

= The Mask of Zorro =

The Mask of Zorro is a 1998 American swashbuckler film based on the character of the masked outlaw Zorro created by Johnston McCulley . It was directed by Martin Campbell and stars Antonio Banderas , Anthony Hopkins , Catherine Zeta @-@ Jones , and Stuart Wilson . The film features the original Zorro , Don Diego de la Vega ( Hopkins ) , escaping from prison to find his long @-@ lost daughter ( Zeta @-@ Jones ) and avenge the death of his wife at the hands of the corrupt governor Rafael Montero ( Wilson ) . He is aided by his successor ( Banderas ) , who is pursuing his own vendetta against the governor 's right @-@ hand man while falling in love with de la Vega 's daughter .

Producer Steven Spielberg had initially developed the film for TriStar Pictures with directors Mikael Salomon and Robert Rodriguez , before Campbell signed on in 1996 . Salomon cast Sean Connery as Don Diego de la Vega , while Rodriguez brought Banderas in the lead role . Connery dropped out and was replaced with Hopkins , and The Mask of Zorro began filming in January 1997 at Estudios Churubusco in Mexico City , Mexico . The film was released in the United States on July 17 , 1998 to financial and critical success . The Legend of Zorro , a sequel also starring Banderas and Zeta @-@ Jones and directed by Campbell , was released in 2005 , but did not fare as well as its predecessor .

= = Plot = =

In 1821 , Don Diego De La Vega ( Anthony Hopkins ) fights against the Spanish in the Mexican War of Independence as Zorro , a mysterious swordsman who defends the Mexican peasants and commoners of Las Californias . Don Rafael Montero ( Stuart Wilson ) , the governor of the region , learns of De La Vega 's alter ego , and attempts to arrest him . De La Vega 's wife is killed during the scuffle . Montero imprisons De La Vega and takes his infant daughter , Eléna , as his own . Twenty years later Montero returns to California as a civilian , alongside Eléna ( Catherine Zeta Jones ) , who has grown into a beautiful woman . Montero 's reappearance coincides with De La Vega 's escape from prison . He encounters a thief , Alejandro Murrieta ( Antonio Banderas ) , who , as a child , once did Zorro a favor . De La Vega decides that fate has brought them together , and agrees to make Alejandro his protégé , grooming him to be the new Zorro . Murrieta agrees to undergo De La Vega 's training regimen in order to be able to take revenge on Captain Harrison Love ( Matt Letscher ) , Montero 's right @-@ hand man , who was responsible for killing Murrieta 's brother , Joaquin .

While still being trained , Murrieta steals a black stallion resembling Tornado from the local garrison . De La Vega scolds Murrieta , claiming that Zorro was a servant of the people , not a thief and adventurer . He challenges Alejandro to gain Montero 's trust instead . Murrieta poses as visiting nobleman named Don Alejandro del Castillo y García , with De La Vega as his servant , and attends a party at Montero 's hacienda . At the party he gains Eléna 's admiration and enough of Montero 's trust to be invited to a secret meeting where several other noblemen are present . Montero hints at a plan to retake California for the Dons by buying it from General Santa Anna , who needs money to fund his upcoming war with the United States .

Montero takes Murrieta and the noblemen to a secret gold mine known as " El Dorado " , where peasants and prisoners are used for slave labor . Montero plans to buy California from Santa Anna using gold mined from Santa Anna 's own land . De La Vega uses this opportunity to become closer to Eléna , though he identifies himself as " Bernardo " the servant , learning that Montero told Eléna that her mother died in childbirth . While walking in a market , Eléna meets the woman who was her nanny . De La Vega sends Murrieta , dressed as Zorro , to steal Montero 's map leading to the gold mine . Zorro duels Montero , Love , and their guards at the hacienda . When Zorro escapes , Eléna attempts to retrieve Montero 's map from the swordsman , but he seduces her , leading to a passionate kiss before he flees .

Terrified of Santa Anna 's retribution if he discovers that he is being paid with his own gold , Montero decides to destroy the mine and kill the workers . De La Vega tells Murrieta to release the

workers on his own so that De La Vega can reclaim Eléna . Murrieta sets off , feeling betrayed by Diego 's vendetta . De La Vega corners Montero at the hacienda and reveals his identity , but Montero captures him by threatening Eléna . As he is taken away , De La Vega tells Eléna the name of the flowers she recognized upon her arrival in California , convincing her that he is her father . She releases De La Vega from his cell and they proceed to the mine , where Murrieta and De La Vega defeat Love and Montero . Eléna and Murrieta free the workers before the explosives go off , and then find the mortally wounded De La Vega . He makes peace with Murrieta before dying , passing the mantle of Zorro to him , and gives his blessings for his marriage to Eléna . In a closing sequence they are shown to be living together with a son named Joaquin , in honor of Murrieta 's brother .

= = Cast = =

Antonio Banderas as Alejandro Murrieta / Zorro : Despite claims made by several media outlets and Antonio Banderas , Banderas was not the first Spanish actor to portray Zorro . Spanish actor José Suárez was cast as Zorro in the 1953 film *La montaña sin ley* , and in the 1960s @-@ 70s Spanish actor Carlos Quiney ( aka Charles Quiney ) portrayed Zorro in three films : *Zorro Il Cavaliere della Vendetta* , *Zorro Il Dominatore* and *Zorro la Maschera della Vendetta* . Banderas was paid \$ 5 million for the role . The character of Alejandro Murrieta was conceived as the fictional brother of the real @-@ life Joaquin Murrieta , making the character either Mexican or Chilean . To prepare for his role , Banderas practiced with the Olympic fencing team in Spain for four months , before studying additional fencing and swordsmanship with Anthony Hopkins and Catherine Zeta @-@ Jones . The three were trained by Bob Anderson during pre @-@ production in Mexico , spending 10 hours a day for two months specifically on fight scenes from the film . During interviews for *The Lord of the Rings : The Fellowship of the Ring* , Anderson rated Banderas the best natural talent he worked with . " We used to call him Grumpy Bob on the set , he was such a perfectionist , " director Martin Campbell reflected . " He was incredibly inventive , and also refused to treat any of the actors as stars . They would complain about the intensity of the training , but having worked with him there 's nobody I 'd rather use . "

José María de Tavira portrays a young Alejandro Murrieta .

Anthony Hopkins as Don Diego de la Vega / Zorro : Hopkins was cast in December 1996 , one month before filming began . Hopkins , known for his dramatic acting , took up the role over his enthusiasm to be in an action film .

Catherine Zeta @-@ Jones as Elena Montero : The actress signed on in November 1996 , when Spielberg saw her performance in the *Titanic* miniseries and recommended her to Campbell . Despite being a Welsh actress portraying a Latina character , Zeta @-@ Jones discovered similarities between her " volatile " Celtic temper and the Latin temperament of Eléna . Izabella Scorupco , who worked with Campbell on *GoldenEye* , and Judith Godrèche both screen tested for the part . The actress credits *The Mask of Zorro* as her breakthrough in entering A @-@ list recognition .

María and Mónica Fernández Cruz portray Elena de la Vega ( infant ) .

Stuart Wilson as Don Rafael Montero : Armand Assante had initially been cast in the role , but dropped out due to scheduling conflicts with *The Odyssey* . Stuart Wilson , who Campbell previously directed in *No Escape* , was cast in Assante 's place four months after .

Matt Letscher as Captain Harrison Love

Tony Amendola as Don Luiz

Pedro Armendáriz , Jr. as Don Pedro

Victor Rivers as Joaquín Murrieta

Diego Sieres as Young Joaquín Murrieta

L. Q. Jones as Three @-@ fingered Jack

Julieta Rosen as Esperanza De La Vega , Don Diego 's beloved wife and Elena 's mother

Maury Chaykin as Prison Warden

= = Production = =

= = = Development = = =

In October 1992 , TriStar Pictures and Steven Spielberg 's Amblin Entertainment were planning to start production on Zorro the following year , and hired Joel Gross to rewrite the script after they were impressed with his adaptation of The Three Musketeers . At the time , Spielberg was producing Zorro with the potential to direct . Gross completed his rewrite in March 1993 , and TriStar entered pre @-@ production , creating early promotion for the film that same month at the ShoWest trade show . By December 1993 , Branko Lustig was producing the film with Spielberg , and Mikael Salomon was attached as director . In August 1994 , Sean Connery was cast as Don Diego de la Vega , while Salomon stated that the rest of the major cast would be Hispanic or Latino . Pre @-@ production proceeded even further in August when Salomon compiled test footage for a planned April 1995 start date .

Connery and Salomon eventually dropped out , and in September 1995 , Robert Rodriguez , fresh from the success of Desperado , signed to direct with Antonio Banderas , who had also starred in Desperado , playing the title role . TriStar and Amblin had been surprised by Rodriguez 's low @-@ budget filming techniques for his action films , El Mariachi and Desperado , and shifted away from their initial plans with Salomon to make a big @-@ budget version of Zorro . Spielberg had hoped Rodriguez would start filming in January 1996 for a Christmas release date , but the start date was pushed back to July . The release date was later moved to Easter 1997 . Rodriguez pulled out of the film ' in June 1996 over difficulties coming to terms with TriStar on the budget . The studio projected a range of \$ 35 million , while Rodriguez wanted \$ 45 million . They both attempted to compromise when Rodriguez lowered it to \$ 42 million , but the studio refused and set \$ 41 million as their highest mark . Banderas remained with the production , and Martin Campbell signed on later that month , turning down the chance to direct Tomorrow Never Dies . The finished screenplay would be written by John Eskow , Ted Elliott and Terry Rossio , based on a story by Elliott , Rossio , and Randall Jahnson .

= = = Filming = = =

The principal photography for the film began in Mexico on January 27 , 1997 on a \$ 60 million budget . The Mask of Zorro was mostly shot at Estudios Churubusco in Mexico City . Production stalled for four days in February when the director , Martin Campbell , was hospitalized for bronchitis . Filming resumed in Tlaxcala , three hours east of Mexico City , where the production crew constructed the Montero hacienda and town set pieces . Sony sent David Foster to join the project as a producer to help fill the void left by Steven Spielberg , Walter F. Parkes , and Laurie MacDonald , who were busy running DreamWorks . Foster and David S. Ward , who went uncredited , re @-@ wrote some scenes ; the troubled production caused The Mask of Zorro to go \$ 10 million over its budget . In December , the producers were frustrated by customs agents when some props and other items , including Zorro 's plastic sword , were held for nine days . During the post @-@ production phase , Spielberg and Campbell decided that Diego de la Vega 's death in the arms of his daughter was too depressing . The ending , where Alejandro and Eléna are happily married with their infant son , was added three months after filming had ended .

= = = Lawsuit = = =

On January 24 , 2001 , Sony Pictures Entertainment filed a lawsuit in United States District Court , Central District of California , Western Division , against Fireworks Entertainment Group , the producers of the syndicated television series Queen of Swords . Sony alleged copyright infringement and other claims , saying the series " copied protectable elements from [ the ] ' Zorro ' character and ' Zorro ' related works " . On April 5 , 2001 , U.S. District Judge Collins denied Sony 's motion for a

preliminary injunction , noting " that since the copyrights in [ Johnson McCulley 's 1919 short story ] The Curse of Capistrano and [ the 1920 movie ] The Mark of Zorro lapsed in 1995 or before , the character Zorro has been in the public domain . " As to specific elements of The Mask of Zorro , the judge found that any similarities between the film and the TV series ' secondary characters and plot elements were insufficient to warrant an injunction .

= = = Music = = =

James Horner was hired to compose the film score in September 1997 . Horner 's work on The Mask of Zorro was influenced by Miklós Rózsa 's score from El Cid . The soundtrack , released by Sony Classical Records and Epic Soundtrax , was commercially successful and propelled by the rising profile of the Latin heartthrobs of Marc Anthony and Australian singer Tina Arena . Their duet , " I Want to Spend My Lifetime Loving You " , plays in the closing credits of the film and was released as a single in Europe . The song went # 3 on the French singles and # 4 on the Dutch singles charts .

= = Historical references = =

The Mask of Zorro and its sequel The Legend of Zorro incorporate certain historical events and people into their narrative . Antonio Banderas ' character , Alejandro Murrieta , is a fictional brother of Joaquin Murrieta , a real Mexican outlaw who was killed by the California State Rangers led by Harry Love ( portrayed in the film as Texas Army Captain " Harrison Love " ) in 1853 . The confrontation in the film takes place more than a decade earlier , in 1841 . The capture of Murrieta 's right @-@ hand man Three @-@ Fingered Jack by Love was also historical ; however , the real person was a Mexican named Manuel Garcia rather than an Anglo @-@ American . As he did in the movie , the actual Harry Love preserved both Murrieta 's head and Jack 's hand in large , alcohol @-@ filled glass jars . The opening sequence is set during the aftermath of the Mexican War of Independence , and an original ending on the DVD includes an appearance by Antonio López de Santa Anna , who is only mentioned in the finished film .

= = Release = =

The Mask of Zorro was initially set for release on December 19 , 1997 before the release date was changed to March 1998 . There was speculation within the media about whether TriStar changed the date in an attempt to avoid competition with Titanic . In reality Zorro had encountered production problems that extended its shooting schedule . In addition , Sony Pictures Entertainment , TriStar 's parent company , wanted an action film for its first quarter releases of 1998 . The release date was once again pushed back , this time to July 1998 , when pick @-@ ups were commissioned . The delay from March to July added \$ 3 million in interest costs .

To market Zorro , TriStar purchased a 30 @-@ second advertising spot at Super Bowl XXXII for \$ 1 @. @ 3 million . Sony , who had been known for their low @-@ key presence at the ShoWest trade show , showed clips from the film , while actors Antonio Banderas and Anthony Hopkins presented a panel at the conference on May 10 , 1998 . The studio also attached Zorro 's trailer to prints of Godzilla . Sony launched an official website in June 1998 . Internet marketing was an emerging concept in the late @-@ 1990s , and Zorro was Sony 's first film to use VRML .

The Mask of Zorro caught the attention of European Royalty with the film 's foreign premieres . Spain 's King Juan Carlos I , Queen Sophia , and Princess Elena attended the first Royal premiere in Madrid in seven years . On December 10 , 1998 , a Royal Command Performance for Zorro was toplined by Prince Charles and his sons .

= = = Home media = = =

The Mask of Zorro was released on DVD on December 1 , 1998 by Columbia TriStar Home Video .

= = Reception = =

= = = Critical response = = =

Based on 69 reviews aggregated by Rotten Tomatoes , 83 % of the critics enjoyed The Mask of Zorro , giving it an average score of 7 @. @ 1 / 10 . Metacritic gave the film an average score of 63 / 100 , based on 22 reviews . Richard Schickel of Time magazine praised Zorro as a summer blockbuster which paid tribute to the classical Hollywood swashbuckler films . " The action in this movie , most of which takes the form of spectacular stunt work performed by real , as opposed to digitized , people , " Schickel stated , " is motivated by simple , powerful emotions of an old @-@ fashioned and rather melodramatic nature . " Zorro exceeded Roger Ebert 's expectations , who was surprised by the screenplay 's display of traditional film craftsmanship . " It 's a reminder of the time when stunts and special effects were integrated into stories , rather than the other way around . " Ebert later called The Mask of Zorro " probably the best Zorro movie ever made . " Despite giving credit to Anthony Hopkins for his masculine portrayal of an older Zorro , Mick LaSalle , writing in the San Francisco Chronicle , found that the actor 's " performance presents a slight problem : The film asks us to believe that no one has figured out that Zorro and his real @-@ life persona are the same person , even though they are the only guys in Mexico who talk with a British accent . "

Todd McCarthy of Variety found the film 's length to be " somewhat overlong " and lacking " the snap and concision that would have put it over the top as a bang @-@ up entertainment , but it 's closer in spirit to a vintage Errol Flynn or Tyrone Power swashbuckler than anything that 's come out of Hollywood in quite some time . " In his review for Rolling Stone magazine , Peter Travers criticized the casting choices for the Mexican roles , which included Banderas , a Spaniard , as well as Hopkins and Zeta @-@ Jones , who are both Welsh . Disappointed with the film 's entertainment value , Travers also expected the film to be a failure with audiences . Internet reviewer James Berardinelli compared the tone and style of The Mask of Zorro to producer Steven Spielberg 's Raiders of the Lost Ark . " While The Mask of Zorro isn 't on the same level , it 's not an altogether ridiculous comparison . Even though Zorro doesn 't feature the non @-@ stop cliffhanger adventure of Raiders , " Berardinelli continued , " there 's still plenty of action , tumult , and derring @-@ do . " He was undecided whether the film would be a box office success , and that it would depend on the on @-@ screen chemistry between Banderas and Zeta @-@ Jones . In one of the film 's most popular scenes , Alejandro renders Eléna topless with a flurry of sword slashes . One critic placed it on his list of " Erotic [ Film ] Scenes in the 90s " .

= = = Box office = = =

The Mask of Zorro was released in the United States on July 17 , 1998 in 2 @, @ 515 theaters , earning \$ 22 @, @ 525 @, @ 855 in its opening weekend . The film dropped from its number one position in the second week with the releases of Saving Private Ryan and There 's Something About Mary . The Mask of Zorro eventually earned \$ 94 @, @ 095 @, @ 523 within the US , and \$ 156 @, @ 193 @, @ 000 internationally , coming to a worldwide total of \$ 250 @, @ 288 @, @ 523 . With the commercial success of the film , Sony sold the TV rights of Zorro for \$ 30 million in a joint deal to CBS and Turner Broadcasting System ( TBS ) .

= = = Accolades = = =