

The Mexican Film Bulletin

Volume 17 Number One

January-February 2011

Welcome Back for Another Year of MFB!

Can you believe it? Seventeen years? Many thanks to everyone who reads *The Mexican Film Bulletin*, online or in print. Whether this is your first issue or you've been around for all 17 years, your support is appreciated.

The Mexican Film Bulletin features reviews and news of Mexican cinema, past and present. The contents reflect the personal opinions of the editor unless otherwise noted.

And now, on with the show--!



Mexican Movies of 2010

The *cine nacional* proved relatively healthy in 2010: 54 Mexican-made features were released theatrically in Mexico (out of a total of 262 films which premiered there, according to boxofficemojo.com). The most popular Mexican films at the domestic box-office were:



1. *No eres tú, so yo*

(comedy starring Eugenio Derbez); 3 million tickets sold

2. *El infierno* (serio-comic film about the scourge of lawlessness and *narcotráfico* in contemporary México); over 2 million tickets sold

3. *Hidalgo, la historia jamás contada* (partial biography of Padre Hidalgo, one of the architect's of Mexico's struggle for

independence from Spain) 900,000 tickets sold

4. *Abel* (directorial debut of Diego Luna, comedy about a young boy with "special needs" released from an institution to spend a week with his family)

5. *Biutiful* (drama about a mortally-ill man in Barcelona; still playing in cinemas at the end of the year, it actually passed *Abel* early in 2011 in total gross earnings)

6. *Te presento a Laura* (Martha Higareda produced, wrote, and starred in this romantic film)

7. *Regresa* (fantasy film about an unhappy young woman who regresses to a past life where she was a princess)

8. *HIM, Más allá de la luz* ("based on a true story," about a man who has unlocked the power of his mind and can apparently do miracles as a result)

9. *Brijes* (animated adventure film for children)

10. *El atentado* (period drama about a plot to assassinate Porfirio Díaz in 1897)

The top-grossing film in Mexican cinemas in 2010 was *Toy Story 3*, earning \$59.3 million compared to *No eres tú, so yo*, which made \$9.9 million and finished in 21st place overall. *El infierno* (#29), *Hidalgo* (#46), *Biutiful* (#55), *Abel* (#62), *Te presento a Laura* (#67), *Regresa* (#85) were the other Mexican films in the top 100 of the box-office list.



Obituary: Paul Picerni

Actor Paul Picerni died in Palmdale, CA on 12 January 2011; he was 88 years old. Picerni was born in Queens, NY, in 1922. He served in the Army Air Corps during WWII, then majored in drama in college. After playing a few bit film roles, he earned larger parts and a Warner Bros. contract in the 1950s. In 1960, Picerni joined the cast of "The Untouchables," playing an assistant to Elliot Ness (Robert Stack).



Picerni and two of his TV co-stars--Abel Fernández and Nicholas Georgiade--made a cameo appearance in *La edad de la violencia* (1963). The three "Untouchables" were cast against type as gangsters in this crime film starring various youthful Mexican performers like Julio Alemán, Julissa, César Costa, and Alberto Vázquez.

Picerni returned to Mexico in 1969 to appear in *The Fearmaker* (aka *El hacedor del miedo* and *Rancho del miedo*), a Mexican-U.S. coproduction shot in English. He was second-billed (in U.S. prints) to Katy Jurado; also in the cast were Fernando Soler and Sonia Amelio.

Paul Picerni had 8 children. A number of them, as well as his brother Charles and Charles' children, went on to work in the film industry.



El Infierno [Hell] (Bandidos Films-IMCINE-FOPROCINE-Estudios Churubusco-EFICINE-Comisión BI 100-FONCA, 2010) *Exec Prod*: Sandra Solares; *Prod-Dir*: Luis Estrada; *Scr*: Luis Estrada, Jaime Sampietro;

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Photo: Damián García; Music: Michael Brook; Music Supv: Lynn Fainchtein; Line Prod: Carlos Estrada, Juan Uruchurtu; Prod Mgr: Jorge Ramírez "Tocayo," Mauricio Lule; General Advisor: José Luis García Agraz; Asst Dir: Martín Torres; Film Ed: Mariana Rodríguez; Prod Des: Salvador Parra; Art Dir: Rodolfo Granados; Sound Design: Pablo Lach; SpecFX: Alejandro Vázquez; Direct Sound: Santiago Núñez; Union: Técnicos y Manuales del STPC



Cast: Damián Alcázar (*Benjamín García*), Joaquín Cosío (*El Cochiloco*), Ernesto Gómez Cruz (*don José Reyes; don Pancho Reyes*), María Rojo (*doña Mari Reyes*), Elizabeth Cervantes (*Guadalupe Solís*), Daniel Giménez Cacho (*Capt. Ramírez*), Jorge Zárate (*El Huasteco*), Salvador Sánchez (*don Rogaciano*), Angelina Peláez (*Mama García*), Kristyan Ferrer (*Benjamín, el Diablito*), Dagoberto Gama (*El Sargento*), Noé Hernández (*El Sardo*), Mauricio Isaac (*El J.R. (Jesús Reyes)*), Silverio Palacios (*Pánfilo, Cucaracha's brother*), Alejandro Calva (*Cmdte. Mancera*), Emilio Guerrero (*mayor of San Miguel Arcángel*), Daniel Martínez (*Officer Mendoza*), Alfonso Figueroa (*La Muñeca*), José Concepción Macías (*town priest*), José Sefami (*don Camilo*), Gerardo Taracena (*Pancho Zopilote*), Carlos Cobos (*hotel mgr.*), Zaide Silvia Gutiérrez (*"vulture" woman*), Tony Dalton (*gringo*), Mario Almada (*El Texano*), Isela Vega (*doña Rosaura*)

Notes: the second most-popular film of 2010 in Mexico (despite receiving a "C" rating, roughly equivalent to an "R" in the USA), *El Infierno* is quite long (nearly 2.5 hours) but never seems padded nor does it drag. Estrada's two previous films--*Un mundo maravilloso* and *La ley de Herodes*--were politically oriented and despite the status of *El Infierno* as an "officially" backed "bicentennial" movie (although the "México 2010" logo has the words "*Nada que celebrar*" [nothing to celebrate] added), Estrada continues to include large doses of social criticism in his serio-comic films. Estrada has developed a stock company

of talent behind and in front of the camera: all three of these films star Damián Alcázar (with a number of others in the cast repeating as well), all three were co-written by Jaime Sampietro, and other names crop up repeatedly (it should be noted that the relatively small size of the film industry in Mexico means familiar names and faces do turn up frequently--the casts of *El Infierno* and *El atentado* overlap considerably, for instance, despite having different directors, settings, and plots).

Benjamín "El Benny" García, after working for 20 years in the USA, is deported and returns to his hometown of San Miguel Arcángel (the film was shot in San Luis Potosí, but seems to take place in one of Mexico's northern states). He learns his younger brother became involved in *narcotráfico* and was killed, leaving behind his common-law wife Lupe (who now works as a prostitute in don Camilo's cantina, "Salón México") and a teenage son. The region is controlled by don José Reyes, who constantly feuds with the gang led by his brother Pancho.

Seeing no chance to follow his dream--opening a school to teach English--Benjamín goes to work in the shabby gas station owned by Rogaciano, and begins a romance with Lupe. His old friend "Gordo" Mata is now "El Cochiloco," don José's right-hand man. When his nephew is arrested, Benjamín needs money to bribe the police, and becomes El Cochiloco's assistant, working for don José.



Eventually, Benjamín grows inured to the violence and corruption: he delivers drugs, punishes recalcitrant customers, battles rivals. He uses the money he earns to buy his elderly mother presents, and builds an elaborate tomb for his late brother, "El Diablo."

However, things begin to fall apart. When don José's useless son J.R. is murdered, apparently by don Pancho's men, the druglord becomes enraged and blames El Cochiloco for failing to protect the young man. El Cochiloco's eldest son is shot to death--although don José accuses his brother's gang, El Cochiloco thinks he is being punished in an "eye for an eye" manner. Seeking revenge, he too is killed. Benjamín and several others are sent to kill as many of don Pancho's sons and henchmen as possible; don Pancho himself is gunned down at a cockfight. However, they also learn the man who set up the murder of J.R. was nicknamed "El Diablito."

Benjamín realises this means his nephew, the son of his brother "El Diablo." The teenager admits he was the *soplón*, because don José had his father killed, in revenge for El Diablo's affair with don José's wife. Benjamín sends his nephew to safety in the USA, but Lupe is killed. Remembering federal police Captain Ramírez had offered him immunity and "witness protection" if he testified against don José, Benjamín offers to tell all, only to discover Ramírez is corrupt. Despite being beaten,

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tortured, robbed of his life savings, then shot and buried (!) by Ramírez's henchmen, Benjamín survives.



On the night of 16 September in San Miguel Arcángel, newly-elected Municipal President don José prepares to make a speech celebrating Mexico's Bicentennial to his assembled constituents in the town square. As don José starts to speak, Benjamín steps out of the crowd with a machine gun, mowing down everyone on the stage--the town priest, politicians, police chief, military officer, don José's wife, and finally don José himself.

As the film concludes, Benjamín's nephew visits the tombs of his father, mother, and uncle. He then crashes into a warehouse where some other young men are preparing drugs for sale and shoots them to death.

Benjamín García is somewhat reminiscent of Juan Vargas in *La ley de Herodes*: both are ineffectual, sad-sack losers whose lives take a sudden upswing, economically and socially, with mixed results. Benny sets off to make his fortune in the USA, promising to send for his younger brother, but never does so; when he returns, two decades later, his mother complains he never sent money or even a card to let them know he was still alive. Benny doesn't return in triumph after his deportation, either: he's robbed twice on the bus ride home (once by a gun-toting thug, once by soldiers at a checkpoint) and is just as penniless as



he was when he left, only now 20 years older. Resigned to working for a pittance for don Rogaciano, Benny is forced into the drug world--El Cochiloco later admits he wouldn't be a *narco* if there was any alternative, but there isn't. Initially repulsed by the violence and unwilling to use drugs himself, Benny soon becomes callous, working with Cochiloco to execute don José's enemies, leaving their corpses with rude, threatening signs tacked on them, smoking dope himself, spending money in a profligate manner. However, when matters unravel, the only thing Benny does effectively is help his nephew escape: otherwise, his girlfriend is murdered, he's betrayed by

Captain Ramírez, beaten up, loses all the money he's skimmed from don José (he offers \$50,000 to each of the corrupt cops who are delivering him to don José for execution, and is indignant when they decide to take it all), and is finally shot and buried ignominiously. Mother of mercy, is this the end of El Benny?

Possibly. Benny's unlikely resurrection and final revenge on don José and the "establishment" figures of San Miguel Arcángel is so bizarre and unbelievable that one might almost think the filmmakers intended this to be a "fantasy" conclusion (somewhat reminiscent of the disputed ending of *Taxi Driver*), and that Benny was actually killed by the cops. This argument is reinforced since there is no scene of Benny alive after the massacre in the town plaza: the next thing we see is his nephew praying at three tombs, representing his father, mother, and uncle (doubly ironic since this is where Benny was buried "alive" after being shot by the crooked policemen).

[Refuting this: apparently a scene was shot of Benny being killed after the massacre by one of don Pancho's surviving henchmen, and this is the person Benny's nephew shoots in the film's final scene. But Benny's second death does not appear in the final print of *El Infierno*, so I suppose this means my interpretation of the plaza massacre as wish-fulfillment fantasy could still potentially be valid?]

El Infierno is amusing--even at its most violent, the black comedy undertones can still be detected--but it has a strong political component. Almost literally everyone we see in the film is corrupt or has been corrupted. The local police? Of course. The federal police? Yes. The Church? Yes (at least the town priest). Politicians? Don't make me laugh, they sure are! Children? Yes (marijuana smuggler El Texano has a little boy as his assistant). Teenagers? Definitely. Women? Certainly, and not just the whores or women directly involved in the drug trade, like doña Mari, don José's wife. When Benny first arrives in San Miguel Arcángel, he sees a dead man on the street, the aftermath of a drug-related shooting. As he watches, little children and a woman (Zaide Silvia Gutiérrez in a cameo) rob the corpse.

Even Benny's mother is not immune. When Benny--now earning good money as one of don José's henchmen--brings her a television so she can watch *telenovelas*, she thanks him but also asks for his wristwatch! Don Rogaciano, perhaps the least corrupt and greedy person in the movie, accepts Benny's drug money and refurbishes his shabby garage into an elaborate mechanic's shop ("now if only I had some customers," he mutters).

Some of these people are clearly evil, while others appear to have been driven to extremes by desperation. *Narcotráfico* has a pervasive effect on all levels of





Mexican society, and even those who want to remain honest and independent are unable to free themselves of its influence. Characters in the film talk about this, and it's also depicted more subtly: drug money has ruined Mexico's economy, the "normal" salary for a working man (including the police) is low enough as it is, but when drug gang members make ten, twenty, or one hundred times as much, services, prices, etc. are skewed towards the



wealthy criminals. The film condemns the havoc the drug trade has had on Mexico, but it doesn't paint everyone involved as inhuman monsters. Even the main

"villain," don José, is a curious, complex character. In one scene he coldly orders various murders, in another he rants "I swear by my sainted mother, I'm going to kill my brother!" and in yet another he cries over the body of his dead son and consoles his wailing wife. He's never really sympathetic, but he's recognizably human, as are most of the people in the movie.

One interesting aspect of *El Infierno* is its attitude towards the USA. Benny is the butt of various insulting remarks about being a *pocho*, and he (inconsistently) sprinkles English phrases throughout his dialogue, but there is no suggestion his long residence in *gringolandia* made him more corrupt or greedy or--for that matter--more inept. There is some talk about how the USA oppresses Mexico, and how smuggling drugs across the border is Mexico's way of striking back for past injustices, but as soon as this is brought up, someone shoots it down: don't criticise the *gringos*, they're the ones who are buying the drugs and making us rich. In one brief scene, a *gringo* arms dealer sells dozens of weapons (including grenades) to Cochiloco and Benny, but his character and the transaction is presented matter-of-factly, with no overt *gringo*-bashing. *El Infierno* doesn't blame Mexico's current troubles on outside forces--though these are certainly contributing factors--but rather on Mexicans themselves. As don Rogaciano tells Benny, the drug trade in Mexico has resulted in "almost a civil war--everyone against everyone."

The performances in *El Infierno* are all good, with a lot of familiar faces from recent Mexican cinema, veterans like Ernesto Gómez Cruz, María Rojo, Daniel Giménez Cacho, and Salvador Sánchez, and even nice cameos from Isela Vega and Mario Almada. The production values are fine, the film is slick and well-made, with no budgetary deficiencies evident on-screen.

El Infierno is, for much of its running time, quite funny, even when it's also violent and nihilistic. However, the ultimate message is a sad one, although it's delivered in an often hilarious, highly-entertaining manner.



El atentado [The Assassination Attempt]

(Alebrije Prods.-IMCINE-CONACULTA-Estudios Churubusco-Gob. del Edo. de Zacatecas-Grupo Santander-Oberón Cin., 2010) *Exec Prod:* Mónica Lozano Serrano, Mariano Carranco; *Prod:* Mónica Lozano, Diego López; *Line Prod:* Mariano Carranco; *Co-Prod:* Enrique Espinosa, Alfonso Soto; *Assoc Prod:* Leonardo Zimbrón; *Dir:* Jorge Fons; *Scr:* Felipe León R., Vicente Leñero, Jorge Fons; *Orig. Novel:* Álvaro Uribe ("Expediente del atentado"); *Photo:* Guillermo Granillo; *Music:* Lucía Álvarez; *Prod Mgr:* Hécto Villega; *Asst Dir:* Joaquín Silva; *Film Ed:* Sigfrido Barjau, Miguel Salgado; *Prod Des:* Sandra Cabriada; *Art Dir:* Ezra Buenrostro; *Set Decor:* Luis Guala; *Sound Des:* Matía Barberis

Cast: Daniel Giménez Cacho (*Federico Gamboa*), José María Yázpik (*Arnulfo "Fitó" Arroyo*), Julio Bracho (*Eduardo Velázquez*), Irene Azuela (*Cordelia Godoy*), Arturo Beristáin (*don Porfirio Díaz*), Salvador Sánchez (*Antonio Villavicencio*), José María de Távira (*Álvaro Mateos*), María Rojo (*Arroyo's mother*), Mario Zaragoza (*Genovevo*), Angélica Aragón (*Tía Avelina*), Dolores Heredia (*Bonifacia*), Ramón Álvarez (*Birote*), Fernando Becerril (*Campuzano*), Roberto Blandón (*Octaviano Liceaga*), Juan Ríos Cantú (*Antonio Milanes*), Patricio Castillo (*Manuel Bellido*), Carlos Cobos (*Gorgorito*), Juan Carlos Colombo (*Brig. Ortiz Monasterio*), Miguel Coutourier (*factory owner*), Fernando del Villar (*son of factory owner?*), Aarón Hernán (*don Felipe González del Río*), Gastón Melo (*Gamboa's assistant*), José Sefami (*Judge Guerrero*), Aislínn Derbez (*Telésfora*), Iazúa Lazos (*Tencha*), Mariana Villalonga Martín (*María Sagasetta*), Armando Pascual (*lintotipist*), Mario Uriel & Miguel Ángel Galván (*well-dressed men*)

[Disclaimer: the version of this film I obtained thru "unofficial" sources had a running time of about 88

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minutes, and was not obviously incomplete. However, IMDB and Wikipedia (among other places) give a running time of over two hours. I have been unable to confirm if the copy I saw was officially re-edited for theatrical release, or if significant footage was missing for technical reasons, or if the longer cited running time is erroneous information. Consequently, the following review may be based on a non-standard copy of the film.]

Note: although this was the tenth most-popular Mexican film of 2010, *El atentado* still lost money due to its high budget (reportedly 70 million pesos, or \$5.8 million; boxofficemojo.com reports domestic earnings of just over \$1 million, although another source indicates it earned about \$3.8 million, still much less than it cost to make).



The first feature film Jorge Fons has directed in 15 years, *El atentado* is an interesting and well-made but flawed work. Based on a novel, the film tells the story of a failed plot to assassinate President Porfirio Díaz in 1897; although blamed on the "anarchist" who attacked Díaz,

the scheme was actually master-minded by members of the government itself. The novel is apparently composed in the form of various collected "documents," the results of an independent investigation by novelist Federico Gamboa (who also held various government posts during his lifetime), but in the film Gamboa is almost a peripheral figure, and the plot itself isn't clearly delineated.

The script is structured with a series of flashbacks, and also includes at least one "alternate reality" sequence--as the would-be assassin prepares to attack the President, he discovers he's lost the dagger he was given to carry out the assault, so he imagines various outcomes (stabbing Díaz, hitting him with a rock, etc.).

The recreation of the time period, the performances, and the basic idea are all good, but the fragmented narrative and the absence of a clear point-of-view make *El atentado* seem a little incomplete. [The following synopsis is, as usual for *MFB*, presented in a linear fashion and does not represent the order in which the events appear in the film itself.]

Author Federico Gamboa and Eduardo Velázquez--Inspector General of the Mexico City police--were university classmates with Arnulfo Arroyo. However, Arroyo has now dedicated himself to a bohemian life, enjoying his "liberty" but aware of how the upper classes,

with the aid of the Díaz government, oppress the workers. In one sequence, Arroyo is present when a squad of mounted *rurales* attack some female factory workers who are on strike; he is knocked unconscious while attempting to rescue an injured woman. Later, while on an excursion to the countryside with his girlfriend--coincidentally meeting Federico, Eduardo, and two young women--Arroyo sees rail cars full of indigenous "rebels" being deported from Sonora to (presumably) the Valle Nacional or another insalubrious location.

Arnulfo, Federico, and Eduardo are all acquainted with Cordelia Godoy, a young and attractive widow. Cordelia is engaged to Eduardo but is having an affair with Federico, and was also involved with Arroyo in the past.

Eduardo, on the orders of cabinet member don Felipe, orders his henchman Villavicencio to get Arroyo drunk and incite him to attack President Díaz on 16 September 1897. Arroyo loses the knife he was given, and has to ineffectually



attack Díaz with nothing but his fists. Díaz is uninjured and orders that Arroyo be taken into custody and interrogated, but not harmed: one of Villavicencio's men attempts to murder Arroyo, feigning "rage" at the assassination attempt, but is held back by soldiers.

However, Eduardo has Arroyo transferred from military custody to the police. A group of thugs is allowed to enter the room where Arroyo--bound and gagged--is being held, and they stab him to death, then flee. However, Álvaro Mateos, a reporter for "El Imparcial," gets the story of the murder of Arroyo and the news spreads. Eduardo commits suicide (off-screen--it's not clear if he was murdered or actually killed himself) and President Díaz demotes don Felipe from a cabinet post to ambassador to Finland.

El atentado focuses chiefly on the characters of Arroyo and Velázquez. Arroyo's political and social beliefs apparently arose from a confluence of factors--his family's financial situation worsened, he became involved with a young woman who was politically active, etc.--but his "decision" to attack Díaz is depicted as almost involuntary (he's quite drunk and consequently easily manipulated by Villavicencio) rather than the premeditated act of an anarchist determined to assassinate a dictator. Velázquez is portrayed as elitist, racist, ambitious, and ruthless.

One of the interesting facets of *El atentado* is its relatively benign image of Porfirio Díaz. This isn't necessarily unusual for Mexican cinema: although the *Porfiriato* is seen as a period when the privileged classes and foreign influences ruled the country--trampling on the rights of *los de abajo* in the name of progress and peace--Díaz himself has often been portrayed as a thoughtful, grandfather-like figure. True enmity is reserved for some of those who followed him in the presidency, such as Victoriano Huerta. In *El atentado*, Díaz isn't avuncular,

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kindly, and white-haired as he appears in films like *México de mis recuerdos* (he's a decade younger than in the immediate pre-Revolution tales, for one thing), but rather a taciturn, strict and dignified leader (who isn't



above such tricks as sitting in a darkened office, forcing his underlings to peer helplessly at his shadowy figure). Unlike some dictators, Díaz appears reluctant to exercise personal power, insisting that would-be assassin Arroyo be arrested, unharmed, and tried under the rule of law (for this, he's mocked by performers in a *carpa*--but to be fair, they also mock Arroyo's drunken assault on the President).

The political aspects of the film are muted but present. The aforementioned scene in which *rurales* attack some peaceful women strikers is the most blatant demonstration of the oppressive nature of the Díaz regime. The boxcars full of "rebel Indians" are more obliquely presented--the



young women accompanying Federico and Eduardo hold hankerchiefs over their noses because of the smell, and filthy hands reach out between the slats on the sides of the cards--but the point is made: resistance to the *porfiriato* will be suppressed at all costs. The film occasionally cuts away to scenes in which some *carpa* comedians mock Díaz before an appreciative crowd, emphasizing that Díaz's program of modernisation has not made him universally popular.

Less traditional is the idea that Díaz, as early as 1897, was opposed by members of the upper class and the government itself. Sometimes one gets the impression--from popular culture, but also from history books--that the Revolution was a mass uprising led by proletarian figures such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, but this

overlooks the important role the intelligentsia had in removing Díaz from office. In *El atentado*, it appears the plot against Díaz was engineered by don Felipe González del Río, a (fictional) member of the cabinet who had designs on the presidency himself, but elsewhere in the film, dissatisfaction with Mexico's governance is also expressed (in varying degrees) by Federico Gamboa, Cordelia Godoy, reporter Álvaro Mateos, and others who are neither working-class nor overtly radical in their political views.

And of course, what would a "conspiracy" film be without a cover-up, government censorship of the press, and "justice" meted out behind the scenes or privately rather than openly and officially? The tagline on the film's poster reads: "In this country, one never knows the truth." To give *El atentado* its due, there are some blackly humorous moments amid the intrigue, mostly revolving around the attempts to silence Arroyo: he's shadowed to the scene of the assassination by one of Villavicencio's men who's been assigned to act outraged and kill the "murderer" of the President; this fails, and Arroyo is arrested. To keep him from naming names, Velázquez and Villavicencio must arrange Arroyo's death; Villavicencio can suggest nothing except *ley fuga* (the old "shot while trying to escape" gambit), repeating this endlessly until Velázquez finally tells him to shut up.

The performances in *El atentado* are generally very good. All the males have huge moustaches planted on their faces, but manage to emote through that camouflage. Julio Bracho (the grandson of director Julio Bracho) and José María Yáznik (somewhat reminiscent of Ignacio López Tarso here) have the meatiest roles, but Salvador Sánchez, Aarón Hernán, and Irene Azuela (who at times looks like actress Meg "Eyes" Foster) are all fine. Arturo Beristáin seems a little overstuffed as Porfirio Díaz, but conveys a steely determination beneath his stoic exterior. María Rojo chews the scenery in one scene as Arroyo's grieving mother, while Angélica Aragón is more subdued as Cordelia's blind aunt.



The production values of *El atentado* are excellent. Recreating 1897 Mexico City must have been an incredible chore--it's one thing to make a period film with a mostly rural setting, and quite another to film a story set in a teeming metropolis of more than a century before. Fons and his crew do this mostly by judicious use of framing, limiting the camera's point of view to a single street or a portion thereof, plus lots of interiors. The set decor, costumes, and so on are carefully crafted and while

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El atentado isn't quite as glossy as some recent period pictures (such as *Arráncame la vida*), it's a very impressive visual evocation of turn of the century Mexico City.

The film as a whole is interesting but somehow misses the mark and fails to be truly insightful, important or even dramatically engrossing.



Los endemoniados del ring [The Demons of the Ring] (Estudios América, 1964) *Prod:* Emilio Gómez Muriel; *Dir:* Alfredo B. Crevenna; *Scr:* Emilio Gómez Muriel, Alfredo Ruanova; *Story:* Alfredo Ruanova; *Photo:* Fernando Colín; *Music:* Antonio Díaz Conde; *Prod Mgr:* Luis García de León; *Co-Dir:* Tito Novaro; *Film Ed:* Raúl J. Casso; *Art Dir:* Artis Gener; *Camera Op:* Raúl Domínguez; *Camera Ass't:* Javier Cruz; *Makeup:* Graciela Muñoz; *Dialog Rec:* Enrique Rendón; *Music Rec/Re-rec:* Heinrich Henkel; *Union:* STIC

Cast: Karloff Lagarde (*Satán*), René "Copete" Guajardo (*Ángel*), Armando Silvestre (*Gonzalo*), Emily Kranz [sic] (*Marta*), Chucho Salinas (*Nando*), Jorge Pous Ribé [aka Jorge Rivero] (*Tarzán Beto*), Dagoberto Rodríguez (*Tony*), Víctor Alcocer (*police inspector*), Fernando Osés, Dorrell Dixon (*Marciano*), Eduardo Lugo, Miron Levin (*Dr. Elizondo*), René Barrera (*henchman*), Armando Acosta (*cabaret customer*), Johnny Dínamo (*singer*); wrestlers: Antonio Montoro, Jorge Allende, Humberto Garza, Benny Galán, Jean Safont, Rizado Ruiz



Notes: given the success of the Santo movies, other wrestlers were drafted into films in the early and mid-1960s. Of the early candidates, only Blue Demon and Mil Máscaras went on to have substantial screen careers. Others, like the one-shot "Enmascarado de Oro" (in *El asesino invisible*, 1964) and the two wrestlers in the "Endemoniados del ring" series, didn't catch on. Emilio Gómez Muriel and his partner Alfredo Ruanova, along with director Alfredo B. Crevenna, were responsible for the latter series, as well as the revived Neutrón movies, which share many of the same credits.

The two heroes in "Endemoniados" are "Satán" and "Ángel," played by Karloff Lagarde (a four-time welterweight champion) and René "Copetes" Guajardo (Lagarde's long-time tag team partner and a middleweight

who actually won the title from El Santo in 1967). Neither man is seen without a mask during the series (photos indicate Lagarde looked sort of like Cavernario Galindo and Guajardo resembled comedian Alejandro Suárez, so perhaps this was best), and--despite their diametrically opposed names--neither wrestler is given any sort of distinctive personality. Curiously, Satán and Ángel wear what appear to be sweatsuits in their non-ring appearances, Ángel in all-white and Satán in black.

Given the bland nature of the picture's putative protagonists, *Los endemoniados del ring* spends a lot of time on the supporting cast (and padding--lots of wrestling matches and musical numbers). The other performers include a young Jorge Rivero (billed under his real name, Jorge Pous Ribé), who had previously appeared in *El asesino invisible*. In that movie, Rivero's face was only seen briefly, but here he's given the full beefcake glamor treatment (although he's doubled in long shots for the wrestling sequences). His love interest is Emily Cranz, a sexy singer and dancer (born in the USA).

Cranz, unfortunately, is given some very odd closeups during Rivero's wrestling matches,



making her appear almost sinister. The rest of the cast is adequate, and it is interesting to see black wrestler Dorrell Dixon in a substantial acting role (his dialogue appears to be dubbed and he's given a "foreign" accent—Dixon was actually born in Jamaica).

As the film opens, manager Nando (Chucho Salinas in one of his numerous comic roles in wrestling movies) and his clients Satán and Ángel are on a "national wrestling tour." Their next stop is Monterrey; but first, Nando has the two wrestlers beat up some construction workers who are blocking the road! (It would serve him right if, after forcing the workers to move, Nando's car had plunged off a cliff!) In Monterrey, wrestling promoter Gonzalo asks Ángel and Satán to throw a match so local idol Tarzán Beto can win. They refuse, but lose the match anyway because Gonzalo has bribed the referee. Wrestler Marciano and Gonzalo's assistant find the promoter's dead body in his office, but when they return with the police, the corpse is gone. Masked wrestler El Duque Incógnito shows up and takes over the business. Can you guess who El Duque is? (Hint: Gonzalo had earlier mentioned that he used to be a professional wrestler before he got into promoting matches.)

Various threads of the plot unravel. Tarzán Beto demonstrates some odd behavior in the ring, and Ángel, Satán, and Nando discover he has heart trouble. A friendly doctor has covered up the condition so Tarzán can earn enough money to retire and marry singer Marta. It's

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suggested that Gonzalo fixed Tarzán's matches so he and gambler Tony could cash in on the handsome wrestler's success. At various times during the movie, Tony's men try to kill Nando and his clients, but always fail.

Ángel, Satán, and Nando threaten to expose Tarzán's illness unless he quits. However, El Duque Incógnito challenges Tarzán to a match, and Tony's men kidnap Marta (Nando also gets caught) to make sure El Duque wins. In a sequence ripped off from *Huracán Ramírez* (and imitated in numerous other wrestling movies), Ángel and Satán burst into the gangsters' hideout, freeing Marta and Nando. She rushes to ringside and Tarzán defeats El Duque, who is unmasked as--Gonzalo! (What a surprise!) Tarzán retires from wrestling to wed Marta. Nando, Ángel, and Satán leave town in their Rambler station wagon, headed for their next wrestling match.

Los endemoniados del ring is a routine wrestling-crime drama. As noted earlier, the running time is padded with ring action--an acquired taste; about the only thing of interest here is spotting Rivero's double, who never shows his face but has a completely different build and hairstyle--and musical numbers (several songs by Craz and one decent one by "Johnny Dínamo"). There are a couple of brief but well-staged fight scenes outside the ring, pitting Satán and Ángel against Tony's gangsters (including veteran stuntman René Barrera). However, it's really rather bland overall.



La Mano Que Aprieta [The Clutching Hand]

(Estudios América, 1964) *Prod:* Emilio Gómez Muriel; *Dir:* Alfredo B. Crevenna; *Scr:* Emilio Gómez Muriel,



Alfredo Ruanova; *Story:* Alfredo Ruanova; *Photo:* Fernando Colín; *Music:* Antonio Díaz Conde; *Prod Mgr:* Luis García de León; *Co-Dir:* Tito Novaro; *Film Ed:* Raúl J. Casso; *Art Dir:* Artís Gener; *Camera Op:* Raúl Domínguez; *Camera Ass't:* Javier Cruz;

Makeup: Graciela Muñoz; *Dialog Rec:* Enrique Rendón; *Music Rec/Re-rec:* Heinrich Henkel; *Union:* STIC

Cast: Karloff Lagarde (*Satán*), René "Copetes" Guajardo (*Ángel*), Gina Romand (*Ana*), Andrés Soler (*Dr. Resin**), Chucho Salinas (*Nando*), María Eugenia San Martín (*Carmen Sánchez Peña*), Claudio Brook (*Prof.*

Davenport), Héctor Godoy (*Antonio*), Consuelo Frank (*Sra. Sánchez Peña*), Miguel Manzano (*Insp. Saldívar*), Carlos Nieto (*Gustavo*), Ramón Bugarini (*Ramiro*), Enrique Ramírez, Guillermo Hernández "Lobo Negro" (*Ramón*), Tito Novaro (*false desk clerk*), Augusto Benedico (*Julio Arena*), Miguel Arenas (*don Miguel*), Johnny Laboriel (*singer*), René Barrera, "Pícoro" (*ring ancr*), Ángel Fernández (*wrestling broadcaster*), Pedro Ortega (*painter*); wrestlers: Antonio Montoro, Fernando Osés, Mishima Ota, Beny Galant [sic], Humberto Garza, Jorge Allende, Juventino Romero, Rodolfo Ruiz, Rizado Ruiz, Mario Texas, Jean Saffon [sic]

*[print sources and some of the film's dialogue makes it sound like Soler's character is named "Resin," but Claudio Brook and other actors pronounce it "Resnick."]

Notes: the sequel to *Los endemoniados del ring* is



much better than its predecessor. The plot is fairly complex, the characterizations are interesting, the cast is strong, and even the two wrestling heroes are somewhat more active participants. There is also a science-fiction angle which is an improvement over the previous picture's routine crime theme.

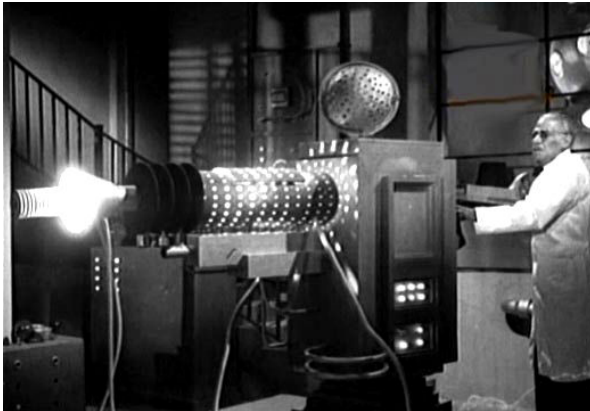
Blackmailer Julio Arena is murdered in Guadalajara. Two of his victims were nightclub singer Ana and scientist Resin. Arena's cousin and her daughter Carmen arrive in the city, responding to his summons, but are met at the bus station by Ramiro, who claims to be Arena's aide. He takes them to the Hotel Luna and says his employer will call them soon. Carmen leaves on a date with her boyfriend Antonio, leaving Sra. Sánchez Peña alone in the room.

Antonio takes Carmen to see the wrestling matches: a tag team battle royale is being held to select three pairs of *luchadores* to compete for an award. Among the victors in the elimination match are Satán and Ángel, managed by Nando. Afterwards, the wrestlers and their manager meet Antonio and Carmen. They drop Carmen off at her hotel; however, when she goes in, she is told she isn't registered, and her mother is nowhere to be found! The desk clerk and bellhop deny ever seeing her before, and the room she had occupied is undergoing renovations. Carmen goes to the police.

Meanwhile, Ana and Prof. Resin are worried that Julio's blackmail material may fall into the hands of another

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criminal. And they're right--two gangs are trying to obtain it. One group is led by the mysterious "Clutching Hand," who hides in the shadows and only reveals one deformed hand to his henchmen. Also after the blackmail documents are Gustavo and Ramón. Ana fears her engagement will be shattered if her fiancé's family learns she was married before, but Resin has bigger things on his mind--he has invented the "ultimate weapon" (a ray gun that disintegrates things) and wants it to be used to enforce world peace, but the Clutching Hand demands the secret to the weapon or Resin's son's reputation will be ruined (he embezzled some money from a bank).



Sra. Sánchez Peña has been kidnaped by the Clutching Hand because her cousin Julio had sent her a claim check which obviously represents the blackmail documents. Carmen has the slip now, and is warned her mother will die unless she surrenders it. She does, but accidentally hands it over to Gustavo and Ramón instead of the Clutching Hand's representatives. The two crooks pick up a package at the bus station, but are puzzled when they get home and open it--instead of documents, they find a metal cylinder which apparently contains radioactive cobalt. The Clutching Hand compels Gustavo and Ramón to work for him, and eventually they recover the real blackmail material.

Ángel and Satán tell Prof. Resin he must pretend to agree to the villain's demands. They make arrangements to trade the secret of the ultimate weapon for the documents (and Carmen's mother) at Resin's lab, but the meeting is set for a time when the two wrestlers are supposed to be participating in a match. While Satán ducks out, Ángel impersonates his partner *and* plays himself (at least they don't have to be in the ring at the same time!).

At Resin's lab, the Clutching Hand is revealed to be Prof. Davenport, an associate of Resin. Resin uses his ray gun to disintegrate the villains, but his device overloads and is destroyed. Resin himself dies, but he's happy because he's taking the secret of the weapon to the grave with him.

La Mano Que Aprieta is loaded with familiar bits borrowed from other films, serials, pulp magazines, etc. The "mystery villain" is not very mysterious: not only is Davenport the only logical suspect for the Clutching Hand (there aren't even any red herrings!), when the villain speaks, his voice is clearly that of actor Claudio Brook (just with a little echo thrown in). The "hand" gimmick is

also kind of strange--it's just a rubber glove (that Davenport peels off at the end), but why it's deformed and why he uses it *at all* is hard to figure out. I guess he just wanted a catchy villain-name and thought "The Clutching Hand" (*La Mano Que Aprieta*) sounded cool.

The "I left my hotel and now they claim I was never there" plot (or variations of it) has been used a number of times before, but it still works here, and the idea of having two competing groups of crooks trying to obtain the blackmail documents is clever. Gustavo and Ramón, the Clutching Hand's rivals, are given quite a bit of character development (I don't know, they seem a little gay to me, but perhaps I'm overthinking it). In a gruesome turn of events, they contract radiation poisoning from handling the radioactive cobalt canister (Gustavo disregards a note on the package warning him not to open it)--and Ramón's cat dies as well--but they're both disintegrated by Resin before the radiation can kill them! The scenes with Sra. Sánchez Peña and the Clutching Hand's gang are nicely handled: she's terrified and has no idea of what they want, while they think she and her daughter are holding out on them.

As with the first film in the series, the running time is padded out with wrestling matches and musical numbers--in this case, a pop song by Johnny Laboriel and a couple of songs by Gina Romand--but Satán and Ángel are at least a little more lively this time in the non-wrestling scenes.

One bit of unintentional humor occurs when Ángel is forced to impersonate Satán in the ring. "Do you think they'll recognize me?" he asks Nando, apparently oblivious to the fact that both he and Satán wear masks!

The supporting cast is pretty good. Gina Romand is attractive and sincere, Andrés Soler is a bit more serious and subdued than usual (which is good), Chucho Salinas provides some very mild comic relief, "Lobo Negro" proves once again that he was one of the better wrestler-actors, and even the regulation love-interest couple (Carmen and Antonio) are not too annoying. Claudio Brook doesn't have much to do as

Davenport (despite his character's Anglo name, he seems to be speaking with a French accent) and is only heard as the Clutching Hand, but he's a solid performer.



There are certainly some flaws and illogical aspects to the movie (the rigamarole required to pick up the real blackmail documents isn't very clear, and the "ultimate weapon" looks so unwieldy and fragile that its "ultimate" nature is quite suspect) but it's elevated to a "pretty good" level by the script and performances.





Lo veo y no lo creo [I See It and I Don't Believe It] (Panorama Films-Estudios América, 1975) *Prod-Dir-Scr:* Alfredo Zacarías; *Photo:* Javier Cruz; *Music:* Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Mgr:* José Llamas Ultreras; *Asst Dir:* Ángel Rodríguez; *Film Ed:* Francisco Chiu; *Art Dir:* Raúl Cárdenas; *Makeup:* Victoria Celis; *Sound Supv:* Carlos Jiménez; *Sound Op:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Dialog Rec:* Francisco Guerrero; *Union:* STIC

Cast: Gaspar Henaine "Capulina" (*Capulina*), Virma González (*Rosa "La Ratona"*), Gaspar Guerrero (*Raúl*), Angélica Chain (*Patricia Rendón Suárez del Valle*), Virginia Gutiérrez (*Sra. Rendón Suárez del Valle*), Miguel Gómez Checa (*police official*), Enrique Pontón (*doctor*), Marcelo Villamil (*Sr. Gerardo Rendón Suárez del Valle*), Pola Sanders, Rita Valencia, Nelson Juárez (*José, chauffeur*), Rubén Aguirre "Shorty" (*tall criminal*), Jorge Casanova (*banker*), Jaime Manterola, Baladina, Juan Garza (*criminal*), Negro Urbán, Roberto Y. Palacios (*don Fermín*), Jaime Pizano, Roberto Uribe, Regina Torné (*dubs Angélica Chain's singing voice*)

Notes: each time I watch one of the dozen or so Capulina films directed by Alfredo Zacarías, I am surprised at the total lack of comedic skill and sensibility demonstrated. Each movie is crammed with comic set-pieces (slapstick fights and chases, mostly) and none is ever funny! Using fast-motion and adding "funny" music doesn't help, either. These scenes are awkward, clumsy, repetitive, overlong, you name it. *Lo veo y no lo creo* is no exception. There is a "food fight" in a bakery, numerous fight scenes between Capulina and a trio of bumbling crooks, a "thrilling" (yeah, right) sequence in which the blind Capulina faces death as he unwittingly stumbles down a tall fire escape, and so on. Not funny. None of it. [While I am reluctant to mention the two movies in the same sentence, the opening sequence could have been inspired by the W.C. Fields' movie *It's a Gift*, in which the irascible, blind "Mr. Muckle" wreaks havoc in a small store. Suffice it to say that *Lo veo y no lo creo* is not a worthy successor to the earlier film.]

But fair is fair, and I will mention three things that were (very) mildly amusing in this picture. First, it turns out that the blind Capulina's "guide dog" (who doesn't act like a guide dog at all) is also blind! (Nothing is ever made of this, and the dog doesn't act blind, but the concept has some merit) Second, I got a chuckle out of this dialog exchange:

Capulina: You should get married.

Raúl (who is blind): *Con mi desgracia?* [Roughly, "With my handicap?"]

Capulina: No, with a girl.

The third bit that has at least the germ of humor is a sequence in a bank. The bank manager has a letter explaining the circumstances of Raúl's trust fund. He hands it to Raúl (who is blind), who gives it to Capulina to read. Capulina is blind (although Raúl doesn't know it), so he gives the letter to his girlfriend Rosa. She isn't blind, but she's illiterate, so she hands it to Patricia. Patricia is almost blind and can't see the letter, so she gives it back to the bank manager. He holds it at arm's length, then puts on thick glasses, and still can't read it! Finally, he says, "I'll summarize it for you."

Capulina, who is blind, is the last remaining servant of wealthy young Raúl, also blind. Raúl doesn't know Capulina cannot see, and asks him to "describe" what is playing on television, "read" the newspaper, etc. While purchasing bread, Capulina wrecks the bakery and gets in a fight with a large customer. The man is pelted with food, has his toupee stripped off, and is forced to pay for the damages. Afterwards, Capulina invites some street people in to eat the remaining food (since it's been paid for). He also meets Rosa "La Ratona," an employee of the bakery. They later run into each other in the park, where Capulina performs as a one-man-band for tips.

Another acquaintance of Capulina is Patricia, a young woman from a wealthy family who is losing her eyesight as the result of a riding accident. She hasn't told her parents about her illness; Capulina urges her to seek medical attention, and she decides to go to Houston to find a doctor. However, she is robbed by three thugs--who earlier were thrashed by Capulina when they tried to rob him--and has to seek shelter in the mansion where Capulina and Raúl work. Capulina passes her off as his cousin.

Since all of Patricia's money was stolen, she needs to visit the bank to withdraw more. Raúl, Capulina, and Rosa go along (Rosa acting as the chauffeur). Raúl learns that for the past six months the bank has been trying to get in touch with him, since he's now old enough to control his trust fund. Capulina, fearing his employer is broke, has been supporting them both with the money he earns in the park.

Back at Raúl's house, two gangs of crooks have broken in (one is led by Raúl's former chauffeur, the other is the same trio of inept criminals who assaulted Capulina and Patricia). Capulina and Raúl defeat the crooks but are accidentally knocked out by Patricia and Rosa! (ha ha)

Patricia visits an eye doctor and learns she can be treated so she won't lose the rest of her sight. Capulina also submits to an examination, and he undergoes an

operation which restores his sight. [There is one bizarre plot hole: Patricia, as mentioned earlier, has not revealed her impaired vision to her parents. She just leaves (intending to go to Houston), and her parents apparently think she has eloped with her rich boyfriend. They don't learn otherwise until he stops by their house one day and asks to see her. Some parents! They subsequently call the police and report a kidnaping, but this never develops into any kind of plot point.]

Lo veo y no lo creo is an odd movie in terms of its treatment of the blind. A fair amount of the "humor" concerns Capulina and Raúl's inability to see (Capulina never really makes much of an effort to really appear to be blind, but Gaspar Guerrero does a little better), which is rather tasteless. There is also a strange scene in which Capulina confronts the three goofy crooks who are pretending to be blind and begging for money in the park. He "shows" them some of his blind friends, who earn money selling food, weaving baskets, and in other ways. The crooks are surrounded by Capulina and the other blind people, beaten, dunked in a pond, and chased off. I suppose the film intends to depict blind people as self-sufficient and it does, after a fashion, but the idea that blind Capulina (with a blind guide dog) can negotiate around the city and take care of all of Raúl's needs is rather hard to swallow.

Angélica Chaín was just beginning her screen career when she made this movie (she had a bit part in *Santo y Blue Demon vs. el Doctor Frankenstein*, as Blue Demon's girlfriend--curiously, Rubén Aguirre also appears in this movie and *Lo veo y no lo creo*) and she looks rather different than she did later in her career. I can't put my finger on it--nose job?--but she more closely resembles Lilia Prado than the later Angélica Chaín. She's still attractive, but just looks...different. She's fine in her role, as is Gaspar Guerrero. I am guessing Guerrero might be Capulina's son, since he appeared in three Capulina movies (the only other film that I am aware he acted in was *Supervivientes de los Andes*). Virma González (wearing huge false buckteeth which are knocked out at the end of the movie) is OK, albeit a little too hyperactive for my taste.

The production values are adequate: most of the movie was shot on real locations (the park, somebody's house) and the technical work is professional.

But whoever told Alfredo Zacarías that he could direct "comedy" should be punished.



La llamada del sexo* [The Call of Sex] (Jorge Camargo-Prod. Filmica Dominicana-Huracán Films-Atlas Films, 1976) *Prod:* Jorge Camargo; *Assoc Prod:* Rossy Mendoza; *Dir:* Tulio Demicheli; *Scr:* L. Bermejo, F[ernando] Orozco; *Photo:* Douglas Sandoval [and Rafael Pacheco, uncredited on Mexican print]; *Music:* Danny Daniel; *Theme Song Sung By:* Donna Haightower; *Prod Chief:* Carmen Berroa; *Sub-Dir:* Federico Canudas; *Film Ed:* Reynaldo P. Portillo, Gabriela Peñalva; *Camera Op:* Rudy Boyer; *Makeup:* Ceres Giraldi; *Decor:* Cruz Baleztena; *Special Optical FX:* Antonio Muñoz Ravelo;

Choreog: Giorgio Aresu, Bob Nixon; *Sound Engin:* Enrique Rodríguez; Mexican-Dominican-Spanish-Colombian co-production

*aka *Obsesión criminal*



Cast: Andrés García (*Victor Litvinov*), Rossy Mendoza (*Mónica Sandoval*), George Hilton (*Carlos Alaria Hernández*), Claudia Gravy (*Gloria*), Verónica Miriel (*Karín*), Eduardo Fajardo (*Sr. Montero*), Frank Braña (*Toife, photographer*), Dan Forrest (*Dino*), Franklin Domínguez, Augusto Fera, Teddy Beltrán, César Olmos, Luciano Angulo, Licena de Bas, Eduardo García, Fernando Casado, Felipe Gil, Víctor Fernández, Carmen Berroa, Fernando Hoppleman, Rubén Echavarría, René Olmos, Dulce María Villeta, Cesarina Castillo, Fernando Tejela

Notes: the 1970s were a fertile decade for Mexican co-productions--in addition to the occasional partnership with Hollywood, Mexican producers allied themselves with Spain, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Argentina, Panama, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, etc. A fair number of these movies were shot outside of Mexico for financial reasons, as was the case with *La llamada del sexo*. Although most of the film (at least in the Mexican release copies) was made in the Dominican Republic (where the two Mexican stars, Andrés García and Rossy Mendoza, were born), some footage was allegedly shot in Miami and Rome (according to the screen credits), and possibly Colombia and Spain (according to other sources). The Mexican version was re-dubbed and the credits were altered: Andrés García receives (undeserved) top billing, and the only producers credited are Jorge Camargo and the Productora Filmica Dominicana (plus Rossy Mendoza as associate producer), while the Spanish and Colombian companies are not mentioned. Tulio Demicheli directed a somewhat similar project the following year in Colombia (*Ángel negro*, with Jorge

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Rivero and Sandra Mozarowsky). Verónica Miriel, a very cute Spanish actress of this era, worked with Rivero in *Rio de la muerte* (1978), another co-production, shot in



Mexico and Puerto Rico.

Carlos, the head of an ad agency in Santo Domingo, wants a divorce from his wife Gloria, but she vows to take every cent he has in the settlement.

[Her ire isn't clearly explained; she is apparently a lesbian and would thus seem to have little reason to be jealous of her husband's alleged womanizing.] Gloria hires private detective Montero to obtain proof of adultery. Carlos makes it easy for her, falling in love with model Mónica; they are surprised in bed by Montero, Gloria, and some photographers.

Before this occurs, Carlos had taken Mónica to his childhood home, now a deserted mansion. The walls of the house are covered with cartoonish scrawls of men and women--all wearing masks--having sex. Carlos explains that his parents held frequent masquerade balls which turned into orgies; he and his step-sister Karín observed the bacchanals as children, which eventually inspired an incestuous relationship between them as they grew older. While in bed with Mónica, Carlos frequently has flashbacks to his life with Karín. He also remembers attacking her boyfriend Dino, being caught in bed with Karín by their parents, and--towards the end of the movie--Dino (now Karín's husband) shooting Karín to death when he finds her having sex with Carlos.

Carlos confronts Gloria in their home. They have an argument, and she falls down a flight of stairs to her death. Carlos takes her body to the abandoned mansion, where he leaves it in a space beneath a window seat. Visiting his friend, psychic Víctor, Carlos demands to know what the future holds. Víctor says Carlos will hit someone with his car, will cause the death of someone near to him, and will be murdered...by Gloria! Carlos, reunited with Mónica, does hit a young boy with car (lightly injuring the child); he tells Víctor the third part of the prophecy must be false, since Gloria is already dead. However, a series of mysterious phone calls and messages seem to indicate she is still alive. Carlos argues with Víctor and accidentally causes the death of his friend, part two of the prediction thus coming true.

Racing to the old house, Carlos searches for Gloria's body, but finds only an old skull. Suddenly, Gloria and Mónica appear and stab Carlos to death. As he dies, he sees them embrace passionately.

La llamada del sexo is rather confusing and illogical, particularly in the twist ending. The audience had earlier seen Gloria tumble down a flight of stairs, saw Carlos put her body in the trunk of his car, and saw him deposit it in the window seat--was she just holding her breath all this time? Also, in the movie's first sequence, Carlos sees

Gloria and her current lover, who is not Mónica. How Gloria met Mónica and became her lover, and why Mónica participates in the murder of Carlos is also left unexplained.

On the positive side, the film takes its time to reveal the whole story of Carlos and Karín. It isn't clear who she is at first, then it seems she's his sister (the step-sister part comes later); there are references to Carlos being "to blame" for her death, but the exact circumstances of her murder (and the revelation that Dino was her husband) come very late in the picture. Carlos is clearly obsessed with the memory of his dead lover, and this affects his sexual and romantic life (possibly one reason Gloria hates him). He does fall for Mónica pretty quickly, however, and manages to overcome his psychological issues and have sex with her.



The performances and production values are generally good. Hilton, Gravy and Fajardo are the best, while García, Mendoza, and Miriel are adequate (Miriél has a lot of screen time but really only one or two dialogue scenes). Verónica Miriel, as noted above, is quite attractive and frequently nude--although for some reason, full frontal nudity does not appear--her youthful sexuality is contrasted with Rosy Mendoza's obvious breast implants and rather coarse (but still attractive) appearance. The film is padded out with a sequence of *carnaval* in Santo Domingo, featuring various floats and dancers. There is also an odd scene in which psychic Víctor appears before a parapsychology conference and performs in a mediocre fashion for the scientists; this seems irrelevant but it may have been included to show Víctor's powers are fallible, thus (mis)leading the viewer to think his three-fold prophecy for Carlos might not be entirely accurate (although it really turns out to be correct in all aspects).



Tempestad (Rescate en el mar) [Storm--Rescue on the Sea] (Hollywood Films, 1978/©1992) *Exec Prod:* Jorge Barragán E.; *Prod:* Jorge Barragán E., Fernando Durán R., Jorge Victoria R.; *Dir:* Fernando Durán R.; *Adapt:* Jorge Barragán E., Jorge Patiño, Jorge de la Rosa, Fernando Durán R.; *Story:* Jorge Barragán E.; *Photo:* Raúl Domínguez; *Music:* Alejandro Giacomán; *Prod Mgr:* Eduardo Danel; *Asst Dir:* Javier Durán E.; *Film Ed:* Max

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Sánchez, Jorge Peña; *Tech Adv*: Capt. Luis Schaufelbergh;
Prod Co-ord: Jesús Fragoso; *Art Dir*: José Luis Garduño;
Camera Op: Roberto Rivera; *Script*: Carlos Durán A.;
Sound Engin: Roberto Martínez; *Action Co-ord*: Bernabé
Palma; *Makeup*: Victoria Celis; *Union*: STIC



Cast: Jorge Russek (*Manny Diaz Kelly*), Alicia Encinas (*Miriam*), Milton Rodríguez (*Capt. Manuel Ferrer González*), Hilda Aguirre (*Manny's asst*), Gilberto Román (*Toño*), Carlos Cardán (*Capt. Martínez*), Jorge Fegan (*prosecuting officer in 1942*), René Cardona Sr. (*Admiral*), María Fernanda (*Manny's wife*), María del Carmen Argentina, Juan Carlos Briseño (*Jorgito*), Leo Villanueva (*Leo*), Gloria Chávez (*Marta*), Juan José Martínez Casado (*Admiral in 1942*), Naty Samperio (*Miriam's mother*), José Ignacio Sambrano (*Miriam's father*), Manolo Cárdenas, Liz Barragán, Gustavo del Castillo, Miguel Gurza, Polo Salazar (*naval officer*), César Ricci, Juan Dosal, Armando Duarte (*naval officer*), Andrea Cantú, Martha Fuentes, Hugo Hernández O., Alejandra Cabarga, Bernabé Palma (*"Velasco" helmsman*), Douglas Sandoval, Sammy Ortiz, Guillermo Aguiluz, Leo García, Ubaldo Olvera

Notes: for reasons unknown (to me), this film was shot in October-November 1978 but was not completed (and copyrighted) until 1992 (the music score by Alejandro Giacomán is definitely not from 1978) and wasn't shown theatrically in Mexico City until 1994. Almost every movie Jorge Barragán was associated with (with the exception of *Satánico pandemonium* and *La hora 24*) was related to the Mexican military: *Águilas de acero*, *Alas doradas*, *Pilotos de combate* (air force), *Comando marino*, *Tempestad* (navy), *Cuna de valientes* (army). There are also several unproduced scripts in the Cineteca by Barragán which seem military-oriented ("Barcos de guerra," "Y también son héroes"). Barragán's armed forces-films feature heroic, patriotic protagonists but suffer

from two major weaknesses--first, budget problems (limiting the amount of realistic action that can be portrayed). Second, because Mexico's military hasn't been in a war for many years (since WWII, and even then only marginally), these movies are consequently compelled to show the armed forces dealing with natural disasters (hurricanes, floods) requiring rescue and humanitarian aid, and the occasional bunch of criminals, drug traffickers, or terrorists.

Tempestad intercuts between several sub-plots before uniting the various protagonists in the latter section of the movie. In one storyline, attractive blonde Miriam argues with her parents and leaves for Acapulco, determined to become a famous actress. She becomes the protege of producer Manny Díaz. Miriam, Manny, Manny's publicist, and his aide Leo board his yacht for a cruise while Manny tries to think of a project for his newest discovery. [Curiously, Manny is depicted as rather prudish--he's a married man apparently having an affair with Miriam, but doesn't want her to "show too much" in her film debut.] Miriam, bored, has an affair with Leo (a nice trick, considering the relatively small size of the yacht they are on).

Meanwhile, Capt. Manuel Ferrer has convinced the Navy to fund a ship ("constructed entirely in Mexico") to be used for training and for oceanological investigations. Ferrer walks with a limp as a result of his experiences in World War Two (shown in flashback). In July 1942, Ferrer was court-martialed for failing to come to the aid of the tanker "Potrero del Llano" when it was torpedoed by a Nazi submarine. Ferrer explained his ship had leaking fuel tanks and had to return to port. Several weeks later, Ferrer proves he is no coward when his ship rams an attacking U-boat. However, Ferrer's dedication to the Navy costs him his marriage: his wife leaves him, taking their young daughter.

Back in 1978, Ferrer's dream comes true with the ship "Velasco" is launched, under the command of his friend Capt. Martínez. One of the passengers on board is Ferrer's young grandson, Jorgito. The ship goes on a cruise off Mexico's Pacific coast, studying microorganisms and other environmental stuff.

Suddenly, "Hurricane Diana" strikes! The Mexican armed forces spring into action, helping victims of the storm. Manny's yacht, meanwhile, is sinking (Miriam takes this opportunity to confess her affair with Leo--way to make a bad situation worse, girl!). Captain Martínez takes the "Velasco" to the rescue, picking up the movie producer and his pals. But wouldn't you know it, then there's an explosion and fire on the "Velasco," and it sinks! Leo gets eaten by a shark but Martínez, sailor Toño, Jorgito, Manny, Miriam, and Manny's publicist are washed up on a desert island. After some scenes of various people worrying (Manny's wife and daughter, Captain Ferrer and his ex-wife and daughter), the castaways are rescued by a seaplane. Ferrer is reunited with Jorgito, Manny's wife overcomes her jealousy and greets Manny (who had earlier renounced his affair with Miriam), and everyone is happy. Miriam decides being an "actress" is not for her, and returns to her parents. The film concludes with footage of

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Mexican naval forces passing in review on 1 June (Navy Day).

Tempestad is pretty sincere but ultimately silly, awkwardly mixing melodrama with small-scale scenes of sailors in action (beefed up with some stock footage)--the fire and explosion that sinks the "Velasco" is depicted in quick cuts with a lot of smoke, fire, and people running around, but at no time does it actually look like a ship is sinking. The movie does its best to foster the idea that the peace-time Mexican navy has an important job to do and is good at it (the same sentiments that are displayed in all of Barragán's other military-theme pictures), but the predictable melodramatic sub-plots just serve as distractions, and the neat resolution of various moral dilemmas is hard to believe (the only thing missing is a reconciliation between Ferrer and his wife; at least the film is honest here--she's still bitter after 35 years!).

Overall, this is a reasonably slick motion picture but only moderate entertainment.



Crónica roja ["Crime Story"] (CONACITE DOS, 1977) *Dir-Scr:* Fernando Vallejo; *Photo:* Raúl Domínguez; *Music:* Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.]; *Prod Mgr:* Eduardo Danel; *Asst Dir:* Ángel Rodríguez; *Film Ed:* Maximino Sánchez; *Art Dir:* José Luis Garduño; *Camera Op:* Roberto Rivera; *Sound Mixer:* Ricardo Saldivar; *Union:* STIC

Cast: Mario Saavedra (*Carlos Mario Albarrán*), Gerardo Vigil (*Víctor Manuel Albarrán*), Carlos Cardán (*José Luis Higuera*), Guillermo Orea (*don Luis*), René Cardona (*judge*), Leonor Llausás (*Sra. Albarrán*), Eduardo Noriega (*investigating judge*), José L. Murillo (*Juan Antonio Albarrán*), Roberto Cañedo (*prosecutor*), Jorge Fegan (*defense attorney*), Víctor Alcocer (*mother's boyfriend*), Jesús Gómez (*boys' school aide*), Regino Herrera (*man with beer*), Carlos Suárez (*Filiberto González*), César Sobrevals (*detective*), Marcelo Villamil (*juvenile judge*), Enrique Pontón (*detective*), Francisco Llopis, J.J. Martínez Casado (*director of boys' school*), Fernando Pinkus (*priest in workshop at boys' school*), Luis Guevara (*bus passenger*), Manuel "Gordo" Alvarado (*don Antonio María*), Rigoberto Carmona (*investigator*), Rubén Calderón (*forensic doctor*), Alejandro Rábago, Armando Pacheco, Ernesto Burgueño, Francisco García Rolón, Pablo Ramírez, Francisco del Toro, Gala Guerrero, Inés Murillo Nieto (*Toñita*), José Luis Almada, José Luis Flores, María Antonieta Murillo, Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, Manuel Anaya, Martha Rios, Raúl Valerio, Sergio Morante

Notes: Fernando Vallejo directed only three films in Mexico before returning to his native Colombia and dedicating himself to writing novels (at least one of which was filmed by someone else, *La Virgen de los sicarios*). His first two movies--*Crónica roja* and *En la tormenta*--are rather unusual, since they are set in Colombia but shot in Mexico (his third picture, *Barrio de campeones*, was filmed in and set in Mexico City). *En la tormenta* concerns political and factional violence in Colombia, but *Crónica roja* could have easily been translated to a Mexican setting since the plot has nothing particularly

"local" about it (in fact, some viewers might not even notice the movie is set in Colombia--the uniforms of the police and some other non-Mexican costumes and cultural-local references are the only major tip-offs).



As the film begins, Víctor Manuel Albarrán (referred to as "Manuel" most of the time) hurriedly packs some clothes and flees from his home. He had been arrested by customs officials on suspicion of smuggling: kept incommunicado in the customs building, he killed two guards and escaped. Manuel's fugitive status causes the disintegration of his family: his father, Juan Antonio, is arrested; his mother, little sister, and teenaged younger brother Carlos Mario (called "Mario") move in with the mother's boyfriend. Mario is thrown out of school after fighting with some other students about Manuel, and goes to work as a messenger in a lawyer's office.

After a legal hearing, Manuel and his two guards stop by his mother's new home for dinner. Manuel, with Mario's help, escapes. Later, Mario brings Manuel some clothes so he can flee the country, but both brothers are captured by the police. Mario is sentenced to a short term in a vocational school for boys.

At his trial, Manuel's lawyer claims his client killed the two guards out of fear for his own life, but the prosecutor argues that Manuel took advantage of the men's lax attitude to murder them (one of the men was shot in his underwear, suggesting he had already gone to bed). Manuel is convicted; as he leaves the court, he's mobbed by young women asking for his autograph.

Later, Mario and two of Manuel's former prison friends arrange his escape from prison, killing several guards in the process. One of the plotters is shot to death as they flee: Mario, Manuel, and José Luis go on the run. They board a bus heading into Colombia's rural hinterlands, but a landslide (and a roadblock, possibly

erected by "bandits") interrupts their journey. When the bus--under the direction of some soldiers--tries to drive over the ruined mountain road, it rolls off a cliff and explodes (fortunately, no passengers were on board). The three men finally reach a provincial city but are tracked down by the police, who surround the block. After a gun battle in which José Luis and numerous policemen die, Mario and Manuel surrender. However, as they exit the house, hands held high, they are riddled with bullets by the police.



Crónica roja has a slight political agenda--this may have been the reason the setting was not changed to Mexico, because it that case it might have run afoul of the censors. The authorities are shown to be somewhat oppressive, jailing Manuel's father for "suspicion," and acting in a rather high-handed manner at other times (notably the summary execution of the brothers at the end). On the other hand, Mario is treated extremely fairly by the juvenile court judge after he tries to help Manuel the first time, and the two brothers do commit various cold-blooded murders in the course of the movie. Curiously, Manuel's guilt in his original case--the deaths of the two customs guards--is never clearly proven; in the middle of the final gun battle, José Luis "out of curiosity" asks Manuel if he murdered the men or not, and Manuel refuses to answer (suggesting the prosecutor's arguments were correct).

For the most part, however, *Crónica roja* is a straightforward action drama with only a few pauses for introspection (the "bus" sequence--foreshadowing *En la tormenta*--is the main example of this) and little character development. The acting is generally good, and the cast is loaded with veterans (including José L. Murillo, who looks odd with his hair dyed black, and René Cardona, whose dialogue was completely post-dubbed by someone else). Gerardo Vigil is OK but Mario Saavedra is really quite good as the teenaged Mario. The pacing is brisk and the production values are fine: the recreation of 1950s Colombia seems evocative to me (although I have no frame of reference), with a lot of vintage cars, etc. (Vallejo was nominated for a Ariel for Set Decor).

Crónica roja won the Best First Work Ariel Award. Overall, it's an engrossing crime drama.



Nacido para matar [Born to Kill] (Víctor Films-Cin. EGA, 1986/©1987) *Assoc Prod:* Edgardo Gazcón; *Dir:* Juan Manuel Herrera; *Scr:* Sergio Alvares [sic] Acosta; *Photo:* Juan Manuel Herrera; *Music:* Alejandro Pérez; *Prod Mgr:* Alejandro Sosa; *Prod Co-ord:* Ramón Loranca V.; *Film Ed:* Francisco Chiu; *Makeup:* José Olivares; *Sound:* Eduardo Martínez; *Sound Ed:* Mary Jiménez; *Re-rec:* Miguel Larraguivel

Cast: Luis Aguilar (*Alberto de la Mora*), Pedro Infante Jr. (*Gilberto de la Mora*), Agustín Bernal (*Franky*), Diana Ferreti (*Alicia Jiménez*), Mario Cid (*Capt. Rodríguez*), Bruno Rey (*"Mystery Man"*), Viviana Olivia (*?Laura*), Blanca Nieves (*Franky's girlfriend*), Luis Guevara (*Alfonso "El Yuca"*), José Viller, Ricardo Piña, Ofelia López, José Luis Avendaño (*billiard hall mgr.*), Gulliver, ?Lauro Salazar (*Lauro*)

Notes: this is a fairly entertaining if ultimately rather pointless movie. It's notable for a fair amount of graphic gore and violence, which isn't especially realistic but is amusing since it was clearly intended to be "over the top." For example, Franky is attacked by 3 thugs in the street--he beats them up (smashing one's face through a car window), with accompanying big spurts of fake blood (the blood tube is visible in one shot), leaves them unconscious on the street, then runs over their bodies with his car three times!! Curiously, there is very little nudity to go along with the gore: Viviana Olivia has a brief topless scene, but Blanca Nieves and Diana Ferreti only go as far as skimpy lingerie.

Franky is hired by a gangster who extorts money from businessmen and has them murdered if they fail to pay. Two of Franky's victims are shown: one man is chased into an abandoned building, stabbed repeatedly, then stripped and mutilated to delay identification; the other man, while taking a shower, is punctured numerous times by a power drill wielded by Franky.

Alberto de la Mora receives demands for a million-dollar payment. His son Gilberto and his secretary-mistress Alicia are upset, particularly when they see the banner headlines about Franky's first victim. [Oddly enough, the newspaper is the "New York Times" and yet the headlines are in Spanish! This is puzzling: the movie is not supposed to be taking place in New York--the credits unreel over footage of Mexico City landmarks--so why the Times was selected is beyond me. It's also unlikely any newspaper would have giant banner headlines about the murder of a private citizen.] Police captain Rodríguez promises Alberto protection and in fact Franky's first attempt to kill the businessman is foiled by alert policemen guarding Alberto's house.

Gilberto tries another method. Through Franky's "agent," Alfonso "El Yuca," Gilberto meets the contract killer and offers him 10 million pesos to lay off. Franky takes the cash but still intends to honor his contract. Tipped off by Alicia (who's in on the extortion plot), Franky makes another attempt to kill Alberto, but is shot to death by Alberto and his son; Alicia is hit by a stray bullet

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and dies. As the movie concludes, the mastermind behind the plot requests another "even better" hitman.

Large portions of *Nacido para matar* focus on Franky, played by the muscular Agustín Bernal. Bernal is quite good in the role, and looks very impressive (running, jumping, climbing). He's depicted as a psychotic killer but



has no "back story" explaining his personality.

In one bizarre sequence (shot with only music on the soundtrack), Franky gets drunk and

breaks into a random apartment, where two senior citizens are eating dinner. He wrecks their home and terrorizes them (unfortunately, it's eminently clear he's not really "hitting" the old man)--the husband dies of his injuries and the wife has a heart attack and dies as well.

Nacido para matar is noteworthy as one of the very few movies in his '80s "comeback" where Luis Aguilar sings (lip-syncs, whatever), in this case a romantic song to Diana Ferreti's character in a restaurant. Aguilar is good in his role, as are Ferreti and Infante Jr., but Bernal has the flashy part. Bruno Rey, despite his prominent billing, is never seen--the gangster is only shown from behind, sitting in a chair in his apartment, and in fact only his arm is seen! (Rey's voice is heard on the soundtrack, however) It's also amusing to see Blanca Nieves play the saxophone and sing as part of her nightclub act (she's pretty good at both, assuming it's really her!). She sings the film's sort-of theme song, "Nacidos para matar" as Franky sits in the audience.

The production values aren't bad, considering. Juan Manuel Herrera not only directed, he handled the cinematography and although the picture was filmed on location and looks like it was shot on cheap stock, the photography is rather good (one series of shots has an odd "mask" covering part of the screen, as if someone left the lens cover half on!). The music score uses various canned themes but is acceptable, but there is an annoying buzz in various dialog scenes.

Likeably sleazy.



Morir a mi manera [To Die My Own Way]
(Televisine—Goyri y Asociados, 1993, ©1994) *Prod/Dir:* Sergio Goyri; *Assoc Prod:* Televisine; *Scr:* Walter Fuentes, Sergio Goyri; *Photo:* Tim Ross; *Music:* Claudio Brugger, Juan Carlos Morelli; *Film Ed:* Enrique Murillo

Cast: Mario Almada (*Mario*), Telli Fillipini [sic] (*Grecia*), Roberto Ballesteros (*Arturo Juárez*), Alfonso Munguía (*Ernesto Vargas*), Luis Gatica (*Col. Max*), Mel Herrera (*Sgt. Contra*), Fernando Sáenz (*Joaquín Ornelas*), Héctor Sáez (*Samuels*), Armando Coria (*Armando*),

Gabriel Godínez (*Pedro*), Rodolfo Amezcua (*El Capo*), Vezania Amezcua (*woman in bar*)

Notes: slow-paced film with brief periods of exciting action and a hazy plot. A gang kidnaps the young daughter of businessman Samuels, and orders him to deliver some important papers in exchange for her release. Samuels asks his friend, ex-cop Mario (now the municipal president of the town), to cover him during the meeting. Once they have the documents, the kidnapers shoot Samuels as he runs towards his daughter (whom he then discovers is dead). The kidnapers explode a bomb via remote control, killing Samuels, then escape, although Mario wounds one of the criminals as they flee.

Federal policeman Arturo comes to town to investigate; he is one of Mario's former students. Arturo and Grecia, Mario's spoiled daughter, become friends. Meanwhile, the kidnapers attack a fishing village and wipe out the inhabitants. Arturo and his men assault the criminals' hideout but fail to catch the ringleaders. The man behind the scheme is Ernesto Vargas, who runs a seafood wholesale operation: he doesn't want the local fishermen to form a cooperative and demand higher prices for their catch. After murdering the corrupt local police chief (another good explosion), the gang kills one of Arturo's men and abducts Grecia. Mario is instructed to bring his signed resignation to trade for his daughter's life. A gun battle breaks out between Arturo and the police and Mario on one side, and Vargas and his henchmen on the other. The criminals are all killed or arrested and Grecia is reunited with her father.

As noted in the opening paragraph, *Morir a mi manera* has a lot of action but the sequences between the shoot-outs and explosions are kind of dull. There are several long scenes between Arturo and Grecia, but no real romance develops—mostly she whines about how her father doesn't spend enough time with her. Even the build-ups to the action are slow and boring. Sergio Goyri is a competent director but he can't make the lulls interesting and since the plot is paper-thin, he isn't given much help. Vargas' scheme is never clearly delineated, and the kidnapers seem more like para-military terrorists or guerrillas than gangsters (yet this is also left up in the air).

Telly Fillipini's role is rather shrewish, but she looks mighty fine in a collection of low-cut tops and tight pants (I have a sneaking suspicion she paid a visit to a plastic surgeon or bought a Wonderbra, or something). Roberto Ballesteros is earnest but miscast as a heroic cop (he's much better playing psychos). Almada, Munguía, and Gatica are all fine.



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