

THE MASK OF ZORRO

Treatment Written by Ted Elliott & Terry Rossio

The opening sequence is told through the eyes of two young brothers, ALEJANDRO and JOAQUIN MURIETTA. It takes place in Alta California, 1822. Mexico is about to win its independence. The Spanish Viceroy of California, MONTERO, realizes his time is up. He has ordered the execution of all political prisoners. The boys sneak into the town square to watch the hangings.

But Montero is foiled again by ZORRO, who sails in and frees the prisoners. Completely heroic, a black apparition in the moonlight, Alejandro and Joaquin watch him in wonderment. But Montero was counting on Zorro's arrival; more soldiers wait in ambush. Zorro is unaware of the trap.

Alejandro and Joaquin give warning. Zorro defeats the soldiers. He thanks the brothers, and presents them with the medallion he wears around his neck, and then he is gone. Joaquin, the eldest, claims the medallion over his little brother's objections. Joaquin also finds an abandoned sword  
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Zorro rides back to his secret cave behind the waterfall. He emerges in his hacienda as Don DIEGO DE LA VEGA, a wealthy caballero with a wife, ESPERANZA, and two-year-old daughter, ELENA. He starts to tell Elena what he did that night, but Esperanza points out that she's not paying attention. Diego says that someday, she will listen to his stories.

Suddenly, Montero invades his home with a company of soldiers. He hates Diego. They were rivals for the love of Esperanza, who chose Diego. Also, Diego supported Mexico in the revolution. Montero's last act as Viceroy will be to send Diego to prison -- for being Zorro! (Montero plants the proof -- he doesn't really know the truth.)

Montero is surprised when mild-mannered Diego grabs a sword and fights him -- very skillfully. A soldier takes aim at Diego. With daring and courage, Esperanza saves Diego. She, too, is expert with a sword. But then a shot rings out -- and Esperanza crumples, dead. As one, Diego and Montero lunge, two blades piercing the heart of the soldier who shot her.

Diego drops his sword, cradles Esperanza in his arms -- and Montero

knocks him unconscious. Diego awakens in chains. The hacienda is in flames. Montero holds Elena, who is crying. "Esperanza should have been mine, de la Vega," he says. "And this daughter should have been my daughter." He leans close. "Will be my daughter." Montero vows to raise her as his own while Diego rots in prison. Diego is helpless to prevent it.

X        X        X

Time passes. Joaquin and Alejandro, older but still kids, attempt to rob a trading post. They wear masks; Joaquin brandishes his found sword. The boys idolize Zorro, but remember only the daring outlaw, not the fighter of injustice. A soldier on the premises laughs at them, and tells them that Zorro is in jail -- where they'll soon end up. He advances menacingly on Joaquin -- but Alejandro steals his pistol. The boys succeed in the daring robbery, and set out on their lives as bandits.

X        X        X

The story next takes us to Spain; we get a sense of scope, of destinies coming together. A Gypsy with a sword attacks a young woman: it is Elena, grown up, in her early twenties, beautiful. She duels with the man, but ultimately falls for a feint. He corrects her; this has been a lesson.

The Gypsy tells her she has a natural gift. "My father is an expert swordsman." Elena knows she is not the model daughter her model father, Montero, deserves. She is torn: something in her drives her to defy convention, and do things like learn to fence from Gypsies.

Late, Elena rides for home, changing from her more mannish fencing clothes into a beautiful dress as she goes. The last thing she does is turn so she is riding sidesaddle. Montero is waiting for her. He tells her that his plans are coming to fruition, and she is to return to California with him. Elena is pleased; there is a genuine bond between them. She looks forward to "seeing California for the first time."

X        X        X

At the mission in Monterey, an old man with a limp is offered food in exchange for his menial labor. He asks for only half the food, and the rest of his payment in pesos. He is saving his money to buy passage to Spain. It is Diego. Then he hears that Montero is returning to Monterey.

Montero's homecoming is a huge, pomp-and-circumstance event. Torches light the beach as Montero steps off the boat, welcomed by important, influential men who nonetheless defer to Montero: he is a monarch returning home.

In the crowd, Diego focuses on Montero. He moves toward him as Montero greets his welcoming party. A knife appears in Diego's hand. Murder in his eye. He closes in --

A voice calls "Father!" Diego and Montero turn. Elena steps through the crowd. Diego instantly recognizes her. She moves past him, into Montero's arms. Calls him 'Father' again.

Diego's resolve disappears. He is devastated. The knife slips from his fingers. He realizes Elena loves Montero. He cannot just kill him in front of her. Diego turns, vanishes.

X        X        X

Elsewhere, Captain HARRY LOVE and his soldiers pursue Alejandro, Joaquin and their gang, including THREE-FINGERED JACK. The gang splits up. Some are captured. Joaquin turns to face Love. Love is an experienced cavalry soldier; with an expert riding maneuver, he corners Joaquin and swings to lop off his head -- we see the medallion as it flies free, hitting the ground in a spatter of blood.

Alejandro sees his brother's death. He eludes capture, returns to the scene. By then, his brother's body has been taken away. The rising sun glints off of something: the medallion.

In a cantina, Alejandro stares at the medallion as he kills a bottle of wine, tears in his eyes. He also has his brother's sword. Suddenly someone grabs the medallion. "Where did you get this?" It is Diego, half-drunk.

Alejandro tells him it was his brother's, who was murdered. Alejandro has vowed to kill the man who did it, using his brother's sword. Diego studies Alejandro. "Revenge can have a very high cost," he says -- then flashes his purse as he leaves.

Alejandro follows him -- exactly as Diego wanted. Alejandro holds Diego at swordpoint, intending to rob him. Using just his cane, Diego disarms Alejandro and turns the sword on him. Alejandro is amazed at Diego's skill.

He begs Diego to teach him to use a sword. Diego considers. He tells Alejandro that if he is going to be in Alejandro's service as a teacher, then Alejandro will also have to be in service to him, no questions asked. Diego has his own revenge to enact, and it will be a difficult task. Alejandro can only see Love's blood spilling onto the ground. Diego helps Alejandro up. The two men shake hands on their agreement.

X        X        X

Diego takes Alejandro into the secret cave behind the waterfall. Lit by torchlight, meager supplies scattered around -- Diego has been living here. In the middle of the dirt floor cave is a thirty-foot-square floor of marble, inlaid with an intricate design: Several circles within a large circle, with various lines of radii intersecting. Alejandro recognizes the design.

It is the same one on his medallion.

"You ... are Zorro?" he gasps. "No, I am not Zorro," says Diego. "Merely a caretaker." He demands Alejandro give him his full attention. He orders him to demonstrate a lunge. Alejandro does so. With a slight nudge, Diego topples the off-balance Alejandro. Diego sighs. "We have a lot of work ahead of us."

X        X        X

Diego trains Alejandro. The circle inlaid on the cave floor is from the old Spanish school of swordplay, the vectors and lines of attack and defense. It is also a central metaphor for the story. Diego tells Alejandro that as his awareness and skill increase, the circle becomes larger, encompassing more of the world. This is one of Zorro's secrets.

We intercut with scenes of Montero's machinations. He reveals to the dons his grand vision: they will purchase California from Mexico and create their own nation. The Lone Star Republic of Texas is their model. Some dons question the cost; their fortunes pooled may not be enough to satisfy General Santa Anna.

Elena is paid court by Captain Love. Her dueña, an old Californian woman, teaches her the language of the fan.

Alejandro's training continues. He is impatient for results. Diego pretends that Alejandro is ready. In celebration, Diego gets Alejandro drunk -- and then comes another, unexpected exam. Drunk, dueling in a cave lit only by moonlight through the waterfall, Alejandro must defend himself.

X        X        X

In Monterey, Captain Love is giving a lecture on law enforcement. Alejandro, in town for supplies, attends. The room is jammed; Montero and Elena are also in attendance. Love is an erudite, witty speaker, as well as a lethal bastard. He unveils a jar; inside is the head of Joaquin Murietta.

Everyone cranes forward; every face focuses on the grisly display -- save two. Alejandro and Elena both turn away -- and their eyes meet. A bolt-from-the-blue moment. Afterward, Alejandro can barely contain his hatred of Love -- even more so, when he sees Love and Elena together.

Diego tells Alejandro that he must never let his eyes betray him. Alejandro is distracted during this lesson. His impatience and wild nature get the best of him. That night, he slips out of the cave, dressed as Zorro.

In town he noticed a beautiful black stallion, intended as a gift for Love. Alejandro will steal it.

In the course of the theft, the horse bucks and fights like a tornado, smashing through walls and scattering soldiers. Freed from a jail cell are several Indians, who see Zorro as their savior. Zorro commandeers a wagon and leads the Indians to the mission.

The padre promises to get the Indians to safety. In the wagon, they discover bags of gold dust and nuggets, which they split. The padre tells Zorro of the 'disappeared ones,' Indians, peasants, even vaqueros who have disappeared under Love's reign of terror. Love's pursuit of Zorro nears the mission.

The padre tells Zorro of an old escape tunnel, beneath the confessional. Zorro ducks inside. He hears a voice from the other side: Elena. Believing he is the padre, she tells Zorro her troubles. She tries to be a proper gentlewoman but hates that role. She has a divided heart, and fears half of it is too wild. Zorro counsels her, but is too flirtatious. Even though they can only see each others' eyes, their passion is undeniable. She realizes it isn't the padre on the other side.

Love hauls her out of the confessional. His soldiers blast the confessional to pieces. The door creaks open. Zorro is gone.

X        X        X

Alejandro returns to the cave, where Diego paces angrily. The appearance of Zorro has upset Diego's timetable. His plan must be accelerated. Diego is intrigued by the existence of the gold ore, and can certainly put it to good use.

Alejandro and Diego adopt the identities of a young gentleman and his servant. Diego forges papers introducing Alejandro to Montero as the son of an old Californian, and gives him a purloined signet ring as proof. Elena's dueña recognizes the ring, confirming Alejandro's identity. He is invited to the ball for Elena's birthday.

Diego tells Alejandro that by romancing Elena, he will not only be helping Diego's cause, getting closer to Montero, but also sticking it to Love. Alejandro grins, "I like that part."

At the ball, Alejandro is impressive, despite having problems with protocol that Diego must surreptitiously help him with. Alejandro also torments Diego, his 'servant,' payback for Diego's training.

Elena does not care for the way Alejandro treats his servant. But she is taken with the young noble when they dance together, a very hot, seductive fandango.

During the dance, Diego slips away. He's suspicious of all the dons present, knows there is more to this than a simple birthday party. He finds evidence of the smelting of gold ore, discovers a secret passage. He withdraws without investigating it further.

The dance ends with Alejandro and Elena tightly embraced, breathing hard, barely within decorum. Love watches, seething. Montero, though, is delighted with Alejandro's obvious breeding and respect for old Spanish court life. He mentions to Love he will invite Alejandro into their circle. But Love is suspicious; he remembers that Joaquin Murietta had a brother named Alejandro.

X        X        X

Alejandro is invited to Montero's estate. Love sits across the table from him, and talks about how ancient warriors would cannibalize their slain enemies, absorbing their essence. Love believes he has the ability to know a man's mind by watching his eyes -- and he suspects Alejandro. Love suddenly produces the jar with Joaquin's head in it.

Alejandro does not flinch. In fact, he one-ups Love -- and drinks the brine from the jar. To Love's disappointment, he has passed his test.

Blindfolded, Alejandro and the other dons are taken to see Montero's secret source of wealth: a gold mine, chained men working it. Several dons worry that this is slavery. Love explains that the men are all law-breakers, sentenced to hard labor. But something is amiss; Alejandro notices children's footprints, an old woman's cane, etc. The mystery of the 'disappeared ones' has been explained. Montero is forcing more than just criminals to work this mine.

Suddenly, one of the miners breaks from line, runs toward the dons. Guards shoot him down. It is Three-Fingered Jack, one of Alejandro's old gang. He dies, one hand extended toward Alejandro -- a hand missing two fingers. Love notices it, scowls. As the blindfolds are put back on, Montero stresses the need for secrecy. They cannot allow a gold rush until they are in control.

X           X           X

Zorro breaks into Montero's estate to investigate the passage Diego discovered. He finds a secret room. Magnificent, everything made of gold. Gold conquistador armor. He discovers an orb and scepter, and several gold coins bearing Montero's visage: Emperor of California and Mexico.

Montero and Love interrupt him. Zorro seemingly disappears. He overhears them talk of conquest: Montero, once in power, intends to wage war on Mexico. Zorro steals the pouch with the map to the mine in it. Discovered, he must escape. Montero cannot allow his plans made public.

Elena discovers Zorro in her room. Angry at his intrusion and his game in the confessional, she finds her sword. He laughs - - but a sword slash cuts the sleeve of his shirt. They duel, slicing each other's clothes. She uses her fan as second weapon, flashing it for diversion and using it to deflect his blade. Ultimately, he disarms her. Breathing heavily, she waits for his next move.

Soldiers smash down the door. With a nod of his head, Zorro springs out the window. Montero is shocked. He grills Elena: "Was he an old man?" "No, he was definitely young ... very physical." Montero is scared, shaken ... but not so shaken to ask, "Where did you learn to fence?"

Zorro must still escape from the estate. Pursued by Love and his soldiers, Zorro is chased, ultimately trapped on a high bridge. He draws his sword, ready to make a last stand. Tornado has other ideas. The horse leaps from the bridge into the river below. The soldiers believe Zorro is the bravest man they ever saw. Zorro believes his horse is insane.

Love finds the pouch, empty. The map must have been swept away.

X           X           X

Alejandro returns to the cave. He cannot find Diego. He follows the cave farther back, up a passage. He emerges in the cellar of a burned-out hacienda. He recognizes it as the de la Vega estate.

Diego sits in what used to be Elena's room. Alejandro confronts him. He feels ready to take on Love. He is tired of being in the dark, of not knowing the purpose of Diego's machinations. Diego tells him that he cannot abandon his line of attack -- or their agreement. Alejandro sees more is going on than just simple revenge -- his circle is expanding.



Diego tells him that they are reaching a critical point. If Alejandro's false identity is discovered, he should tell them he is a de la Vega. Alejandro reluctantly agrees.

X           X           X

General SANTA ANNA arrives from Mexico, already sitting astride his white horse as the his longboat nears the beach. He is presented with the Articles of Confederation, signed by the dons allowing Montero to buy California in their names. Santa Anna agrees to sell California to Montero, but has one worry: rumors of a large gold strike. It would make no sense to sell El Dorado, would it?

Fearing discovery, Montero orders Love to destroy the mine -- with the miners and guards inside. And once the dons have signed their lands over to the new country, they will be disposed of as well. Montero will control California and its resources.

At the El Dia de la Muerta celebration, Montero receives a letter that reveals Alejandro's false identity. Alejandro admits his duplicity, and (as instructed) says he is the illegitimate son of Diego de la Vega -- whom he hates. He used an alias to hide his shame.

Montero is apoplectic. He forbids Elena from ever seeing Alejandro again. She protests she is in love with him. Montero turns ashen, filled with a cold wrath. He orders Elena locked away. He orders Love to kill Alejandro.

Love drags Alejandro away, tells him he will die trapped in the mine with the other prisoners when they blow it up. But Alejandro is able to effect his escape. He races into the woods, finds cover. He must remain absolutely silent as soldiers search for him.

Suddenly Alejandro is startled -- very close to him, staring straight at him warily is a silver fox. Alejandro stares back at it. It is a silent, weird, defining moment, a moment of destiny for Alejandro. The soldiers clatter past, and the moment is past. The fox leaps quietly away.

X           X           X

Elena's dueña discovers the young woman as she's about to escape out her window. The old woman asks where she is going. Elena tells her she intends to find Alejandro, and leave California if she must.

The dueña is overcome. She also hates the name de la Vega -- her young husband was one of the soldiers killed the night Diego was arrested. But for Elena to marry her brother would be a sin and an affront to God.

She tells Elena the truth: Elena is also a de la Vega, the daughter of Diego. Elena is devastated, but knows it is true. She escapes out through the window.

Zorro finds her. He tells her that Montero must be stopped. He has hidden something in her room that will reveal his true nature to her -- the map to the hidden gold mine. He entreats her to get them to Santa Anna to stop the sale of California.

Soldiers pass by; Zorro pulls her into hiding, arms around her -- almost like a dance embrace. Very aware of each other. Recognition dawns on Elena's face. "Alejandro," she says. His eyes have betrayed him. He admits the truth, and declares his love. She tells him it is impossible. "My true name is Elena de la Vega," she says, and runs away.

Alejandro cannot follow. He must attempt to save the people in the mine. On the way, he confronts Diego. The old man has used him, manipulated the situation to turn Elena against Montero. He knows that Diego sent the letter that exposed his alias, put him in danger. He planned it all from the beginning. Diego has gained his revenge -- and his daughter -- but without regard for anyone else. His desire to hurt Montero caused him to also hurt Elena.

Alejandro leaves Diego to stop Love from destroying the mine. The two men meet, duel on horseback, their steeds leaping and spinning, swords crashing. Alejandro has the opportunity to pursue Love and kill him -- but turns away. He must save the miners. Alejandro has grown beyond his need for revenge. Diego's teachings, and his experiences, have transformed him into the true Zorro.

In a spectacular sequence, as the mine blows up around him, Zorro battles soldiers and leads the miners to freedom. They may end up subjects in Montero's California, but they will still be alive to fight.

X        X        X

Elena has found the map. A fire burns in the fireplace. She cannot decide what to do -- burn the map to save the man she has known and loved as her father? Or deliver the map to Santa Anna? A figure appears in her room. It is Diego. He holds a hand out for the map. She makes her decision, gives the map to him. "I never meant to harm you," he whispers, then strides out the door.

Diego has learned from Alejandro; the pupil has become the teacher. The story of two men's revenge has become the story of their redemption. The true spirit of Zorro has been recaptured.

Diego bursts into Montero's study. The gold has been delivered. Santa Anna is about to sign the papers granting California to Montero. Diego demands the sale be stopped, reveals the truth about Montero. He gives Santa Anna the map. "Why should I believe you?" asks the General. The answer: "My name is Diego de la Vega."

Montero and Elena are shocked. Santa Anna remembers the name as a supporter in Mexico's war for independence. He tears up the sale documents -- and will keep the gold. All hell breaks loose as Santa Anna departs.

Montero attacks Diego. The two duel. At one point, a soldier takes aim on the duelists. Elena intervenes -- showing the same daring and courage her mother possessed.

Alejandro rides back to the estate. Love ambushes him at a river crossing. They duel on slippery stones as the water rages around them. Love cannot accept Zorro's earlier mercy, accuses him of cowardice, befitting a man who hides behind a mask. Alejandro reveals his true identity: Alejandro Murietta, brother of Joaquin. He masterfully outfights Love, and slays him, leaving his brother's sword impaled in the man who killed him.

Diego battles Montero relentlessly, wearing him down, disarming him. And then Montero grabs Elena, puts a gun to her head. Diego immediately drops his weapons. "You fool -- I wouldn't have hurt her," sneers Montero. "I couldn't take that chance," says Diego -- and that's when Elena knows in her heart who her true father is.

Elena shoves Montero as he fires, but the bullet still strikes Diego. Montero scoops up his sword and strides to Diego, prepares to administer the coup de grace --

Tears in her eyes, Elena shoves Diego's sword into Montero. Montero turns. The last thing he sees is the woman he loved as his daughter. He collapses, dead.

Alejandro and Elena reunite. Diego will recover. Elena is unsure of what her relationship to her real father will be like. But she is willing to listen to his story, about Montero, and her mother ... and Zorro. "That is all I ever wanted," says Diego. "It began twenty years ago, in Alta California ..."

And so Diego tells her the story he began when she was two years old, the story he never finished. The story of the legend of Zorro. The circle is complete.