

Hollywood Defined

Who knew the next page-turner would be a dictionary?

By Mairi Hennessy

Like an actor who carefully plots the arc of their career, Hollywood has escaped being pigeonholed. It takes all kinds to make the entertainment world go 'round, from power brokers to poseurs, BS artists to creative geniuses. There are the masterminds, insiders, outsiders, interns, media hounds, techies, grunt labor, pitchmen, moviegoers and hordes more.

Is it so surprising not everyone speaks the same language? Finally, here's the book to level the playing field: "A/V A to Z: An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Media, Entertainment and Other Audiovisual Terms."

Letter by letter, lexicographer Richard W. Kroon dissects the entertainment industry's idiom, history and culture in painstaking detail.

In Kroon's quest to leave no stone—or word, or acronym—unturned, he travels back to the Stone Age, the industry's cradle. As old as man's discovery of fire, audiovisual was born as "shadow plays cast on cave walls to accompany the stories of the hunt."

From crude beginnings to modern times, a lot has changed in Hollywood. Technology is the obvious. And with it, fast-changing technical terminology. This work closes the gap of ages.

For movie enthusiasts, it's an entertaining and informative read, that delves deep into the dust-covered annals of Hollywood history. For those in the industry, it's a whopper of a reference to aid cross-department communication. But for newbies still in the fake-it-'till-you-make-it stage of their showbiz careers it's a must read.

Think four years of film school bound in one hardback book.

The ambitious book was clearly a monstrous undertaking, one that took Kroon and contributors more than seven years to complete. Stretching beyond mere dictionary definitions, Kroon explores the origins of terms, stages of development, as well as its impact on the industry. More than 10,000 entries, ranging from everyday terminology to the obscure, are supported with illustrations and anecdotes.

Kroon also pays close attention to less documented areas of distribution, exhibition and business—and even covers Yiddish terms. The rich collection of cross-over terms bridges everything from acting, writing, development, distribution, accounting, production, post-production, exhibition and Hollywood culture.

The entertainment industry is a world built on slang and, in a greater sense, slang is a means of excluding the outsider, of perpetuating exclusivity. This is one of Hollywood's historical trends. It's a world where not even the great fortunes of William Randolph Hearst or Howard Hughes could buy insider status.

Like Hollywood itself, its idiom has a colorful past. The language is remarkably sexist. Where possible, Kroon offers gender-neutral alternatives. And without glossing over Hollywood like a high-priced plastic surgeon, Kroon does not ignore the industry's many offensive terms, and illustrates how meanings transmute over time. Take "money shot" for example. Once a graphic reference in the porn industry, it is now mainstream. But, other familiar terms— like schmuck— still hold the power to offend. The book cautions against the usage of some terms, a welcome XXXX to those new to the business and hoping to avoid foot-in-mouth syndrome.

"A/V A to Z" is one of the most comprehensive reference books compiled on the industry, and ironically somehow personifies it by trying very hard not to be typecast. Classified as a text book, the nearly 800-page encyclopedic dictionary can not be considered purely academic considering the leading role the entertainment industry plays in pop culture.

The work reaches out to a much wider audience as it takes on yet another quality of the culture it defines: it's entertaining. Yes, a dictionary that's entertaining.

Ultimately, it's fascinating facts and Kroon's dry wit that keep the pages turning.

"A/V A to Z" is so comprehensive it could very well become Hollywood's bible. Have to wonder if its mass appeal wasn't coolly calculated in some corner office, like a bid for numbers at the box office.