

REWRITE

By Paul Chitlik

(Michael Wiese Productions, 2008, 173 pages)

In the 29 years since Syd Field's "Screenplay" first appeared on bookstore shelves, the market has become so glutted with books on screenwriting that one wonders if there's anything left to say about it. Yet every year new gurus appear, like so many emperors in new clothes, coining their own terms and repackaging three-act structure in an attempt to pass it off as their own invention.

Perhaps the most refreshing thing about "Rewrite" is that it's *not* a novel or unique approach to screenwriting but a back-to-basics manual — a reiteration of tried-and-true techniques for crafting a screenplay, along with sensible advice about style and formatting. Everything Chitlik says has been said before, but never more clearly or succinctly and, perhaps, never all in one place.

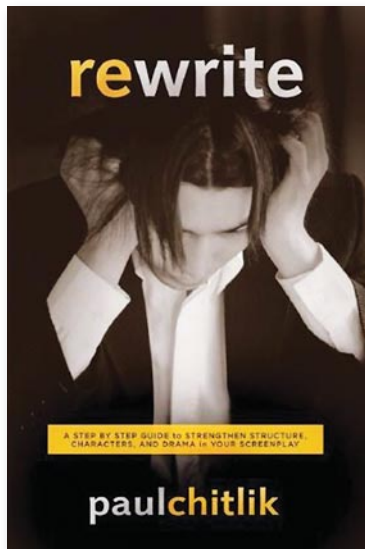
"Rewrite" starts with two assumptions — 1) that your aim is to write a classic Hollywood-style narrative and 2) that you already have the first draft in hand and are about to embark on the second. But Chitlik — a veteran writer for the studios and networks who now teaches in the UCLA Extension Writers Program — assumes nothing when it comes to the reader's prior knowledge of screenwriting. He starts from scratch and lays the foundation carefully, layer by layer. First he divides the script into seven basic parts: ordinary life, inciting incident, end of act one, midpoint or turning point, low point, final challenge and return to ordinary life. Then he goes on to talk about what makes a powerful protagonist and a worthy antagonist, what

constitutes true conflict, how to structure scenes and the role of subplots.

Chitlik explains when and how to write outlines and beat sheets — two extremely valuable tools — and provides a great example of each in the book's appendix. In a chapter called "The Right Look," he shows you how to write a script your readers will visualize in shots, without ever trespassing on the director's domain by using words like "wide shot" or "close up."

The book is sprinkled with exercises for the reader to tackle. Most are well thought-out, but there is one disappointment in the chapter called "Paring It Down," which ends with a 19-page script segment the reader is asked to tighten. It would be a much more useful exercise if Chitlik had followed it with his own rewrite of the material so that the reader could have something against which to measure his success. Chitlik does include some samples of revisions from one of his own scripts, but the changes from draft to draft are sometimes too subtle to catch, and the reasoning behind the changes is not explained in much detail.

For the most part, "Rewrite" succeeds. It's a quick, entertaining read, offering reliable information in a well-organized format. Chitlik may have unnecessarily limited his readership by choosing to title his book "Rewrite," though. One needn't have completed a script in order to appreciate or use this book. In fact, if you read it before starting your next screenplay, you just might save yourself a lot of trouble when it comes time to rewrite. **CS**



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