

## Movie Outline 3.0

There's a new screenwriting program in town!

From the time screenwriters embraced the computer as their tool of choice, there has always been software to assist and/or frustrate writers as they attempted to bring their vision to the blank page and beyond. At first it was in the form of templates such as Scriptor from Screenplay Systems (now Write Brothers, Inc.). Then Final Draft arrived on the scene with a fully functional word processor dedicated to the screenplay format. Then a little program called Script Thing (one of my favorites) was bought by the guys over at Write Brothers, and after some tweaks and revisions we had Movie Magic Screenwriter.

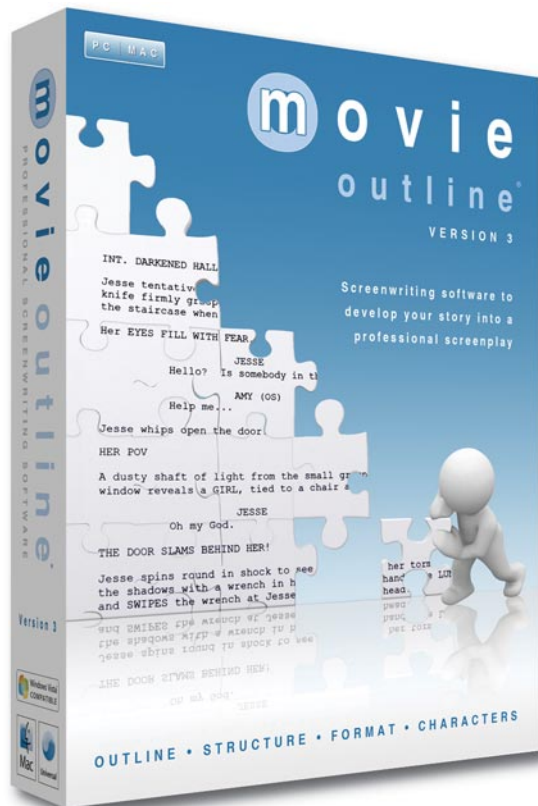
Today the market is dominated by Final Draft and Movie Magic (with a big shout out to Celtx, a free shareware program that delivers some nice bang for no bucks). Each program has pros and fans alike singing their praises. But a little competition is always a good thing, and Movie Outline 3.0 brings it to the table. (As it happens, Movie Magic also included outlining tools in its most recent update.)

Still, Movie Outline has taken what it does best and expanded nicely into the script formatting/word processing market. And even if you're not a fan of outlining (for the record, most pros do this religiously), it would be a shame not to use the wealth of tools provided by the program.

The interface itself is clean, simple and easy to use with tabs across the top to allow you to effortlessly slip back and forth between your script and the different tools such as Outline, Characters, Feel Factor, Reference Library, PowerView, Step Cards and Story Tasks. I particularly enjoyed the features that allowed me to color-code just about any part of the script for analysis, isolate one character's dialogue (to see if I'm writing a consistent voice) or just view the electronic note cards and shuffle the scenes at my discretion.

For those of you using Final Draft or

Movie Magic, scene or step-outline cards may be nothing new since both programs sport electronic index cards. But Movie Outline does more than just structure your script. It helps flesh out your cast of characters with features like Character Profile Wizard, which includes a detailed character interview section that asks more



than 70 questions to help you flesh out your characters and their individual arcs. And while no software will create your characters or write the story for you, Movie Outline's tools definitely help keep all your notes and development ideas in one organized place. And they even throw in a fun reference library where you can compare your structure to that of a similar film or genre. Granted, this analysis is only available for 12 films (the most recent being *Spider-Man*), but the website promises to have more available in the near future.

Support for the program is top notch

and free of charge. I e-mailed a question and got an automated response almost instantly, followed by an e-mail from a real person that directly addressed my concern in less than two hours. The one drawback is that live phone service is only available on weekdays from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. (ET). That means after 2 p.m. on the West Coast, you'll have to resort to e-mail to get help. Still, the quality of support is outstanding.

The program itself is supposed to be cross-platform (Mac or PC), and my Windows Vista laptop ran Movie Outline without a glitch. While I did not test the program on a Mac, I expect the performance would be similar. Of course, like most programs, there are a few quirks. For example, in the outline mode, the program recognizes slug lines (INT. or EXT.) one time only on each new electronic index card. And if you need to import a script from another program, it has to be in text format (.txt) with no weird formatting, e.g., stretched margins. But this is pretty much the case in Final Draft or Movie Magic Screenwriter. The cool thing with the import was that Movie Outline broke out all the characters for me in the other sections of the program, so I could use the character tools without having to enter each individual character into the program one by one.

Overall, Movie Outline 3.0 compares very favorably to Final Draft and Movie Magic Screenwriter. The only glaring omission (which the other two programs seem to cover) is the lack of professional revision tools that facilitate omitting pages and other production rewrites. That said, Movie Outline 3.0 does a terrific job of helping writers organize their development process from beginning to end and has effectively raised the bar in the screenwriting software arena. Now, if they could just create the writer's version of a cooking timer to tell us when our scripts are ready to launch. Version 4.0? **CS**