

Introduction

Since the invention of language, people have told stories to entertain each other; with the introduction of literacy came a slew of people telling their stories on the page. A need for mass entertainment to fill amphitheatres saw the first play scripts and, finally, moving pictures brought people around to writing films.

If you've taken the time to pick up and buy (or download) this book, chances are that you're one of the many people each year who realise that they have a story to tell, and that the only place to tell it is on the screen. In the following pages, I'll teach you all about the basics of screenwriting and how to apply them to each of the media for which they can be applied: feature films, shorts, half-hour television sitcoms, hour-long dramas, advertising and even the ever-emerging market for web series. We'll talk about plotting (both in the short-term, as used in features and shorts, and long-term, as applied to TV and the web) and character development. I'll talk you through the balance between writing for actors, directors and industry gatekeepers, we'll talk about pitching and we'll discuss where to find ideas. I'll even introduce you to resources in the way of software, writing communities and the places where you can find real-life writing opportunities to get your career started.

I know what you're thinking now: 'I just looked you up on IMDB and all I found were a bunch of credits listing you as an extra and a runner, who are you to tell me all this?' Look at me as your first lesson: there are no guarantees of success in this business; you have to write because you love to write, not because you want success. I wrote my first screenplay at the age of twelve. It's never seen daylight outside of my friends and immediate family - and never will - but it was the beginning of my journey: the point where I started to learn my craft. I spent my adolescence reading screenwriting books; I maintain that every new writer must buy themselves a copy of Syd Field's excellent *Screenplay* and devour it as a starting point. Not to say, of course, that you won't find a lot of the same things in his book and mine; the advice and lessons I'll be teaching in this book are all based on the experience I've gained since reading and applying Field's lessons.

My whole life, despite being unproduced, unpublished or occasionally uninspired, I've been a writer. Writers write. It's what we do; if it isn't screenplays, it's short stories, or novels, or poetry or even the odd Haiku. It's blogging or journalism. And every time we write, we learn something. I've been writing screenplays for fifteen years now. I've had more near-sales, dollar options and micro-budget indie assignments that I dare think about. The thrill of chasing that first sale drives me nearly as much as the thrill of torturing my protagonists down the long, winding road to their ultimate goal.

All the while I've been writing, I've been an active part of the online writing community by participating in forums, sharing advice with less experienced writers or helping other writers break down their mental blocks. Eventually, I decided to share my advice with other writers by writing articles for various websites; I published my first article on character development at The Movie People (<http://www.moviepeople.info>) in 2009. I eventually opened my own blog about screenwriting, Trainee Writer (<http://failingwriter.wordpress.com>) to pass on the nuggets of advice that I thought up whilst I was writing and to share anecdotes about my progress, as well as to self-promote (we'll discuss that later.) Eventually, I incorporated a 'contest' and a forum into the site in the hope of turning it into an active community and resource for the young writer. Naturally, the next step was to condense the advice into a book. The following is the product of those fifteen years of practice, experience and hard labour.

While some will be quick to cast doubts upon the validity of the advice contained herein, or stick by the amateur producer's mantra ("Have you read *Save The Cat*? You must read *Save The Cat*!") I hope that you will be one of those who chooses, instead, to hear me out, to read my thoughts and maybe to learn something. One thing you'll quickly learn once you go off into the big wide world of Hollywood is this – opinions are like assholes: everybody has one, and everybody thinks theirs is the sweetest smelling. The truth is this: every piece of advice you receive from anyone in this industry about anything can and will be useful to you at some point. The trick is learning to filter the advice you need from the rest and, sadly that's something only experience and intuition can teach you. What follows is my advice, built on that which I've gleaned from other writers when I was starting out and throughout my screenwriting career; their advice was based on the advice they received and who knows? Maybe one day you'll impart advice to another writer based on the advice contained in this book.

Happy Learning

- *Kriss Sprules, 21/08/2012*