1960s and was a popular performer in films like *Jalisco nunca pierde* with Vicente Fernández, and Carlos Enrique Taboada’s *Más negro que la noche*.

Dosamantes married Spanish lawyer Enrique

Rubio González and they had 2 children—future singer Paulina Rubio and Enrique Rubio—but divorced in 1974. Dosamantes later wed producer Carlos Vasallo Tomé, which led to her appearance in his multi-national productions such as *Day of the Assassin*, *Escuadrón Counterforce*, and *Jugando con la muerte*.

In the late ‘80s-90s, Dosamantes made a number of films as an assertive female action star—among them, *Rosa de la frontera*, *El placer de la venganza*, *La metralleta*, etc. She continued to work, mostly on television, until 2021.

Susana Dosamantes is survived by her third husband, Luis Rivas, her 2 children, and several grandchildren.



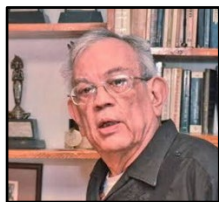
### Xavier Loyá

[Another belated obituary] Actor Xavier Loyá died of heart failure on 22 September 2020 in Mexico City; he was 92 years of age. Xavier Hernández Loyá was born in December 1927 in Mexico City (although some sources give 1934). His father was a bullfighter and composer Agustín Lara was his uncle. Loyá studied acting at INBA and made his stage debut in 1949; his first screen role was *Huellas del pasado* (1950). Loyá did not appear in many films in the Fifties but worked more regularly in the ‘60s-70s, and made some *videohomes* for Juan José Pérez Padilla in the 1990s. His final movie role appears to have been in Leopoldo Laborde’s *Boy Undone* aka *Memorias de lo que no fue* (2017).

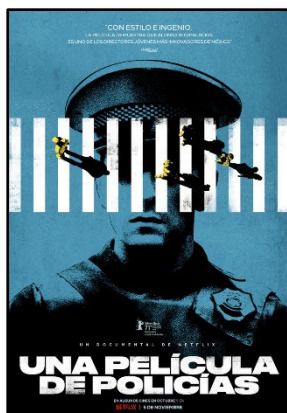
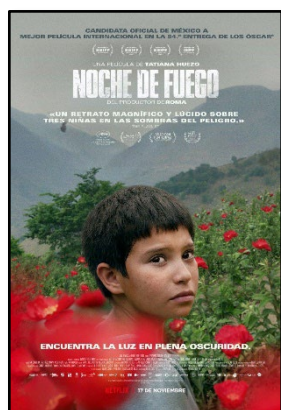


## Xavier Robles

Writer Xavier Robles passed away on 24 June 2022 as the result of injuries received in an automobile accident; he was 73 years of age. Francisco Xavier Robles Molina was born in the state of Puebla in February 1949; his father, José Humberto Robles Arenas, was a playwright (Xavier's brothers included writer Sergio Molina and actor Jorge Humberto Robles). Robles had written stories and books and in 1976 collaborated with Felipe Cazals on the screenplay of *Las poquianchis*. He won two Arieles for the script of *Rojo amanecer* (shared with his then-wife Guadalupe Ortega) and was nominated 5 additional times. He also directed three documentaries.



## 2022 Ariel Awards



The 64<sup>th</sup> Ariel awards ceremony was held on 11 October 2022 in Mexico City. *Noche de fuego* and *Una película de policías* battled for the top honours, earning 6 prizes each. *Los minutos negros* won 3 Arieles.

[Winner listed in **BOLD**]

### Best Film:

*Cosas imposibles*, *El otro Tom*, ***Noche de fuego***, *Nudo mixteco*, *Una película de policías*.

### Best Direction:

**Alonso Ruizpalacios**, *Una película de policías*; Ángeles Cruz, *Nudo mixteco*; Arturo Ripstein, *El diablo entre las piernas*; Ernesto Contreras, *Cosas imposibles*; Tatiana Huezo, *Noche de fuego*

### Best Actor:

Alejandro Suárez, *El diablo entre las piernas*; Benny Emmanuel, *Cosas imposibles*; Leonardo Ortizgris, *Los minutos negros*; Noé Hernández, *Nudo mixteco*; **Raúl Briones**, *Una película de policías*.

### Best Actress:

Ana Cristina Ordoñez, *Noche de fuego*; Ilse Salas, *Plaza Catedral*; **Mónica del Carmen**, *Una película de policías*; Nora Velázquez, *Cosas imposibles*; Sylvia Pasquel, *El diablo entre las piernas*.

### Best Male Co-Star:

Andrés Delgado, *Cosas imposibles*; Daniel Giménez Cacho, *El diablo entre las piernas*; **Kristyan Ferrer**, *Los minutos negros*; Memo Villegas, *Noche de fuego*; Salvador Garcini, *Cosas imposibles*.

### Best Female Co-Star:

Aída López, *Nudo mixteco*; Eileen Yáñez, *Noche de fuego*; Mabel Cadena, *La diosa del asfalto*; **Mayra Batalla**, *Noche de fuego*; Norma Pablo, *Noche de fuego*.

### Best Newcomer:

**Adrián González**, *Blanco de verano*; Alejandra Camacho, *Noche de fuego*; Giselle Barrera, *Noche de fuego*; Israel Rodríguez, *El otro Tom*; Julia Chávez, *El otro Tom*.

### Best Original Screenplay:

Ángeles Cruz | *Nudo mixteco*

**David Gaitán**, **Alonso Ruizpalacios** | *Una película de policías*

Joaquín Del Paso, Lucy Pawlak | *El hoyo en la cerca*  
Jorge Cuchi | *50 o dos ballenas se encuentran en la playa*  
Laura Santullo, Rodrigo Plá | *El otro Tom*

### Best Adapted Screenplay:

Martín Solares, Mario Muñoz | *Los minutos negros*

**Tatiana Huezo** | *Noche de fuego*

### Best Editing:

Miguel Salgado | *Nudo mixteco*

Miguel Schverdfinger | *El otro Tom*

Miguel Schverdfinger | *Noche de fuego*

Paloma López Carrillo | *El hoyo en la cerca*

**Yibrán Asuad** | *Una película de policías*

### Best Photography:

Alejandro Cantú | *El diablo entre las piernas*

César Gutiérrez Miranda AMC | *Cosas imposibles*

**Dariela Ludlow** | *Noche de fuego*

Emiliano Villanueva AMC | *Una película de policías*

Federico Barbabosa | *Los minutos negros*

### Best Sound:

Guido Berenblum (Sound Design), Santiago Arroyo

Camacho (Direct Sound), Jaime Baksht, Michelle

Couttolenc (Sound Mix) | *El hoyo en la cerca*



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Isabel Muñoz Cota (Direct Sound), Javier Umpierrez (Sound Design), Michelle Couttolenc, Jaime Baksht (Sound Mix) | *Una película de policías*

**Lena Esquenazi (Sound Design), Federico G. Jordan (Direct Sound), Paulo Gama (Sound Mix)** | *Noche de fuego*

Misael Hernández (Direct Sound), Enrique Greiner (Sound Design, Sound Mix), Raymundo Ballesteros, Manuel Montaña (Sound Mix) | *Cosas imposibles*  
Pablo Tamez (Direct Sound), Rodrigo Castillo Filomarino (Sound Design, Sound Mix) | *Nudo mixteco*

### **Best Original Music Score:**

**Andrés Sánchez Maher, Gus Reyes** | *Cosas imposibles*  
David Mansfield | *El diablo entre las piernas*  
Jacob Lieberman, Andrés Sánchez Maher | *Oaxacalifornia: El regreso*  
Kyle Eric Dixon, Michael David Stein | *El hoyo en la cerca*  
Leonardo Heiblum, Jacobo Lieberman/*Noche de fuego*

### **Best Production Design:**

Alejandro García, Sandra Flores | *El diablo entre las piernas*  
Diana Saade | *Cosas imposibles*  
Erika Ávila | *La diosa del asfalto*  
**Ivonne Fuentes Mendoza** | *Los minutos negros*  
Oscar Tello | *Noche de fuego*

### **Best Costume Design:**

**Abril Álamo** | *Los minutos negros*  
Alejandro Caraza | *La diosa del asfalto*  
Laura García De La Mora | *El diablo entre las piernas*  
Úrsula Schneider | *El hoyo en la cerca*  
Úrsula Schneider | *Noche de fuego*

### **Best Makeup:**

Alejandro Caraza | *La diosa del asfalto*  
Itzel Peña | *Una película de policías*  
**Mari Paz Robles "La Negra"** | *El exorcismo de Carmen Farias*  
Roberto Ortiz | *Los minutos negros*  
Roberto Ortiz, Ana Flores | *Noche de fuego*

### **Best Visual Effects:**

**Fernando Campos, Jaime Jasso, Isaac Basulto, Harumy Delmira Villareal, Raúl Campos, Enrique Sánchez "Quix", Flavio Pedota, John Blásquez, Santiago Ortíz- Monasterio, Alexey Platonov, Zack Rodríguez, Max Blásquez, Aaron Valenzuela** | *Aztech*  
Luis Montemayor | *Los minutos negros*  
Martin Lake, Isaac Tellez, Raúl Pano | *50 o dos ballenas se encuentran en la playa*  
Miguel De Hoyos, Gustavo Leão | *Noche de fuego*

Roberto Ham | *El exorcismo de Carmen Farias*

### **Best Special Effects:**

Alejandro Vázquez | *Malibú*  
Fernando Campos, Max Albarrán, Harumy Delmira Villareal, Isaac Basulto, Miguel Ángel Marín, Ulises Guzmán, Raúl Campos, Enrique Sánchez "Quix", Salvador Drán, Mauricio Van Hasselt | *Aztech*  
José Martínez "Josh" | *El hoyo en la cerca*  
Ricardo Arvizu | *50 o dos ballenas se encuentran en la playa*  
**Ricardo Arvizu Jr.** | *Noche de fuego*

### **Best First Work:**

*50 o dos ballenas se encuentran en la playa* | Jorge Cuchi Guixhuba | Sabrina Muhate  
*Muerte al verano* | Sebastián Padilla-Padilla  
**Nudo mixteco** | **Ángeles Cruz**  
*Te nombre en el silencio* | José María Espinosa De Los Monteros Tatto

### **Best Documentary Feature:**

*¿Qué les pasó a las abejas?* | Adriana Otero Puerto, Robin Canul Suárez  
*Cruz* | Teresa Camou Guerrero  
*Oaxacalifornia: El regreso* | Trisha Ziff  
*Te nombré en el silencio* | José María Espinosa De Los Monteros Tatto  
*Una película de policías* | **Alonso Ruizpalacios**

### **Best Animated Feature:**

*Un rescate de huevitos* | **Gabriel Riva Palacio Alatraste, Rodolfo Riva Palacio Alatraste**

### **Best Documentary Short:**

*En el fin del mundo* - Abraham Escobedo Salas  
*Flores de la llanura* - **Mariana X.**  
*La libertad interna* - Porfirio López Mendoza  
*Llámeme puta* - Digcencia Alejandrina Mejias  
*Pepedrilo* - Víctor Cartas Valdivia

### **Best Animated Short:**

*Fuego* | Romina Díaz Araujo, Clara Helena Cobo Reyes  
*Llueve* | Magali rocha Donnadiu, Carolina Corral Paredes  
*Mijo tiene un dinosaurio* | Alfredo Salomón  
*Secretum* | Javier Gutiérrez  
*Tío* | **Juan J. Medina**

### **Best Fictional Short:**

*El sueño más largo que recuerdo* | **Carlos Lenin**  
*Invierno* | Rafael Ruiz Espejo, Luis Pacheco  
*Manchester Acatitla* | Selma Cervantes  
*Reina* | Ozan Mermer  
*Viral* | Laura Andrea Martínez Hinojosa

**Best Ibero-American Film:**

- Cadejo Blanco* (Guatemala) | Justin Lerner
- El buen patrón* (España) | Fernando León De Aranoa
- El prófugo* (Argentina) | Natalia Meta
- Memoria* (Colombia) | Apichatpong Weerasethakul
- Mis hermanos sueñan despiertos* (Chile) | Claudia Huaquí

**Ariel de Oro:** Diana Bracho; Daniel Baksht



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