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# THE ARCHANGEL'S FEATHER

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## LA PLUMA DEL ARCANGEL

(VENEZUELA)

A CNAC presentation of a Grupo de Cine 90/Cinema Sur production. Produced by Martha Pabon.

Directed by Luis Manzo. Screenplay, Juan Carlos Gene, Cesar Sierra, based on the novel by Arturo Uslar Pietri. Camera (color), Cezary Jaworski; editor, Cacho Briceno; music, Aquiles Baez; production designer, Luis Pinto; art director, Carlos Medina; costume designer, Rosa Munoz; sound (Dolby Digital), Stefano Gramitto. Reviewed at Palm Springs Film Festival, Jan. 10, 2003. Running time: 95 MIN.

Gabriel Vilano .....	Ivan Tamayo
Lazarillo .....	Roque Valero
Fina .....	Elaiza Gil
Colonel .....	Alejo Felipe
Hilario .....	Julio Mota
Flora .....	Martha Pabon
Father Lisandro Pinto .....	Armando Gota

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By ROBERT KOEHLER

**A** studied approach to magical realism keeps "The Archangel's Feather" earth-bound, but tyro helmer Luis Manzo's overt love of vintage Hollywood glamour imagery brings a certain charm to the Venezuelan fable. Juan Carlos Gene and Cesar Sierra's script, based on Arturo Uslar Pietri's novel, is set in a remote 1930s-era village, where the airborne arrival of a man in a white suit temporarily overthrows the oppressive order of things. Future landings on the festival schedule aren't likely to lead to many commercial openings for Venezuela's foreign-lingo Oscar entry, beyond select urban Latin American markets.

A fuzzy opener conveys a vague mystical sense, but the tale soon establishes its mildly satiric voice as the village mourns the death of

the local telegraph operator, which the paranoid police chief (Alejo Felipe) considers suspicious. Even stranger is the sudden arrival of Gabriel Vilano (Ivan Tamayo), positively glowing in an ice-cream suit and calmly announcing he's the new operator. Shy assistant Lazarillo (Roque Valero) helps give Gabriel the lay of the land, and the strange process by which edicts are issued to the town via two distant, faceless authorities, dubbed "The Governor" and "The Supreme Chief."

While Lazarillo casts doe-eyed looks at pretty Fina (Elaiza Gil), she is powerless to return his affections since the town bully has knocked her up, causing a boiling scandal. Quickly sensing injustice, Gabriel makes his presence felt with the town's self-appointed power elite, and uses the Supreme Chief's telegrams to right several wrongs that have been rotting the town.

This turnaround goes only so far, however, and though it suggests Gabriel's angelic powers have limits, it isn't played to full comedic effect by Manzo.

Hollywood cinephiles will take away some pleasures here, such as the Gabriel Garcia Marquez approach as reimagined by Frank Capra, and how the exceedingly elegant and suave Tamayo carries himself in the manner of the young Orson Welles, keeping his cool when all others are losing theirs.

Design and visual elements never quite succeed in marrying the physical crudeness of the actual environment with a romantic, gauzy look by lenser Cezary Jaworski.