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Guillermo Arriaga, Noted Screenwriter, Steps Behind the Camera

by Saenger, Diana

When director and Oscar-nominated screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga was 19 years old, in Mexico City, a nearby house was on fire, and someone told him there were people inside. The house went up in flames. Authorities later said there were no people inside. But the scene had haunted him ever since. Last year, the filmmaker pushed that memory from his mind and onto the big screen when he used it as a device in the movie *The Burning Plain*.

Arriaga is no stranger to Hollywood. A novelist and screenwriter for years, the filmmaker has gained a notable reputation for going far beyond the norm as one of today's most original storytelling voices. His insight and his works' significance have resulted in many award-winning films and novels that illustrate the emotions ordinary people face during challenging turns of events.

"When I began writing novels, I wanted to portray real stories of real life," Arriaga said. "I have a great Faulkner influence; the first film I wrote, *Amores perros*, was based on *The Sound and the Fury*. I try to bring a literary quality to my films."

Amores perros, starring Gabriel Garcia Bernal and Adriana Barraza, was the first of three collaborations between Arriaga as writer and Alejandro González Iñárritu as director. The three interconnecting storylines, which reveal Uves affected by a horrific car accident, were based on a serious auto accident Arriaga had in 1985. International critics hailed *Amores perros* as a cinematic classic. The film received an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film and won the ALMA (American Latino Media Arts) Award in 2002.

Amores perros has been heralded as one of the first Mexican films to cross over into the Hollywood spotlight, opening doors for a new generation of filmmakers to leave their footprints internationally.

Arriaga has also directed, produced and written short films, documentaries, television series, and radio and television commercials. Most assuredly, he will keep writing fascinating stories. Meanwhile he continues to promote *The Burning Plain*, recently out on DVD.

"That's my focus at me moment," he said. "A movie without an audience is a movie that dies."

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