

Those Dam Movies

So here I sit, watching the klieg lamps being rolled into place. The giant crane is parked across the street from me. It holds up the "rain bar" that'll eventually be used to simulate rain tonight. Traffic on highway 93 slowly rolls past the equipment. I can only imagine the tourist's thoughts. "Gee Hildegard, what d'ya suppose all the commotion's about?" "I don't know Stanley, maybe they're filmin' one o' those doc-u-men-taries?" "Maybe so."

I'm sure the truck drivers in their big rigs aren't so kind. Traveling across Hoover Dam is no picnic for trucks. Switch backs and narrow roads make it very dangerous. Adding a thirty minute delay for a movie shoot doesn't help much.

What is all this about, you ask? Well, there is only one Hoover Dam, and often (about six times a year) some film maker or television producer decides they just *have* to film at the dam. We don't have any objections, over 100 shows have been filmed here over the years. All we ask is that the dam isn't portrayed in an unfriendly light and that no damage is done to the historical structures (or anything else). That's my job. That's why I'm here at 11 PM, on top of Hoover Dam, watching everyone hurry up and wait. There's no telling how long it'll be before something *interesting* happens. I mean, the set up, traffic control, food catering and everything up to this point have been interesting, but there hasn't been any *real* action yet.

Someone decided it would be a good idea to make a romantic drama about a

Mexican woman living in southern Arizona falling in love with a man who lives in southern Nevada. Of course, much of the action centers around Hoover Dam, one of the only through-ways between the two.

Tonight they want to shoot the climatic final scene where our hero (played by Matthew Perry) finds himself on top of the dam with a broken car. It's raining and his relationship with the heroine is going down the tubes. Meanwhile, she is speeding from Arizona to his arms to proclaim her undying love for him. She arrives at the dam, and because of the rain, almost doesn't see her lover in the middle of the road. She crashes her truck and rushes to his arms. He discovers that she's very pregnant (I haven't read the whole script yet so I don't know why he didn't know she was with child) and, of course, she goes into labor. The child is born on top of the dam, on the state border and everyone lives happily ever after. The end.

While I've been sitting here, the movie crew has finished setting up the shot, a quick rehearsal happened, and the extras in cars have lined up and are ready. The tension builds, they maneuver the "rain bar" into place and make final preparations.

Boy, hurry up and wait. This crew must all be ex-government workers or something. Over an hour has passed since "final preparations" were made and still nothing has happened - with one exception: the iced-latte-cappuccino-esspresso-mocha-frappe truck showed up on location. Everyone took a much needed caffeine break.

I'm now beginning to understand how movie budgets can be in the tens, or even

hundreds, of millions of dollars. There must be 250 people working on this shoot, most of whom are sitting around me. However, I can only see five or six actually doing something identifiable as productive. The optimist in me can't help but believe that the other 245 people are doing something productive albeit opaque to me. But I don't think so.

After another couple of hours and false starts, the scenes started happening. For once, I expected less, and got more. The "rain bars" suspended 50 feet over the dam successfully simulated a heavy downpour. With several thousand watts worth of spot lights back lighting the water droplets as they fell, you could really see sheets of "rain." The actors repeated the scene four times, each time a little different. I'm sure the movie's editor will have plenty of options to choose from. One time through, the wind moved the "rain" away from the action. Right at that moment, our hero is supposed to be listing "omens" that "prove" the couple should be together. "What about the Grand Canyon?" he shouts, "the dog, the little girl? Everything says we should be together. Look the rain stopped. See?" he ad-libbed.

By this time, false dawn had started to pinken the eastern sky. After a few more "takes," the director called for a "wrap." The cranes lowered the rain bars, the actors picked up their coffee cups, the crew packed the lights and cameras. I sat and watched the end of their day and the beginning of everyone else's.

APRIL 19 IS
BROUGHT TO YOU
BY

KEN FORMAN

KFORMAN@WIZARD.COM