

# Booze and boredom on the rails

TRAINS from Page 10

At approximately 1:30 a.m., four or five shadowy figures allegedly run up to a slow moving train just west of downtown Lincoln. Although possibly as many as four or five sojourners were present at the beginning, only three of them were actually able to board the vehicle. Another of the drawbacks of trains, I guess.

This particular train had been previously designated as the Do-or-Die Vehicle, because about half a dozen had already been allowed to pass unchallenged. This one however, had no open boxcars. At each end of every coal car there is a small crouch area, just

big enough for two or three people to huddle in the wind. Luckily, we found one with a platform over the wheels.

And so the journey begins. Now, after safely boarding the train, it's time to celebrate. Out of the Backpack of Necessities comes the bottle of fine champagne. Total expenses so far; \$3.79. Destination: North Platte, because apparently one of us knows somebody there who'll actually give us a ride back.

Anyway, now the hard part is over — it's time to sit back, relax, enjoy the wine, and chat about how easy it is to find rides to North Platte. ("Don't worry, all westbound tracks out of Lincoln have to go through North

Platte." "Are you sure we're going west?")

It is a calm, peaceful, relaxing, and not too darn windy night. Unlike highways, railroad tracks are virtually free of all those nuisance signs and billboards that clutter up highways, so the scenery is beautiful. After a time, perhaps an hour or two, (just over a liter) we come to a city. We can roughly make out a sign in the distance about Beatrice Waste Disposal Site or something like that. Boy, how about that Beatrice. They must own everything. Funny coincidence, we laugh amongst ourselves. There's a Beatrice in Nebraska, south of Lincoln. By the Kansas

See TRAINS on 13



Courtesy of Columbia Pictures

Hoffman and Beatty stranded in movie.

## Film shame of road pics; 'Ishtar' bites the dust

By Chris McCubbin  
Staff Reporter

In the '40s two mismatched but talented entertainers, (Bob Hope and Bing Crosby) together with their sexy co-star (Dorothy Lamoure) created, by accident, some of the most delightful low comedy ever.

In the '80s two mismatched but talented actors (Warren Beatty and Dustin Hoffman) together with their sexy co-star (Isabelle Adjani) created, on purpose, a mess called "Ishtar."

Before I proceed to savage this movie, let me say that "Ishtar" is frequently very entertaining, and if you do decide to plop down your money to see it, you'll probably leave amused.

But there are flaws to this film that simply cannot be excused. First there's its budget. "Ishtar" would have made a very nice \$1 million film, even a \$5 or \$10 million film. But it's more than annoying to think that about \$50 million, that could have (and should have!) gone to feed starving third-world children, instead went to allow prima-donnas like Hoffman and Beatty to act like dorks.

As I mentioned, "Ishtar" is (more or less) a tribute to the Hope/Crosby "Road Movies" ("Road to Zanzibar," "Road to Morocco," etc.) These seven films, made mostly in the '40s, were silly, chaotic, micro-budget affairs which worked solely because of the inexplicable comic *frisson* which existed between the stars.

Hoffman and Beatty completely lack this *frisson*. Hope and Crosby played fools, but they were likeable, charming, clever fools. Hoffman and Beatty come off merely as annoying morons.

In "Ishtar" Beatty and Hoffman play

Rogers and Clarke, a singing/songwriting duo so bad they can only get a gig at the "Chez Casablanca" nightclub in Marakesh.

The film's first 20 minutes, recounting the duo's origins in New York, is pointless and interminable — the movie's low point right at the beginning.

Rogers' and Clarke's excruciatingly bad songs rapidly go from amusing to buzzsaw annoying. The film's original music was performed by veteran schlockster Paul Williams, together with director Elaine May and Beatty and Hoffman. How much Paul Williams can one movie stand? Not this much.

When Hoffman and Beatty are off-screen, or separated, May occasionally manages to produce an uncommonly amusing scene. Separately Hoffman's character is quite a bit funnier than Beatty's clumsy Jethro Bodine impersonation.

May ("The Heartbreak Kid," "Mikey and Nickey") is an undeniably skilled and subtle comic director, but she is relatively inexperienced. When her two mega-stars (and, incidentally, her boss; Beatty produced "Ishtar") are on screen they inevitably whisk the film right out of May's gifted hands and pound it into a shapeless lump of Three Stooges noise.

Charles Grodin gives the film's best comic performance as an amiably sinister CIA agent. Also watch for Matt Frewer (AKA Max Headroom) as another CIA agent in a brief but hilarious scene.

I don't know what it costs to rent a couple of helicopters, some vultures, a camel and some desert, but "Ishtar" is definitely not worth \$500 million. It might be worth your \$4, if you're very, very bored, but you're probably better off waiting for it to hit HBO.

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