

SANTO VERSUS BLU-RAY

ARTICLE BY DAVID WILT

Rodolfo Guzmán Huerta (1917-1984) had been a journeyman professional wrestler for nearly a decade before he adopted the persona of “El Santo” in 1942. He went on to become an icon of Mexican popular culture, starring in 50 films and appearing in a long-running comic book, in addition to his career in the ring. Santo was Mexico’s superhero, defender of the weak, friend to the friendless, implacable enemy of evil in all forms.

Santo’s films played repeatedly in cinemas around the world, and later on television. When home video came into existence, most of his movies became readily available on VHS and DVD, but generally only in their original Spanish-language versions. Only four Santo films had been dubbed into English in the pre-video era: *Santo contra los zombies* (as “Invasion of the Zombies”), *Santo contra las mujeres vampiro* (“Samson and the Vampire Women”), *Santo en el museo de cera* (“Samson in the Wax Museum”), and *Santo contra el Dr. Muerte* (“Masked Man Strikes Again”). English subtitled versions of some other Santo films eventually emerged in the video and Internet era, giving non-Spanish speakers the opportunity to enjoy the adventures of the Silver-Masked Man more fully.

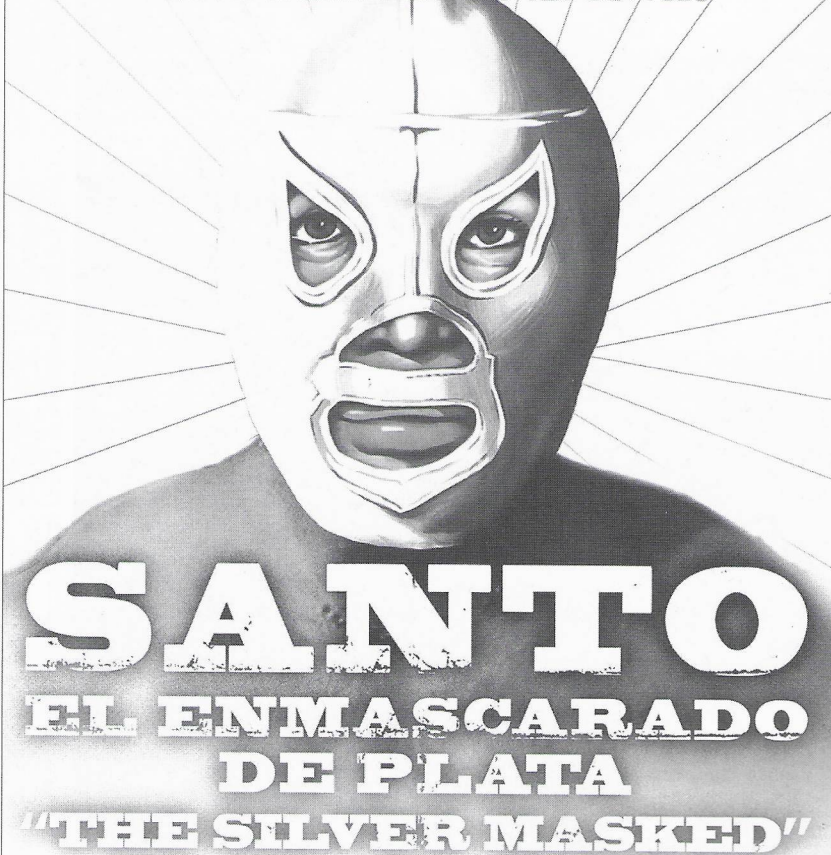
VCI Entertainment has obtained the rights to a number of Santo films that had been newly dubbed into English for Robert Rodríguez’s “El Rey” network. El Rey was an English-language television service, founded in 2013, that showed (among other things) Mexican films to Latinx viewers whose Spanish skills were perhaps not perfect, but who wanted to get in touch with their heritage. El Rey shuttered its cable television operation in 2020, but has announced plans to begin a streaming partnership with Cinedigm.

VCI released the newly-dubbed version of the notorious “nude-scenes” Santo picture *El vampiro y el sexo* early in 2021, and will follow it with an eight-film Santo box set in early 2022 (street date January 18, 2022). Included will be: *Santo in the Wax Museum* (Santo en el museo de cera, 1963), *Santo in the Treasure of Dracula* (Santo en el tesoro de Drácula, 1968), *Santo vs. the Riders of Terror* (Santo contra los jinetes del terror, 1970), *Santo in the Vengeance of the Mummy* (Santo en la venganza de la momia, 1970), *Santo vs. Frankenstein’s Daughter* (Santo contra la hija de Frankenstein, 1971), *Santo and Blue Demon vs. Dracula and the Wolfman* (Santo y Blue Demon contra Drácula y el Hombre Lobo, 1972), *Santo and Blue Demon vs. Dr. Frankenstein* (Santo y Blue Demon contra el Dr. Frankenstein, 1973), and *Santo and Mantequilla Napoles in the Vengeance of the Llorona* (Santo y Mantequilla Nápoles en la venganza de la Llorona, 1974).

With the exception of *Santo in the Wax Museum*, these films are all in color and represent the middle period of Santo’s screen career, when he was working at the large Churubusco studio facility and in some cases co-producing his own films. Production values are generally good, unlike some of the ‘70s Santo films shot elsewhere (such as Ecuador, Colombia, Haiti, the USA, and Puerto Rico). All these films have fantasy content (or, in the case of *Riders of Terror* and *Vengeance of the Mummy*, were at least sold that way), compared to Santo’s less-interesting (in the opinion of some) crime and “straight” adventure pictures made in this era. They provide a good glimpse of a major portion of Santo’s screen career which has been largely unavailable in English.

Santo in the Wax Museum, as one of the original dubbed Santo films, may be familiar to some English-speaking audiences, although the K. Gordon Murray version hasn’t been widely available for some time (and may have never been released on video/DVD in an “authorized” edition). This is the third film in what could be considered the original Santo trilogy produced by Filmadora Panamericana—*Santo vs. the Zombies*, *Santo vs. las mujeres vampiro*, and *Santo en el museo de cera*—which are fairly consistent in their “look” and the usage of the Santo character. Santo worked for numerous producers during his long screen career: in 1971-72, for instance, he made ten films for six different companies. The VCI box set contains mostly movies produced by Cinematográfica Calderón in co-production with Santo himself. *Wax Museum*, the only non-Calderón picture in the bunch, borrows from *Mystery of the Wax Museum*, *House of Wax*, and even *Island of Lost Souls*, and has a rare cinematic instance of a Holocaust survivor portrayed as a villain (and he’s not, as one might expect, murdering fugitive Nazis)! Santo, as in the previous two Panamericana pictures, is used in something of a *deus ex machina* role, with more action scenes than “dramatic” footage.

8-MOVIE ENGLISH LANGUAGE BOXSET



Santo in the Treasure of Dracula is the original Mexican release version of *El vampiro y el sexo* (without the nude scenes added for export markets). For years *Treasure of Dracula* was mostly available—even on home video—in a black-and-white version, but its 1968 theatrical release was in color, and that is what viewers will see here. *Treasure of Dracula* is essentially the same as *El vampiro y el sexo*, but with alternate “clothed” takes of the handful of scenes featuring nudity—Santo’s films were routinely classified as acceptable for all audiences in his native land, due to his popularity with children. Santo’s early films were probably influenced by “Batman” comics, particularly in their depiction of Santo’s gadget-filled headquarters, but *Treasure of Dracula* takes this to a level not seen before (or afterwards) in his films: Santo is now a scientific genius who has invented a time machine! The film is split into two parts, one—without Santo—set in the 19th century which paraphrases Bram Stoker’s original novel, and the other a contemporary story (with Santo). This is an interesting and rather radical departure for Santo movies in this period, when he was generally front-and-center from the outset.

Santo vs. the Riders of Terror is a Western with horror overtones, and is notable as the only Santo film set entirely in the past (some others had a combination of contemporary scenes and period scenes). Demonizing lepers isn’t cool (and Santo objects to that), but watching Santo ride a horse is fun. It’s a bit of a stretch to work a wrestling match into a 19th-century story, but the movie manages to pull it off.

Santo in the Vengeance of the Mummy was one of two 1970 films in which Santo battled mummies (the other was *Las momias de Guanajuato*). The mummy’s backstory in this one is quite similar to the “Aztec Mummy” movies, also written by Alfredo Salazar, and the monster’s costume and makeup are quite effective. A point of trivia interest is the appearance of Santo’s youngest son, Jorge Guzmán, who a decade later would become professional wrestler El Hijo del Santo.

Santo vs. Frankenstein’s Daughter and *Santo and Blue Demon vs. Dracula and the Wolfman* are two of the better Santo films of this period, with multiple monsters in each one. The titular menace of *Frankenstein’s Daughter* is played by Gina Romand—who’d attempted to kill Santo the previous year as a vampire queen in *La venganza de las mujeres vampiro*—as Dr. Freda Frankenstein. Apparently Santo’s blood can magically reverse aging (a premise repeated in 2002’s *Star Trek: Nemesis*, replacing Santo with Captain Picard and Dr. Frankenstein with Shinzon) and Freda Frankenstein hates those wrinkles. As noted, Santo has to deal with two varieties of Frankenstein’s monsters, both played by Gerardo Zepeda.



Santo and Blue Demon vs. Dracula and the Wolfman is one of the most entertaining films in Santo's career, pairing Santo and Blue Demon and pitting them against an unusually strong lineup of villains, led by Dracula (Aldo Monti, repeating his role from *Santo in the Treasure of Dracula*) and Rufus Rex the Wolf Man (Larry Talbot and Waldemar Daninsky must have been busy), as well as an evil hunchback, some vampiric and lycanthropic hench-people, and a bunch of gangsters to boot. Slick and colorful with a couple of surprising plot twists, this is quite fun.

Santo and Blue Demon vs. Doctor Frankenstein, the second "Santo vs. the Frankenstein Family" film benefits again from

the presence of Santo and Blue Demon, who work well together (even though, in real life, they were rivals in the ring). It isn't quite as good as *Frankenstein's Daughter*—the primary monster, created by "Irving Frankenstein," isn't very impressive, basically just a muscular black guy—but it still has the two superhero wrestlers as the protagonists, which is always nice to see.

In the final film of the set, Santo teams up with another famous real-life athlete, boxing champion José "Mantequilla" Nápoles, to battle a legendary Mexican monster, La Llorona, in *Santo and Mantequilla Napoles in the Vengeance of the Llorona*. La Llorona (The Crying Woman) had appeared in a mere handful of Mexican films prior to this, but the 21st century has seen nearly two dozen (!) more movies (the majority not made in Mexico) featuring some incarnation of the character. Santo had encountered a number of female monsters in his career—mostly vampires and the occasional witch—but in this movie the *real* villain is a gangster played by René Cardona Sr. (who, coincidentally, had directed the 1959 version of *La Llorona*). For a change, Cardona wasn't behind the camera; the last four films in the box set were all directed by Miguel M. Delgado, longtime house director for famed comedian Cantinflas but also capable of doing any other genre, including horror (*Misterios de la magia negra*). *Vengeance of the Llorona* is another film in which Santo's son Jorge Guzmán appears, albeit in a minor role, and La Llorona was played by Kiki Herrera Calles, granddaughter of former Mexican president Plutarco Elías Calles (although it's unlikely she donned the—pretty decent—monster makeup).

The Santo box-set films will be 4K restorations, English-language versions only. The package will include four discs in Blu-ray/DVD, and a special slipcase will be offered for the first 2,000 sets.

Extras on the set include some newly-created video material. David Wilt (full disclosure: me), whose "The Films of El Santo" website has been online since 1996, contributes video introductions for each of the films, and a video essay on "The History of El Santo." There is also what was probably the final interview ever done with René Cardona III—who sadly passed away on May 16, 2021, shortly after recording the video—who talks about his famous film family. René Cardona Sr. (his grandfather) and René Cardona Jr. (his father) were prolific filmmakers, with literally hundreds of credits as producer, director, writer, and actor between them. René Sr. directed seven Santo films (three of which are included in this box set), as well as acting in several; René Jr. directed two Santo films with his father. René III started out as a child actor, playing a bit role in *Santo contra Capulina*, went to film school in the USA, then embarked on a directorial career of his own. The Santo box set also includes extensive photo/poster galleries for each of the films in the set, and liner notes by yours truly.

VCI also released a double feature of *Night of the Bloody Apes* and *Doctor of Doom* (Las luchadoras contra el médico asesino) on October 19, 2021. This Blu-ray/DVD combo pack comes in a special slipcase (first 2,000 orders) and—unlike some previous releases of *Night of the Bloody Apes*—has a wealth of extras. Included are a commentary track by writer Travis Crawford, a video essay by this writer, original trailers, and photo/poster galleries.

The company will also be releasing a number of other Mexican films, including some classic non-Santo fantasy films, later in 2022.

Dubbing may not be to everyone's taste—but then again, neither are subtitles. So if your Spanish isn't good enough to watch the originals—or even if it is, and you'd like upgraded 4K restorations and various bonus extras—VCI's new Santo set should serve to introduce the Silver-Masked Man to a wider audience than before.



Cinematográfica Califorma, S. A. y Santo el enmascarado de Plata presentan a:

SANTO
EL ENMASCARADO DE PLATA

BLUE DEMON

ALDO MONTI
AGUSTIN MARTINEZ SOLARES
NUBIA MARTI
Ma. EUGENIA SAN MARTIN

SANTO Y BLUE DEMON CONTRA DRACULA Y EL HOMBRE LOBO

en EASTMANCOLOR

con WALLY BARRON - JORGE MONDRAGON
La niña LISSY FIELDS - ANTONIO RIZEL - CARLOS SUAREZ - IURDES BATISTA y CARLOS LEON
Luchadores: EL ANGEL BLANCO - RENATO - EL HIPPIE - Narrador: ENRIQUE LEANES
Argumento y adaptación ALFREDO SALAZAR
Dirección de **MIGUEL M. DELGADO**

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Filmadora PANAMERICANA, S. A.

Presenta a:

SANTO
EL ENMASCARADO de PLATA

CLAUDIO BROOK
RUBEN ROJID
NORMA MORA
ROXANA BELLINI

SANTO EN EL MUSEO de CERA