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Too Many Obituaries (Again)

Mario Almada

Mario Almada, one of the most popular Mexican actors of the last 5 decades, died at his home in Cuernavaca on 4 October 2016; he was 94 years old. Mario Almada Otero was born in Huatabampo, Sonora, on 7 January 1922. He



spent part of his childhood in Mexico City before returning to Sonora with his family as a teenager. While a grade school student in the capital, Almada and his brother Fernando appeared as extras in the Juan Orol-directed *Madre querida* (1935).

Back in Huatabampo, Almada dedicated himself to agriculture until he was nearly 40 years of age; at that time, he left Sonora and relocated to Mexico City to work with his father and 3 brothers running the popular night “El Señorial.”

When “El Señorial” closed in the early 1960s, Mario’s younger brother Fernando—who had begun singing and acting professionally—convinced him to become his partner in producing the feature film *Nido de águilas*, starring Fernando and giving Mario a producing credit. Several years later they made *El jinete de la bruja*: when actor Bruno Rey was severely injured on his way to the shoot in Guanajuato, Mario stepped in and took his role. However, it was the Western *Todo por nada* which shot him to fame as an actor: he received a Diosa de Plata award for his role (he won the prize again for another Western, *El tunco Maclovio*). From the late 1960s until shortly before his death, Mario Almada would appear in literally hundreds of feature films and *videohomes*, including nearly 100 with his brother Fernando (who, despite being 7 years younger than Mario, retired from acting in the early 2000s).

Mario Almada is best remembered for his many action films, but for the first several decades of his acting career he played a wide variety of roles—including numerous villains—in many different genres. One of his more unusual films was Arturo Ripstein’s *La viuda negra*, for which Almada received an Ariel nomination as a priest who has an affair with his housekeeper. Almada later said

this film was his least favourite, since it offended him as a Catholic. Almada was nominated for another acting Ariel for the sports drama *El Chido Guan, el tacos de Oro*, and received a lifetime achievement Ariel de Oro in 2013.

Almada continued working until shortly before his death, although most of his later roles in theatrical films were essentially cameos, such as his appearance in *El Infierno*. The majority of his credits from the mid-’90s until his death were for *videohomes*. He also acted on several television series, including a recurring role on “El Pantera.”

Mario Almada was married to his wife Consuelo from 1951 until his death; they had two sons and two daughters. His son Marcos Almada became an actor, director, writer, and producer.



Martha Roth

Actress Martha Roth died on 7 October 2016; she was 84 years old. Martha Roth Pizzo was born in Padua, Italy in May 1932, but moved to Mexico with her family as a child. She studied

with famous acting teacher Seki Sano and made her professional debut in 1948. Roth appeared regularly in films until 1960, when she retired to raise her family. She had two sons with her first husband, composer Rubén



Fuentes, and was later married to producer J. Fernando Pérez Gavilán, although they were separated at the time of her death.

Roth appeared in a handful of films and *telenovelas* in the Seventies and Nineties, and made her last screen appearance in *Morirse está en hebreo* in 2007. After working in the *telenovela* “Destilando amor” in that same year, she retired. Roth was a resident of a retirement home in Mexico City at the time of her death.



Lupita Tovar

Actress Lupita Tovar died on 12 November 2016 in Los Angeles; she was 106 years old. Guadalupe Natalia Tovar Sullivan was born in Oaxaca in July 1910. She was “discovered” in Mexico by filmmaker Robert J. Flaherty, and began her career in Hollywood in the late 1920s. She returned to her homeland to make *Santa* (1932), and

alternated between filmmaking in the USA and Mexico until 1945, when she retired from acting. Tovar's Hollywood films include the Spanish-language *Dracula* (1931--she also appeared in a number of other Spanish-language Hollywood pictures) and *The Crime Doctor's Courage* (1945): most of her roles in English-language movies were either minor



parts in bigger films or in B movies. In Mexico, Tovar starred in *Marihuana*, *El rosario de Amozoc*, *María*, *Resurrección*, and *Miguel Strogoff*.

Lupita Tovar married producer Paul Kohner; they had two children, producer Pancho Kohner and actress Susan Kohner. Susan Kohner's two sons, Chris and Paul Weitz, also became filmmakers.



Gonzalo Vega

Gonzalo Vega, a popular actor in Mexico for nearly 5 decades, died on 10 October 2016; he had been suffering from myelodysplastic syndrome (also known as "preleukemia") for a number of years. Gonzalo Agustín Vega González was born in Mexico City in November 1946. He attended the Centro Universitario Teatro and became a professional actor in 1968; he temporarily retired due to illness in 2010, but returned when his health improved in 2012.



Vega was a popular performer in *telenovelas*, in films, and on the stage. For 20 years he appeared in the comedy play "La señora presidenta," in a dual role as brother and sister. He also

worked in numerous classic *telenovelas* like "Pecado de amor," and "Cuna de lobos"; his last *telenovela* work was in 2008.

Gonzalo Vega made more than 50 films, including *El lugar sin límites* (Ariel as Best Supporting Actor), *Nocaut*, *Retrato de una mujer casada*, *Lo que importa es vivir* (Ariel as Best Actor), and the 2012 hit *Nosotros los Nobles*.

Vega's first wife was María Eugenia Tovar, mother of his daughter Gabriela. After their divorce, he had relationships with actress Ofelia Guilmáin and singer Dulce, then married Leonora Sisto. Sisto and Vega had three children, two of whom--Zuria Vega and Marimar Vega--followed their father into the acting profession. Gonzalo Vega's last wife was Andrea Sisniega, who survives him.



Diana Herrera

Actress Diana Herrera died on 12 October 2016.

Herrera made her screen debut in the mid-1970s, but her most prolific period of work was in *sexy-comedies* of the later 1980s and *videohomes* of the 1990s and 2000s. Her films include *La lechería*, *Noche de pánico*, *Las travesuras del Super Chido*, and *El charro Juárez*. She also appeared in *telenovelas* such as "Hasta que el dinero nos separe."



In 2000, Herrera underwent cosmetic surgery and suffered adverse effects for the rest of her life, nearly losing a leg in 2005.

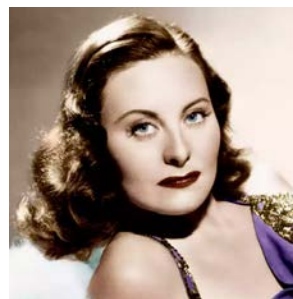
Herrera is survived by a son and two grandchildren.



Michèle Morgan

French actress Michèle Morgan died on 20 December 2016; she was 96 years old. Simon Renée Roussel (her real name) was born in France in February 1920. She studied drama and entered the film industry as an actress in the mid-1930s. Within a short period of time, Morgan

became a star, appearing opposite Charles Boyer in *Ourage* and Jean Gabin in *Le Quai des Brumes*. In the early 1940s she moved to Hollywood and starred in a handful of films, including *Joan of Paris* and *Passage to Marseilles*.



After World War II, Morgan worked in the UK (*The Fallen Idol*) and Italy (*Fabiola*), but spent most of her career in France, appearing in films and on television into the 1990s. She starred in the French-Mexican coproduction *Los orgullosos* (*Les Orgueilleux*) in 1953.

Michèle Morgan was married to American actor William Marshall and had one son with him. She later married French actor Henri Vidal, who died in 1959, and was then married to actor-director Gérard Oury from 1960 until his death in 2006. Morgan is survived by six grandchildren.



Carlota Bilbao

Carlota Bilbao, a Mexican native who spent her acting career in Spain, died of pneumonia in Madrid on 26 October 2016. Carlota Bilbao Caballé was born in Chihuahua in 1918, but moved to Spain when young. She first became popular in the late 1940s, and continued to work in cinema



until 1969 (returning for a small role in a 1979 movie). Her most famous film is probably *Marcelino pan y vino* (1955).

Bilbao made no films in the land of her birth, but she did appear in several Mexican-Spanish co-productions shot in Spain, including *Educando a Papá* (directed by and starring Fernando Soler), *El amor que yo te di* (with Arturo De Córdova) and *Mi noche de bodas* (starring Luis Aguilar).



Adriana Rosique & León Serment

Producer Adriana Rosique and her ex-husband, director León Serment, were murdered in two separate incidents in August and September 2016. Shockingly, their son Juan Benjamín Serment was later charged with hiring their killers.

León Juan Serment Salvador Serment Guerrero was born in Mexico City in 1961. He attended the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica film school, became a cinematographer and director, and later--with Adriana Rosique--founded the production company "Taller de Luz." Serment was known for his documentaries, including *El efecto tequila* (2011). On 28 August 2016,



Serment was stabbed to death in Mexico City, presumably during a street robbery. On 19 September, the body of his ex-wife and filmmaking partner Adriana Rosique was found in her apartment, an apparent suicide. However, the police later accused the couple's son

Juan Benjamín of direct involvement in both crimes.

María Adriana Rosique Manjarrez, born in Mexico City in 1961, met León Serment while in university. The couple became partners in life and in filmmaking, Serment directing films that Rosique produced. They had two children.



Pedro Plascencia Ramírez

Musician Pedro Plascencia Ramírez died on 1 November 2016; he was 85 years old and had been suffering from cancer.

Pedro Plascencia Ramírez was the ex-husband of actress Carmen Salinas, and the father of the late composer Pedro Plascencia Salinas (1956-1994), who wrote music for films



(including *Lo que importa es vivir*, *Trampa infernal*, and *El bulto*), television programs and *telenovelas*. The elder Plascencia had worked closely with singer Juan Gabriel for many years.



Renato López

Actor and television host Renato López died on 23 November 2016 as the result of gunshot wounds. The bodies of López and his agent were found shot to death in their car near Jilotzingo, state of Mexico. Although it was initially believed that robbery was the motive, rumours later emerged of the actor's involvement with drug dealers.



Renato López Uthoff was born in Mexico City in March 1983. He appeared in several films, including *El cielo en tu mirada* and the recent *Macho* (2016), and was also the host of TV programs like "Vivo" and "E! Pop."



Luis González de Alba

Writer Luis González de Alba took his own life on 2 October 2016; he was 72 years old. González de Alba was born in San Luis Potosí in 1944. He attended UNAM and became involved in the student movement in 1968; after the massacre at Tlatelolco (2 October 1968) he was arrested and sent to prison for 2 years.



González de Alba was a prolific investigative journalist and a gay activist who contributed to numerous Mexican publications. He wrote nearly a dozen novels and a

number of books on sexuality and other scientific topics. He also produced and wrote the screenplay for Jaime Humberto Hermosillo's 2006 feature film *El malogrado amor de Sebastián*.



The MFB Collection

Since March 2016, I have been scanning the various stills, lobby cards, window cards, and pressbooks I have collected over the years (I also have about 600 one-sheets--both Mexican and non-Mexican--which sadly are too large to scan). The estimated totals for the Mexican (and a few Spanish, Cuba, Argentine, etc.) film items in the collection are:

Lobby cards: 8,000

Stills: 6,770

Window cards: 250

Pressbooks: 150

Mini-posters & video posters: 85

Since these now exist in digital form, using them in MFB will be even easier than before. I also plan to add another Tumblr site to my existing account that will be dedicated to showcasing these items (I'll post the URL in the next issue of MFB).



Mario Almada Films: Western Mario

Los doce malditos [The Damned Dozen]

(Estudios América, 1972) *Dir-Scr*: Toni Sbert; *Photo*: Fernando Colín; *Music*: Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Mgr*: Jesús Fragoso; *Asst Dir*: Javier Durán; *Film Ed*: Raúl Casso; *Camera Op*: Agustín Lara; *Makeup*: Graciela Lara; *Sound*: Consuelo Jaramillo; *Union*: STIC

Cast: Mario Almada (*Morgan*), Claudia Islas (*Estela*), Rogelio Guerra (*Dandy*), Jorge Russek (*Hawk*), Arsenio Campos (*Baby*), Mario Castellón B. (*Poker*), Rodrigo Puebla (*Macho*), Alfredo Gutiérrez (*Negrete*), Gerardo Zepeda (*Big Ben*), Juan Garza (*Indio*), Fernando Yapur (*Mac*), Antonio Zubiaga (*Silent*), Julio Martínez, Marcos Contreras, Jesús Gómez (*man in saloon*)



Notes: although *Los doce malditos* is just a routine Western, I have a sentimental attachment to it. It's one of the first Mexican films I ever saw in Spanish (in the late 1970s, on television), and I was happy to discover that my rudimentary (at that time) knowledge of the language was still good enough to understand what was going on. "*Maldito perro*," says Claudia Islas early in the movie. Hey, that means "damned dog!"

Hawk and his band of outlaws (12, all told) rob a bank and flee towards Mexico. They stop off at a remote farm, where former bounty hunter Morgan and former dancehall girl Estela are living. Hawk has a grudge against Morgan—who killed his brothers—but Estela helps Morgan escape before Hawk takes his revenge. Hawk and his men burn the farm and ride off with Estela as their hostage. Morgan pursues, unarmed at first, and gradually begins to eliminate members of the gang. Hawk refuses to release or murder Estela, using her as bait in an effort to lure Morgan to his death. The other outlaws protest. Dandy, rejected by Estela when she was working in a saloon, wants to kill her and move on; Macho is attracted to Estela and tries to steal the money and escape with her, but is shot by his own comrades.

Desperate for water, Hawk and his 3 remaining henchmen—Dandy, Poker, and Silent—are guided by Estela to an abandoned town, but the well is dry. Hawk

agrees to a showdown with Morgan, but plans an ambush. Dandy attacks Estela with a knife, but she smashes his head with a rock, steals his pistol, and helps Morgan kill Hawk and the other robbers. Morgan and Estela are reunited.

Los doce malditos was an uncredited remake of *Un tipo difícil de matar* (1965), which starred Fernando Casanova and Julie (aka July) Edwards in the Almada and Islas roles. Emilio Fernández played a part roughly equivalent to Macho, but his character is spared at the end of the movie because he protected Edwards from his fellow outlaws. Otherwise, the premise of the two films is almost identical. *Un tipo difícil de matar* was apparently shot in both Spanish- and English-language versions (Hollywood actors Slim Pickens and Paul Heselton have supporting roles), but the English-language movie is difficult to find (some sources cite it as *Hard Breed to Kill*).

Los doce malditos keeps Mario Almada off-screen most of the time: he just lurks around and periodically kills one or more of the bandits (before he gets a pistol, he uses a rattlesnake, a wooden spear, and a rope to eliminate various outlaws). Most of the footage is devoted to the titular band of bank robbers as they ride across the desert towards Mexico, arguing among themselves and cringing whenever Morgan takes a pot-shot at them. Of the dozen outlaws, most are just cannon fodder: Jorge Russek, Rogelio Guerra, and Rodrigo Puebla are the only ones whose characters have real personalities. Hawk stubbornly refuses to give up his revenge on Morgan, Dandy is constantly mean to Estela, and Macho tries to help her (hoping to be rewarded in a lustful fashion later). Everyone else has a name and a vaguely different "look," but they don't live long enough to make much of an impression. Claudia Islas is fine as Estela, in a role somewhat more sympathetic than her usual parts in this period, although her character's backstory is still on the "tough" side.



The majority of the film was shot on location, although the opening bank robbery sequence—which is reasonably well done—takes place on a studio "Western street," the interior of Morgan's cabin is shown for a bit, and there is a brief scene in a *cantina* later (Morgan guns down two of Hawk's men sent to buy supplies, warning the onlookers—

“this is a private matter”), but otherwise everything takes place outdoors, mostly in desert-like terrain (*Los doce malditos* was shot near Río Frío, between Mexico City and Puebla).

Emilio García Riera mentions (in his *Historia documental del cine mexicano*) that *Los doce malditos* doesn’t display any of the directorial tricks common to spaghetti Westerns (and their imitators): crazy zooms, shock cuts, etc. Director Toni Sbert instead hews to a very bland, zero degree style throughout. Sergio Guerrero’s score also avoids imitating Ennio Morricone, instead sticking to the most hackneyed and stereotypical “Western movie” music possible.

Entertaining enough, but quite forgettable for the most part.



Cabalgando con la muerte [Riding With Death]

(Productora Metropolitana, 1986) *Exec Prod*: Miguel Kahan; *Prod*: Ignacio García C.; *Dir*: Alfredo Gurrola; *Scr*: Jorge Patiño; *Story*: Andrés R. Gutfreund; *Photo*: Agustín Lara; *Music*: Jep Epstein; *Prod Mgr*: Roberto Lozoya; *Asst Dir*: Alejandro Todd; *Film Ed*: Sergio Soto; *Creative Supv*: Andrés R. Gutfreund; *Camera Op*: Silvano Zúñiga; *Action Co-ord*: Alfredo Gutiérrez, Rafael Valdez; *Makeup*: Graciela Muñoz; *Sound Ed*: Ignacio Soto; *Dialog Rec*: Abel Flores; *Re-rec*: Ricardo Saldivar; *Union*: STIC



Cast: Mario Almada (*Cándido Malacara*), Blanca Guerra (*Josefina*), Eric del Castillo (*Isidro López*), Rodrigo Puebla

(*Toroco*), Víctor Lozoya (*Diego López*), Rafael Banquels [sic] (*Sebastián Durán*), Carlos East (*Wallingford*), Ignacio Magaloni (*Calisto Durán*), Ramiro Ramírez (*Ernesto*), Valentín Santana, Eduardo Bulnes, Rojo Grau (*Nemesio*), Óscar Fentanes (*Durán son*), Bernabé Melendres (*farmer*), Alberto Arvizu (*gunman*), Rossanna Carrasco, Ernesto Juárez (*storekeeper*), Óscar Cadena (*gunman*), Lucía Paylles (*Ernesto’s wife*), Isidro Sánchez, Cecilia Hernández, Mario Arévalo (*gunman*), Helena Noble (*young prostitute*)

Notes: although Mario Almada and his brother Fernando first achieved fame in the late 1960s and early 1970s in traditional Westerns like *Todo por nada*, by the 1980s the Western genre was no longer prevalent in cinema, Mexican or otherwise. In Mexico, rural action films, historical (Mexican Revolution-era) pictures and dramatic *rancheras* often used Western elements, but the traditional period-Western became scarce (although not extinct). However, Mario Almada did appear in several good exceptions, *Cabalgando con la muerte* (1986) and *Juan Nadie* (1989).

Cabalgando con la muerte is based on a screen story by Andrés Gutfreund, a Salvadoran who won an Oscar in the 1970s for a documentary short and then became a

filmmaker in Hollywood (mostly in television). [He has since returned to El Salvador to try to establish a film industry there.] Gutfreund and screenwriter Jorge Patiño’s script combined elements of *Shane* and *The Magnificent Seven*: a wandering gunfighter helps some farmers stand up against a predatory outsider, and befriends a young boy along the way, before riding off at the conclusion.

The film is deliberately paced and smoothly directed by Alfredo Gurrola, with lots of low-key performances and relatively little in the way of flamboyant melodramatics. The performances are restrained and effective, although Víctor Lozoya’s character at time acts a little too young (he’s clearly a teen but his role seems to have been written more at the level of the child in *Shane*). The production values are fine: the film was shot on location in the state of Tlaxcala, using existing structures (Isidro’s “farm” has a suspiciously large number of substantial buildings, more like a *hacienda* fallen into disuse than a small farm as in *Shane*).



Tossing an ear of corn into the air, Cándido rides in the direction it points towards when it lands. He confronts a young boy (later identified as Diego, Isidro’s son) who is “stalking” him with a rifle, and the boy runs away. Arriving at a nearby farm, Cándido is given water by the owner, Isidro, and is there when Sebastián and his threatening sons show up and urge Isidro to sell his land to them. Cándido’s presence dissuades them. Isidro explains that Sebastián has been forcing out the local farmers, who aren’t used to defending themselves. Cándido agrees to stay and train Isidro and a handful of holdouts. Isidro’s wife Josefina isn’t pleased with the plan, and doesn’t want her son Diego to learn gunfighting.

Sebastián’s sons and *gringo* Wallingford—the man behind the plan to buy up the land—urge Sebastián to use force to remove the farmers. Wallingford imports 4 gunfighters, but when they learn their opponent is a Mexican gunfighter, they decide only one man is needed for the job, and Toroco is chosen. Meanwhile, Sebastián’s son Calisto ambushes Cándido and leaves him in the desert, wounded, to die. Cándido is rescued and taken to Isidro’s farm, but Isidro is killed by Toroco. Cándido recovers and leads the farmers (and Diego, Isidro’s son) to Sebastián’s home: the farmers kill Sebastián and his family. Cándido shoots Toroco.



Wallingford returns with his 3 remaining gunmen, although one deserts rather than face Cándido. Cándido kills the two gunfighters and Wallingford attempts to

surrender but Cándido forces him to draw and shoots him as well. Cándido departs, over the objections of Diego (there is some suggestion the now-widowed Josefina would like him to stay as well, but she doesn't admit it). As the film concludes, Cándido tosses another ear of corn, which seems to point back towards the López ranch.

Cabalgando con la muerte isn't slavishly imitative of *Shane*, but the inspiration is clear. Most of the major events in *Shane* are recreated in some fashion in *Cabalgando*, although the conclusion is not really similar.



Even some of the minor bits are replicated: in *Shane*, Calloway warns Shane that villain Ryker is setting up an ambush, but Shane goes anyway. In *Cabalgando*, one of Sebastián's

sons—who happens to be Isidro's godson—warns Cándido of his father's plans. The dialogue between Shane and Marian re: "a gun is a tool," is repeated between Cándido and Josefina. As Cándido departs at the film's conclusion, Diego runs after him for a bit, evoking Joey's actions in *Shane*. The relationship between Cándido and Josefina is also reminiscent of the unspoken romance between Shane and Marian in the earlier film, although Cándido's attraction to Josefina is less obvious than Shane's platonic love for the married Marian.

To its credit, *Cabalgando con la muerte* never seems like just a retread of *Shane*, and contains enough unique aspects and local flavour to allow it to stand on its own. There is even a bit of socio-political commentary:

Wallingford is a retired gringo gunfighter, and there are several scenes in which he and his hired gunmen disparage Cándido because he's Mexican, and they can't conceive of a Mexican gunfighter. (This is undercut a bit because Rodrigo Puebla not only looks Mexican, he has a Spanish-sounding name; furthermore, the gunfighter played by Alberto Arvizu has a very clumsy gringo accent, making it pretty obvious that he's also Mexican.)



Cabalgando con la muerte is one of the rare "straight," traditional period Westerns made in Mexico in this era and it also happens to be one of the best.



Juan Nadie* (Prods. Perumex**, 1989) *Exec Prod:* Luis Quintanilla R.; *Prod:* Orlando R. Mendoza; *Dir:* Alfredo B. Crevenna; *Scr:* Ramón Obón [Jr.]; *Photo:* Fernando Álvarez Colín; *Music:* Tino Geiser; *Prod Mgr:* Carlos Lozoya R.; *Asst Dir:* José Amezcuita; *Film Ed:* Ángel Camacho; *Art Dir-Sets:* Alberto Villaseñor, Rubén Piña; *Makeup:* Guillermina Oropeza; *Choreog:* Nora

Gatica; *Camera Op:* José Luis Lemus; *Action Coord:* Alejandro de la Peña; *Sound Op:* Roberto Muñoz; *Re-rec:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Sound Ed:* Jaime Reyna; *Union:* STIC

*"Juan Nadie" is the rough equivalent of "John Doe"—in fact, Frank Capra's *Meet John Doe* was released in Spain as *Juan Nadie*.

**the production company name and even an animated logo—a map with Mexico and Peru highlighted, then arrows merging into a handshake—suggest this is a coproduction but it has a completely Mexican cast and crew, and was shot entirely in Mexico, so I don't know what Peru contributed, if anything.

Cast: Mario Almada (*Juan Nadie*), Claudia Guzmán (*María*), Juan Gallardo (*Darío Robles*), Carlos Cardán (*gambler*), Tere Velázquez (*doña Rosalba*), Benjamín Islas (*Rogelio Robles*), Carlos Rotzinger (*doctor*), Alfonso



Munguía (*friar*), Antonio Raxel (*Col. Carter*), José Luis Fernández (*bounty hunter*), Jesús Gómez (*El Güero*), José Luis Murillo (*comisario*), Enedino Aguirre (*don Álvaro*), Gerardo Soublet (*"Pareja,"* Roberto Ruy (*settler*), Rubén Márquez (*card*

player), Baltazar Ramos, Abel Casillas (*cowboy*), Félix Casas, Rubén Esparza (*?singer*), Ángel de la Peña, Rafael Montalvo (*Reverend*), Julio Santos (*cowboy in cantina*), Carlos Lozoya, Marilú Robuey?, Alejandro de la Peña, Alfredo Ramírez, José Medina, Adán Palacios

Notes: one of the best Mexican Westerns of the 1980s, *Juan Nadie* is also an iconic Mario Almada movie, well-produced, acted, directed, and with a literate script. It's hard to imagine how director Crevenna and scripter Obón could collaborate on a fine movie like this and, just a couple of years later, make a total dud Western like *Pleito de colosos*. Sure, *Juan Nadie* had a bigger budget and a better cast, but every other aspect is also ten times better than the later movie.

Gunman Juan Nadie is hired by the doctor in a Western town threatened by local *cacique* Darío Robles. Robles, tipped off by the town banker, sends men to kill Juan: in a showdown in the local saloon, Juan is wounded and loses his rifle. A gambler kicks it away from him, but bargirl María—who had earlier told Juan she had admired him since she was a girl—tosses Juan another weapon and he finishes off Darío's men. María protects the gambler—her lover—from Juan's wrath. A wagon load of corpses arrives at Darío's ranch, and the unscrupulous villain is ambushed and killed by Juan when he comes out to investigate.

Juan departs, but Darío's widow Rosalba, and her tubercular son Rogelio vow revenge. A reward of \$1,000 is offered for Juan, and when the gambler tips off a bounty hunter about Juan's whereabouts, an irate María breaks up with him. "There are heaps of women like you," the gambler says. "There are only a few scoundrels as bad as you," María replies. Juan kills the bounty hunter but is forced to take shelter in a remote desert church when his wound worsens. María joins him there and they decide to

travel to Mexico together (María is from a small town in Mexico, and came north to seek her fortune--how'd that work out, bargirl?). When Juan is attacked by an Apache seeking revenge for one of his earlier "jobs," María must shoot the man to save him.

Rosalba sends former cavalry officer Carter after Juan (Juan had killed two of his companions and humiliated the soldier years before). [In a curious scene, Carter--wearing his full Army uniform--is mocked by two cowboys. They refer to the "Confederates winning the Civil War," and say "the southerners are working as laborers on their old plantations and the former slaves are the bosses now." In the first place, Carter is clearly wearing a blue Union uniform, and the statements about the Confederacy "winning" the Civil War and yet the "Southerners" (*sureños*) working on their own plantations are odd and contradictory.] Carter challenges Juan but is killed in the confrontation.

However, the gambler tortures the friar at the desert church into revealing Juan and María's destination, and he asks Rosalba to give him enough men to catch the couple. The gambler isn't interested in the reward, he merely wants María back. Despite his illness and over his mother's objections, Rogelio goes along on the hunt. [Benjamín Islas sports chalky makeup and coughs every five seconds so the audience will be sure to know he has tuberculosis.] They catch up with Juan and María at a border hotel, but the gambler wants to save María's life and is shot in the back by Rogelio. María is mortally wounded; Juan kills all of his attackers except Rogelio, who flees.

Juan confronts Rosalba at her ranch. She reveals herself as his former wife, who left him because he "belonged to another woman. She's here right now, between us--Death." Juan announces his intention to avenge María by killing Rogelio, and Rosalba says Rogelio is actually his son. "You're just saying that to save his life," Juan replies, and she says "You'll never know for sure." Rogelio wounds Juan and is shot to death in return; Rosalba has the opportunity to kill Juan, but decides to let him live, so he can be tormented by the ghosts of his victims.

Although there is nothing shockingly original about the plot of *Juan Nadie*, the script is quite good and avoids the obvious clichés, or at least makes them palatable (the good acting helps). In addition to the quotes mentioned above, there are other clever lines (a bounty hunter tells Juan there's a thousand-dollar price on his head and Juan says "You've got me there, nobody would pay anything for you") and a fair amount of character development. The

gambler, for instance, has no particular reason to kick Juan's rifle away in the opening gunfight--he just doesn't like the gunfighter (and is perhaps a bit jealous of María's obvious hero-worship). Later, he takes María's rejection in a cavalier fashion (even though she throws all of his clothes out of the window of their room!) but then decides he really loves her. Or does he? After telling Rogelio he loves María, the gambler then says "it's like gambling, I don't like to lose," and he had previously told Rosalba he wanted to catch Juan Nadie "to retrieve something of mine that he took." So either María is a possession and the gambler's pride won't let him "lose" her to another man, or the gambler really does love her. The scales might be tipped a little in the favor of the latter, since the gambler does lose his own life trying to protect María from Rogelio and his men, who want to kill Juan and don't care who else gets hurt. Juan, María, the friar, Col. Carter, and others all have moments where they talk about themselves, their lives, their feelings, etc., something not exactly common in genre films.

The performances are generally quite good, with the exception of Benjamin Islas and his constant coughing.

Tere Velázquez is a bit strident but this is acceptable. [On a trivia note, Mario Almada didn't have much luck with the Velázquez sisters in this era: in *Apuesta contra la muerte* (1989), he was married to bitter alcoholic Lorena, and they are both killed in a fiery car crash at the end!] Mario Almada does look rather worn and battered, but his relationship with the much younger Claudia Guzmán is believable.

The production values of *Juan Nadie* are satisfactory, with some nice location shooting (although the Estudios América "Western town" backlot is also in evidence). Oddly enough, much of the movie was shot in the state of Veracruz, rather than some place like Durango (in the north), but the scenery is effectively "Western" in appearance. Crevenna's direction and the photography by Fernando Colín are fine. The final sequence takes place at night outside the Robles *hacienda*, and is quite stark and atmospheric, with mist rolling in and obscuring the screen at the end, a poetic touch.

This is a top-notch dramatic Western, certainly one of Mario Almada's better starring efforts and one of the best credits in the last two decades (at least) of director Alfredo B. Crevenna's long career.

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Spooky Western Mario

Los jinetes de la bruja (En el viejo Guanajuato) [The Riders of the Witch: In Old Guanajuato] (Prods. Almada, 1965) Prod: Mario



Almada; *Dir:* Vicente Oroná; *Scr:* Vicente Oroná Jr.;
Story: Vicente Oroná; *Photo:* Rosalío Solano; *Music:*
 Gustavo C. Carrión; *Songs:* Luis Demetrio; *Song Arr:*
 Armando Manzanero; *Prod Mgr:* Luis García de León;
Prod Chief: Armando Espinosa; *Asst Dir:* Jesús Marín;
Film Ed: Carlos Savage Jr.; *Art Dir:* Pablo Galván;
Camera Op: Urbano Vázquez; *Lighting:* Antonio Solano;
Costumes: [Bertha] Mendoza López y [Vicente] Tostado;
Makeup: Román Juárez; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields;
Sound Engin: Manuel Topete; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino
 Samperio; *Sound Ed:* José Li-Ho; *Union:* STPC;



Eastmancolor

Cast: Kitty de Hoyos (*Salomé*; *Susana Helguero*), Fernando Almada (*Roberto*), Dagoberto Rodríguez (*Javier*), Roberto Cañedo (*Casiano Jáuregui*), Blanca Sánchez (*Amalia*), Rafael del Río (*Alcides*), José A. Espinosa (*Ferrusquilla*) (*don Manuelito*), Alicia Bonet (*Rosita*), Enrique Álvarez Félix (*Daniel*), Carlos Rotzinger (*son of puppeteer*), José Eduardo Pérez (*Cmdte.*), Consuelo Frank (*doña Eulalia Henestrosa*), Antonio Raxel (*Arévalo*, *puppeteer*), Jorge Mateos (*Jáuregui brother*), Manuel Arvide (*don Pedro Henestrosa*), Mario Almada (*chief henchman*), María Cecilia Leger (*Tomasa*), Francisco Oroná, Salvador Godínez (*henchman*), José María Cora, Roberto Porter, Agustín Fernández (*henchman*), Javier y sus Marionetas, Carlos Suárez (*Lieutenant*), Felipe del Castillo

Notes: Uruguay-born Vicente Oroná wrote and acted in *Cruz Diablo* (1934), a period film about a masked swordsman. As a director, he later resurrected the Cruz Diablo character for *El hijo de Cruz Diablo* (1941) and *La sombra de Cruz Diablo* (1954). Oroná was also responsible for directing 3 masked hero "El Lobo Solitario" films in 1951 (with Dagoberto Rodríguez in the leading role), and 3 "Látigo Negro" pictures in 1957 (starring Luis Aguilar; the 5 movies made in 1959 with Julio Alemán were not directed by Oroná). After directing the first Almada brothers film, *Nido de águilas* in 1963, Oroná was re-hired for *Los jinetes de la bruja*, which allowed him to use his masked hero motif one last time (this time it's *El Chinaco Negro*, who somewhat resembles a blackface George Washington). Oroná's last directorial

credit was the next Almada production, *El tesoro de Atahualpa* (1966).

A period action-mystery-pseudo Western with music, *Los jinetes de la bruja* is a well-produced film, shot partly on location in Guanajuato, with colourful settings and costumes, a witch, a masked mystery hero, songs, some comedy, and a substantial cast. The movie is perhaps best known as the acting debut of Mario Almada. Originally slated just to produce the picture, Mario was pressed into service in a substantial villain's role after actor Bruno Rey suffered a serious automobile accident on the way to Guanajuato. He's fine, although required to do little more than utter threats and scowl menacingly.

In the mid-1800s, a traveling puppet show arrives in Guanajuato, which is currently in turmoil thanks to a feud between the Henestrosa and Jáuregui families, each accusing the other of cattle rustling. The populace is also terrorised by tales of ghosts haunting the *Hacienda de los franceses*. When puppeteer Arévalo is found hanged on the property of don Pedro Henestrosa, the landowner is arrested for murder. His daughter Rosita seeks out her godmother, "witch" Salomé, for assistance. Salomé recruits Roberto and his two friends Javier and Alcides. The puppet show goes on as scheduled (presumably the puppeteer's son has assumed his role) but when the puppets cast suspicion on a group of sinister types, the outlaws burn the wagon and stage. A black-masked rider, the *Chinaco Negro*, arrives and battles the villains.

The rest of the film is a series of confusing events, plot twists, secret identities, and a drawn-out conclusion with a fairly high body count. Don Pedro is kidnaped from jail and his wife from their home, both by their son Daniel,



who's working for the outlaws. The Chinaco Negro shows up periodically to threaten the villains and vow vengeance. Roberto neglects his shrewish fiancée to do Salomé's bidding, accompanied by

Javier and Alcides. A young woman named Susana claims she has inherited the *Hacienda de los franceses*.

The mystery villain, who disguises himself as a scarecrow, is revealed to be mild-mannered court clerk don Manuelito. He has proof that the French invaders buried gold bars in the *Hacienda de los franceses* during the Intervention, and enlists the Jáuregui family and their henchman to help find it. Manuelito tries to cheat the Jáuregui out of their share and is shot to death. The Chinaco Negro tricks the Jáuregui into admitting their guilt, but is mortally wounded. He's exposed as the badly-burned son of the puppeteer and the long-lost son of Salomé. The Jáuregui escape and threaten to kill don

Pedro and his wife, but Daniel redeems himself by saving them, only to be killed. Three more Chinacos show up and capture the Jáuregui, unmasking as Roberto, Javier, and Alcides. Susana, shot during the gunfight when the original Chinaco was killed, is actually Salomé, who then dies. Confused yet?

The Chinaco Negro aspect of the plot is rather confusing. He first appears while the puppet show stage and wagon are burning, but is later revealed to be the son of the puppeteer, presumed killed during the fire (and his face is scarred when he removes his mask). How did



he have time to escape the fire and don his costume, etc.? Also, the villains shoot him during this encounter, but the bullets don't harm him: he gets his invulnerability from Salomé. Yet later he meets Salomé and she is surprised when he reveals his identity (the audience doesn't see this until the end of the film), and thus it's clear she did not "create" the Chinaco Negro character and they are in fact working at odds (although towards the same ultimate end) for much of the movie. The extra trio of Chinacos in the final sequence is somewhat reminiscent of *Cruz Diablo* (where the masked hero was played by two different characters), but again it is unclear how and why Roberto and his friends donned the costumes, except to make the movie's title a bit more relevant. The Chinaco mask and costume are unusual and effective.



Los jinetes de la bruja tries to hedge its bets about Salomé's supernatural powers. Several times she says she has "hypnotic" or "mental" abilities, but this doesn't explain how she teleports from place to place within a scene (popping up behind characters and then popping up in another spot), or how she imparts invulnerability to gunfire to the Chinaco Negro (the Chinaco played by Alcides is wounded in the final showdown, explained away because Salomé was wounded and losing her

strength). Additionally, Susana's transformation back into Salomé as she dies is clearly "magical."

Additionally, Arévalo's main puppet seems to have supernatural powers. After the puppeteer is killed, the puppet show goes on and the villains are surprised to see no one is controlling the marionettes! Additionally, the main puppet moves and talks as if he were a sentient being most of the time, except when the original Chinaco Negro is dying (and then we see the puppeteer's son apparently "speaking" for him). [As an aside, before puppeteer Arévalo is killed, he carries around his dummy wherever he goes, and the dummy speaks as if it is alive, although this could be a case of a puppeteer sublimating his own personality, *a la* Mel Gibson in *The Beaver*.]

With a large cast and such a muddled script, the performances tend to get lost: there is simply too much going on. Kitty de Hoyos, her face darkened and wearing false eyebrows (and possibly a false nose) is good as Salomé, but Fernando Almada is just one of the crowd, despite his status as the putative hero. Similarly, Roberto Cañedo has too little footage to be considered the "main" villain, making his final comeuppance a bit anti-climactic. Blanca Sánchez has a thankless role as Roberto's vindictive, jealous fiancée--this is meant to be comedic, but the character is really unsympathetic. However, the whole cast is made up of capable, veteran performers (or young actors who hold their own), and no one can be singled out for a poor performance.

Not a great film, but certainly not a boring or poorly-made one.



El pistolero del Diablo [The Devil's Gunman] (Filmadora Chapultepec, 1973) *Prod:* Pedro Galindo Jr.; *Dir:* Rubén Galindo; *Adapt:* Jorge Patiño; *Story:* Bruce C. Wilson; *Photo:* Rosalío Solano; *Music:* Gustavo César Carrión; *Prod Mgr:* José Luis Orduña Guzmán; *Prod Chief:* Armando Espinosa; *Asst Dir:* Manuel Ortega; *Film Ed:* Jorge Bustos; *Lighting:* Antonio Solano; *Camera Op:* Felipe Mariscal; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Ernesto Caballero; *Re-rec:* Ramón Moreno; *Sound Ed:* Sigfrido García; *Union:* STPC; Eastmancolor

CAST: Fernando Almada (*Joseph Morgan*), Mario Almada (*"Dr. Petroni"--the Devil*), Carlos Cardán (*Mike*

Nolan), Jorge Patiño (*Tom*), Elsa Cárdenas (*Betty Morgan*), Irlanda Mora (*Nolan's girlfriend*), Marco Antonio Campos (*"Viruta" (doctor)*), Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán (*Steve Preston*), Tamara Garina (*witch*), Rosángela Balbó (*Berta*), Carlos León (*Frank, bartender*), José Antonio Zubiaga (*Phil Preston*), Hernando Name (*Preston brother*), Mari Carmen González (*Norma, Steve's wife*), Marcelo Villamil (*Sheriff*), Arturo Arévalo (*clerk in clothing store*), Federico González (*Mac, barber*), Fernando Yapur [cut?]

NOTES: this is a mildly interesting fantasy-Western, with some graphic (but unconvincing) gore and a bit of brief nudity. Perhaps the biggest flaw is the hokey music score by Gustavo C. Carrión, which is loaded with stereotypic "Western" music (including harmonicas), although the film is also slow-paced and most of the action takes place in the last 20 minutes or so. On the positive side, Mario Almada is good as the stylish Devil, and Fernando Almada turns in a satisfactory performance in the lead role.



In a small town in the old West, town drunk Joseph Morgan earns a meager living cleaning out the spittoons in Mike Nolan's saloon. Morgan was once a respectable married man, but after he accidentally shot his own young son while hunting, he became an alcoholic. His wife Betty—who chose him over Nolan—now works as a dressmaker and lives apart from her husband. Morgan's only friend is the slow-witted Tom. Nolan and the rest of the town, including the three Preston brothers, abuse and mock Morgan.

An old house (actually, more like a castle) outside town is reported to be deserted, but Morgan meets the mysterious Dr. Petroni and an old witch there. After Betty Morgan is raped and left in a state of shock by the Prestons, Morgan agrees to sell his soul to Petroni, who is really the Devil. In exchange, he becomes invulnerable to harm: only a man with a pure soul who has never sinned can kill him. Morgan kills the Prestons: he hacks Steve into numerous pieces with a scythe, tosses Phil into a pit full of sharpened stakes, rapes and murders the third brother's wife, and then tramples the man to death with his horse. He also cuts off the head of Nolan's current girlfriend and stabs Nolan to death with a pitchfork.

Morgan prepares to take his catatonic wife to San Francisco for treatment, but Petroni stops him. Tom, angry that Morgan hit him and sent him away (Tom had been trying to return a dagger to Morgan, but the handle looked like a cross and this repulsed Morgan), stabs Morgan to death. However, Morgan wakes up in the abandoned stable where he sometimes sleeps: it was all a dream! As Morgan walks through town, he runs into Dr. Petroni, who says: "We have a lot to talk about."

El pistolero del Diablo (the title is rather misleading, since Morgan never shoots anybody with a pistol) is obviously a variation on the "Dr. Faustus" tale, but it takes forever to get started. The whole first half of the film is spent showing Morgan's humiliation at the hands of the Prestons and Nolan, his failed attempt to reconcile with Betty, and so forth. He meets Petroni (in a dream) in the opening sequence, but doesn't sign over his soul until more than halfway through the movie. The plot and characterizations aren't that well developed, either. Morgan doesn't like Nolan, and Nolan seizes every chance to humiliate him, but this is hardly reason enough (it seems to me) for Morgan to decapitate Nolan's girlfriend (who never harmed anybody) and murder Nolan. The Prestons beat up Morgan and then rape his wife, but at the same time two of the brothers are married to (apparently) decent women, and in every scene (except the beating and rape ones) the Prestons are not portrayed as being that evil. The rape and murder of the third brother's wife features a few flashes of nudity (in contrast, after Betty is raped her assailants apparently take the time to put her clothes back on, since that's how she's found)—once again, this is a character who isn't guilty of anything except being married to somebody that Morgan doesn't like. Morgan is a glum figure throughout the movie—it might have been more interesting to have him undergo some sort of change of personality after he signed away his soul, but this doesn't occur.



Not bad, but nothing really special. A similar premise was used—somewhat more effectively—for *El Diabólico* (1976).

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El extraño hijo del sheriff [The Sheriff's Strange Son]

(Artistas y Técnicos Asociados-Estudios América-CONACITE Dos, 1982) *Exec Prod:* Armando Duarte; *Dir:* Fernando Durán; *Scr:* Eric del Castillo, Bárbara Gil; *Photo:* Agustín Lara; *Music:* Rafael Carrión; *Prod Mgr:* Carlos Lozoya; *Asst Dir:* Damián Acosta;

Film Ed: Ángel Camacho; *Decor:* José Luis Garduño; *Camera Op:* Alberto Arellano; *Makeup:* Graciela González; *Sound Engin:* Guillermo Carrasco; *Re-rec:* José Luis Núñez; *Union:* STIC

Cast: Mario Almada (*Dr. Jack Miller*), Eric del Castillo (*Sheriff Frederick Jackson*), Rosa Gloria Chagoyán (*Julia*), Alfredo Gutiérrez (*Jeremías Santos*), Luis Mario Quiroz (*Fred and Eric Jackson*), Roberto Cañedo (*judge*), Wally Barrón (*Sam*), Alicia Encinas (*Mary Jackson*), Ramón Menéndez (*prosecutor*), Mario del Mar (*Smith, storekeeper*), Guillermo Inclán (*doctor at trial*), Antonio Camacho, David Montenegro, Blanca L. Muñoz (*orphanage matron*), Isabel Vázquez, Edmundo Barahona, Julián Abitia (*postal clerk*)

Notes: a

Westernized version of *The Other* (with touches of *The Omen* and *The Exorcist* for good measure), *El extraño hijo del sheriff* is a moderately entertaining picture albeit one made

without much style. Shot in a flat, TV Western-like visual scheme, *Extraño hijo* is satisfactorily produced and generally well-acted, but it never works up a spooky atmosphere despite a couple of room-shaking possession sequences.

Artistas y Técnicos Asociados was a cooperative organization responsible for a handful of undistinguished features, among them *El extraño hijo del sheriff*, *Golondrina presumida* (directed by Eric del Castillo), *Señoritas a disgusto* and *Un adorable sinvergüenza*, all made between 1982 and 1985. Prominent in ATA's credits are the names of Armando Duarte, Eric del Castillo, Bárbara Gil, Mario del Mar, Julián Abitia, and Roberto Cañedo. Several of the pictures were based on plays, but



none seems (in retrospect) to have been very commercial in concept, with the exception of *Extraño hijo*.

In the American West of 1890, Sheriff Jackson rides into town to seek the services of Dr. Jack Miller. Miller, however, is busy with an epidemic, and Jackson has to return to his ranch with his friend Jeremías and attend his wife Mary's difficult childbirth without medical assistance. Mary gives birth during a lunar eclipse, then--gazing at her child--dies of horror. A few years pass. Jackson now lives in town. His son is always kept hidden away in his house (why he moved to town when his ranch would have



been a better place to isolate the boy is never explained). One night, Jackson asks Miller to come to his home to attend an injured man; however, Miller discovers the sheriff wants him to separate his

conjoined twin sons, Fred and Eric. The doctor refuses, but is compelled to operate at gunpoint. Eric, the weaker twin, dies during the procedure, which is accomplished despite a strange force which seems to shake the house (both Miller and Jackson are briefly knocked unconscious by flying objects). Afterwards, the sheriff and doctor bury Eric's body in the desert.

Fred apparently recovers without complications, but then begins to talk about Eric as if his brother were still alive, and at times even seems to be Eric. While in this state, "Eric" guides the vengeful Sam--whose outlaw son had been hung by Sheriff Jackson--to his grave. Jackson is arrested for murder and sentenced to hang; Dr. Miller loses his license for 10 years. Fred is taken to an orphanage run by Julia, who treats the boy well. When Jackson is about to be executed, Eric appears and activates the gallows.

Jeremías and Dr. Miller take Fred from the orphanage to his late father's ranch to live. Both men

suspect supernatural forces are at work, and Miller begins to correspond with experts around the world in an attempt to solve the mystery. While Miller



and Fred are in town, Eric tricks Jeremías into digging up his grave, then causes him to die of fright. Miller and Julia collaborate in an attempt to save their own lives and cure Fred of his demonic possession: Fred is hypnotized and Eric's spirit (manifested as a green ball of animated fire) leaves his body. However, he takes over Julia's body and murders Dr. Miller. Now the two brothers can be together, although one's spirit resides in the body of a young woman.

El extraño hijo del sheriff has a limited number of special effects, mostly mechanical (shaking walls, flying objects), with a few opticals (glowing eyes, the green fiery

spirit). The conjoined-twins effect is accomplished with a double in most scenes, although there is one satisfactory split-screen shot. Luis Mario Quiroz--later on the popular *Papá soltero* TV show--is rather good as Fred (who is a nice kid and loves his father) and the evil Eric (who hates his father and who conspired to kill him), although his dialogue was dubbed so he doesn't get 100% credit for his performance. Mario Almada, Eric del Castillo, and Alfredo Gutiérrez are fine, but Wally Barrón hams it up a



little. Rosa Gloria Chagoyán is satisfactory in a bland role, while Alicia Encinas appears in only one scene and has little to do except look pained (as she's giving birth) and horrified (when she sees her twin sons).

Director Durán, as noted earlier, doesn't go in for fancy directorial flourishes, but the secret of the twins is kept a surprise for a while, and to the film's credit isn't revealed in a particularly horrifying or exploitative manner. However, the movie as a whole is derivative, visually uninteresting, and in the final estimation, rather forgettable.

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Action Mario



Cazador de asesinos [Hunter of Murderers] (Monterrey Films, 1981) *Prod:* Roberto González; *Dir:* José Luis Arqueta; *Adapt:* Carlos Baldemar [sic]; *Orig. Idea:* Roberto González; *Photo:* Fernando Colín; *Music:* Héctor Sánchez; *Asst Dir:* Damián Acosta; *Film Ed:* Enrique Murillo R.; *Camera Op:* Alberto Arellanos, Febronio Teposte; *Stunts:* Bernabé Palma; *Re-rec:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Union:* STIC

Cast: Mario Almada (*Eduardo Garza*), Eric del Castillo (*Capt. García*), Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán (*Mario's partner*), Carmen del Valle (*Amparo de Garza*), Rómulo Lozano (*Padre Lozano*), María Eugenia Llamas "La Tucita" (*Doctor Campos*), Lorenzo de Monteclaro (*singer*), Leonel González (*Severo*), Antonio Zubiaga (*Severo's henchman*), Rodrigo Puebla (*Severo's henchman*), Cecilia Camacho (*Martha Garza*), Roberto Sosa (*Lalo Garza*), Héctor Benavides, Martha Zamarripa,

Los Cadetes de Linares (Homero Guerrero, Guadalupe Tijerina), Los Barón de Apodaca, Rogelio Gutiérrez y Conjunto, Marina Vega, Pedro González, Flor Vega, Ventura Cantú, Alfredo "Alacrán" Jiménez, Roberto González (*García's assistant*), Gerardo Zepeda (*drug dealer in bar*), Jesús Torres Espejo, Ernesto Landín Mijares (*Cmdte. Landín*), Roberto Iglesias, José María González, Minerva Gil, Adrián Montemayor, Jorge Riva, Roel Martínez

Notes: *Cazador de asesinos* is credited as being based on an "original idea" by producer Roberto González, and that's probably correct, if by "original idea" you mean

Death Wish. However, González and prolific scripter Carlos Valdemar didn't actually remake the famous Charles Bronson film (based on a novel by Brian Garfield), they just extracted selected aspects of the earlier movie's plot and mixed them into a standard cop-action story. Consequently, *Cazador de asesinos* alternates spasmodically between scenes of Mario Almada as a vigilante by night, and Mario Almada as a police officer by day. He wears an overcoat and fedora and uses a .44 magnum for his nocturnal activity, donning a leather jacket and using a regular pistol for his official work. But bad guys get shot, regardless.

In Monterrey, former policeman Eduardo now works as a gunsmith. One day while he's out, three men—led by Severo—rob his home-based business, and are surprised by Eduardo's wife Amparo. The men rape (we assume) and murder Amparo and daughter Martha. Eduardo's son Lalo



witnesses the crimes and falls into a catatonic state. Eduardo spots Severo in a book of mugshots, but doesn't tell police Captain García. Eduardo starts prowling Monterrey at night: he shoots some people who attempt to rob

him, then escalates to selecting criminals (using police files) for execution (he even shoots one man with a sniper rifle). He also returns to duty on the police force. Responding to an armed robbery, Eduardo kills one of the fleeing crooks—who turns out to be one of the men who murdered his wife and daughter—but Severo and the other man escape.

Lalo returns to normal and is reunited with his father. Meanwhile, Severo and his remaining partner team up with a group of "revolutionaries" (they say they commit crimes for "the movement") and rob a factory, but the police are quick to respond. Eduardo and the others shoot all of the criminals to death, including Severo. Afterwards, Captain García gives Eduardo 24 hours to get out of town.

Cazador de asesinos is a fairly slick action film (although it makes Monterrey seem like a war zone, with multiple high speed car chases and violent gun battles erupting in broad daylight) but there is a definite

disconnect between the *Death Wish*-inspired plot segments and the rest of the movie. Eduardo doesn't actually embark on his vigilante career until almost exactly the half-way point of the film; even then, we don't see all of his killings (a newspaper headline says he eventually kills a dozen criminals). Then, when Eduardo rejoins the police force, a lot of time is spent showing him combatting regular crooks. The *denouement* is rather anti-climactic, since there's no confrontation between Eduardo and Severo (in fact, Eduardo doesn't even recognise him until all of the criminals are dead). This is both outrageous coincidence and yet realistic: Eduardo doesn't make any particular effort to track down the killers of his wife and daughter, he just accidentally comes across them (two different times!) in the course of his regular police work, not his nighttime vigilantism. [It would have been even



more realistic if Severo and his gang had never been brought to justice at all, which is what happens in the original *Death Wish*.]

There's an interesting twist (which doesn't go much of anywhere) in the latter section of the film,

as Severo and his sidekick hook up with the woman-run group of political terrorists. The criminals chafe at working with the women (there is one man in the group, but the leader and the other two followers are young women), who never state their political goals, but make it clear their motives for the planned robbery are loftier than those of Severo and his pal.

The various character nuances present in *Death Wish* are absent in *Cazador de asesinos*. While Mario Almada is fine as Eduardo, particularly in his scenes with his catatonic son, he's an ex-cop and gunsmith, the complete opposite of Paul Kersey's anti-gun architect: Kersey is driven to embrace guns and become a vigilante after the brutal assault on his family, while Eduardo is depicted (even before his wife and daughter are killed) as someone



who readily uses guns to kill criminals on the street. *Cazador de asesinos* is really just another "revenge" film, of which there were scores of examples in Mexican cinema of the 1980s.

This doesn't mean *Cazador de asesinos* is not well-made and reasonably exciting. Shot in Monterrey, the filmmakers obviously went to some trouble and expense for the action sequences, especially a very long car chase (there's also a shorter one later). A number of cars are wrecked and a police car is blown up by a grenade in the final shoot-out. The dramatic scenes are more or less just marking time until the next burst of action, and there is a plethora of musical numbers which also slow down the overall pace.

A few trivia notes. María Eugenia Llamas, famous for her appearances as "La Tucita" opposite Pedro Infante in the late 1940s, was off-screen during the Sixties and Seventies before making a brief comeback in a handful of action films in the '80s. Flaco Guzmán has a fairly substantial role as a police agent, but his character doesn't seem to have a name; while villain Severo calls one of his two henchman something ("Patotas?" I don't remember), it's impossible to tell which guy he's speaking to, and the other sidekick goes unnamed. Appearing in cameo roles are real-life police officials Jesús Torres Espejo and Ernesto Landín Mijares. Producer Roberto González has a fairly active film blog (numerous posts from 2011 until the present) at <http://www.pistolerosfamosos.com>.



Siete en la mira [Seven in the Gunsight] (Miura Prod., 1983*) *Exec Prod:* Eduardo Galindo; *Prod:* Jesús A. Galindo; *Dir:* Pedro Galindo III; *Adapt:* Carlos Valdemar; *Story:* Gilberto de Anda; *Photo:* Luis Medina; *Music:* Nacho Méndez; *Prod Mgr:* Samuel de la Fuente; *Prod Chief:* Juan Morán; *Asst Dir:* Mario Cisneros Jr.; *Film Ed:* Carlos Savage; *Camera Op:* Gastón Hurtado; *Stunts:* Luis López; *Makeup:* Aurora Chavira; *Sound Supv:* Ramón Moreno; *Re-rec:* René Ruiz Cerón; *Sound Ed:* Javier Patiño; *Union:* STPC

*some sources list 1984 but the film itself carries a 1983 copyright date

Cast: Mario Almada (*Sheriff Al Ventura*), Fernando Almada (*Marcos Ventura*), Jorge Reynoso (*Vikingo*), Eleazar García Jr. (*Falco*), Adalberto Arvizu (*Aníbal*), Javier García (*Yunke*), Diana Ferreti (*Mazda*), Fernando Sainz [sic] (*Adam*), Melchor Morán (*Pedrito Ventura*), Ernesto Rendón (*Gitano*), Luis López (*Milo*), Julio Lerma (*Cherokee*), Rubén Benavidez [sic] (*Gil Alvarez*), Fernando Benavidez (*Mac Alvarez*), Leo Villanueva (*Jerry, deputy*), Leonardo Noriega (*Ben García*), Nina Kovars (*blonde*), Baltazar Guzmán (*Sam López*), Pedro González (*old Paco*), Lilí Soto (*Gina*), *men:* Máximo Escalante, Víctor Alanis, Daniel Robles

Notes: although it wasn't the first Mexican "biker gang" movie, *Siete en la mira* was very successful and helped help start the trend towards portraying bike gangs as "punks." The script is composed of equal parts *The*

Wild One, *Rio Bravo*, *High Noon* and *Born Losers*, along with the usual Almada brothers' action *shtick*. There is surprisingly little gore and no nudity, although the "C" rating (roughly equivalent to an "R" in the USA) suggests currently-available versions may have been cut.

After beating up some *cholos* who were hassling one of their members, a biker gang led by Vikingo heads into the Texas countryside, temporarily stopping at an abandoned barn near a small town. [In the brawl with the *cholos*, the bikers use martial arts moves and, oddly, sports equipment like baseball bats, a pool cue, and hockey sticks! Later, as they ride, some of the gang wear catcher's masks instead of helmets--Vikingo wears a gas mask?!--while others have regulation motorcycle helmets.]

Sheriff Al Ventura confronts the gang and says "I don't have anything against you all. The only thing I ask is that you don't cause me any problems." That night, the bikers come into town and visit the local bar; Al convinces the owner to let them in, but warns the gang not to cause trouble. [Their arrival is the first time the audience gets to see the gang's faces: a series of "shock" closeups reveals their bizarre makeup, lipstick, face paint, etc.] Meanwhile, Al's brother Marcos is retiring from the police force--a widower, he wants to spend more time on his ranch with his 12-year-old son Pedrito. [Want to take bets on who won't survive the movie?]



An attractive blonde leaves the bar alone, and is followed home by Milo, one of the bikers. Milo is trailed by deputy Aníbal, who merely watches as Milo breaks into the woman's house and assaults her. Aníbal drives away and returns in time to shoot Milo to death as the biker flees from the house after killing his victim (more or less accidentally). The next day, the two bodies are discovered. Mac Alvarez is taken into custody: earlier, he was seen target-shooting with an unregistered .45, and this pistol (now missing) was apparently the murder weapon. Vikingo and his gang (now numbering seven) learn of their comrade's death; Al promises the murderer will be arrested and convicted.

The gang takes out its anger on Marcos, stopping him on a back road and attacking his car with bats, chains, an axe, etc. (why he doesn't just drive away isn't clear). They later take two sets of hostages: children and teachers in the local school, and some influential citizens in the bar. Vikingo says Al has 24 hours to turn over Milo's killer.

Pedrito, Marcos' son, is shot to death trying to escape from the school as his father watches helplessly. Later, Al discovers an ejected shell from the .45 in Aníbal's police cruiser and realizes the deputy killed Milo; Aníbal flees. The children in the school are freed after Marcos shoots one of the punks, but the hostages in the bar are still in danger (one dies trying to escape; deputy Jerry is wounded in the melee and later dies when female biker Mazda shoots him with a crossbow; Marcos kills her). Aníbal is

captured by the punks, whipped, and murdered in cold blood.

Al and Vikingo face off in the bar. The biker leader escapes; one of his henchmen kills a hostage by sticking his head in a large fan (the punk is strangled by Al with Vikingo's bullwhip). Finally, the last two bikers--



Vikingo and his lieutenant Falco--are cornered on a country road by Al, Marcos, and the townspeople. Falco runs down Marcos with his motorcycle but is shot by the retired cop, and both die. Al and Vikingo have a showdown and the punk leader loses, fatally.

Siete en la mira stretches credulity at times, particularly in the early "hostage" sequences when the bikers don't appear to have any firearms (later, Vikingo brandishes a large pistol and Mazda pulls out that crossbow). The punks threaten to kill schoolchildren with a hockey stick and the well-armed police back down! It's also hard to understand why Aníbal goes out of his way to frame Mac for the killing of Milo: Aníbal could have easily shot the punk rapist-murderer "in the line of duty" (not to mention he could have prevented the rape and murder if he had chosen to do so). He does express extreme dislike of the punks at all times, and earlier he had flirted (in a creepy way) with Mac's girlfriend (right in front of him) but this hardly seems like motivation for all of the trouble he went to (driving away from the blonde's house, stealing Mac's pistol, driving back to the blonde's house and shooting Milo, etc.).



On the positive side, it's a bit of surprise when Pedrito dies (children are often immune in films like these), and Al's initial reasonable attitude towards the punk gang is a change of pace.

The performances are generally good, but without a lot of depth given to any of the characters. Even the punks are fairly restrained, only occasionally acting particularly

vicious or depraved, and only about half of the gang members (Vikingo, Falco, Milo, and Mazda--because she's the only female) are differentiated (Adam, Gitano, Cherokee, and Yunke are completely interchangeable). There are no female roles of significance (unless you count Mazda, who has almost no dialogue and does nothing special until the end, when she kills Jerry with her crossbow and is then immediately shot to death by Marcos).

The production values are satisfactory. There are no big action set-pieces and the final "chase" is marred by under-cranking in an effort to make the cycles and pursuing cars seem like they're going faster. [There is also a technical flaw in the scene where the punks trash Marcos' car-- some lines of dialogue are looped in before the gang comes into view, with Marcos saying something like "there they are, I hope we don't have any trouble with them," etc.] Generally, this is a slick and fast-paced action picture.



Drama Mario



La viuda negra [The Black Widow] (CONACINE, 1977) *Dir:* Arturo Ripstein; *Scr:* Vicente Armendáriz, Ramón Obón [Jr.], Francisco del Villar; *Orig Play:* Rafael Solana ("Debiera haber obispos"); *Photo:* Jorge Stahl Jr.; *Music:* Miguel Pous; *Based on themes by:* Luis Arcaraz; *Prod Mgr:* Luz Ma. Rojas; *Asst Dir:* Manuel Ortega; *Film Ed:* Rafael Ceballos; *Art Dir:* Salvador Lozano; *Decor:* Carlos Grandjean; *Makeup:* Rosa Guerrero; *Sound:* Alfredo Solís; *Re-rec:* Jesús González Gancy; *Sound Ed:* José Li-Ho; *Prod Assts:* José Luis García Agraz, Félix Martín; *Union:* STPC

Cast: Isela Vega (*Matea Gutiérrez*), Mario Almada (*Padre Feliciano*), Sergio Jiménez (*Dr. Leonardo Saldívar*), Hilda Aguirre (*Úrsula Díaz*), Juan Ángel Martínez (*town resident*), Leonor Llausás (*woman who asks for secrets*), Ana Ofelia Murguía (*wife of don Cosmé*), René Casados (*new priest*), Eduardo Alcaraz (*Don Cosme*), Beatriz Marín (*young Matea*), Jorge Fegan (*town resident*), Socorro Bonilla, J.J. Martínez Casado (*Toño, domino player*), Gerardo Castillo, Yaco Alva, Ernesto Boj, ?Arturo Ripstein (*man who dances with Matea*)

Notes: Mario Almada—in more than one interview—cited *La viuda negra* as a "stain" on his career, one of the few films he wished he hadn't made and forbade his children to watch. Almada admitted the film was actually well-done, but its premise clashed with his Catholic sensibilities. The Mexican government agreed, suppressing *La viuda negra* until 1983, when it was released with several cuts (CONACINE was a government production company, and presumably Ripstein's project was approved by the outgoing Echeverría administration, then "canned" by the more conservative López Portillo regime).

La viuda negra was nominated for 7 Arieles in 1984—Best Film, Direction, Actress, Actor, Screenplay, Editing, and Set Decoration—winning one (Best Actress, for Isela Vega; Almada lost the Best Actor prize to Humberto Zurita in *Bajo la metralla*, which also bested *La viuda negra* in the Best Film, Direction and Editing categories).

Matea is left at a convent as an infant and grows up



there, often getting into mischief. As a young woman, she becomes a housekeeper for an elderly priest, and when he dies is sent to fulfill the same position for provincial priest

Padre Feliciano. [The opening sequence intercuts still photographs of Matea as she grows up with live action vignettes of her escapades, "scored" to the sound of a heartbeat. She later tells Padre Feliciano about working for the other priest.] Feliciano is easy going and seems to get along well with his parishioners, although he confidentially tells Matea that priests and nuns are "useless" members of society. He firmly rejects the romantic advances of Úrsula, who insists she has fallen in love with him.

Town doctor Saldívar, a domino-playing friend of Feliciano, asks the priest's permission to court Matea. Feliciano



pressures a very reluctant Matea into accepting Saldívar's invitation. On a walk through the countryside, Saldívar attempts to assault Matea and she has to fight desperately to stop him. Saldívar spreads rumours that Matea and Feliciano are having an affair, and the townspeople complain to the priest. He denies the charges, but when they depart, he and Matea give in to their desires and eventually fall in love.

Feliciano becomes ill and Dr. Saldívar and the rest of the town refuse to help. Matea nurses Feliciano until he dies, then barricades herself in the church. She warns the parishioners that the priest revealed all of their shameful secrets to her, including affairs, drug deals, and so on. She takes over the church and even celebrates Mass, alone. A



new priest arrives in town and Matea starts to seduce him but winds up driving him away. Matea summons the townspeople to the church and reveals their sordid pasts; but they just laugh at her and agree she's insane, so her accusations can't be taken seriously.

La viuda negra is a very leisurely film. Arturo Ripstein's direction is detached and cool, with many scenes shot from a distance and relatively few close-ups. Even the scenes in which Matea loses her composure and screams are filmed in medium shot (or more) and aren't "enhanced" by giant close-ups, zooms, or other impact-enhancing film techniques. The music score, unfortunately, is something of a misfire: Miguel Pous provides lush, instrumental versions of popular songs by Luis Arcaraz, and while in some cases these supply ironic counterpoint to the events unfolding on the screen, most of the time this merely makes *La viuda negra* feel like a cheap movie with a score of "canned" music.

There isn't much in the way of overtly didactic commentary. *La viuda negra* isn't especially anti-clerical or pro-feminist. Padre Feliciano's priestly duties aren't shown in any detail—he seems like a decent person, but hardly a saint (in contrast, Matea talks about her previous employer, a priest who often traveled deep into wilderness areas to minister to isolated villages). Matea's character is rather mysterious: the opening sequence portrays her (as a child and teenager) as mischievous and sexually curious, but she demonstrates none of these attributes when working for Padre Feliciano. If anything, she appears modest and retiring. When Matea and Feliciano have an affair they do become romantically and sexually active, but Matea is not portrayed as seducing Feliciano or anything of that nature.

The depiction of the town residents as outwardly bourgeois and staid but morally corrupt inside is hardly unique to *La viuda negra*: numerous works of popular culture (in Mexico and elsewhere, e.g. *Peyton Place*) have exposed the hypocrisy of small towns (in Mexico, "the provinces"). It is somewhat unbelievable that the townspeople would turn against Padre Feliciano so quickly and to the extent that they would literally allow him to die

rather than providing any assistance. On the other hand, he does criticise them quite severely (both in a meeting at his house and from the pulpit), and their "sins" are rather awful (including drug dealing, child rape, and murder), so I suppose they are capable of anything.

La viuda negra is essentially a two-character film. As noted above, both Isela Vega and Mario Almada were nominated for Ariel awards for their performances. Although somewhat stereotyped as a sex symbol, Vega had, relatively early in her career, proved herself to be an accomplished actress: she received Ariel nominations for *Las reglas del juego* and *Tráiganme la cabeza de Alfredo García* prior to her win for *La viuda negra* (and took home another Ariel for *La ley de Herodes* in 2000). Matea's character, feelings, and motivations are never overtly spelled out, although she does tell Padre Feliciano that she initially had sex with him because he was kind to her and seemed lonely, eventually falling deeply in love with him. After Feliciano's death, Matea becomes bitter and depressed,

although it's unclear if she's really deranged or not.

Mario Almada, shorn of his usual moustache (Mexican priests are traditionally clean-shaven), plays Padre Feliciano as a decent man with a sardonic sense of humour: he doesn't seem to be particularly happy or content with his vocation, but he's not portrayed as blatantly corrupt or hypocritical. He's outraged when his parishioners accuse him and Matea of an improper relationship, and admits he feels guilty because he had pressured her into accepting Saldívar's invitation.

The rest of the cast is fine. Sergio Jiménez has the most substantial role aside from Vega and Almada, and while he seems sincere at first, is quickly exposed as a bad person (we later learn he was run out of another town for dealing in drugs). Hilda Aguirre and Leonor Llausás have one "big" scene each, and everyone else is solid if not notable in supporting roles. Production values are fine (the film was shot on location in San Miguel de Allende in the state of Guanajuato).



Para usted, jefa [For You, Chief] (CONACITE DOS, 1979) *Dir-Scr*: Guillermo Murray; *Photo*: Xavier Cruz Ruvalcaba; *Music*: Marcos Lifshitz; *Prod Mgr*: Guillermo Escobar; *Asst Dir*: Francisco Guerrero; *Film Ed*: Max Sánchez; *Art Dir*: José Méndez; *Camera Op*: Adrián Canales; *Makeup*: Antonio Ramírez; *Re-rec*: Ricardo Saldívar; *Sound Op*: Guillermo Carrasco; *Sound Ed*: Jorge Peña; *Union*: STIC

Cast: Tere Velázquez (*doña Rosa*), Mario Almada (*Chino*), Angélica Chaín (*Fanny Morales*), Carlos Zárate



(himself), Javier Lozano (*Efrén Manzanares*), Abel Woolrich (*El Chupamirto*), Leonardo Trebole (*Nicolás*), Gerardo Vigil (*Ramón*), Sandra Chávez (*Tencha*), Sergio Calderón (*El Nazi*), Sonny Alarcón (*boxing announcer*), Agustín Álvarez Briones (*boxing commentator*), Luz María Peña, Alma Oropeza, Francisco Sánchez M., Gabriela Murray, Manuel Cárdenas, Gerardo Klein, Jorge Fegan (*doctor*), Leonor Llausás (*comadre*), María Elena García, Baltazar Ramos C., Rodrigo Murray, Francisco Guerrero Jr., Francisco del Toro, Baltazar Ramos Jr.

Notes: Guillermo Murray has had a long career as an actor, but directed only 2 feature films (and one episode of a third, 1969's *Siempre hay una primera vez*): the fantasy *Una vez, un hombre* (1970) and *Para usted, jefa* (1979). *Para usted, jefa* is an unusual film, shot in an odd, stream-of-consciousness style, with numerous flash-backs, fantasy sequences, voiceover narration, and other attention-grabbing techniques.

Boxer Efrén sends his widowed mother Rosa a new colour television set so she can watch him fight Carlos Zárate in Los Angeles. On the night of the bout, Rosa hosts Efrén's wife Tencha and her infant son, Rosa's other two sons Ramón and Miguel, Efrén's friends El Chupamirto and El Nazi, and Chino--a film director, boxing fan, and Rosa's ex-lover--along with Fanny, a young woman from the *barrio* who is Chino's latest girlfriend. Efrén eventually loses the fight to the challenger.



Scenes of the boxing match are intercut with footage of Rosa and the others watching (and drinking, eating, and talking), television commercials (for Richmond cigarettes and Suprema beer, among other products), flashbacks to events in Rosa's life, and fantasy sequences imagined by Rosa.

The film is told from Rosa's point of view and while she is a somewhat sympathetic character, she is also portrayed as self-centered and bitter. During Efrén's long and bloody fight, Rosa shows no sign of being upset or worried about her son (to be fair, neither do most of the others in the room), and when he loses, she's only upset that he didn't--as he apparently did in his previous bouts--"dedicate" the fight to her. In her interior monologues, she criticises her slatternly daughter-in-law, her other sons, Efrén's two dodgy buddies from the *barrio* who lurk in the

back of the living room during the fight, her late husband, her doctor, and Chino. She says "how does it feel to lose one's youth? I don't know, because I was never young."

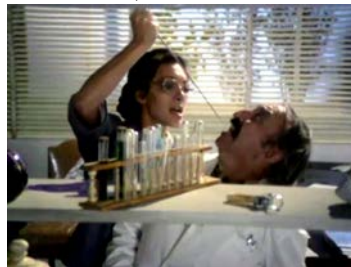
Rosa married Nicolás, a borderline alcoholic whose violent reaction to Efrén coming home after being beaten



up by a bully was presumably the boy's motivation to become a professional boxer. After the death of Nicolás, Rosa had an affair with Chino, a film director of vampire movies and Westerns, but those

genres "went out of style and the producers forgot about him. That's why he drinks so much." Rosa ends her relationship with Chino, even though he warns her that she's dooming herself to a lonely and sterile existence. Something of a hypochondriac, Rosa worries about her blood pressure and complains to her doctor about vivid nightmares, which he attributes to the onset of menopause.

The fantasy sequences include one in which Rosa imagines Efrén having sex with an actress in a television commercial, and another in which she stabs her doctor



with a knitting needle! In one scene, Rosa fantasizes about the home life of *gringo* fight referee Mr. Brown: he goes home after the bout to his lovely wife and two blonde children, and

they all drink malted milk and eat "hamburgers and apple pie" in their fantasy kitchen.

The fight sequences are effectively done, and are accompanied by narration by real-life boxing announcers Sonny Alarcón and Agustín Álvarez Briones. Carlos Zárate was a professional boxer who held the world bantamweight title at the time *Para usted, jefa* was made, although in the film it is Efrén who's the champion and Zárate is the challenger.

The television commercials--with their annoyingly constant repeated jingles and catch-phrases--heard and seen in the film are both realistic and ironic.



The performances in *Para usted, jefa* are generally quite good, although Tere Velázquez and Mario Almada have far more to do than the other actors. Velázquez is effective throughout, and is extremely convincing as the prematurely aged Rosa, who sits and knits during the fight, shooting disgusted looks at the other guests as we hear her

acidic commentary in voiceover. [Velázquez has several nude scenes; Angélica Cháin also appears nude and there are several topless shots of the actress in the aforementioned fantasy sex scene between Efrén and a TV actress.] Mario Almada is excellent as well: Chino sits on the living room floor, drinking constantly and commenting on the boxing action, as his sexy young girlfriend cuddles next to him (more daggers from Rosa's eyes at this). In the sequence (broken into multiple parts) in which Rosa breaks up with him, Chino seems honestly disappointed but not heartbroken. He knows (and tells Rosa) that he can find another lover, but he's sad that she thinks they are



"sinning" (even though her husband's been dead for 3 years) and that she is cutting off a vital part of life.

Although *Para usted, jefa* is quite complicated in film-form and narrative

terms, Murray's direction (of his own script) isn't pretentiously "arty" or difficult to follow. There are a few bits of socio-political commentary, some black humour, but it's largely an impressionistic psychological study of a woman. Sadly, for some reason Guillermo Murray never directed another feature film, but both *Una vez, un hombre* and *Para usted, jefa* are fascinating, atypical works of cinema.



Musical Mario



¡Ay Chihuahua no te rajes! [Oh Chihuahua Don't Back Down!] (Pels. Latinoamericanas-Noveltty Internacional Films, 1980) *Prod:* Roberto Rodríguez; *Dir:* Federico Curiel; *Scr:* Federico Curiel, Adolfo Torres Portillo; *Photo:* Jorge Senyal; *Music:* Rafael Carrión; *Prod Mgr:* Roberto Lozoya; *Asst Dir:* José Luis Urquieta; *Film Ed:* Jorge Rivera, Ángel Camacho; *Camera Op:* Raúl Zaragoza; *Dialog Rec:* Francisco Strempler; *Re-rec:* Salvador Topete; *Sound Ed:* Pedro Gómez; *Union:* STIC

Cast: Mario Almada (*Rómulo Fierro*), Rosenda Bernal (*Rosenda*), Manuel López Ochoa (*Lauro Mendieta*), Rosa Gloria Chagoyán (*Julia Gallardo*), Eduardo Alcaraz

(*priest*), Jean Safont (*Lucio Tapia hijo*), Marcko D'Carlo (*Rómulo's friend*), Carlos León (*musician*), Heriberto Aceves, Juan Gallardo (*Ramón Tapia; Lucio Tapia padre*), José Luis Urquieta (*wedding photographer*)

Notes: this is a reasonably entertaining *ranchera* musical-comedy but stands out chiefly because it features Mario Almada in a rare comedic lead role. Although Fernando Almada began his career as a singer and actor, Mario Almada is not known for his musical abilities (he did perform in live venues with Fernando), but in this film he competently sings three solo songs and shares a *coplas* number with Manuel López Ochoa and Juan Gallardo (López Ochoa does one solo and Rosenda Bernal sings twice).

Ay Chihuahua no te rajes! somewhat resembles a John Wayne film like *Donovan's Reef* (except it takes place in Mexico and features 8 songs): two protagonists (one older) fight each other (often over a woman) but team up to face a threat to them both, with lots of insult humour and 4 (count 'em, 4) separate brawls.



Rómulo is a prosperous rancher in Chihuahua who is well-known for his womanising and his hatred of everything related to the state of Jalisco. He tells the local priest (in a sequence which imitates a silent film, shot in desaturated colour, with inter-titles and "old-time" piano music) that his grandfather lost his ranch, horse, and bride to *charro* Lucio Tapia from Jalisco. Afterwards, his grandfather suffered from diarrhea for five years, finally marrying the *yerbera* who cured him! Rómulo himself loved a young woman named Laura, but they argued and she left him 25 years before, even though she was pregnant with his child. Rómulo learns Laura has since died, but he has a son--Lauro--who is a *charro* and a horse-dealer in Atotonilco, Jalisco.

Rómulo travels to Jalisco and meets Lauro, on the pretext of buying some horses. He doesn't reveal his true identity, but the two men become fast friends. Rómulo apparently falls in love with the much younger Julia, who is also courted by Lauro and Ramón Tapia, grandson of the *charro* who stole Rómulo's grandfather's wife, horse, and ranch many years before. Rómulo also makes friends with Rosenda, a local schoolteacher who is (marginally) closer to his own age. Ramón, urged on by his father, foments discord between Lauro and Rómulo.

Julia agrees to marry Rómulo, even though he didn't really propose to her. Rómulo brings his local priest to Jalisco and, together with Rosenda, they hatch a plan. Rómulo says if Julia wants to marry him, she has to do it right away. She can't go through with the ceremony, admitting she loves Lauro. Both Julia and Rómulo were using each other, independently, to make Lauro jealous enough to propose to her. The film concludes with a double wedding: Lauro and Julia, and Rómulo and Rosenda.

In addition to the 8 songs and four brawls, *Ay Chihuahua no te rajes!* also contains a long sequence of a *charrería* (sort of like a rodeo), which means the actual plot of the film consumes a rather small part of the total running time. Watching the film on video allows one to fast-forward through the songs, which speeds up the pace, but in fact this is not a bad film at all. Mario Almada seems to be having a great time playing a flamboyant *norteño*, and while Manuel López Ochoa looks a bit too old for his role (he was in his late 40s rather than the "25" stated in the script) but is generally satisfactory. Both Rosa Gloria Chagoyán and Rosenda Bernal are fine, and Eduardo Alcaraz is amusing as the wily priest. Production values are adequate: most of the film seems to have been shot on location (although apparently not in Jalisco or Chihuahua).

Ay Chihuahua no te rajes! generated a sequel, *Los cuates de la Rosenda* (1982), which reunited Almada, López Ochoa, Bernal, Chagoyán, Alcaraz, and Marcko D'Carlo.



Martha Roth and the Bad Boys

No me quieras tanto... [Don't Love Me So Much...] (Filmadora Chapultepec, 1949) *Prod:* Pedro Galindo; *Dir-Scr-*

Adapt: Chano Urueta;

Story: Eduardo

Galindo; *Photo:*

Víctor Herrera;

Music: Gonzalo

Curiel; *Prod Chief:*

Antonio Sánchez B.;

Asst Dir: Ignacio

Villareal; *Film Ed:*

Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir:* Ramón Rodríguez G.; *Makeup:*

Margarita Ortega; *Camera Op:* Felipe Quintanar; *Sound*

Engin: James L. Fields, Nicolás de la Rosa; *Re-rec:*

Galdino Samperio

Cast: David Silva (*Gustavo Rivas*), Marta [sic] Roth (*Diana*), Arturo Martínez (*Mauricio del Valle*), Joaquín Cordero (*Reynaldo*), José G. Cruz (*Enrique Gutiérrez*), Carlos Múzquiz (*Luis*), Julio Ahuet (*El Chupado*), José Escanero (*Sr. del Valle*), Alfonso Alvarado (*police commander*), [Alberto] Sicardi & Brenda [Conde] (*dance team*), Los Panchos (Alfredo Gil, Jesús Navarro, Hernando Avilés) (*themselves*), Julio Sotelo (*Julio, cabaret emcee*), María Cecilia Leger (*doña María*), Jesús Gómez (*policeman*), Hector Mateos (*cabaret patron*), Hernán Vera (*pool hall mgr*), Pepe Nava (*man in barrio*), Stefan



Verne (*cabaret patron*), Rogelio Fernández (*henchman*), Ángel Infante (*hotel desk clerk*), José Luis Rojas (*El Turista*), Salvador Terroba (*police agent*), Jorge Chesterking (*client*), Enrique Carrillo (*policeman*), Daniel Arroyo (*cabaret client*), ?Paco Martínez (*hotel guest*)

Notes: David Silva and Martha Roth appeared together in *Una familia de tantas* (1948)—as a young door-to-door salesman and the sheltered middle class teenager who falls in love with him—and were reunited in *No me quieras tanto...* the following year (in fact, *No me quieras tanto...*



went into production just as *Una familia de tantas* was being released in Mexico City). However, their roles were quite different this time, with Silva cast as a ruthless leader of a drug trafficking gang and Roth as his abused singer-girlfriend.

While watching *No me quieras tanto...* one cannot help imagining that somehow David Silva and Arturo Martínez switched roles just before production, since Silva plays the kind of villain Martínez usually plays, and Martínez has what could easily be perceived as the protagonist's part. The first part of the movie features Martínez being released from prison after 5 years; he was sent there because Silva framed him and threatened to have Martínez's father also charged with a crime if he protested his innocence. Martínez now demands that Silva turn over the faked evidence about his father, or else. [In an odd and somewhat pointless twist towards the very end of the film, the chief of detectives says Martínez was lying when he claimed he was completely innocent: the police have proof that he was battling Silva for control of the drug business, but everything else Martínez said was true.]

After serving his prison sentence, Mauricio returns to the Hotel Atlántico where his friend Enrique works: Enrique has kept Mauricio's apartment for him, and has safe-guarded his friend's money as well. Mauricio visits the Cabaret Diana and confronts his former partner Gustavo: he gives Gustavo 48 hours to hand over the document which falsely incriminated Mauricio's father. As he leaves the club, Mauricio raptly watches Gustavo's girlfriend Diana sing for the audience.



Gustavo is a gangster who uses the cabaret as a front for his drug business. To punish drug addict Reynaldo for interfering in his chastisement of Diana, Gustavo says Reynaldo must kill Mauricio the next evening. Diana overhears the plot and tips off Enrique, but her brother Luis—Gustavo's right-hand man—murders Enrique before he can warn Mauricio. Mauricio is informed that he can

retrieve the incriminating document if he returns to the Cabaret Diana the next evening.

The police pick up Mauricio and he tells them that he was an innocent businessman who was swindled by Gustavo and then framed for drug trafficking. Mauricio went to prison because Gustavo threatened to frame his elderly father as well. As noted above, the police tell Mauricio they know he isn't entirely innocent, but they will use him to capture Gustavo.

The next evening, Mauricio enters the cabaret. The nervous Reynaldo leaves to get a "fix" and Gustavo orders Luis to kill Mauricio. Luis shoots Mauricio, then Luis is shot by the police; Gustavo grabs Diana and Reynaldo shoots him. Diana flees and Gustavo follows her outside, dying in Diana's arms.

As noted above, Gustavo is a far cry from a typical "good bad-guy" character. He's cruel and calculating, emotionally and physically abusive to Diana and Reynaldo, orders murders, runs a drug ring, and has almost no redeeming values. His only soft spot is Diana's elderly mother, whom he supports and cares for, telling Diana that he never knew his own parents and grew up on the streets. It's unclear if Diana really loves him or is just grateful to him for saving her and her mother from a life of poverty, although the film suggests the former. David Silva is quite good as Gustavo, projecting a very efficient, cold and ruthless attitude throughout.

Unfortunately, director Chano Urueta didn't get an equally effective performance from Joaquín Cordero. At some point Cordero decided "constantly biting one's nails and looking uncomfortable and petulant" was the way to play a drug addict, and with very few exceptions, that's what he does throughout the entire film.

Carlos Múzquiz, not to be outdone, chews gum ostentatiously in all of his scenes. José G. Cruz and Arturo Martínez are both satisfactory, with Martínez largely playing against type. It's not until the very end of the film when he starts displaying a certain amount of unheroic trepidation, and it's something of a surprise when he's shot in the final confrontation.

Martha Roth is fine in what is a rather subsidiary role. She sings three songs but is apparently dubbed by someone else (Roth later displayed musical talent of her own, both composing and performing, but it's clearly not her singing in *No me quieras tanto*...). These musical numbers are even more awkward given the presence of the excellent trio Los Panchos—who do two songs—and a flashy dance routine by Sicardi and (an scantily-clad) Brenda.

Production values are fine, with a nice mix of actual location shooting and studio sets. Chano Urueta's direction is rather stylish, with lots of low-angle shots, giant closeups, and long-ish takes. In one sequence in the

cabaret, the camera pulls back from Mauricio then pans and dollies across the room to the singing Diana. This shot is then reversed, with the camera moving from Diana, panning left and then tracking in to a closeup of Mauricio as he realises it's Diana who is performing. This is quite slick and effective, unlike the final sequence, in which Diana stalks across the club towards Mauricio, a strange, fixed expression on her face as she's singing. She just wants to warn him that he's in danger, but she instead looks sort of demented.

Well-made and interesting.



Ventarrón [Gust of Wind] (Filmadora Chapultepec, 1949) *Prod:* Pedro Galindo; *Dir-Scr-*

Adapt: Chano Urueta; *Orig. Comic Strip::*

José G. Cruz; *Photo:*

Domingo Carrillo, Jorge Stahl [Jr.];

Music: Rosalío

Ramírez; *Songs:* Juan

Bruno Terraza; *Prod*

Mgr: Porfirio Triay

Peniche; *Prod Chief:*

A. Sánchez Barraza;

Asst Dir: Zacarías

Gómez Urquiza; *Film*

Ed:: Jorge Bustos; *Art*

Dir: Ramón

Rodríguez; *Makeup:* Concepción Zamora; *Sound Supv:*

James L. Fields; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Dialog*

Rec: Manuel Topete

Cast: David Silva (*Ventarrón*), Martha Roth (*Olga*), Isabel del Puerto (*Myrna*), Adalberto Ramírez (*Alfredo*), Gustavo del Rivero (*El Rubí*), Tanna Lynn (*Amanda*), Pascual García Peña & Ángel Infante (*Ventarrón's henchmen*), J. Trejo Morales (*gangster*), Juan Bruno Terraza & Orchestra, Benny Moré (*singer*), José Luis Rojas (*gangster*), José Escanero (*paralysed man*); people at tribunal: Guillermo "Indio" Calles, Victorio Blanco, Lupe Carriles; Guillermo Bravo Sosa (*hunchback*), Regino Herrera (*gambler*), Margarita Luna (*gangster*)

Notes: *Ventarrón* reunited Chano Urueta, David Silva and Martha Roth from *No me quieras tanto*..., which had been shot in March and released in July 1949. Since *Ventarrón* went into production in August of that year, one imagines *No me quieras tanto*... looked like it was going to be profitable, and producer Pedro Galindo probably wanted to strike while the iron was hot. The result was an entertaining crime film, stylishly written and directed by Urueta, based on a comic strip by José G.



Cruz (who had appeared in *No me quieras tanto...* but is absent from the screen this time).

Ventarrón begins with a brief, symbolic prologue in which a man in a wheelchair says “when the *ventarrón* enters the *barrio*...sinister occult powers are exposed and destroy everything!” This doesn’t have anything to do with the rest of the film, but it sets the tone. A long and well-executed jailbreak sequence follows, as gangster Ventarrón escapes from prison. He and his henchmen



arrive at “La linterna mágica” cabaret, where Juan Bruno Tarraza and his orchestra, with singer Benny Moré, perform a couple of numbers.

[Tarraza’s first song is an instrumental, and Urueta shows only Tarraza—pounding the keys of his piano—and 3 trumpet players. As Benny Moré sings, we get a few brief glimpses of the rest of Tarraza’s “orchestra,” which still only appears to consist of 6 or 7 musicians.]

Ventarrón and his men burst into the cabaret and gun down rival El Rubí; they take Alfredo with them as they depart. Alfredo and his sister Olga are put on trial in front of a crowd of criminals, beggars, and other shabby-looking characters at the *Mesón de los dormidos*. Ventarrón tells his story in flashback...

[The “trial” of “traitors” Alfredo and Olga by their underworld peers is reminiscent of Fritz Lang’s *M*, and Urueta would include a similar scene in 1954’s *La bruja*. Another trial is shown briefly later in *Ventarrón*, which indicates this sort of justice was meted out on a regular basis by those unable to resort to traditional courts of law.]

Alfredo brings his boss, Ventarrón, wounded during one of their criminal exploits, to the apartment he shares with his sister Olga. Ventarrón decides to stay there until he’s no longer being actively sought by the police.

[In a long sequence shot almost exclusively in alternating closeups, Ventarrón slices open his wounded arm and orders Alfredo to remove the bullet with his bare hands, as Olga looks on, horrified.]

Ventarrón eventually moves back into the mansion he shares with his girlfriend Myrna, but the gangster has fallen in love—honorably—with Olga. (This doesn’t stop him from also hooking up with his former lover Amanda, a singer: he tells her to quit her job and move into a house he’ll provide for her.) Ventarrón explains to Olga that he

was a poor child of the streets who eventually worked his way up to become leader of a criminal gang, and that he devotes his time to robbing the rich and giving to the poor.

The jealous Myrna tips off Alfredo that his sister is Ventarrón’s new squeeze (true only in the romantic sense), and this—along with his own ambition—pushes Alfredo to betray Ventarrón to his rival El Rubí. However, when Olga learns Ventarrón is being set up for an ambush, she calls the police and has him arrested to save his life. [End flashback.]

The tribunal acquits Olga of treachery, but Alfredo is found guilty, even though Ventarrón tries to excuse him by claiming Alfredo was upset over his sister’s apparent seduction. Alfredo pulls a gun and is shot to death. Ventarrón tells Olga he wants to change his life, so he turns himself in to the police to pay his debt to society. When he’s released, they will be reunited.

Ventarrón is especially well-directed and shot (by two different cinematographers, for unknown reasons). Urueta films a fair amount of the movie in closeup and also prefers low-angle shots (maybe not Ozu-like, but noticeably lower than straight-on). There also seems to be some deep-focus going on. The final sequence—Ventarrón walks out into an alley, spots the police at both ends, strides towards them to surrender, then Olga emerges and runs towards the camera as he is driven away—is lit and shot in a very effective and atmospheric manner.

David Silva (incessantly smoking) is stalwart as Ventarrón, and makes the most of the scene in which he explains to Olga how and why he became a criminal. Martha Roth plays the ingenue here, clad in a tight Forties sweater-and-skirt combo (comparing her appearance here and in later films, one suspects she at some point after *Ventarrón* had a nose job). “Adalberto Ramírez” later changed his name to Alberto Mariscal and moved behind the cameras (for the most part), first as an assistant director



and then (in the 1960s) as a director: he’s quite animated in the villainous role of traitor Alfredo. In contrast, Gustavo del Rivero has little to do as El Rubí—del Rivero had a relatively brief film career and is mostly undistinguished here.

Ventarrón’s two mistresses were played by Isabel del Puerto and Tana Lynn. Del Puerto was actually a Viennese model and actress (real name, Elisabeth von Hortenau) who made just over a dozen film appearances in

Mexican cinema from the late 1940s to the early 1950s (including 1948's *Una familia de tantas* with David Silva and Martha Roth). As Myrna, del Puerto is imperious and disdainful, eventually leaving Ventarrón over his attraction to the virginal Olga and taking up with his rival El Rubí. Blonde Tana Lynn can be seen in minor roles in just over 2 dozen films in the roughly the same era: she sings in *Ventarrón*, but it's unclear if she's dubbed or not.

Although generally a very good film, there are a few minor points where *Ventarrón* falls short. Most of the film is supposedly being related by Ventarrón to the tribunal, but there are numerous scenes depicted in the flashback in which he was not present and could not have known what occurred. Additionally, Ventarrón's description of himself as a sort of Robin Hood (although he doesn't mention that



name, he's clearly alluding to this by using the "rob the rich and give to the poor" line) seems a little self-serving, because at no point do we ever see him give away any money to "the poor!" In fact, he and his men rather ruthlessly eliminate a man driving a truckload of contraband (so they can hijack it), and while the driver is probably a member of a rival gang, he could simply be a working man doing a job. Neither of these is a major issue, but they're flaws nonetheless.

Still, *Ventarrón* is a solidly entertaining piece of work, helped considerably by Chano Urueta's stylish direction.



La ciudad perdida

[The Lost City]

(Filmadora

Chapultepec, 1950)

Prod: Jesús Galindo

[uncredited]; Dir-Adapt:

Agustín P. Delgado;

Orig. Comic Strip: José

G. Cruz; Photo: Agustín

Jiménez; Music Score &

Dir: Jorge Pérez; Songs:

Luis Arcaraz; Songs

Sung By: Chucho

Martínez Gil; Prod Mgr:

Porfirio Triay Peniche;

Prod Chief: A. Sánchez



Barraza; Asst Dir: Américo Fernández; Film Ed: Jorge

Bustos; Art Dir: Ramón Rodríguez; Camera Op: Sergio Véjar; Makeup: Concepción Zamora; Dances: Carlos Valadez; SpFX: Jorge Benavides; Sound Dir: James L. Fields; Dialog Rec: Luis Fernández; Music/Re-rec: Galdino Samperio

Cast: Martha Roth (*María Esther*), Roberto Romaña (*Adrián de Alba*), Esperanza Issa (*Alicia*), José Baviera (*Alberto de los Rios*), Arturo Soto Rangel (*Ramiro, Adrián's grandfather*), Carlos Valadez (*Raúl "Colilla"*), Juan García (*Peralvillo*), José G. Cruz (*Manuel*), Fernando Galiana (*Antonio*), Joaquín García "*Borolas*" (*Borolas*), Mario García "*Harapos*" (*Harapos*), Xochimilcas Boys, José Pardavé (*man in barrio*), Leonor Gómez (*Leonor*), Aurora Walker (*doña Julia*), Enedina Díaz de León (*midwife*), Víctor Manuel Castro (*dancer*), José Luis Fernández (*card player*), Lupe Carriles (*María Ester's aunt*), Humberto Rodríguez (*mailman*), Juan José Laboriel (*musician*)

Notes: despite appearances, *La ciudad perdida* is not a gangster/crime film, but a rather conventional melodrama about a young man who tries to reclaim his inheritance from an evil, greedy relative who caused the death of his parents and a grandparent. The protagonist is not a gangster (he's a gambler) and organised crime is not involved.

Roberto Romaña had modeled for José G. Cruz's *fotomontaje* comic strips such as "Carta Brava," and appeared in four films based on Cruz stories: *Carta Brava*, *Cabaret Shanghai*, *La ciudad perdida*, and *Manos de seda*. He also worked in a handful of other movies, including *Serenata en Acapulco*, where he was reunited with Martha



Roth, and later collaborated with Fernando Méndez on the scripts of several films in which he did not appear. Romaña was an adequate actor but not especially distinctive. He doesn't have a lot of screen time in *La ciudad*

perdida: in addition to the substantial flashback sequence in which he doesn't appear, there are sub-plots featuring Martha Roth and Carlos Valadez, as well as José Baviera and José G. Cruz, which consume a considerable amount of the film's duration.

Another performer of interest in *La ciudad perdida* is dancer/actor Carlos Valadez, who performed in live venues in the USA in the Forties and Fifties (he also sang, and in fact sings a bit—acapella—in this film and demonstrates an excellent singing voice). Valadez's Mexican film career was relatively brief but he's fine here as a semi-villain. Valadez and Martha Roth perform a cute dance number in a cabaret, and Roth has another dance with a group of chorus boys (including future director Víctor Manuel Castro). Earlier, Los Xochimilcas—billed here under their earlier name of "Xochimilcas Boys"—play in the *barrio* and Roth dances with Borolas and Harapos, then briefly with Valadez.

The supporting cast is strong, including a solid role for Arturo Soto Rangel, who gets to play both middle-aged Ramiro and elderly Ramiro. Juan García and Borolas are a bit annoying as Adrián's comic sidekicks--although they do have a cute scene where they pick up two bored women in a cabaret--but Harapos is better as Raúl's bushy-haired henchman. Top-billed Martha Roth is appropriately waifish as María Esther, mistreated by her aunt and faithfully in love with Adrián.

Adrián grows up in a poor *barrio* known as "The Lost City." He loves María Esther, who lives with her abusive aunt. Before he dies, Adrián's grandfather Ramiro tells him a story [in flashback]... Years before, Ramiro and his daughter Alicia worked for the wealthy doña Julia and her grown son Antonio. Antonio loves Alicia, and when he learns she is

pregnant, decides to marry her, over his mother's objections. Alberto, doña Julia's lawyer and a distant relative, orders his chauffeur Manuel



to kill Antonio before the wedding, so the family fortune won't be inherited by his wife and unborn child. Time passes, and Alicia has a son, Adrián. Doña Julia learns of this and decides to bring them to live with her, but Alberto murders her and frames Ramiro for the crime. Ramiro takes the infant Adrián from the dying Alicia and flees to the *barrio* "La Ciudad Perdida" to save the child from Alberto and Manuel. [end flashback]

Adrián goes to the city with his pals Peravillo and Borolas, hoping to claim his inheritance and avenge his parents. He promises to return for María Esther. However, Adrián's letters and money (he becomes a successful gambler) are intercepted by Raúl (aka "Colilla," or



"Cigarette Butt"), his rival for María Esther's affections. Eventually, Raúl—with the assistance of María Esther's greedy aunt—wears down María Esther's resistance, and she agrees to be his partner in a dance act.

They become popular performers in the city, and come to the attention of Adrián. He reconciles with María Esther.

Adrián breaks into Alberto's house, demanding the lawyer give him his rightful inheritance; Alberto refuses. Manuel, although no longer in Alberto's employ, blackmails the lawyer, threatening to reveal the entire plot. Alberto hires Raúl to eliminate Adrián and Manuel, but Raúl won't betray Adrián. Instead, they abduct Manuel and convince him that Alberto is plotting his death. Manuel confronts Alberto: Alberto admits his guilt and is overheard by Adrián and the police. Manuel shoots

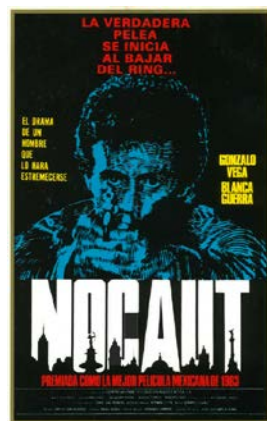
Alberto and is in turn killed by the police. As the film ends, Adrián marries María Esther.

La ciudad perdida isn't quite as stylish or grim as some of the other José G. Cruz adaptations directed by

Chano Urueta and Juan Orol, but it's fairly entertaining, has a solid cast, and is reasonably well-produced, with satisfactory sets and an acceptable number of extras in crowd scenes.



More Films of Those Who Passed On in 2016



Nocaut [Knockout]

(Cooperativa Kinam, ©1983)

Exec Prod: Fernando Cámara;

Prod: Jorge Díaz Moreno;

Dir/Scr: José Luis García

Agraz; Photo: Ángel Goded;

Music: Gerardo Suárez; Song:

Alfonso Cuarón, Pablo

Romero; Assoc Prod: Estudios

Churubusco-Azteca, Enrique

Mendoza; Prod Mgr: Hernán

Littín; Post-Prod Mgr:

Benjamín Cabral; Asst Dir:

Luis Estrada; Asst to Dir:

Alfonso Cuarón; Film Ed: Carlos García Agraz; Art Dir: Elizabeth Menz; Action Coord: Ángel de la Peña; Mkup: Estela Sánchez; Sound: Nerio Barberis; Union: STIC

Cast: Gonzalo Vega (*Rodrigo Saracho*), Blanca Guerra (*Lilia Montero*), Wolf Ruvinskis (*Saúl Beltrán*), Guillermo Orea (*Fausto López*), Salvador Pineda (*Latino*), Blanca Torres (*Rodrigo's mother*), Ignacio Retes (*old man*), Roberto Cobo (*Wilfredo Gandía*, "El Sultán"), Alejandro Parodi (*cab driver*), Ernesto Yáñez (*Pedro "El Mesie"*), Dolores Beristáin (*Lola*), Agustín Silva (*Insp. Valdespino*), Sergio Castillo (*Martín*), Rodolfo D'Alexandre (*Matías*), Armando Duarte (*Damián*), Jaime Ramos (*Brena*), Laura Padilla (*Licha Saracho*), Carlos East (*Aguirre*), Elizabeth Menz (*Sra. Beltrán*), [Juan] Ignacio Aranda (*Saúl Jr.*), Alonso Echánove (*man in apartment*, Sr. Cuarón), Dora Guerra (*woman in apartment*, Sra. Cuarón), Patricia López (*maid*), Nuria Montiel (*child in apartment*), Ángel de la Peña (*pharmacy deliveryman*), Nathalie Fidler (*woman in hallway*), Victorina Garesi (*Sra. Brena*), Matía Barberis (*Brena child*), Lourdes Rodríguez (*La Quereterana*), Alejandro García (*Jaime*); *gunmen*: Carlos Quintero, Benjamín Cabral, Evodio Rey de los Palenques, Eduardo Curiel, Roberto Chapman; Bárbara Lynn (*sings for Blanca Guerra*)

Notes: José Luis García Agraz was a former film student at CUEC who worked his way up in the industry as a screenwriter and assistant director before directing his first feature film, *Nocaut*, in 1983 (although in fact he had to help form the Kinam production company to do so). The film earned García Agraz a Best First Work Ariel award, a Best Supporting Actor prize (for Alejandro Parodi), and four additional nominations (Best Film, Best Photography, Best Editing--for the director's younger brother Carlos--and Best Music Score). García Agraz later won Best Director Arieles twice, for *Desiertos mares* and *El misterio del Trinidad* (he was also nominated for *Salón México*).

Nocaut is a relatively familiar tale of a boxer who becomes involved with the mob, with fatal results, but the film is formally modern, intercutting flashbacks with "the present," in increasingly-rapid fashion. The following plot synopsis does not attempt to reproduce the exact sequence of these scenes.

As *Nocaut* begins, Saúl Beltrán--later revealed to be a corrupt businessman--is shot to death while playing chess. His murderer, former boxer Rodrigo, flees.



Rodrigo was a mechanic and a talented amateur boxer who dreamed of representing Mexico in the Olympics, but his godfather Fausto convinced him to turn pro, backed by the wealthy Beltrán. Rodrigo is successful at first, but becomes disenchanted when Beltrán forces him to fight even though he's injured. Rodrigo refuses to throw a fight and is beaten up. Fausto is murdered by El Mesié when he says Rodrigo is quitting. Meanwhile, Rodrigo's girlfriend Lilia becomes the mistress of El Mesié to further her singing career.

Rodrigo kills El Mesié to avenge Fausto, and is permitted to get away with this because his victim was cheating gangster Sultán. Rodrigo goes to work for Sultán as an enforcer. He finally shoots Beltrán, whose ruthlessness ruined his life. After the murder, Rodrigo



asks co-worker Latino to hide him, but is betrayed to Sultán's men. Rodrigo escapes (although Latino is murdered) and goes to Lilia for help. She gives him some money and hands him over to a cab driver who'll help him escape, but the driver turns out to be a former victim of Rodrigo's strong-arm work. Rodrigo flees again and is given shelter by an older man who claims he was unjustly imprisoned years earlier, and wants to help. He's lying, and sells out Rodrigo to Sultán, but once again the ex-fighter eludes his pursuers. Rodrigo forces his way into an apartment and takes a man, his wife,

and their infant hostage. Remembering a similar situation from his past, Rodrigo has them call for a pharmacy delivery: he knocks out the deliveryman and steals his car. However, as he drives away, Rodrigo has a breakdown, realising he can never escape. As the film concludes, he is taken away by Sultán's hired killers.

Nocaut begins with Beltrán's murder and then intercuts Rodrigo's backstory with his attempts to flee the city. The flashbacks are roughly in chronological order, so the viewer can follow Rodrigo's downfall, from an honest young man with dreams of Olympic glory to gangster's henchman. As he tries to escape, he is constantly betrayed by those to whom he turns for help (although it's not clear if Lilia knew the cabbie whom she says is reliable is actually a bitter victim from Rodrigo's henchman days). Killing Beltrán was pointless: he was just a cog in a larger web of criminal corruption, and Rodrigo must now be eliminated to serve as a warning to others.



Gonzalo Vega is excellent as Rodrigo, who succumbs to the lure of "easy" money at his godfather's urging, but soon learns he's a virtual slave to Beltrán and his



organisation. Although Rodrigo--due to his injuries--can no longer win fights, he can still participate in bouts to help build up new talent. When even this is beyond his abilities, he becomes hired "muscle" for Sultán's drug

ring, eliminating the competition. Vega is quite effective as Rodrigo grows more and more desperate, finally giving up and accepting his fate.

The rest of the cast is fine, but no one is particularly notable. Wolf Ruvinskis, Roberto Cobo, Guillermo Orea, etc., all play more or less to type. Blanca Guerra is attractive and sincere but her character's motivation is a little shaky. Alejandro Parodi, as noted above, won an Ariel for his role as the garrulous, then vengeful taxi driver: he chews the scenery quite a bit, but is lively and entertaining.

The production values are fine, with some very nice photography by Ángel Goded. Although Gerardo Suárez's music was nominated for an Ariel, today it sounds a bit hackneyed, with lots of synthesizers and repetitive bits. There's one song in the movie as well, with lyrics by future director Alfonso Cuarón (who is also credited as an assistant to José Luis García Agraz).

Nocaut, as noted earlier, doesn't have an especially original premise, but it makes good use of its Mexico City locations, and has a strong cast and technical components. The fatalistic, no-way-out plot is not exactly upbeat, but the film as a whole is interesting and well-made.



Los orgullosos* [The Proud Ones] (C.I.C.C.

Chrysaor Films/Prods. Iena/Reforma Films, 1953) *Prod:* Raymond Borderie (Fr), Salvador Elizondo (Mx); *Dir:* Yves Allégret; *Scr:* Jean Aurenche; *Dialog:* Jean Aurenche, Jean Clouzot [and Pierre Bost, uncredited]; *Adapt:* Yves Allégret; *Story:* Jean-Paul Sartre ("Typhus") [uncredited]; *Photo:* Alex Phillips; *Music:* Paul Misraki [and Gonzalo Curiel, uncredited]; *Asst Prod:* Raoul J. Levy (Fr), Mauricio de la Serna (Mx); *Admin Gen:* Charles Borderie (Fr), Jorge Elizondo (Mx); *Prod Dir:* Louis Wipf (Fr), Felipe Subervielle (Mx); *Asst Dir:* M[ichel] Romanoff (Fr), J[aime] Contreras (Mx); *Film Ed:* Claude Nicole; *Decor:* Gunther Gerszo; *Camera Op:* Louis Née (Fr), H[ugo] Velasco (Mx); *Makeup:* Fortuna (Fr), Sara Mateos (Mx); *Sound:* William R. Sivel (Fr), Luis Fernández (Mx); *Mexican Co-Dir:* Rafael E. Portas

*aka *Les Orgueilleux*; released in USA as *The Proud and the Beautiful*

Cast: Michèle Morgan (*Nellie*), Gérard Philipe (*Georges*), Víctor Manuel Mendoza (*Rodrigo*), Carlos López Moctezuma (*doctor*), Michèle Cordoue (*Ana*), André Toffel (*Tom*), Arturo Soto Rangel (*priest*), Beatriz Ramos (*nurse*), Jaime Fernández (*bus driver*), Josefina Escobedo (*Bonita*), Lucrecia Muñoz (*Rosa*), Guillermo Segura, Salvador Terroba (*man who steals wallet*), Chel López (*second man who carries Tom*), Manuel Vergara "Manver" (*Joaquín*), Lupe Carriles (*prostitute*), ?Luis Buñuel (*smuggler*)

Notes: *Los orgullosos* was a French-Mexican coproduction shot in the CLASA studios and on location in the town of Alvarado in the state of Vera Cruz. Two

versions were made, one in French and the other in Spanish. According to Jorge Bustos, he edited the Mexican version without reference to the French version, so it is possible the versions are significantly different. I have only seen the French version, which has French sub-titles for the Spanish dialogue (of which there is quite a bit); Gérard Philipe and Carlos López Moctezuma speak both Spanish and French and it sounds like they did their own dialogue in both languages, whereas Víctor Manuel Mendoza is pretty obviously dubbed when he speaks French. Michèle Morgan and Michèle Cordoue speak only French, and most of the other Mexican performers speak only Spanish (Arturo Soto Rangel uses a bit of French and it's unclear if he's dubbed or not).

Georges is a drunken Frenchman who now lives in the town of Alvarado, where he does odd jobs to earn the price of a drink. When a tourist falls ill on a bus, the town doctor has him taken off and put into quarantine; the man's wife, Nellie, is given a room in the doctor's house. The man dies and the doctor says he had meningitis, a highly contagious disease. With the aid of Georges--a former



doctor himself, who stopped practicing and became a drunk after the death of his wife--the doctor gives Nellie the vaccine and has Georges inject him in the spine as well. Georges refuses the vaccine, saying his accumulated layers of filth will protect him.

Nellie discovers her husband's wallet is missing and she has no money. She sells a religious necklace to Ana, the French wife of Rodrigo, owner of the local *cantina*. Rodrigo later gives it back to Nellie, which infuriates Ana. More townspeople fall ill and the doctor sets up a makeshift hospital in the church. Nellie despises Georges because he humiliates himself for liquor, and she despises Rodrigo because he facilitates this behaviour. However, Nellie gradually realises Georges is liked by many in the town because he's kind-hearted, and when he risks his life to take a little girl to the "hospital" so she can receive treatment, Nellie finds she's in love with him.

As the disease spreads, Ana leaves town, just before the army quarantines the area. Rodrigo makes a pass at Nellie but she rejects him. The doctor says a new treatment center needs to be opened at the other end of town, and asks Georges to stay sober for 24 hours and take charge of it. Nellie runs there to be with Georges, and they embrace.

Los orgullosos is extremely well-made and (dubbing aside) well-acted by the cast. The location shooting is excellent and the studio interiors mesh seamlessly. Some have criticised Yves Allégret for a rather bland directorial effort, but this is not really noticeable: the film is slick and effectively paced, and if it doesn't have a lot of fancy



camera angles (Alex Phillips' cinematography is very good, though) or edits, this doesn't reduce the overall dramatic impact. One might note the rather clichéd ending, alternating "romantic" shots of Nellie and Georges running towards each other, until they meet and embrace.

However, for the most part this is a serious work, which even includes a bit of almost fourth wall-breaking analysis: Nellie confesses to the priest that she felt no sorrow at her husband Tom's death, and only cried when she discovered his wallet was missing. We never see Nellie and Tom before he falls ill, so there is no set-up for this, i.e., no hints that their marriage was a bad one. Nellie even seems puzzled at her lack of feeling, telling the priest that she thought it was God's way of sparing her pain, but now she just thinks she's not capable of caring for another person. Of course, she very quickly falls in love with Georges--



after initially being repulsed by his manner and appearance--which is a traditional bit of film plotting, but at least the script mitigates her actions (falling in love with another man so quickly

after her husband's death) by including the aforementioned scene.

Los orgullosos doesn't treat Mexico as an especially "exotic" place populated by stereotypical characters--although the music score is filled with incessant "local" music--but one imagines French audiences (in fact, most non-Mexican viewers) would find Alvarado to be less "civilised" than a French town, for example. The "Third World" setting allows for comments about the excessive heat that affects visitors (this is, oddly enough, given as the reason Georges was drunk when his wife died, and there is

a long scene in which Nellie tries to cool herself in a hotel room), the rapid spread of a malignant disease, and the presence of only one doctor (and no police or other municipal authorities as far as we can see) despite Alvarado being depicted as rather large and well-populated.

The performances are all solid. Gérard Philipe portrays Georges as a cynical alcoholic who retains his basic intelligence, wit and humanity despite being required to play the fool at times. If he rather too easily conquers his addiction to alcohol, this can be explained away as (a) a reaction to an emergency situation, (b) due in part to Nellie's influence, and (c) possibly only temporary. Michèle Morgan, Michèle Cordoue, and Carlos López Moctezuma are also fine, giving nuanced performances (although López Moctezuma sort of vanishes from prominence after the first 30 minutes or so). Víctor Manuel Mendoza, although dubbed in the version I saw, is also satisfactory as the smooth-talking Rodrigo, who eventually drops his courteous exterior and attempts to "collect" on his kindness to Nellie (even then, he backs off when she strenuously rejects his advances).



Los orgullosos was based on a story by Jean-Paul Sartre (some sources cite a novel), who reportedly argued with the filmmakers and asked to have his name removed from the credits. Another name missing from the credits in the French version (but credited on Mexican posters and presumably on the Mexican print) is Rafael E. Portas, the "shadow" director required by Mexican union rules. It's unclear what duties these men performed (and perhaps their work varied from film to film): they could have served as a liaison between the Mexican crew and the foreign director, or may have simply done nothing but collect a paycheck.



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