
Summer Book & DVD Review

Author and screenwriter Jeffrey Freedman gives his review on some books and DVDs from the summer season.

Summer makes it crystal clear that life really is a beach. Sink or swim, you may as well wade into the waters of inspirational and instructional literacy while you're waiting for your own personal Titanic to come in. While you're doing that, I've checked out some great DVD and book titles that should make this a summer of sharpening your screenwriting skills and firing up the cognitive idea machine to make this a productive writing season.

Four Great Books About The History and State of The Industry:

The Big Picture by Edward Jay Epstein, Random House

The Whole Equation by David Thomson, Knopf

Gods and Monsters by Peter Biskind, Nation Books

Final Cut by Steven Bach, Newmarket Press

Creating Characters by Marisa D'Amico, Michael Wiese Productions:

A comprehensive overview of what makes us humans and movie characters kick and how to use them to kick-start your muse.

Another Day In Showbiz by Pierre Cossette, ECW Press: One producer's very engaging story about how nice and nasty this business can be. Very instructive from a production perspective.

The 100 Best Movies You've Never Seen by Richard Crouse, ECW Press: Kind of a presumptuous title (I've seen more than a few of the movies in this book) but a nice compendium of great, arcane films you probably should see.

The Good, The Bad, and The Dolce Vita by Mickey Knox, Nation Books: I love this autobiography by this revered actor who got dragged through the celluloid sludge in Hollywood, was worked over by the "Black List" of Communist paranoia in Washington, D.C., and then absconded to Rome where he became the unofficial Mayor of Rome. It's a great, humble, straightforward, informed and very human telling of a fascinating life in the film business.

Big Bosoms and Square Jaws: The biography of Russ Meyer, King of The Sex Film by Jimmy McDonough, Crown Publishers: Regardless of what you think of Russ Meyer, he is, by any American s definition, a success. He got his work out, put his vision on the screen and didn t make out too badly in most respects. This book tells the whole story without judgment or embellishment. A great read.

Eternal Sunshine of The Spotless Mind/American Beauty/Gods and Monsters, Newmarket Press: These three are part of Newmarket s "Shooting Script Series." Not only are the scripts wonderful to read, but the notes and photos about the making of the movies make them great additions to any screenwriter s library.

The Last Honest Place In America by Marc Cooper, Nation Books: A great story about the drama and dramatic potential of the thousand and one stories in Las Vegas. Beautifully written and thought-provoking.

DVDs

Distant, a film by Bilge Geylan, Mongrel Media: Okay, it s bleak, depressing and makes you want to slit your wrists by the time it s over, but it s one of the most visually stunning and exquisitely shot films I ve seen in a long time. A really great "I m not the only one who feels this way" flick. New Yorker Video.

L Ennui: Cedric Kahn s sensuous drama about sexual obsession and the sins of seduction. Mongrel Media.

My Architect: A Son s Journey, Nathaniel Kahn s moving documentary about his emotional and spiritual search for his deceased father, the internationally renowned architect, Louis I. Kahn. Mongrel Media.

Flamenco, a film by Carlos Saura: When you get stuck you gotta to something to get unstuck. I do flamenco dancing. Whether it s in the middle of Santa Monica Boulevard, Broadway or the Champs Elysees, I just get up and slam the heels into the concrete and get the arms gyrating, fingers gesticulating and joyfully flay every other extremity to this ancient amalgam of dance and vocal celebration of the human spirit known as flamenco. This is a video that will do for you what you may have relied on drugs and rock n roll for only there won t be any hangover or unhealthy addiction. Mongrel Media/New Yorker Video.

Ayurveda, a film by Pan Nalin: Another great physical, spiritual and emotional DVD that can help you recharge your muse while you familiarize yourself with one of the oldest holistic medical systems in the world. Mongrel Media/KINO.

Great Beach and Retreat Reads

1776 by David McCullough, Simon & Schuster: An account of the pivotal days of the American Revolution written with the drama and intensity every screenwriter shoots for.

The R. Crumb Handbook by R. Crumb and Peter Poplaski, MQP: Say what you will about Crumb, the truth is he was highly sought out by Hollywood and knew how to negotiate his way around the sharks and still remain true to his art. To wit: Because I'm an acutely visual person, storytelling is secondary to me. It's been my observation that most people aren't all that visually attuned. What they respond to more than anything else are stories. Strong, simple narratives. That quote by Crumb from this book could have come out of any Screenwriting 101 book. But he knows the power of visuals and stories and what are great screenplays if not great stories told in a visually dramatic, moving and stunning fashion?

My Life So Far by Jane Fonda, Random House: She comes off as pretty humble for someone who is coming from where she is. As an inside look at the industry and life in the celluloid/media fastlane from the 60s to the present, it's very much a good read. Gets a little bogged down in real world, not Hollywood, politics. But Fonda has lived a comprehensive life on and off the screen and you come away feeling she is trying to do what she can to put her privilege to good use in service of the vast majority of souls who are not born with the multitude of advantages as she.

Bukowski For Beginners by Carlos Polimeni, illustrations by Miguel Rep, A Writers and Readers Beginners Documentary Comic Book: Summer is slow. Life is short. Art is long. How many more reasons do you need to derive inspiration from the poet and screenwriter of Barfly Charles Bukowski? The only poet who has more to offer screenwriters and any other kind of writer than any other living poet in America is Charles Bukowski, and he's dead. Even though he's in that Elysium of uncompromised scribes, he still has better advice and better prose than anyone who's still around. Check out this great introduction to Hank for a look at how creative catharsis and life lived to the hilt still justify this awful, beautiful existence.

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

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