

BLOOD FOR PEARLS 1498 AD-1540 AD



Tragedy, adventure, romance, drama, history, legend, and greed, all play their parts in this action-packed feature film based on historic factual events, which narrates the events that were triggered by the arrival of **Christopher Columbus** during his third voyage in 1498 and the discovery of the richest pearl beds ever found. In his own words, Columbus writes in his logbook; ***“we have arrived at the land of the riches”*** and in reference to the richly adorned natives who greeted the sailors he wrote: ***“They didn’t wear any small pearls, either because they had plenty of large ones or they did not know how to pierce them,....., some pearls were as large as pigeon eggs, others as small as mustard seeds...”***



The plot is about a native settlement at the North coast (later it was called **“The Pearl Coast”**) of South America (nowadays known as Venezuela), a peaceful place where the natives fished and lived their lives, adorned with pearls, gold, shells and bone fragments. Tribal members of the Guaiquery tribe lived along the shoreline near the delta of Orinoco. They dressed in a cloth (made from coconut fibers) covering their genitals (guayuco) and for festive purposes they painted their bodies with colored pigments and danced in a ritualistic manner. They were excellent fishermen, swimmers and divers and their diet consisted of farmed roots, such as cassava, harvested fruits and animals, some domesticated and mostly hunted. Guaiqueries used spears, gaff hooks and torches for fishing and the women would gather shellfish and shells. They would turn the shells into utensils used as knives, spoons and as body ornaments. Some of the women were drilling pearls and shell fragments to be used as necklaces, bracelets and

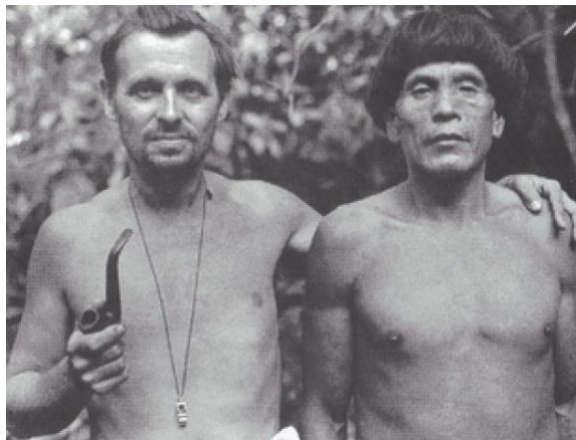
ance-lets. They were also experts in the elaboration of dugout canoes which they used for their marine expeditions. Their settlements were individual straw huts for each family and a big hall type central hut which was used for their rituals and other festive occasions.

On a particular day they saw some big ships approach the coast (on the ship was Columbus and his crew in 1498). The crew on the ships were malnourished, sick and thirsty, the voyage took them longer as initially planned, because there was no wind for about three weeks.

The main character is a teenager, and the son (Charaima) of the chief (Cacique).



The first encounters are friendly, the natives give them food and fresh water and offer them shelter and the conquistadores see all the gold and pearls that the natives are wearing. They start to barter for Valencian earthenware, needles, and such. The Spaniards ask where those pearls are from. The natives show in the direction of a tiny island (later identified as Cubango). Columbus must leave for Hispaniola after several days but some of the crew stay with one of the ships to explore the area. They will be guided by the natives to the island where they start collecting and fishing for pearls with the natives. One of the Spaniards falls in love with one of the native women and they start a relationship. During those days, it is a mutually beneficial relationship, among other things, the Spaniards teach the natives how to salt fish to keep it fresh and the natives introduce the Conquistadores to cassava and cassava beer, also called massato or kasiri, which the Spaniards welcome, because they like the taste of alcohol.



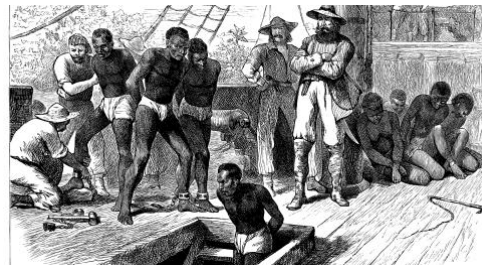
There is also another nearby tribe, the Caribs who are warriors and cannibals, they come occasionally in their canoes and attack the peaceful Guaiqueries. Caribs are fierce, ruthless, and aggressive warriors who the Guaiqueries fear and during one of those attacks, the Spaniards use their muskets against the invading Caribs and the Guaiqueries are thankful for having been saved by the Spaniards.

The main plot will be on the island of Cubango for a timespan of about 20 years. The relationships between the settlers and the natives goes bad fast, within 4 to 8 months and ultimately all the natives are enslaved and killed for the pearl fishing. During that timeframe, there will be more attacks from the Caribs as well as from pirates.

The main character is Charaima who at the beginning is about 5 to 7 years old and son of the Cacique. His mother gives her pearl necklace to Columbus upon their arrival at the beginning of the movie. Charaima is a friendly good-hearted boy who knows how to fish, hunt and gather shells and pearls to make body adornments. (Some of the local native women are drilling pearls and shells in their settlement). Throughout the movie he sees the horrors unfold until he is enslaved himself. **He takes a clay jar and buries it on the island and fills it up with pearls over several years. (This is the central plot of the movie). Throughout the entire movie he keeps putting pearls away, some of them already drilled, others recently fished. He does that until his violent death (shark attack or malnourishment) at about 25 years.** Those natives that survived the diving explorations were taken by maladies brought by the Europeans.

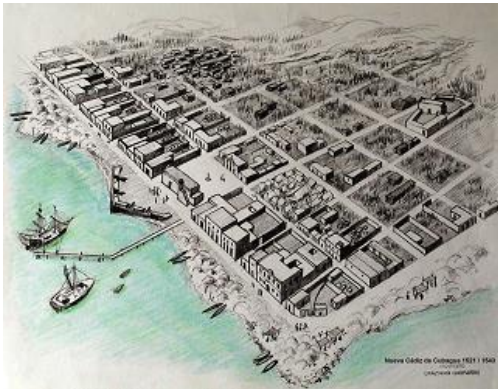
At the beginning, some of the settlers rape the local women and kill them, others take their woman and start families with them, giving birth to the first mestizos born in America.

Once the local natives (Guaiqueries) are killed, the settlers bring more natives with good diving skills from the Bahamas, about 60,000 Lucayans from the Bahamas get killed in the process. Once the Europeans run out of natives, they start bringing slaves from Africa, from tribes specially selected for their diving skills.



At the beginning (1498-1510) the island (Cubango is deserted and has no water or vegetation), people come and go on a temporary basis, just to fish for pearls. Aside of pearls, there is a seepage of crude oil on the island which the Spaniards use to repair their ships. They also take the oil and ship it back to Spain. That is the first oil export from America.

Between 1510 and 1528, (this was the economic splendor) the Spaniards build a city called Nueva Cadiz with limestone and bringing gargoyles and other luxurious items from Spain. The first independent Governor of Nueva Cadiz is chosen to regulate the pearl trade. Between 1499 and 1540 about 54 million carats of pearls were exported, a total of 11 tons. For those numbers 100 billion shells had to be culled, creating huge mountains of shells along the shoreline (they still can be seen nowadays). At the initial years, diving was done in 4 to 8 feet of water, then deeper and deeper until finally in the last years the depth was up to 30 feet.



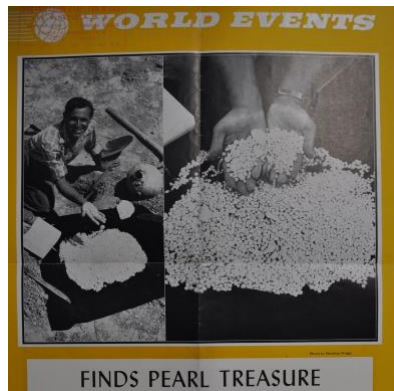
“The life of those divers was no life at all, it was infernal death. Working from sunrise to sunset, they were beaten by the harsh supervisors, they were frequently bitten by sharks, the salt water opened sores and their natural hair looked burned, making divers look like “sea wolves”. These enslaved Indians, disfigured by their labor, looked like a “different race of men or monsters”. The pressure from the depth of the water frequently caused them to hemorrhage blood from their mouths and many died after only a few days of fishing.”

“There is no hellish and hopeless life on this earth that may be compared with it.” (Bartolomé de las Casas 1516)

In the meantime, Europeans enjoy the newly acquired riches from the pearls. During those initial years, pearl exports to Europe exceeded all the other exports combined (gold, emeralds, spices, and slaves). Pearls were the first commodity of America. They were classified into different categories by size, shape, luster and color and the biggest and nicest ones were separated for the royal crown, they were called Pedreria. Others called Ave Maria, were used for clerical purposes, such as the elaboration of rosaries. 20% taxes were levied by the Crown, also called “El Quinto”- “The Fifth”, although it is estimated that about half of the production was continuously stolen or not declared. Sevilla in Spain became the main trading port, receiving the pearls from where they would be distributed to different markets, mainly to the Spanish crown, Portugal, England, and Germany, where the jewelers were, who made all the royal jewelry for the different kings and emperors. The pearl trade created vast riches for most of the population to a point that even maids and slaves had pearls and used them as savings and for trading goods.

Between 1528 and 1540, Cubango declines, French pirates attack the island several times, there is ransacking and destruction, the pearl fisheries are depleted, and the remaining Europeans and black slaves all suffer and are living in worse and worse conditions. Most of the people are killed or move to nearby areas. In 1540 a hurricane finishes destroying the island, and no one remains alive or goes back.

The end of the movie is showing the destroyed and desolated island after passing of the hurricane, the camera zooms out, shows a rapid time laps and forwards 420 years to the same location, when an archaeological team surrounded by the ruins of the island unearths the buried clay jar filled with pearls and empties it in front of the camera (actual original footage).



IN HONOR OF THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF NATIVES AND BLACK PEOPLE THAT WERE KILLED IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Locations: Original location is Cubango island, optional is Florida Keys or Bahamas. Spain, Sevilla and studio recreations

Genre: feature film, action, adventure, based on true historic events

Possible cast: Edgar Ramirez

Characters: The main character is Charaima, between the ages of 7 through 26.

Secondary Characters:

1. The parents of Charaima, the father is the chief (Cacique) and the mother is an expert ornament maker.
2. Christopher Columbus in the 1st act
3. A Spaniard called Pedro (he was part of the first crew that was left behind by Columbus). He lives with a native woman on the island and supervises the fishing canoes. He is a bad tempered and evil person who does not see the locals (and blacks) as humans, but rather as animals.
4. In 1499 Pedro Alonso Niño who returns to Spain with 96 lbs of pearls to be sold on the market and hand delivered to the Queen. This is the first profitable voyage for the Crown and creates a huge buzz back in Spain (Cadiz and Sevilla) and hundreds of Spaniards leave for the new continent to find treasures for themselves.

