The 2011 Ariel Awards

The 53rd edition of the Ariel Awards, sponsored by the Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y Artes Cinematográficas, was held on 7 May 2011 at the Palacio de Bellas Artes.

The big winner of the year was *El infierno*, Luis Estrada's ironic contribution to Mexico's Bicentennial, which received nine awards, including Best Film, Direction, and Actor.

The only other films which took home multiple statuettes were *Las buenas hierbas* (3 Arieles), *Año bisiesto* and *Abel* (2 Arieles each).

Career achievement Arieles de Oro were presented to actress Ana Ofelia Murguía and director Jorge Fons (shown above).
BEST MAKEUP
Alessandra Bertolazzi (*Biutiful*)
Carlos Sánchez (*Chicogrande*)
Eduardo Gómez (*El atentado*)
Roberto Ortiz (*El infierno*)

BEST VISUAL EFFECTS
Canek Kelly Guevara, René de la Rosa, Raúl Luna,
Rodrigo Santoyo, Sergio García Francia (*De día y de noche*)
Alejandro Valle (*Las buenas hierbas*)
Ángel M. Huerta, Armando Guajardo (*Seres génesis*)

BEST SPECIAL EFFECTS
Daniel Cordero (*El atentado*)
Alejandro Vázquez (*El infierno*)
Sergio Jara Jr. (*Hidalgo...*)
Alejandro Vázquez, Efeccine Mobile (*Somos lo que hay*)

BEST FIRST WORK
*Alamar* (dir. Pedro González Rubio)
*Año bisieoto* (dir. Michael Rowe)
*La mitad del mundo* (dir. Jaime Ruiz Ibáñez)

BEST FEATURE DOCUMENTARY
*El árbol olvidado* (dir. Luis Rincón)
*La cuerda floja* (dir. Nuria Ibáñez)
*La historia en la mirada* (dir. José Ramón Mikelajüeregui)
*La vida loca* (dir. Christian Poveda)
*Un día menos* (dir. Dariela Ludlow)

BEST FICTION SHORT
*Busco empleo* (dir. Francisco Valle)
*El último canto del pájaro Cú* (dir. Alfonso Ruiz Palacios)
*En aguas quietas* (dir. Astrid Rondero)
*La mina de oro* (dir. Jacque Bonnavent)

BEST DOCUMENTARY SHORT
*Casa cuna* (dir. Alicia Segovia Juárez)
*Extravíos* (dir. Adriá Campmany Buisán)
*Hasta la punta de los dedos* (dir. Alejandro Murillo Martínez)
*Río Lerma* (dir. Esteban Arrangoiz)

BEST ANIMATED SHORT
*Luna* (dir. Raúl Cárdenas, Rafael Cárdenas)
*Martyris* (dir. Luis Felipe Hernández)
*Moyana* (dir. Emiliano González)
*Xochimilco 1914* (dir. Colectivo Viumasters)

BEST IBERO-AMERICAN FILM
*El hombre de al lado* (dir. Mariano Cohn, Gastón Duprat) Argentina
*José Martí: el ojo del canario* (dir. Fernando Pérez) Cuba
*También la lluvia* (dir. Iciar Bollain) Spain

ARIELES DE ORO
Ana Ofelia Murguía, Jorge Fons

SALVADOR TOSCANO MEDAL
Jorge Ayala Blanco

Humberto Navarro Dies
Drummer Humberto Navarro of the musical group "Los Caminantes" died of complications from pneumonia on 6 June 2011. Navarro, along with the four Ramirez brothers, was an original member of Los Caminantes, formed in Guanajuato in the early 1980s. The group was very popular during this decade and beyond, and appeared in the feature film *Caminantes...si hay caminos* (1990).

Screen to Print:
Mexican Movie and Celebrity Comics Part One

*MFB* Volume 4, Number 4 contained an article entitled "From Comic Book to Screen," which described some of the many Mexican films adapted from comic books. Now, 13 years later, we begin to tell the other side of the story! Actually, the other sides to the story: comic books based on film characters, real-life celebrities in comic books, and Mexican movie-comics.

There were a number of Mexican comic books which contained adaptations of film stories--covering both Mexican and foreign movies--but the most extensive series was published weekly (originally bi-weekly) by Editorial Salcedo for about two years in the early 1960s under the title "Revista Figuras presenta Su Película Favorita." Curiously, "Su Película Favorita"--in a nearly identical format, with even the same cover design and type-face--was also published under the "Foto Cine" title, but apparently not as a
preceding or succeeding publication, since the issue numbers were not continuous between the two versions.

Revista Figuras "Su Película Favorita" began as a comic book, with drawn artwork re-creating the images of the films adapted, but at some point (at least by issue 68) switched to the fotonovela format, utilising screen captures. The covers were usually--but not always--reproductions or adaptations of the films' poster art.

The majority of the films adapted by "Su Película Favorita" were Mexican productions: most of the other movies chosen were European, although a handful of Hollywood titles showed up, including The Facts of Life, a Bob Hope-Lucille Ball comedy, and The Hoodlum Priest. The Mexican titles cover a wide spectrum of genres, from comedies and melodramas to horror films and Westerns; a large number of production companies were involved.

Copies of this magazine are not especially rare or expensive, although this of course varies by issue. The list below was largely compiled from Ebay and Mercado Libre (the Mexican equivalent of Ebay) listings.

Revista Figuras "Su película favorita"
(non-Mexican films are underlined)

1: La cigüeña dijo sí 30 June 1960
2: Sonatas
3: unknown
4: Yo sabía demasiado Sept 1960
5: Simitrio Sept 1960
6: Los ambiciosos
7: Amor en la sombra Oct 1960
8: Muñecos infernales Oct 1960
9: La hermana blanca Oct 1960
10: Senda prohibida
11: unknown
13: La Llorona Nov 1960
14: Peligros de juventud Nov 1960
15: Teresa Dec 1960
16: unknown
17: Sissi y su destino [Sissi - Schicksalsjahre einer Kaiserin] Dec 1960
18: Cuando regrese mamá Dec 1960
19: Remolino Dec 1960
20: Hijas casaderas unknown
21: Vacaciones en Acapulco Jan 1961
22: La carcel de Cananea Jan 1961
23: En busca de la muerte Feb 1961
24: El hombre de la ametralladora Feb 1961
25: Los Laureles Feb 1961
26: La chamaca Feb 1961
27: Azahares rojos Mar 1961
28: Una pasión me domina Mar 1961
29: Ojos tapatíos Mar 1961
30: Tres tristes tigres Mar 1961
31: Quinceañera Apr 1961
32: Ellas también son rebeldes Apr 1961
33: Un rayo de luz Apr 1961
34: Guantes de oro Apr 1961
35: Mañana serán hombres! Apr 1961
36: Los desarraigados May 1961
37: Suicidé mí amor May 1961
40: Sobre el muerto las coronas May 1961
41: Las Leandras June 1961
42: Besito a Papá June 1961
45: Casi casados July 1961
48: El aviador fenómeno
49: through 56 unknown
50: Muchachas que trabajan unknown
51: Los jóvenes salvajes [The Young Savages, '61] Oct 1961
52: Katia Oct 1961
53: Juan Sin Miedo Oct 1961
54: Carnaval en mi barrio Oct 1961
55: El beso de Judas
56: Jaque a la locura [Schachnovelle aka Brainwashed, '60] Nov 1961
57: El Tigre Negro Nov 1961
58: Confidencias matrimoniales
59: Sol en llamas Dec 1961
60: El rey fugitivo unknown
61: El Centauro del norte Dec 1961
62: Vivo o muerto Dec 1961
63: Estos años violentos
64: Las recien casadas Jan 1962
65: Cuanto vale tu hijo? Jan 1962
66: De hombre a hombre
67: Vámonos para la feria Feb 1962
68: Espiritismo Feb 1962
Año bisiesto [Leap Year] (Machete Prods.-IMCINE, 2010) Prod: Edher Campos, Luis Salinas; Assoc Prod: Gustavo Campos, Olga González; Dir: Michael Rowe; Scr: Michael Rowe, Lucía Carreras; Photo: Juan Manuel Sepúlveda; Film Ed: Óscar Figueroa Jara; Art Dir: Alisarne Ducolomb; Sound: Antonio Diego; Prod Mgr: Laura Pino; First Asst Dir: Rodrigo Bello Noble; Makeup & Hair: Vanessa Campos; Sound Design: Miguel Ángel Molina Gutiérrez

Cast: Mónica del Carmen (Laura López Martínez), Gustavo Sánchez Parra (Arturo), Marco Zapata (Raúl), Diego Chaz (first man), Jaime Sierra (second man), Armando Hernández (third man), Ireri Solís & José Juan Meraz (young neighbors), Ernesto González & Bertha Mendiola (older neighbors), Dagobert Gama (Papá), Nur Rubio (cashier)

WARNING: review contains spoilers. It's not possible to discuss this film fully without revealing the details of the plot, so if you're planning on seeing this film (it's being released in selected theatres in the USA and is already available on import DVDs from Mexico and the UK), then skip this and come back later.

Notes: while it's not entirely true that there are "two Mexican cinemas"--a commercial cinema and an "art" cinema (or "festival" cinema)--it is relatively easy to categorise a large number of recent Mexican films in one of these categories (which recognising there are definitely films which are both "serious" and "popular"). Año bisiesto certainly falls into the art-film group--the explicit sex scenes alone would limit its audience and thus its box-office potential, the depressing subject matter aside--yet it's not grim or pretentious. Laura is a young woman from Oaxaca now living in Mexico City and working as a free-lance writer. Most of her work is done from her apartment (she communicates with her editor and others via telephone and e-mail), her mother still lives in the provinces, her young brother Raúl visits occasionally, but she is essentially alone (aside from the opening sequence in a supermarket, the whole film is set in Laura's apartment). She spies on her neighbors--a young couple and an older couple--envying their companionate lives. Periodically, Laura ventures into the night and brings a young man home, but these encounters never progress beyond the one-night stand level.

Then, wonder of wonders, one of these men, Arturo, comes back for a second night! And a third! Arturo's sexual preferences go beyond the vanilla: he slaps her, chokes her, beats her with a belt, urinates on her, toys with a sharp knife, burns her with a cigarette. Afterwards, he's affectionate and kind, and Laura responds to him. [One of the interesting aspects of Año bisiesto is that Laura apparently submits willingly to Arturo: she does not "go along" with his dominant behaviour in exchange for his company, she encourages it, or so it seems.]

Early in the film, Laura turns the page on her calendar and marks 29 February in red. This date means something to her, but what? As the film unfolds, the days of the month are crossed out. Finally, on 28 February, Laura tells Arturo she wants him to kill her during sex on the following night. She will arrange everything so he won't be suspected, and--in the heat of passion, an example of
provides no simple answers. Laura's penchant for lying to beaming sun) and smiles. Life goes on.

_Año bisiesto_ is full of clues about Laura's life, but provides no simple answers. Laura's penchant for lying to others clouds matters even more (on the telephone she claims she's just made an elaborate Chinese dinner for a friend, while she's actually sitting alone on her sofa, eating ramen noodles and watching television; she tells Arturo she's friendly with her neighbours, even baby-sitting their children; when her editor calls, she tells him she's moving to Switzerland to work in the Mexican embassy there). However, despite her reluctance to talk about her past, she informs Arturo she lost her virginity when she was 12 years old (but won't tell him who her partner was), and that 29 February marks the fourth anniversary of her father's death. Laura says her father was "a good man," keeps a photograph of him at her bedside, and shaves her legs (and elsewhere) with his razor, but it's easy to infer something more sinister occurred between them which has marked Laura psychologically.

Her exile is self-imposed, she lives in a trap of her own making. She has chosen to withdraw from society, to work from home, to observe others rather than interact with them. And if she's constantly disappointed that the men she brings home for casual sex don't instantly provide the companionship and affection she craves, well--what can one expect from this class of relationship? It's a self-fulfilling prophecy, one-night stands only last one night. Despite her dominant sexual behaviour, he's not a pitiable, helpless figure. This is a very inefectual, particularly in relation to his (unseen) girlfriend who eventually drops him. Consequently, despite her loneliness and depression (and deeper psychological issues), Laura is actually the strongest, most competent person in the film. Whatever her plans were for 29 February before she met Arturo, once her suicide-by-lover scheme falls through, she doesn't kill herself. Instead, she prepares to face another month of life, but this time with a little smile. This is a wonderful touch and provides a perfect matching gesture to the film's opening: Laura rushes out of the supermarket to catch up to an attractive young man she'd spotted inside, but he's gone, and a wry expression of disappointment flashes across her face ever so briefly.

The first-time director and co-author of _Año bisiesto_, Michael Rowe, is Australian-born but a resident of Mexico. He won the Best First Work prize at this year's Arieles for this picture, which is smoothly put together without a lot of obvious stylistic gimmicks. As noted earlier, after the opening sequence the film takes place entirely in Laura's apartment. The production values are fine--although this couldn't have cost too much to make, there are no signs of budgetary insufficiency.

Mónica del Carmen won the Best Actress Ariel for her performance here, and while her willingness to do the more revealing scenes probably had something to do with it--it's hard to criticise an actress who not only does sex scenes, but allows herself to be photographed picking her nose and sitting on the toilet!--Laura is a fascinating and enigmatic character, expertly realised by the actress, director, and the script.

_Año bisiesto_ is a compelling character study, quite engrossing overall, and--surprisingly--isn't as dark or depressing as a brief description of the plot might suggest (the ambiguous, possibly-hopeful ending helps a lot in that respect).

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**Chuco el Roto** (Reforma Films, 1954)

*Prod:* Salvador Elizondo;  *Assoc Prod:* José Luis Bueno;  *Dir:* Miguel M. Delgado;  *Adapt:* Inígo de Martino, Adolfo Torres Portillo;  *Story:* José Luis Bueno;  *Photo:* José Ortiz Ramos;  *Music:* Luis Mendoza López;  *Waltz:* F. Villanueva;  *Prod Chief:* Armando Espinosa;  *Asst Dir:* Felipe Palomino;  *Film Ed:* Jorge Bustos;  *Art Dir:* Manuel Fontanals;  *Decor:* Manuel Ladrón de Guevara;  *Makeup:* Rosa Guerrero, Concepción Zamora;  *Sound:* Eduardo Fernández, Rafael Ruiz Espanza
CAST: Luis Aguilar (Jesús Arriaga aka "Chucho el Roto"), Elda Peralta (Matilde de Frizac), Antonio Espino "Clavillazo" (La Changa), José Baviera (don Diego de Frizac), Miguel Manzano (Antonio Lebrija), Jorge Casanova (El Rorro), José Muñoz (La Fiera), María Gentil Arcos (mother of Jesús), Beatriz Saavedra (Lupe), Alicia Rodríguez (Lolita), Paz Villegas (Clara), José Pidal (don Severo), Manuel Noriega (owner of carpentry shop), Humberto Rodríguez (servant), Juan Pulido (doctor), Pedro Elviro "Pitouto" (León Santitos), Chel López (Tuerto), Antonio Raxel (police insp.), Francisco Pando (prison guard), Jorge Arriaga (prison guard with whip), Emilio Garibay (Hipólito, prison guard), Roberto Meyer (warden), Hernán Vera (Margarito Rosas, night watchman).

NOTES: This was the second sound version of the "Chucho el Roto" story, and would be followed by two multi-film series which basically relate the same tale. In 1870, cabinet-maker Jesús Arriaga falls in love with Matilde de Frizac, while working for her father, don Diego. When Matilde becomes pregnant, don Diego bans Jesús from the house and takes Matilde to Paris. Seven years later, they return with a little girl, Lolita, who is explained as being a "war orphan" adopted by the kind-hearted Matilde. Jesús spots them, and when Matilde refuses to acknowledge him as Lolita's father, Jesús kidnaps the child. Although Jesús is arrested for the crime--during his mother's wake--he refuses to reveal Lolita's whereabouts (she is with his aunt Clara and his sister Lupe).

Sent to prison for 20 years, Jesús becomes friends with Lebrija, La Changa, La Fiera, and El Rorro, all of whom are eventually released. Jesús escapes from prison, disguising himself as the warden, and forms a criminal gang with his former prison friends. However, he insists that no violence be committed and that an equal part in each robbery be donated to the poor. A series of crimes follow, often with Jesús and the others in disguise. Meanwhile, Jesús is reunited with his daughter, now a teenager. She believes he is a rich businessman. He reluctantly agrees to one more robbery before he retires with his family to the country. However, the police have infiltrated an informer, El Tuerto, into the gang, and the next robbery is really an ambush. Jesús and Lebrija are captured, and the others are killed. Jesús and his friend are sent to the San Juan de Ulúa fortress in Veracruz; they try to escape but Jesús is mortally wounded. He lives long enough to see Lolita and Matilde reunited.

This version of Chucho el Roto is slightly different than the others, discarding some of the plot twists involving members of the gang (in particular, Chucho is not betrayed by La Fiera here, but by an outside informer). The elaborate robberies are reduced to two, including one in which La Changa impersonates a bishop in order to swindle a jeweler out of numerous valuable pieces. Although the film is relatively long--105 minutes--the plot is fairly schematic and most of the characters are drawn in a very sketchy fashion. As a concession to the talents of star Luis Aguilar, Chucho gets to sing a couple of songs, but these interludes are brief and fairly well-integrated into the film as a whole. The production values are satisfactory, although it is clear the film was made on a limited budget.

Aguilar is adequate as Chucho, and Elda Peralta is attractive as Matilde. One curious aspect of many of the Chucho el Roto movies is the relative lack of love interest: Chucho and Matilde have an affair early in the movie, but Matilde is fairly easily convinced by her father to drop Jesús, and never shows any sign of really pining away for him. Similarly, Jesús doesn't try very hard to win Matilde back: he only wants his daughter. And, contrary to what one might expect, he doesn't pick up another sweetheart in the course of the film. José Baviera is solid, as usual, as the proud don Diego. In one scene, Matilde says she'd even marry Jesús if that would bring Lolita back, but Diego replies: "I'd rather see you and the girl dead than have you bring shame to the family name." Tough dad! As traditional in these films, La Changa is played by a comedian, in this case Clavillazo, whose wholly artificial style of "acting" clashes horribly with the rest of the performers. Only in the sequence where he impersonates the bishop does he approximate some kind of naturalistic acting. The rest of the cast is filled out with familiar faces, including Pedro Elviro "Pitouto" in a larger than usual role as the prison warden's secretary.
Tarjeta verde (Green Card) (Historia de una ilegal) [Story of an Illegal Immigrant Woman] (D'Angelo-Cardiel, 1979) Exec Prod: César D'Angelo, Antonio DeMarco, María Cardiel; Dir-Ser: César D'Angelo; Photo: Gary Zietlow; Music: Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.], César D'Angelo; Asst Dir: Rafael Portillo Jr., Antonio Fernández; Film Ed: José Li-Ho; Continuity Editor: Herbert Strock; Makeup: Dennis Glass; Sound Engin: Mike Sabo; Union: STPC (post-production)

Cast: Carmen Salinas (Luciana), David Reynoso (Víctor Rodríguez), Luciana (María Elena Fernández), René Cardona [Sr.] (lawyer), Eduardo de la Peña "El Mimo" (barmen), Enrique Cuenca "Polivoz" ("Mónica," waiter), Carlos Rivas (Juan Torres), César D'Angelo, Nelson Velázquez (Luis), Rosa María Briz, Aaron Berger, Raquel Elizondo, Martha Moreno, Felipe de Jesús, Drew Michaels (Joe), José Félix Infante, Ray Ávila, Pepe Gavilán, Enrique García, Bren Holiday, Isolina Contreras, Moki De Marco, Amelia Carrión, Jim Beam, Ofelia Grijalva, Enrique Cordero, Patricia Hernández, Roberto Stuart, Mario Valdez, Katy Curiel, Oswaldo Sandoval, Angel Macias, César G. Galindo, José A. Márquez, Alejandro Herrera, Jaime Véndega, Héctor Arambula

Notes: shot entirely in Los Angeles with a mostly non-Mexican crew (note the name of Hollywood B-movie director Herbert Strock in the credits), Tarjeta verde may or may not have had Mexican money invested in it, but since the top names in the cast are all Mexican performers, and since the post-production was done in Mexico City, this should at least qualify as a co-production.

A familiar tale of the tribulations of a Mexican immigrant to the USA, Tarjeta verde is notable mostly for the presence of busty singer-actress Luciana, who made a handful of melodramas in this period. Although I had seen this picture years ago, I didn't remember many details, and in fact when I reviewed another Luciana movie--La Coralillo--I thought her brief topless scene there was her only such work. However, I was wrong. Immediately after the actress has a big dramatic scene indignantly refusing to take a job as a nude "model" because she's a "decent woman" with "morals," the film cuts to footage of her character taking a shower! She's clearly nude (and it's clearly Luciana), although the opaque glass doors of the shower deny the audience all of the lurid details. Then, she gets out of the shower and we are treated to some topless shots (from the side, to be sure) as she puts on a robe. This sequence is hilarious, given its juxtaposition with the moralizing tone of the scene we have just seen. [Not that Luciana didn't utilize her two significant "assets" in this film and in the rest of her career--later in the movie she has back-to-back musical numbers wearing gowns that display a lot of cleavage, and throughout the movie she frequently wears low-cut tops or has her blouse unbuttoned to provide us with an eyeful.] As a singer and actress, Luciana is actually pretty good, but virtually all of her pictures are melodramas where she has to suffer, suffer, suffer.

Unlike many movies about ilegales, Tarjeta verde does not depict Maria Elena (or "Malena," as she's called) undergoing an ordeal to reach the USA. When the film begins, she's already in the company of her aunt and her aunt's neighbor, Lolita (legal residents). Her uncle Juan ogles her sexy niece, which foreshadows Malena's rocky relations with men for the rest of the movie.

Malena confesses to Lolita that she left Mexico because she's pregnant: she was seduced and abandoned by her boyfriend Luis. Lolita arranges for an abortion (a legal one: they are shown leaving a hospital). Lolita: "Was the abortion painful?" Malena: "Yes, but it was more painful to kill a child." Next, they visit a lawyer who agrees to help Malena get her "green card"--but it will cost up to $2,000 and take 4-8 weeks. Lolita makes a down payment and he agrees to start the process (leering at Malena).

After a long search, Malena is hired as a seamstress in a garment factory (she uses a name and social security number belonging to someone else). However, factory owner Joe--who wears his shirt unbuttoned almost to his waist--takes a fancy to his new employee. He says she's wasting her time working in the factory for a pitance, when she could make $150 a day modeling bikinis, lingerie, and..."artistically" (he later ups the ante to $500 for the "artistic" kind). Malena refuses, saying she'd rather die than compromise her morals. Joe threatens to call Immigration, and adds that her attitude is typical: Mexicans "are the way they are," because they lack ambition and don't know a good opportunity when they see one. Malena departs. At her aunt's house, she's assaulted by her drunken, lecherous uncle (after he--and the audience--watches her take that shower). Malena clubs him with a vase or something and flees to Lolita's house. Afraid to call the police, Malena gets a job in agriculture, hoping to find "tranquility" in the rural atmosphere.

Well, she's wrong. Her employers short-change her on her salary, only relenting when she threatens to contact the authorities (probably an empty threat, since she's an undocumented worker anyway). Her boss, Juan Torres, claims his marriage is a failure and his children were killed in a car wreck. Malena goes to a dance with him and is invited to his house to "see a photograph of his mother" (!). He drugs her but his plans for seduction are foiled by the arrival of a woman who says Juan is incorrigible: he's the father of her three children and still seduces others.
Malena finally agrees to work as a cocktail waitress and part-time singer in the club where Lolita is employed. While there, she meets promoter Víctor Rodriguez. He offers her work as a performer, but she turns him down, claiming she isn't prepared for life as a professional singer. [A completely extraneous scene follows, featuring Enrique Cuenca as an effeminate waiter and Lalo el Mimo as a bum. This was clearly shot to take advantage of the presence of these two actors in Los Angeles, but has no relevance to the rest of the movie and isn't funny either.]

Víctor proposes marriage to Malena when he returns from his tour. She accepts, but wants to wait until she gets her "green card," so she can visit her ailing mother in Mexico. Víctor helps make her a big star. Malena's lawyer is irritated when he hears the news, insisting he would make a better husband than Víctor (even though he's about 20 years older than Víctor, who is himself somewhat older than Malena). He calls Malena and tells her she can pick up her green card at his apartment that night; Víctor overhears, and he and his men break in just in time to rescue Malena from (yet another) rape attempt. The angry lawyer, badly beaten, offers a client $5,000 to do a "special job." What a coincidence--it's Malena's former boyfriend Luis! The next day, as Malena, Víctor and the rest of the wedding party leave the church, the lawyer steps up and hands her the green card. Luis appears and tries to shoot Víctor, but Malena steps in front of the bullet and is killed (Luis, in turn, is riddled with bullets by Víctor's bodyguards). Víctor: "damned green card!"

Tarjeta verde is at times unintentionally humorous (and the attempts at deliberate humor usually fall flat). Malena has an attractive body, but it is a little hard to believe that every man she meets would attempt to seduce, rape, or (at best) romance her. The USA is depicted as a rather hostile place for immigrants: Malena is tricked into buying a watch on the installment plan, she (and the other farm workers) are exploited by their employer, there is an ever-present threat of "La Migra" (although they're never seen in action--there is a sequence in which two men are arrested by plainclothes cops on the street, but the reason is unclear), plus there's all of that rape stuff going around (at least if you're Malena).

The performances are variable. The pros are generally good, although René Cardona really seems too old and frail to be harboring any romantic thoughts, and (as noted earlier) Cuenca and de la Peña have little chance to display their talents. The second tier of actors is also adequate (Malena's aunt, Joe, etc.) but the minor players are wisely given little to do and much of their dialogue seems to have been post-dubbed. [Curiously, Drew Michaels as "Joe" speaks good English and poor Spanish in his first scene, but in his big scene with Malena his Spanish is quite good, and yet he doesn't seem to have been dubbed.]

Tarjeta verde is fairly well-produced: though obviously shot entirely on location, the photography, sound, music, editing, etc. are all satisfactory. [There is one shot in which the reflection of the director or a crew member can be seen in a glass door, but that's not a terrible offense.] I know very little about César D'Angelo (just a vague feeling he might have had some music or entertainment business connections), but while this seems to have been his only directorial effort, his work is fine--it's certainly as good as similar films by "professional" Mexican filmmakers.

Nothing spectacular, but--as with most movies about Mexicans in the USA--this is rather interesting in its depiction of the immigrant experience and U.S. culture, and it's also a satisfactory melodrama.
Singer Marcos wakes up one morning in a motel, hung-over and alone. However, evidence in the room indicates he was not alone, if you get my drift. The motel clerk can’t tell Marcos who his “roommate” was, since they checked in during the night clerk’s shift. The rest of the movie is a series of flashbacks to the previous evening, intercut with Marcos’s attempt to discover who he slept with.

The suspects include married woman Olga—she and Marcos sneak onto the “Montaña Rusa” roller coaster after it has closed for the night, but Marcos eventually learns he didn’t sleep with her. He attempted to seduce the tipsy widow Malena, but is unable to perform himself because he’s too drunk. The teenaged María takes him through a secret door in the convent boarding school where she lives—they emerge in a rock-and-roll nightclub, but Marcos later discovers he didn’t have sex with María either. He finally discovers he did make love with Olga. He attempts to discover who she slept with.

Olga’s room-mate is the gay Fermín (earlier, when Marcos began to suspect this, he attempts suicide but fails). None of the scenes are really that amusing, in large part because Muñiz is not that sympathetic or funny (but also because the script isn’t very witty). The performers do their best but the whole enterprise falls rather flat.

As mentioned earlier, the cast is filled with well-known people—although Germán Robles and Virma González have pointless cameos—but no one really stands out. The songs (including one written by Paul Anka) are forgettable and all in all, the picture is mediocre at best.

Notes: bland pseudo-ranchera, set in Xochimilco, located in the south of Mexico City and known for its gardens, canals, and flower markets. A cynical reviewer might cite this movie as a showcase for the momoxa, or compare it to the Agrásánchez Guanajuato-Mummy movies, given the presence of senior citizens Guizar, Cardona, and Fernández in prominent roles (however, I prefer to think of it as a sort of tribute to the Golden Age of Mexican cinema).

This is also a good example of the family ties of the Mexican film industry: almost everybody is related to somebody else in the business. Norma Herrera (the daughter of famous still photographer Armando Herrera) appears with her son Armando Araiza (her husband is director Raúl Araiza); Fernando Fernández is directed by his brother Jaime; Cruz Infante is one of Pedro Infante’s sons; Tito Guizar was related to Lilia Guizar and Pepe Guizar, as well as being the son-in-law of Manolo Noriega; Queta Carrasco’s sister Ada was also an actress; Susana Cabrera was the cousin of Pompín Iglesias; and we don’t need to highlight the identities of René Cardona’s son and grandson (not to mention his ties by marriage to the Zacarias family).

Rosendo Vargas owns some trajineras, colorful, flower-besrewn tourist boats which travel on the canals in Xochimilco. His uncles Julián and Miguel run the café “Los Solterones” (The Bachelors) nearby. The wealthy don Generoso is trying to buy up as many chinampas (plots of land reclaimed from the original lake, some actually floating) in the area as he can, but Rosendo refuses to sell and advises his friends to do likewise. Sisters Isabel and Rosita both flirt with Rosendo, but he prefers Elena, a widow with a teenage son, Pedrito. Elena
is persecuted by the other women in the area—because her husband was a herbal doctor, they accuse her of being a witch.

Julián decides to organise the annual “Feria de las Flores,” a festival which elects a queen and includes other events (coincidentally, Pedro Infante had a supporting role in 1943’s La feria de las flores, which also featured Fernando Fernández in the cast). This outrages don Generoso, who was planning on using the feria to launch his political career. After a clash between supporters of the two men, the local party organiser tells both men their political aspirations are doomed.

Generoso is angry when Elena rejects his marriage proposal, and Isabel is upset when she sees Rosendo kissing the attractive widow. Rosendo is nearly killed when Generoso runs his car off the road during an impromptu race; the rich villain and his men attempt to abduct Elena, but Rosendo shows up and thashes Generoso (the fight is shot in extreme long-shot to disguise the fact Infante isn’t really beating the crap out of the elderly Fernández, but rather his double—even so, the implication is rather odd). As the movie concludes, Isabel is elected Queen of the Feria, while Elena gives up Rosendo so he can marry Rosita, who truly loves him.

Allá en el Rancho de las Flores isn’t a bad movie, but it isn’t really a good one either. There are too many songs by Cruz Infante (who looks more like Víctor Junco than Pedro Infante, and—despite the fulsome compliments of the other characters in the movie—isn’t a great singer either). While the film as a whole isn’t paced slowly, many of the scenes (especially the allegedly “humorous” ones and the musical numbers) drag on far too long. None of the multiple sub-plots is very dramatic or even detailed. The production values are satisfactory (the movie was shot on location in Xochimilco during December 1983) without being particularly noteworthy.

As intimated above, Cruz Infante (not to be confused with José “Pepe” Infante Cruz, one of Pedro’s brothers, who starred in La vida de Pedro Infante) isn’t an especially charismatic or dynamic performer, although he’s adequate. This film and El Sinaloense (also 1983, also directed by Jaime Fernández) were his two shots at movie stardom (he later died in a car accident). Fernando Fernández (who by this time resembled Cesar Romero) is fine as the villain, but Tito Guízar and René Cardona have embarrassing, comic-relief roles as squabbling old men.

[The film’s best line does come out of their verbal sparring, however. When Julián says he’s going to run for Congress, Miguel says “You can’t do that, you’re not even Mexican.” When Julián protests that he is, Miguel replies, “Then why do you talk like that?” Julián says “I was raised in Guadalajara.” This is a joke on Cardona’s Cuban origins, as well as his pronounced lisp, although in the context of the movie—Julián and Miguel are supposed to be brothers—it makes no sense at all.] The rest of the cast is adequate, although Susana Cabrera is under-utilised.

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Cacería humana [Human Hunt] (Cin. Sol, © 1987)
Exec Prod: José Luis Barragán; Dir: Valentín Trujillo; Scr: Jorge Manrique, Valentín Trujillo; Story: Gilberto de Anda, Jorge Manrique, Valentín Trujillo; Photo: Antonio de Anda; Music: Gustavo Pimentel, David Storrs; Prod Co-ord: Víctor Lozoya (Mexico City), José Luis Murillo (Acapulco); Prod Mgr. Arq. Arturo Martínez; Asst Dir: Román Hernández; Film Ed: Sergio Soto; Camera Op: Agustín Meza; Makeup: Guillermina Oropeza; Sound Op: Rogelio Pichardo; Union: STIC
Cast: Valentín Trujillo (Rodrigo), Flaco Guzmán (Lagartijo), Olivia Collins (Olivia), Sergio Goyri (Marcos), Luis Aguilar (police chief), Gilberto Trujillo (Menso), Carlos East (don Octavio), Raúl Trujillo (Alberto), Linda Johnson (Lucy), Arturo Martínez hijo (second victim), Gustavo Aguilar “Manotas” (Jaime), Luis Felipe Vales (hotel clerk), Alejandra Vidal (Olivia’s sister)
Notes: although the production values are fine and the cast is good, Cacería humana is only a routine thriller.
Though structured more as a “whodunit” than an action movie or a serial-killer picture, little or no suspense is achieved and the details of the plot are not very logically worked out.

Alberto elopes with Lucy, because her father objects to their relationship. Borrowing a car from Alberto’s brother, they drive to Acapulco for their “honeymoon.” However, after spending some time on a secluded beach, the young couple is pursued by a mysterious figure wearing a motorcycle helmet who tries to kill them. Spending the night hidden in the forest, the next day they try to escape but their car is rammed and pushed over a cliff by the mystery killer’s black pickup truck.
[One might call this an example of a Psycho-style plot twist—a long opening sequence features the film’s apparent protagonist who is then abruptly murdered, and the rest of the movie has a different protagonist trying to solve the crime.]

Rodrigo, Alberto’s brother, is contacted by the authorities of a small town near the crash site. He arrives to identify his brother’s body, but is suspicious at the reception he receives. Everyone except the attractive
Olivia and mechanic Lagartijo urge him to leave town as quickly as possible. After driving to the crash site, a hairpin turn known as “La Chueca” (the Crooked One), Rodrigo is nearly killed when the brakes on his car fail. Rodrigo learns other accidents have occurred near La Chueca over the past six years. In fact, while he is investigating, another young couple is murdered in the same manner as Alberto and Lucy. The only clue is a black pickup truck observed near the scene of the crimes. Rodrigo learns town policeman Marcos—who arrived in the area just when the murders began—has a black truck with a “tumba-burros” (a metal grille on the front). Rodrigo, on the pretext that he’s interested in buying the pickup, goes with Marcos to see it, but someone locks the garage and sets it on fire in an attempt to kill them (they escape). Lagartijo is later slain by the helmeted killer.

Rodrigo decides the police chief must be the murderer, and he and Olivia convince Marcos to arrest his boss. However, the chief escapes and heads for La Chueca. Rodrigo and Olivia, who have fallen in love, are at the beach location. She tells him she saw her (topless) sister on that spot, six years earlier, with Olivia’s fiancé. Now Olivia is repelled by any physical demonstration of affection. As Rodrigo drives away, the black pickup appears and tries to force him over the cliff, but the killer truck takes the plunge instead. Rodrigo climbs down to the wreck and unmasks the murderer as…Olivia!

One of the major problems with Cacería humana is the sheer clumsiness of the killer’s modus operandi. When Alberto and Lucy (and later, another young man and his girlfriend) climb up the cliff from the beach, the black pickup roars towards them before they are actually on the top of the cliff (there’s a little stone wall there, too), so it has no chance of hitting them at all! Instead of going back down the cliff, the victims instead make a run for their parked car, and then try to drive away, only to be pursued (for several miles, it seems) by the pickup until they reach just the right spot where they’re rammed and driven off the cliff. One might say, “oh the killer has a fetish about killing people in a specific way,” but that doesn’t explain the attempt to burn Marcos and Rodrigo alive, nor the graphically gory beating of Lagartijo with a metal pole. None of this is very mysterious or suspenseful, although I confess I knew who the killer was before I saw the movie (thanks to a printed synopsis).

There are some good things about Cacería humana: the direction is pretty slick overall (Valentín Trujillo had been an actor for 20-plus years before he started directing, and didn’t have much to learn) and the location shooting is nice. The only gore occurs in the murder of Lagartijo—which goes on for a while. Linda Johnson (who must have been someone’s girlfriend, since her dialogue is dubbed although she doesn’t play a gringa and—while she’s cute—she isn’t any cuter than any given Mexican actress of the period) and two other actresses have brief topless scenes on the beach, while Olivia Collins appears in a wet shirt that leaves nothing to the imagination. It’s nice to see Luis Aguilar back in harness as well.

Not bad, but not great.

El Halcón Solitario [The Lone Falcon]
(Filmadora Chapultepec, 1963) Exec Prod: Rubén Galindo; Prod: Pedro Galindo; Dir-Adapt: Zacarías Gómez Urquiza; Prod Chief: José de Jesús Fernández; Prod Chief: José Alcalde G.; Asst Dir: Winfield Sánchez; Film Ed: Jorge Bustos; Art Dir: Manuel Fontanals; Decor: Ernesto Carrasco; Camera Op: Felipe Mariscal; Lighting: Luis Garcia; Makeup: Margarita Ortega; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Dialog Rec:
El Halcón Solitario

Cast: Luis Aguilar (Armando Morales), Lucha Villa (Lucha Preciado), Tito Junco (Felipe Bonilla), Rosa María Gallardo (Irma Preciado), Alejandro Parodi (Dr. Gabriel Morales), José Chávez [Trove] (henchman), Arturo "Bigotón" Castro (don Francisco Preciado), Emilio Garibay (henchman), Roberto Meyer (don Guillermo), Celia Tejeda (?Maria), Tomás Rodríguez (Tomás), Guillermo Bravo Sosa (party guest); henchmen: René Barrera, Vicente Lara "Cacama," Rubén Márquez, Margarito Luna, Nothanael León "Frankenstein"; Mirón Levine (townsman)

Notes: a belated sequel to Los Cinco Halcones (1960) and Vuelven los Cinco Halcones (1961), El Halcón Solitario reduces the roster of masked Western heroes from 5 to just one, Luis Aguilar (whose character has a different name than in the first two movies, but since this film opens with the five Halcones riding and singing their theme song, then bidding one member farewell, the link between the pictures is solidly established). Unfortunately, El Halcón Solitario is a mediocre Western notable only for a strong cast and a rather blatant borrowing from the "Lone Ranger" origin story. Otherwise, the plot and pacing are weak, the acting routine, the action sequences sparse and unexciting. Aguilar and Lucha Villa don't sing as much as one might expect, but since the movie is less than 70 minutes long, this may explain it (they do sing several songs separately and together).

Armando Morales (the local police chief) welcomes his brother Gabriel back to their small town--Gabriel has just received his medical degree. However, rancher Felipe Bonilla orders his men to kidnap Gabriel so they can use him as a hostage to distract Armando from his duties. Bonilla's men also attack the Preciado ranch, killing the owner (the father of Armando's girlfriend Lucha and her sister Irma) and stealing the cattle. Armando himself is later waylaid and dumped into a canyon, presumed dead.

But indio Tomás (don't call him Tonto) rescues Armando and takes him to a secret cave, where he nurses him back to health. When he's recovered, Armando takes the secrecy identity of the Halcón Solitario (although he's never referred to by this name in the movie) to combat Bonilla and his henchmen. Since Armando is missing and presumed dead, Bonilla has been named police chief, a post he uses to enrich himself and protect his men from capture as they commit various crimes.

Lucha is abducted by Bonilla's men and taken to his ranch, but the Halcón frees her. He takes Lucha and her sister to the cave, but Bonilla's men discover the hideout. After a battle, Armando forces one of the outlaws to reveal the truth about the missing Gabriel. A short time later, the municipal president throws a party and Bonilla is confronted by Gabriel and Armando. Armando triumphs in a shoot-out with the villain and everyone is happy (except Bonilla of course).

El Halcón Solitario avoids one problem that plagued many earlier Luis Aguilar masked-cowboy films, i.e., the obvious doubling of the hero in any and all action scenes. However, it (unfortunately) does this by having very few action scenes at all! To be fair, the one major fight sequence (in the cave) is adequately done, and Aguilar himself dons the mask for some dialogue scenes, but the masked Halcón isn't very active or prominent in the film as a whole. Indeed, much of the footage is dedicated to Bonilla and his henchmen, including a strange sequence in which one of the outlaws sings a sad song as his compatriots get drunk and weep! (Bonilla then bursts in and angrily throws them out of the room, cursing them as useless drunks!) As mentioned earlier, the acting is nothing special, as everyone goes through their paces by rote and no one stands out.

The production values are adequate, with a fair amount of location shooting, but the movie--while professional in appearance--is very bland.

More Revista Figuras "Su Película Favorita"

Well, I just made the "May-June" deadline for this issue. Over the past several months, I have been involved in many things, chief among them (a) finding and buying a house, and (b) the Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden's 2011 "Summer Camp Film Festival," which is an annual event I host. Hopefully, by the next issue of MFB, I will be in my new home and better organised than ever before!

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