

Un pirata de doce años* [A Twelve-Year-Old Pirate] (Avant Films, 1971, ©1972) Prod:

Mario A. Zacarías; Assoc Prod: René Cardona Jr., Hugo Stieglitz; Dir-Scr: René Cardona Jr.; Photo: José Ortiz Ramos; Music: Raúl Lavista; Prod Mgr: Luis Quintanilla; Prod Chief: Fidel Pizarro; Asst Dir: Felipe Palomino;

Film Ed: Alfredo Rosas

Miguel Arana; Camera

Carlos Arjona; Makeup:

Sound Ed: Abraham

*the Distrimax DVD appears on the film itself

Cast: Hugo Stieglitz (Goldark), Christa Linder (Gerardo Cepeda (Scott)), Fields (Lucy), Eric Claus (de León), Rogelio Guerra (Capt. Alvarez), Mena, Gustavo Gamen,

Notes: this film is *Robinson y Vierre en la isla encantada*, Cardona's sequel to his hit *Robinson Crusoe*. Although *La isla encantada* was shot immediately after this movie (or, possibly, footage was shot for both films at the same time), and the films share some of the same cast and crew, *Un pirata de doce años* is a distinct, unrelated motion picture.

This was the first starring vehicle for "Al Coster," in real life René Cardona III. René III had appeared in at least nine previous movies, but *Un pirata de doce años* was the beginning of his rather brief career as a child star (followed by some acting roles as an adolescent and a teenager, after which he moved behind the cameras as a director). He's fine here, not at all self-conscious or mannered in his performance. His juvenile compatriots don't fare quite as well: Lindy Fields, whose other major role of note was in *Zindy, el niño de los pantanos* (another tropical adventure with Al Coster, albeit one shot in Guatemala) is awkward (I wonder if she is related to "Lissy Fields," who appeared in *Santo y Blue Demon vs. Drácula y el Hombre Lobo*, and/or James L. Fields, the head of the Churubusco studios sound department) and Eric Claus (who made no other movies that I am aware of) has little or nothing to do. Both of these kids are so blonde that it makes your eyes hurt (Al Coster is also a *giüero* but not so much).

The adult cast is studded with familiar names but since the film is really just a series of chases and action sequences, no one has to "act" much. Christa Linder is beautiful as always (both she and Gina Morett wear extremely low-cut gowns that never get dirty or torn)--her dialogue was post-dubbed, but you can see by her lip movements that she was speaking Spanish on the set. Pancho Córdova wears a horribly bogus wig and beard combination and is given a few bits of "colorful"

dialogue, but he and the rest of the pirate crew--eye-patch wearing Gerardo Cepeda and Alexander Báez, costumed to resemble an Apache or something--are one-dimensional characters. Similarly, Hugo Stieglitz does virtually no "acting," just "action." [The preferred spelling of his last name is "Stieglitz," and I guess he used his clout as associate producer to have himself billed this way for once.] Everyone else (Agosti, Rey, Carol, Guerra) is adequate.

The production values are variable. Most the film was shot on location (the major exceptions are some cave interiors clearly filmed at Churubusco) and there are a decent number of extras (Spanish soldiers and indigenous warriors), but the film's budget didn't stretch to actual pirate ships (or, apparently, stock footage), so what we get are a small set representing a ship's deck, and various ship models. These aren't horrible but they are obvious (in several scenes, forced perspective is employed in the same shot with actors and the shoreline, to make them look full-sized). It's also a little odd to see ships at anchor with all of their sails set! (apparently the models were made with sails that weren't removable) Interestingly enough, back-projection--not a standard technique in Mexican cinema--is used (rather poorly to be honest) in a few shots at the end of the movie. Also mildly annoying are the patently fake guns carried by the characters: these do not resemble actual weapons in the least, and in several scenes a smaller barrel



(apparently the functional one that allows the prop to "fire") can be spotted inside the rifle's "bell"-shaped muzzle. Children and women carry and fire these weapons with ease, hardly a realistic touch.

As the film begins, Morgan's pirate ship is sunk by the Spanish. Morgan and five of his men reach shore, where they are pursued by Spanish soldiers. Two of the pirates die quickly, but Morgan, Scott, Luma, and Barracuda reach the jungle, where they are befriended by Eric Goldark, a young boy who helps them elude their pursuers. Eric, the son of John Goldark ("The king of the pirates"), and his father were captured by the Spanish, along with Lady Harold, her servant Marú, and Lady Harold's niece and nephew. Eric's father died trying to help the others escape, and Eric has been hiding in the jungle ever since. The Márques de León tells Lady Harold that she and her party will be sent to Spain as proof Great Britain is financing pirates to prey on Spanish treasure ships in the New World.

That night, Eric, Morgan, and the other pirates attempt to rescue Lady Harold, but the Spaniards intervene; Eric escapes with Lucy and Tomy, but Morgan and his men are caught. The next day, the pirates are to be executed but the children cause a diversion and free their friends. They flee through the jungle, pursued by Spanish soldiers and attacked by cannibal headhunters. Morgan is wounded by a native's arrow, but Marú extracts it and Lady Harold



sucks out the poison from the wound. The fugitives are separated into two groups; Morgan and his men are trapped in a cave by the Spaniards and Scott is killed. Eric, Lady Harold, and the rest fight off waves of attacking cannibals (who always turn and run after one volley of shots, apparently unaware it takes a long time for muzzle-loading guns to be re-loaded). They are finally reunited and steal a Spanish longboat, but Marú is mortally wounded by a pursuing soldier's chance shot. A pirate ship suddenly appears and their cannon fire decimates the Spaniards on the beach; Morgan and the others are rescued by their own kind.

Un pirata de doce años is rather strong stuff for a childrens' movie, at least by today's standards. There are numerous on-screen deaths, some of them rather graphic.

One nice (and possibly unplanned) effect occurs early in the film: one of Morgan's men--facing the camera--is shot from behind, and his blood splatters the camera lens! Later, we see several Spanish soldiers slowly sink in quicksand, another devoured alive by piranhas, not to mention numerous soldiers and cannibals mowed down by gunfire (Lucy's cute pet dog also dies, the victim of a headhunter's arrow). Eric kills several soldiers himself, as do Tomy, Lucy, and Lady Harold. Marú fights a sword duel with a lecherous Spanish officer and wins! Linder and Morett's abundant cleavage is a bit risque for a movie aimed at children. There is also a mildly humorous sequence in which Eric accidentally sees Lucy swimming nude; he returns to the cave, embarrassed, and when Tomy asks about his sister, Eric's (too) quick reply is "I don't know, I haven't seen her." This is almost the only non-essential sequence in the whole picture, which otherwise consists of virtual non-stop running around.

One mildly curious aspect of the film is the depiction of the Spanish as villains and the pirates (who are British) as the heroes. This would seem to be at odds with Mexico's historical and language links to Spain. It is true the Spanish conquest of America is often depicted unfavorably in Mexican cinema, but *Un pirata de doce años* does not really concern this issue. However, while the Spaniards are the antagonists, only one (Bruno Rey's hook-handed, lecherous officer) is really villainous; the Spanish leader acts honorably and professionally according to his own beliefs, and so do the rest of his men. The pirates also comport themselves decently--Morgan spares the life of Capt. Roda, whom he has disarmed and wounded in a duel (although earlier, Morgan defeated a Spanish adversary by tossing sand in his eyes and then stabbing him!).

A note about the U.S. DVD version (Distribimax) of this movie. As noted above, the DVD case lists the title in large letters as *Pirate Kid*, and the text on the case is in English and Spanish. The main menu gives "English" and "Spanish" choices, but this only applies to the menus themselves--there is only one version of the movie on the disk; however, there is an option for removeable English sub-titles and a judicious sampling suggests that these are fairly accurate. García Riera gives a 95-minute running time for the picture, but the DVD copy is only 89 minutes long. Nothing is obviously missing, so it is possible the 95-minute figure was incorrect.

In general, *Un pirata de doce años* is adequate entertainment: it is certainly not slow or boring, but it has about as much dramatic depth as a Bazooka Joe comic.

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