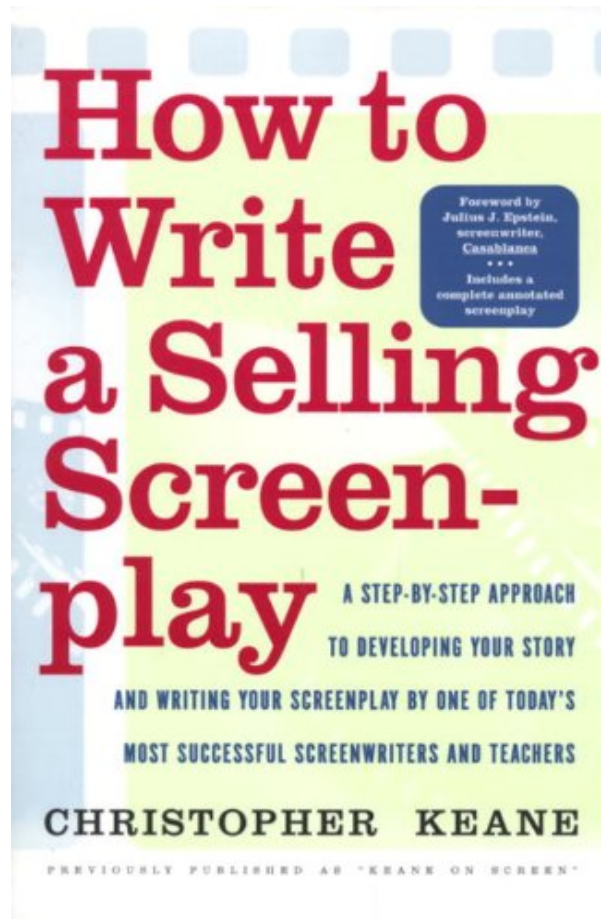
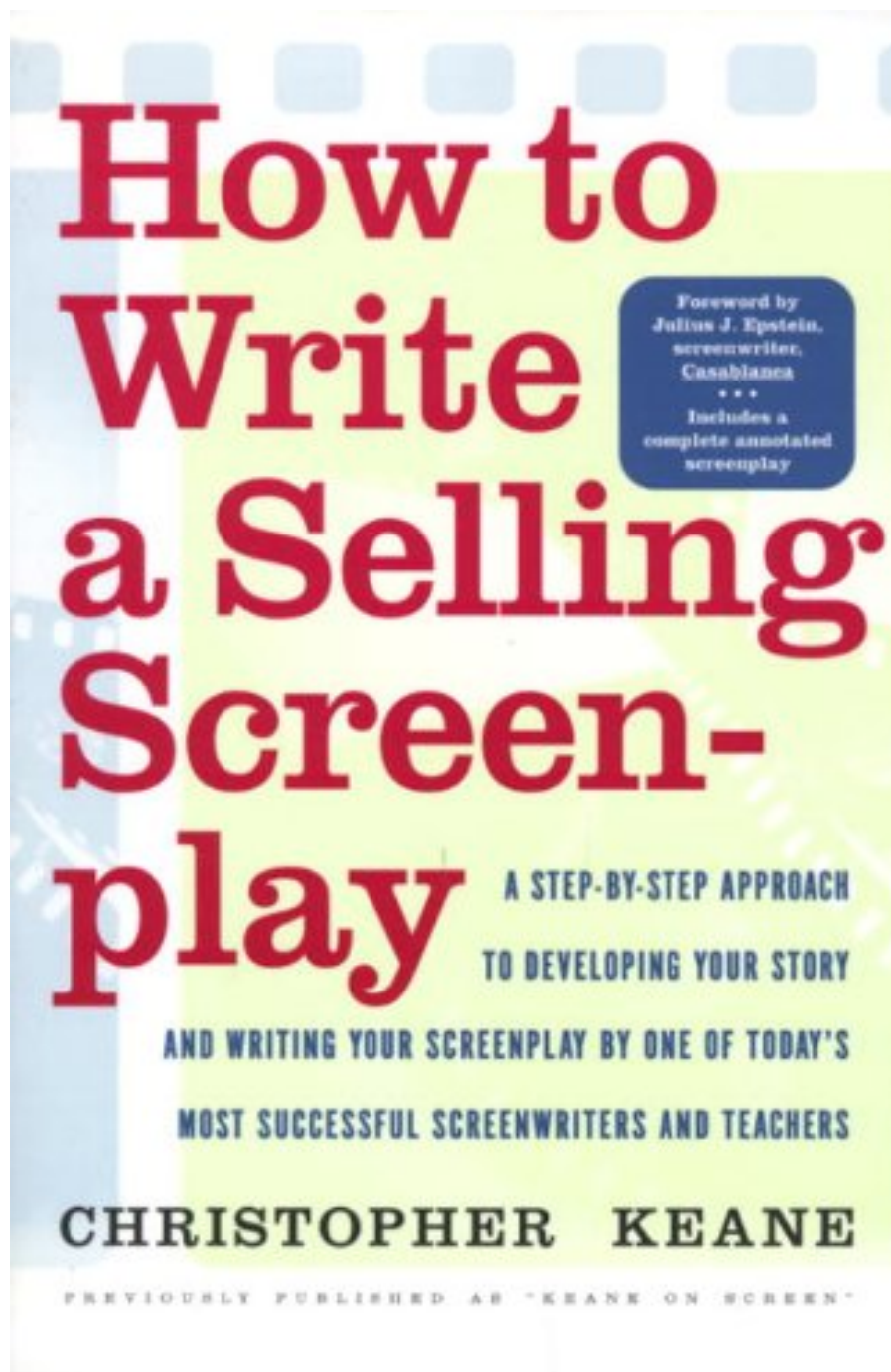


# HOW TO WRITE A SELLING SCREENPLAY BY CHRISTOPHER KEANE



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Short on Namedropping, Long on Practical, Exemplified Advice

By D C Hall

There are so many books on screenwriting already in existence that the real question any reviewer must address when another one comes along is: if you could only afford to buy one of them, why should you buy this one and save the others for any book tokens you might receive at Christmas? The title of this review forms the basis of my answer to that question.

Chris Keane has made his living as a professional writer for decades, focusing mostly on novels and screenplays. His success has brought him many offers of teaching posts, and indeed, he spends a considerable part of each year teaching at Emerson, where he is an Associate Professor, and at the International Film and Television Workshops in Maine. All this makes him actually aware of the nitty-gritty needs of both the fledgling screenwriter and the writer who has been over the course more than once, but who needs to re-learn key lessons. These lessons are so key that for much of the first part of the book, one feels like one is directing a question and answer session, rather than having questions answered in which one might possibly be interested. From the question of work habits to how to generate ideas, and what to do with

them once you have them, through to characterisation, dialogue, and the scene as the nucleus of the screenplay, Keane is both judicious and generous with his hard-won wisdom.

The second half of the book puts theory into practice. It consists of the full text of Keane's screenplay 'The Crossing', with honest, detached critical commentary at the end of each scene or section. This allows the reader to see exactly what Keane is talking about in the first half of the book, to experience the emotion that his own work needs to generate, to feel for the characters, and then, with Keane's assistance, to stop and reflect on why he feels as he does. In the hands of a writer with a bigger ego but less talent, this method might well have had the reader reaching for the sick bag after only a few pages, but it works wonderfully here, and it seems to me that anyone wishing a career in screenwriting could not wish for clearer, more genuine exemplification.

A final point on this structural feature of Keane's indispensable book. Something else the inclusion of this constantly optioned but not yet produced screenplay teaches the would-be screenwriter is how tough his desired career can be, that he could write a screenplay as good as Keane's and still wait a long, long time to see it on the big screen, if indeed he ever does.

Other books on screenwriting claim to 'make it easy'. Keane's puts the emphasis exactly where it should be: on the work.

23 of 24 people found the following review helpful.

A good solid foundation

By Frank Cunat

This is a clearly written, easily read book that distills lessons derived from the author's long experience in the movie business. Keane is able to express his points purposefully and succinctly, unlike other authors I've read. I'm a playwright who is interested in branching into teleplays, and this is the first book I've read that discusses in detail the differences between teleplays and screenplays. Arguably Keane's book is a bit formulaic, but he'd probably say that he's just describing the formulas which the studios are interested in.

My only qualm was Keane's inclusion of \*full text\* of one of his own unproduced screenplays, complete with annotations (at one point he says, "WHAT A CLIMAX!"). Yes, the screenplay illustrates his points, but it also seems like a blatant attempt to find another producer. (Sorry, Chris, that's how it seemed.) He could have made the same points with only a few excerpts.

19 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

There are better books about screenwriting than this.

By A Customer

Reading about screenwriting from someone who has actually written AND sold screenplays is of course refreshing. That said, I personally think the topics of the book are better covered by Robert Mckee, Christopher Vogler and Linda Seger. But of course the test for books about screenwriting is whether or not it inspires the reader. And if you are looking for a very detailed step-by-step 'recipe' then this book might be for you.

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