

V. The Crimson Pirate

In this doughty 1952 addition to the canon of star-produced maritime vehicles, the nimble and charming **Burt Lancaster** steps into the sea boots of **Douglas Fairbanks** and **Errol Flynn** before him. *Lancaster's* entertainment background before cinema was as an *acrobat in the circus* and in this film, as well as others, he brings along his former tumbling partner **Nick Cravat** as **Captain Vallo's** on-screen sidekick, the wordless **Ojo**. In the film, the two apparently performed the majority of their characters' stunt work.

Vallo operates in the **Spanish Caribbean** and takes a Royal ship bound for **the island of Cobra**, bearing a crown envoy and stock of arms to deal with the rebel leader **El Libre**. *Vallo* initially proposes selling the arms to *El Libre* and ransoming the envoy but is recruited instead to capture *El Libre*. Hijinks ensue and eventually *Vallo* meets *El Libre's* beautiful daughter **Consuelo** who sways him back to her father's side. In the effort to rescue *El Libre*, the pirates liberate a dotty scientist who proceeds to invent an array of *anachronistic devices* that lead to a decisive rebel victory.

The script began life as a serious allegory about the cold war but when people involved with the film, including *Lancaster*, came under scrutiny by the **House Un-American Activities Committee**, the script was reworked to be presented as a light-hearted comedy. However, just a passing glance can tell you whose nose was being tweaked. The pirate is *definitely red*.

The film was released to *universally* positive reviews, did well at the box office and has remained influential since that time. The title of **Terry Gilliam's** short film **THE UNIVERSAL CRIMSON ASSURANCE** was inspired by this film. The film is a primary source for much of the spirit and at least one specific sequence in the first **PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN** film, our next voyage, **The Curse of the Black Pearl**.

Two of the ships seen in this film also appeared in a prior voyage, the **LYDIA** and the **MARCEL B. SURDO**. They were the primary ships employed for full-size shoots in the 1950 fim **CAPTAIN HORATIO HORNBLLOWER**. **THE CRIMSON PIRATE** was shot primarily on the Italian island of **ISCHIA**.

Let the mains'l fall! *Away hawsers* and make fast the hogsheads and caskonaries! *Beware the jabberwock, there!* Make ready the *strongboxes* and the *branding irons*! Steel your guts me hearties, for we make sail this very instant and set course for the *fair island* of **Cobra**!