It's the holiday season. Snowflakes should be coming down, but they're not, thankfully. Otherwise, why live in Southern California? The pressure is off, too, or at least lessening. Hollywood is shutting down for the holidays.

But I'm a writer as well as a director. No rest for a writer. Writing is one of the things you can do anywhere, anytime. I write three or four pages a day (well, two or three), good or bad—and believe me, sometimes they're terrible—but I get them written.

When computers came on the scene (they were called "dedicated word processors" in their initial days; just ask Stephen King), I thought my productivity would go way up. I'd write more, because it would be so easy to revise.

Revising is the heart of good writing. "Writing is rewriting" is the old saying. That was the great gift of the computer. They made revisions easier. It was a good thing. Prose does get better the more you work it.

Same with film. There isn't a picture that can't be improved by taking out a few frames there, or adding back that one shot you dropped, or raising the sound level on that music cue, or having a better sound affect on the bullet hit.

So revising, polishing, making your script or the cut of your video project better has become part of the workflow. But revising, made easy by today's devices, is also a terrible trap. Any of the arts, but especially writing and movies, naturally draws obsessives. Same with painting. Because the product is never good enough. And now that it is so easy to make it "better," the work, the polishing, the revising never stops.

This is the curse of the computer, the screenwriting program, Final Cut Pro 2, Avid, Shake, 3-D animation, etc., because they allow the artist to be in process forever. I don't know how many friends I have who are still working on that short, movie, screenplay, book, play or video game after a year or so. Or two or three.

This driven, monomaniacal pursuit of excellence has led to the need of another skill, an axiom to creative life, so to speak: that is, the art of letting go. One has to know when it's good enough, when to move on, when you've polished it to the point where you're making it go away. Usually when you're talking about cuts in terms of frames, and you've been doing it for more than a week, it's time to let go. Or put a gun to your head.

Because what is happening more often than not is that you're not making any progress with the story. You're spinning your wheels. This isn't a danger when you're working on a commercial film. There's money on the line, it is a product, like a widget, to be finished, no matter how well or badly. Ergo, the old saying "It doesn't have to be good. It has to be Thursday." And if it isn't, you're fired.

But what about when it's an independent, or someone making a YouTube video for himself or friends or to break into Hollywood? He has to remember that he can't look at the particulars until he has finished the whole. He must always have a first assembly before he starts tearing into it—so he can see the whole of it, the better to see the holes. Same with a script or a book. There's nothing to revise if you haven't reached the end.

So my advice to everybody, experienced professional or amateur, talented or otherwise, is to get it all shot, get it all written, get it all into rough form, the whole thing, until the climax, the last shot, the epilogue, the fadeout to The End. Then go back to work on it. Not before. Above all else, finish the damn thing first.

This is on my mind because I'm writing my Twisted Tales for FEARnet. I'll start shooting next month. A lovely way to welcome in the New Year. And what am I doing right now. Compulsively revising the Tale I'm writing (*sneaky grin*). Same with this article. I don't want to tell you how many times I have revised it, in search of what it's really all about.

So my advice is as applicable to me as to you, and I hope you consider it more seriously than I

do, because, you see, I still have to do a little bit of tweaking. It's not quite right. That line of dialogue, you know, just the change of a few words will make all the difference.

Merry Christmas to all the compulsives out there, Happy Holidays to every writer and filmmaker seeking perfection—be smart and know when to let go, and to all of you and to everybody else, a great New Year.