

how to make a turkey



Jan-Michael Vincent and Marilyn Hassett as Mike and Maureen in a rare happy moment

A major feature film, shot with a large budget in Vancouver, organized by one of Canada's most successful producers using the 'international approach' now in vogue... and *Shadow of the Hawk* turns out to be a turkey. The following is the story of the shoot.

by Fiona Jackson

Cinema Canada asked me some months ago to write an article on the then just-completed film **Shadow of the Hawk**. Like everyone else associated with that production in Vancouver, I just wanted to forget about it and go on to the next one. There was also the (faint) possibility that it would be a good film, and since it was a "Canadian" film (note the quotation marks) it seemed more positive and helpful to get behind the film and hope for its success. Well, now the film has been released and that hope has faded. **Cinema Canada** has come back again and asked for an article about why, based on what I know of the production, it is such a bad film. That may seem like a reasonable request. Since I was one of the few people to start with the film and stay with it to the end it may appear logical that I would have some insight to offer.

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Perhaps it is bad because it went through three directors, two art directors, two first assistant directors, three directors of photography, two production managers, two script supervisors, two construction managers, two associate producers and two stills photographers. There were even two craft service people. But let me make an obvious comment, and then beg the question. Nobody ever starts out to make a bad film and this one was more positive than some others I have worked on. The story had exciting possibilities and one hoped it would make an entertaining and even enlightening film. But let me start at the beginning.

In November of 1975 director Jack Smight (*Airport '75*, *Midway*, *No Way to Treat a Lady*) arrived in Vancouver to make a Columbia Pictures film to be produced by John Kemeny and International Cinemedia. The story was to be about a young man, half Indian, who has made it in the 'white' world and rejected his Indian heritage. His grandfather, a shaman whom the young man has not seen for several years, arrives at his door and dupes

him into returning to the reserve. Along the way he has many frightening mystical experiences and evolves from callow young man to real human being. It had love interest, exciting special effects and all the color of Indian tradition and culture.

Smight was a charming man, positive about working in Canada and more educated than most about the country and Canadian film. His assistant director, Robin Clarke, was equally charming and helpful and the whole thing was an exciting prospect. Locations were found, with Bob Linnell chosen as production manager, and John Wardlow, production assistant. We cast the supporting roles in December and local actors were delighted with Smight and his respect for their professionalism and experience. The shooting date was to be just after Christmas. Locals pointed out the hazardous weather conditions at that time of year but it was decided to shoot the story according to prevailing conditions. At this time Seamus Flannery was art director and his department was in full gear. Smight and Kemeny returned to Los Angeles

and a ~~long-distance relationship was~~ set up with the production office. This caused a measure of difficulty.

The first delay in shooting came about because of script revisions. Writers came and went. The original story was set in desert country and massive alterations had to be made to give it a coastal Indian flavor. Jack Smight left, ostensibly because of another film, but no one who had observed the tensions between him and Kemeny was surprised at this move. Robin Clarke left soon after having been offered a chance to produce his own property, something he had been working on for some time. The production office came to a virtual standstill, until eventually phones were disconnected and only a production secretary remained.

Early in January Daryl Duke was announced as director, a replacement which made everyone here happy. Happy because Duke was not only Canadian but Western Canadian and someone who knew about and loved Indian history. With Daryl came Herb Wright, a young American producer with whom Daryl had worked at Universal. His role was to be associate producer but soon he became the last in a series of writers and assumed both titles. The rest of the crew remained intact for a short while until Seamus Flannery resigned as art director, to be replaced by his assistant Keith Pepper. The shooting date was now to be March 15. The first production meeting with Daryl happened in mid-February and there still was no script. The shooting date became March 8. The story became more and more exciting. Duke gave it authenticity and there was to be a thread of Carlos Castaneda running throughout. This was not only good box office but of current popular interest. It was about this point that the CFDC became involved, although most of us working on the film, being unaware of this at the time, still saw it as an American picture.

Many of the problems that ensued seemed avoidable. For instance, the telephones were never reconnected to their original efficiency. There were only three weeks in which to prep the film, three weeks for new locations, new cast, new wardrobe – in fact, a whole new picture, still without a final script. There were queues in the production office to make phone calls – each department head trying to get things ordered and in motion. The intercom system involved shouting and running up and down halls and stairs. No one could get through because the three lines we had were always busy. Kemeny

insisted that the phone company could not install in time. When I went ahead and got a telephone within an hour's notice he was furious and wanted to deduct the cost from my fees. Duke was closeted in his office all day long on script rewrites while everybody needed to talk to him. Script sessions were interrupted by casting sessions, wardrobe queries, set queries, location queries, etcetera, etcetera, ad nauseum. Pandemonium would be an understatement.

On the Friday before the first day of shooting (Monday) we had a final production meeting. Sheaves of single-spaced typewritten sheets of unresolved production problems were the outcome. Duke asked for a postponement and was refused. Early into the shoot it became apparent that Duke and Reg Morris were not working well together. Reg resigned and was replaced by Richard C. Glouner from Los Angeles, a cinematographer with whom Daryl had worked many times. The relationship between Duke and Kemeny, always tense at best, progressively worsened until it seemed that two pictures were vying with each other, the one Daryl was making and the one the producer wanted made. The female lead became ill and was to remain so throughout the shoot. Dan George became ill and returned to the set only with a full-time nurse and serious restrictions on how much he could work. Duke and crew worked interminable hours. It was weeks into the shoot before Duke even had hours off to himself.

The hassles continued. Weird accidents and complications took place. There was talk of evil Indian spirits that had been conjured up through the use of real chants and dances. It became funny. A bear who was imported from L.A. wanted only to sleep. A crew of grown men and women stood around in a meadow in the middle of winter waiting for him to wake up while his frustrated trainer tried to bribe him with angel food cake. It transpired that the bear we were asking to attack humans was named Gentle Ben, and had been trained to love them. Tensions developed between the bird handler and the bear handler. It seems the birds were eating the bear's food or vice versa and it was bad for their diet. It became ludicrous. It rained. It snowed. More people became ill. There was never a firm shooting schedule and even on a day-to-day basis it changed radically to deal with illness and weather variables. Bob Linnell was replaced as production manager and it was suggested that the crew list be issued in pencil, so many were the changes.

Columbia Pictures executives flew in and out at such a rate there was hardly time for introductions. Compromise after compromise was made on the story line and locations. I got casting requests for "emaciated Indians", a near-impossibility on the west coast peopled almost totally by round-faced, well-fed Indian bands. Because of schedule changes I took to hanging out in beer parlors to recruit the next day's extras, hoping they would sober up in time for the first shot.

That all of this culminated in Duke's firing came as a shock but not a total surprise. Glouner departed with Daryl and they were replaced by George McCowan, a Canadian director, and Phil Lathrop, another US cinematographer. There was no heart in the film after Duke left. Everyone just wanted to get it finished and get the hell out. The leading lady became more seriously ill and many of her remaining scenes were shot with a double. Press was bad. The film was called "Shadow of the Turkey" and "Squawk of the Hawk".

The shoot limped to a finish, to everyone's relief. The political ramifications became evident only after the fact. The CFDC has been unanimously castigated by filmmakers across the country for their investment in the film. The "Canadianness" of the project was dubious at best. It is unclear what makes a film magically alter in this way. What was a US film became Canadian virtually because of the addition of a Canadian director. The reviewers can best deal with the content as related to Canadian life.

It would be easy but unfair to try to pin responsibility on personalities. It seems clear that you cannot make a major feature film with three weeks of preparation. You cannot make any kind of film when the producer and the director are working at cross purposes. Probably by the first day of principal photography any hope for the Hawk became redundant. It is not possible to make a film by committee and this is how that film was made. The credits are interesting. Reg Morris and John Holbrook get shooting credits. Morris was on the film for a matter of days and Holbrook was almost entirely concerned with second unit. But they are Canadian and that looks good. There is no mention of the two US cinematographers. The replacement crew who came in after Duke's firing get the rest of the credits, including McCowan as director. Perhaps those of us who got no credit at all are the lucky ones. Well, **Cinema Canada** – you had to ask, didn't you? □