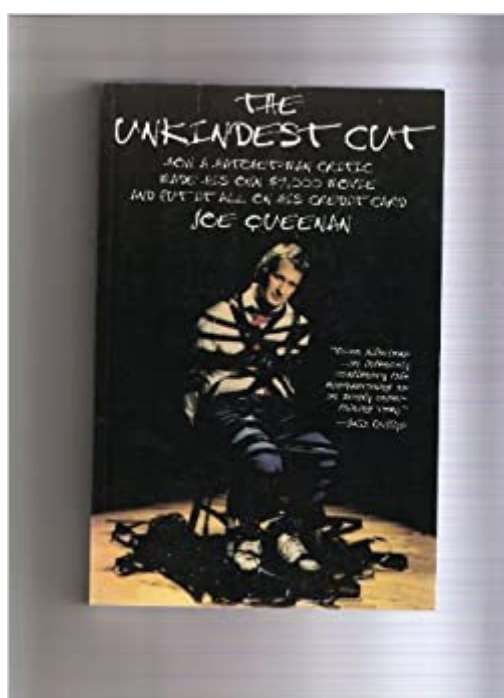


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# The Unkindest Cut: How A Hatchet-Man Critic Made His Own \$7000 Movie And Put It All On His Credit Card



## Synopsis

Following in the maverick mold of Quentin Tarentino, Spike Lee, and Richard Rodriguez, Joe Queenan becomes an auteur and, in the process, funnier than ever, as he tries to master the art of writing, directing, scoring, casting, and marketing a movie--all by himself.

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## Customer Reviews

When Queenan saw Robert Rodriguez's award-winning film *El Mariachi*, which was reputedly made for only \$7000, he thought he'd like to duplicate the feat. Because of his extreme dislike of 12-step recovery programs, he decided to make a movie-12 Steps to Death-about an ex-LAPD cop whose life was ruined when a "schizoid anorexic recovering alcoholic with Attention Deficit Disorder slammed into the car, kill[ing] his wife and kids." Queenan plugged the film on the nationally syndicated *Imus-in-the-Morning* radio program and dreamed of the glories that lay ahead. But fantasy quickly turned to dreaded reality as he strived to write a screenplay, recruit neighbors as actors and lay out the filming over a 10-day period in Tarrytown, N.Y., where he lived. We see Queenan as he takes the \$279 Hollywood Film Institute course; learns the astronomical cost of everything from camera rental to buying film stock. In the end Queenan is left with a bill for more than \$67,000. Fans of Queenan (*If You're Talking to Me, Your Career Must Be in Trouble*) will find this memoir funny in parts but often tedious and repetitious, and student filmmakers may find it interesting for its nuts-and-bolts information. Major ad/promo; author tour. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

After reading that Richard Rodriguez had made *El Mariachi* for \$7000, Queenan, film critic for *Movieline*, *GQ*, and many other publications, decided that "all Rodriguez had proven was that someone could make a movie for \$7,000. What would be really cool was proving that anyone could make a movie for \$7,000. And that anyone was going to be me." This book is the story of that colossal error in judgment. The film, entitled *Twelve Steps to Death*, is about the murder of a controversial psychiatrist who counsels the recovering population of No Quarter, Wisconsin. The script (about one-fifth of the book) is hilarious, promising the kind of offbeat, indie film that studios are buying by the boatload these days. Unfortunately, the resultant movie stinks by most accounts. The rest of the book deals with how that script became that particular movie?i.e., the day-to-day workings of a movie under production. Hidden among the anecdotes of this movie directed by a writer who's never directed, starring his neighbors, most of whom have never acted, is a readable guide to making a movie; but this is more a cautionary tale than a how-to manual. Don't try this at home. Recommended for film and humor collections of academic and large public libraries. Adam Mazmanian, "Library Journal" Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A thoroughly enjoyable read for independent filmmakers. Queenan carefully documents every phase of the low-budget filmmaking process and the result is an entertaining and thought-provoking book.

This project was designed as a parody of 'Rebel without a Crew' by Robert Rodriguez. Robert produced a movie for \$ 7,000, taking numerous shortcuts along the way, so sarcastic writer Joe Queenan, having \$7,000 to spare, decided to join him. R's fundamental idea is that you become a director by doing everything from holding the camera to dressing the sets. Which is very good, but Joe - by his own admission - didn't even know how to use an Instamatic. So he needed help, and, well, help never comes cheap when your contacts are among the over-30 set instead of enthusiastic film school types. As a result, even the proposed budget was seriously out of control. Why Joe continued despite this is a complete mystery to me, and - I think - to his readers as well. It was already clear from the start that Joe was not the type of person who could actually make a \$ 7,000 film. (To put this in perspective, \$ 7,000 was about what the film and developing cost on Rodriguez' picture). But he did. I must warn those interested in this book: The script is ghastly. It's not that it's not politically correct; that I can surely deal with. But the truth is that there are NO sympathetic

characters. NONE. The supposed hero is a tough, mean-spirited cop who spends most of his time insulting his partner. The villain is an evil shrink who taunts his patients. And his patients are annoying too, although their level of annoyance is pretty much built into the concept. I recommend the book highly because it's side-splittingly funny, and because the lessons that should be learned from it are obvious: Don't try to make a film if you haven't got a few videos under your belt and have learned some lessons from them. Incidentally, despite the ending, Joe Queenan has since made another film. Guess filmmaking ruined neither his finances or his marriage, despite claims to the contrary in the book. Or is he a closet masochist?

Joe Queenan has a gift for writing. I have read one reviewer saying his writing is, perhaps, pretentious -- and.. sometimes it is. But, come on... he's really funny. He's meanly sarcastic. It's so great. And who can meld wicked sarcasm with big words? Oh, ok. I guess some other authors can too. But I still choose Joe Queenan over anyone else. This book, I must say, is either his finest or one of them. As of 10/17/01, "The Unkindest Cut" is not available. Thank God I have a reasonable library. I found this accidentally.. while looking for something else by Joe Queenan, "Balsamic Dreams"(which is also good). I took the book off the shelf, sat down at an empty table, and started reading. Fifty pages later, I was more than ready to check "Unkindest" out. Reading this was such a pleasure. I went through the adventures of Joe Queenan for a long time span. And since I'm an aspiring director, this was already an instant classic for me. If you like Joe Queenan, you will most definitely love this book. Yeah, currently it's not available, but buy one used. They should be available here. It's worth it. It's touching, funny, dead serious sometimes, and just overall one of the better reads I've had the pleasure for a long time.

Mr. Queenan seems not to have grasped that satire is a weapon of the powerless against the powerful. When satire is aimed at powerless people, it is not only cruel but profoundly vulgar. -Molly Ivins, NY Times Book Review on Imperial Caddy by Joe Queenan It's hard to imagine how Molly Ivins could be more wrong, though not the least bit surprising that she is. The natural target of satire is not power, but stupidity, and it is simply one of those brutal facts of life that the powerless are often so because they are stupid, while the powerful, though quite often stupid themselves, are usually less so. Satire is however an important weapon to use against the powerful, because their stupidity has a tendency to affect us all, whereas the stupidity of the powerless is generally fairly harmless. She is right though, that the satirist will often appear to be cruel and vulgar; after all, their profession basically consists of pointing out how stupid people are. But it is possible, perhaps even

necessary, for them to leaven this effect by pointing out one other thing : their own stupidity. No humorist is more savage than Joe Queenan, but in recent years he's learned this lesson and taken to making himself the butt of his own humor. When his job as a self described "hatchet man critic" found him watching the Robert Rodriguez film, El Mariachi, which was notoriously said to have been made for \$7000, Joe Queenan decided that he was so sick of hearing these kinds of obviously confabulated stories about independent filmmakers that he would try it himself : [A]ll Rodriguez had proven was that someone could make a movie for \$7,000. What would be really cool was proving that anyone could make a movie for \$7,000. And that anyone was going to be me. This book details his misadventures as he sets out to do just that--well, actually to make one for \$6,998. He quickly determined that in order to keep costs down, and headaches to a minimum, his movie, Twelve Steps to Death, would have to be made without professional help, or rather interference, because professionals wouldn't be willing to make the necessary compromises. So instead, he wrote, directed and acted in it himself; used friends, family and neighbors; and shot the whole thing in his hometown of Tarrytown, NY.. Much of the book is taken up by the script and by the very funny process of making the movie, which ends up costing twice the budgeted price even with all the corner cutting. Then an interesting thing happens, Queenan finds himself getting caught up in the whole deal and starts to think in bigger terms than just showing it can't be done. He starts to think about having a finished product that people will actually pay for. The cynic starts to care. And so he begins blowing larger and larger sums of money to get the picture edited, add sound effects and music, and produce a quality print. He stages and of course wins his own film festival, where Twelve Steps is the only entry and the judges are friends, in-laws, and his mother. Then he takes the movie to a Dallas Film Festival...and the roof falls in on his dreams. In its review of the movie, the Dallas Observer compared it to "a flatulent snuffalupagus, pausing before each target and expelling noxious gases." This is all very funny, but along the way something more profound is also revealed. Queenan discovers that it just isn't that easy, despite all his sniping over the years, to make a good movie. More important, he offers the reader a chance to see just how divorced from that reality he became. Queenan actually deceived himself into thinking that the movie was good, when it was manifestly, and virtually had to be, awful. And he's one of the most cynical guys on the planet; imagine how much easier it must be for artists, with their inherently dreamy temperaments, to trick themselves. No wonder most art isn't very good. The people who produce it are fundamentally incapable of maintaining the emotional distance that is required to judge it objectively. In the end the joke is on Joe Queenan as he learns this valuable lesson--that people don't set out to make crappy movies, they just turn out that way, despite their best intentions--in devastating, but very amusing,

fashion.GRADE : B

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