



Like a lot of kids I grew up watching behind the scenes specials about movies like Star Wars and Indiana Jones and was always impressed with how much planning went into these films, particularly the storyboards they used to plan out every shot. It wasn't until I was standing in the streets of Gotham City on the backlot of Pinewood Studios that I learned that even the most action-packed of movies rarely have everything storyboarded.

The vast majority of what you see onscreen is invented the day that the cast and crew arrive on location; a location like a lovely bend in the Yellow River, just south of Porterdale, about 40 miles east of Atlanta.

There we were, making an independent film called "False River", best described as a cross between Fellini meets Scooby Doo. I'd read the script several times during prep and was on set every day of filming and I still had **no idea what it was all about**.

On this fine Monday morning we had just returned to work following a weekend of torrential rain and the river was high. Really, really, *really* high. *Remarkably high*. In the early morning light we could see dark shapes appearing along the top of the churning, rock-strewn rapids then slipping back beneath the water.

A nearby fisherman explained that those were *turtle* heads.

Snapping Turtle heads to be precise... and they were *everywhere*. Dozens of them covered the width of the bend in the river where we would be filming that day.

By our fifth trip carrying equipment across the stupid river, it hadn't gotten any easier to navigate the twisted jumble of rocks lining the bottom from shore to shore. Two steps forward and you were up to your knees, two steps more and you were up to your neck. Every five feet you'd bash your shins against a hidden rock shelf. I didn't check with any of the others who were making the crossing, but my anticipation of being bitten by a **snapping turtle** was running higher than



the river, and it didn't help that I was towing an old-fashioned water-heater behind me. It was supposed to be some sort of giant corroded "nuclear" battery with a great big grab handle on one side, but I kept calling it a water heater because I'm delightfully unpretentious and my shins were smarting from banging against all those rocks.

After what seemed an eternity, we were ready to shoot.

The cameras and most of the crew were all back on the bank where we first started, more than 50 yards away, but it was out here on the rocks where the action was set to occur. All I had to do was stay hidden in the rapids behind a rock out-cropping and release the "nuclear battery barrel" into the current on cue, so that it coincided with our actors, Salvator Xuereb and George Faughnan, as they dove into the river to escape their fictional pursuers. Tied to the barrel was a safety line, which I was supposed to use to pull the actors back to the rock when director Rex Hauck called "cut".

I knew this, and the actors knew this. **We all knew this.**

With radio confirmations back to shore that YES, we fully understood the plan, the actors were instructed to go to their start marks inland from the bank, at which point I moved 20 feet upriver and dropped down onto a slippery shelf behind one of the big rocks in the whirling rapids, all the while running through a mental rehearsal of the timing for when I would release the barrel. I really wanted to get my part right.

At the last-minute my radio burbled forth with a change in plans from the director that we would not, repeat **would not**, be using the barrel on this take.

**"Do NOT release the barrel, Drew.... got that?"**

**Got it.** This was an important piece of information, and I assumed that the actors heard the update from the PA crouching in the trees behind them. Not so much.

Cameras rolled, 'Action!' was called and the actors came running out of the woods and hit the water.....first one.... SPLASH!! .....then the other.... SPLASH!!

They started to splash around (George's character had been shot in the neck, so Salvator was forced to play the lifeguard and keep him afloat).

From my vantage point I could see the boys sloshing around in the current, and I suddenly realized that Salvator was operating with old information. I could tell that he still thought that he would be getting the barrel because he started glaring in my direction, obviously wondering why I'd missed my cue.

I couldn't very well yell at him that they'd told me not to send it, partly because there was probably a microphone on the bank, but mostly because they couldn't possibly hear me over the sound of the churning water and bobbing turtle heads.

So I did the only logical thing a person in my situation could do: I pointedly began to ignore him.

Instead of watching our actors flop around in the water, I allowed myself to become completely engrossed with a leaf floating past, hoping that the actors might forget about me and put more effort toward not drowning.

I studied a spider web in a crevice along the water line. I watched some clouds drifting by overhead. After a moment I cut a glance over toward them and could plainly see that not only had they not forgotten me, they were both now convinced that I'd forgotten the entire reason that we'd been sent out into the rapids in the first place. I could feel their eyes boring into me, filled with anger and the certain promise of the horrible retribution yet to come (assuming they managed to survive this scene, I mean: they were looking pretty waterlogged.)

"This had better be looking really, really good on camera," I thought to myself.

Salvator finally managed to splutter a command... **"Drew, give me the barrel"**.

But... but... the 1st assistant director had plainly instructed me NOT to send the BARREL to the actors, so I kind of shook my head at Salvator with a tiny, desperate "go away" grimace on my face, never quite looking him in the eye... the equivalent of saying "I'm not here, you can't see me, please stop looking at me".

Salvator's eyes kind of bugged out when I did that, which was embarrassing because it was such a funny expression that I nearly busted out laughing..... if he could only see his own face!! I mean, surely we'd all get a laugh out of this one at the end of the day!!

Of course, at this particular moment, as he was flailing around in the strong current, Salvator didn't have comedy on his mind.

He wanted a barrel, and he wanted it **now**.

So again he commanded (this time with a little more force (and gurgle) in his voice), **"GIVE me the BARREL!!!!"**. Nope, I shook my head - nope, I couldn't do it.

I shook my head some more, hoping that he'd give up at this point. I mean, honestly... my attempt at ignoring the actors hadn't helped the first time around so this time I just gave them a blank stare. Maybe they'd take the hint.

Convinced that I was the stupidest prop guy he'd ever worked with, Salvator now bellowed, **"DREW, GIVE ME THE GOD DAMN BARREL (glug) OR I'LL KILL YOU!!!!!!!!!!!"**

He was clearly building a convincing case for me to send the barrel in his direction.

Just at that moment, picoseconds into a daydream where I was explaining to the police why I hadn't saved two actors from drowning, someone barked a command over the radio. Finally, my cue!

I jammed the barrel into the channel between two rocks, giving it a special twirl to make sure that it caught the current and curved directly toward Salvator and George, who then climbed aboard and drifted limply down river.

I later found out that the 1st assistant director had never given the signal for me to release the barrel. It might have been random static on the radio, but looking back I suspect that it was more likely a subconscious decision to avoid being remembered as the prop guy who drowned (or was soundly beaten by) two actors.

You know, Salvator did finally forgive me, but I don't think he ever forgot.

