

DOING IT FOR MONEY

The Agony and Ecstasy of Writing and Surviving in Hollywood

Whether you are a screenwriter, an aspiring screenwriter, a sort-of-working screenwriter or are safely and sanely none-of-the-above, **Doing It For Money** gives eye-opening insights into "what it's really like" in the bipolar, weird yet wonderful world of Hollywood!

Forty-eight provocative essays take you on a wild ride through the terror, backstabbing, idiocy and triumph that go hand in hand with being a screenwriter.

There's also a treasure trove of insider advice on beating the system and avoiding the pitfalls inherent in the writing and selling of a movie/TV script.

And, for those who like to be "in the know" about what goes on behind the scenes, there are plenty of juicy tidbits about shows, stars, producers, directors and even a few life or death (really!) situations for the essential yet oddly ignored writer.

This unique look at what it is to "do it for money" is laid out in seven playful yet illuminating chapters, ranging from "**The Writing Process**" (aka Avoidance) to the train-wrecks of **pitching, selling, "collaborating"** (aka incorporating inane changes from execs and stars) to those moments of personal triumph and revelation that, in the end, are why it's not really about the money.

To wit.....

CHAPTER 1 (excerpts)

I Only Take Phone Calls When I'm Writing: The Writing Process

Who really likes writing? Not most professional writers. Writing for money is like marrying for money: you earn every penny.

Phil Alden Robinson, Oscar®-nominated Steve Gaghan and Dan Petrie Jr. each share how they try to avoid the process but ultimately get in the flow.

"I do not get up early on the days I write, as I don't want to be groggy. In fact, to prevent grogginess, i sleep as late as possible, then exercise (very good for clearing the head before writing), take a long shower (good thinking can be done here), feed the dog.....do all the assorted little things around the house that have piled up to get them out of the way so they don't give me an excuse later for not writing.

Now it's time for lunch...."

-Phil Alden Robinson (**Field of Dreams; Sneakers**) from his entry "How I Write"

CHAPTER 2 (excerpts)

Breaking and Entering: How Miracles Sometime Happen

Eleven seasoned writers tell their tales of breaking-in to "the biz" and how wildly unpredictable the road to an assignment can be.

"Although it wasn't called diversity at the time, I was hired because the star of the show, Robert Guillaume, insisted in having an African-American writer on staff. If he hadn't, my days of Xeroxing would have undoubtedly been prolonged..."

-Bill Boulware (*The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, The Parkers*) from his entry "The New Guy"

CHAPTER 3 (excerpts)

Curveballs: Pitching and Selling

Whoever came up with the idea of writers pitching was one of those kids who liked pulling wings off flies. Probably still does.

Think about it. Let's drag a mumble-mouthed, navel-gazing, recalcitrant social retard into an office, and make him put on a show! Why would anyone do that, except to take pleasure in the suffering of others?

Here, writers decry the art of the pitch....

"...and led me into the wood-paneled inner sanctum. But the chair behind the desk was empty. Where was Mr. Big?"

I heard moaning coming from behind me. I turned to find the Studio President lying on his couch writhing in pain.

"Who the fuck are you?" he growled.

"I'm the writer; But look, I'm sure the last thing you want to do is listen to my pitch while you're in pain like that. Let's reschedule."

He looked up and down, and then uttered those seven magic words I never in my life expected to hear: "Naw, let's just get it over with...."

-Andrew Marlowe (*Air Force One, End of Days*) from his entry "The Art of the Pitch"

CHAPTER 4 (excerpts)

Visions and Revisions: The Script Monster

A script develops a life of its own. Often in opposition to its writer!

Here, writers describe frantic attempts to tame the script monster... and find that when they finally feel they "got it right," somebody at the studio doesn't think so....

"It was simply the act break – a one-page montage, neatly spaced, describing our lead character trying on a series of disguises.

'My problem is,' she [the studio executive] said, 'there are too many words on the page.'

Incredulous, I asked what she meant.

'Just what I said,' she answered haughtily. 'I can't read that many words.'

"How hard can it be to read one short page?" I pleaded.

' I don't have the time; And I know the woman at the network has the same problem....You have no choice. There has to be more space on the page.'

Obviously that was so she would have some place to color...."

-Billy Riback (**Murphy Brown, Home Improvement**) from his entry "Too Many Words."

CHAPTER 5 (excerpts)

Collaboration: I did it their way

The relationship between writers and their other "collaborators" (studio execs, directors, all-knowing stars, the producer's girlfriend...) in the collaborative art of filmmaking has always been, to use the language of contemporary relationship psychology, "fraught with issues".....

"I hadn't exactly heard warm, fuzzy things about Kevin Spacey and Helen Hunt. I had heard that he was tough, and that she currently held the title of Most Difficult Working Actress.

"Helen was actually quite charming until the first moment I politely disagreed with her. Her mouth set, her eyes grew hard, and I don't recall that she ever again demonstrated the slightest pretense of civility. I quickly learned that anyone who said anything but Yes to her was, then and forever, the enemy..."

-Leslie Dixon (**The Thomas Crown Affair, Mrs. Doubtfire**) from her entry "Dish Served Cold"

CHAPTER 6 (excerpts)

In A Clearing Stands A Boxer: Surviving The Course

If big screen and tv writers could open their skulls and show their psyches, the carnage and scar-tissue would put a stevedore's mitts to shame.

"Ya see this here? Got it pitchin' a feature at Disney." Or "Two words. Meg Ryan." Therein lie the reasons why Samuel Johnson said no man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money.

" ...until (reading) page four. His face contorted in Hitlerian fury, spittle formed at the corners of his mouth, his eyes popped out. He screwed the pages into a ball and threw them at me.... 'Chetta-veend... in America anybody might own an instrument of death...' I wasn't sure where this was going, but I didn't like it.... He put his hand in the drawer...and I saw him remove something dark and heavy... He had finally lost control, and I was about to become a headline.

"I wouldn't even get decent billing given the murderer was Otto Preminger...."

-Lionel Chetwynd (*Ike, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*) from his entry "Me And The Monster"

CHAPTER 7 (excerpts)

They like me, They really like me: Coming Out The Other End

There is No Cure: The struggles of the writer's life are chronic but not fatal. And through the terrors, the frustrations and the failures, there are triumphs.

"It took me a lifetime to discover the importance of writing not for money alone, but with a passion that must be quenched, and the value of accepting criticism of that passion's product..."

"Honest criticism is frequently valid and should be respected, but praise is too often after-shave lotion: it should be sniffed, not swallowed."

-Hal Kanter (Award-winning Broadway, Radio, Film and TV screenwriter) from his entry "Don't Say It Again, Sam."

Editor Daryl G. Nickens is a former chair of the graduate screenwriting program at AFI and still teaches there and at USC. An Emmy, WGA and Humanitas Prize nominated screenwriter, he works in film, television and animation. He recently sold an original script to HBO. He lives in L.A. with his family.