

Dirty Pretty Things

SCREENPLAY BY STEVEN KNIGHT

Studio: Miramax (released July 18)

Category: Original

Storyline: A highly principled night clerk (Chiwetel Ejiofor) at a posh London hotel, who in his native Nigeria was a doctor, gets drawn into a scheme to extract organs from desperate immigrants in exchange for passports.

About the script: Taut script presents a Dickensian, character-rich vision of modern London, in which educated foreigners toil invisibly in service jobs, while the less-skilled risk degradation and death in the quest for work papers. In the third-act climax, its protagonist trumps adversity in a most satisfying way. "In creating Okwe (the night clerk), I wanted to create an unequivocally



KNIGHT

good person, who at the end of the story does the exact same thing the villain does, only this time, everyone cheers," says Steven Knight, the first-time screenwriter. "I wanted to have a good character do a bad thing for a good reason." His depiction of London's immigrant underworld, he says, was an attempt to be true to life. "In the West End, that posh bit of London, the night porter would almost certainly be African, and the chambermaid would be Turkish, or



Filipino. I find that there are so many stories in our midst of daring and escape and torture and war, from the people who are sweeping our floors and driving our cabs, but it's always the passenger's

story, not the cab driver's, that gets told, and that just seems a waste."

Biggest challenge: "Keeping it to length, and trying not to get carried away with

the possibilities, or the number of characters." Also, working out the clever ending.

Breakthrough idea: Figuring out how Okwe would be able to turn the tables on Sneaky (Sergi Lopez), the hotel manager. "I thought, he's going to have to drug him, but how? Then I realized I could go back and make Sneaky a drinker. That was a wonderful moment, when I realized, that will work. He's going to put (the knockout drug) in the beer," Knight says.

Favorite scene: Juliet, the prostitute (Sophie Okonedo), comforts Sinay, the virgin (Audrey Tautou), in a hotel room moments after Sinay has lost her innocence.

Lines we love: Okwe, at the end, to the man who delivers the money and asks why he's hasn't seen him before: "We are the people you do not see. The people who drive your cabs, clean your rooms, and (perform sexual services for money)."

Writer's bio: Knight is a novelist and television writer in London. He began "Dirty Pretty Things" as his fourth novel, but found it taking a different shape. "It became my first serious screenplay attempt." He took it to BBC Films, where it found its way eventually to director Stephen Frears. "I got a call out of the blue from Stephen Frears. We met at a bar in Notting Hill, and he decided to do it."

— Amy Dawes