

Script Analysis: 'Rocketman' — Part 1: Scene-By-Scene Breakdown

[Scott Myers](#)

Read the script for the award-winning film and analyze it all week.

Reading scripts. Absolutely critical to learn the craft of screenwriting. The focus of this bi-weekly series is a deep structural and thematic analysis of each script we read. Our daily schedule:

Monday: Scene-By-Scene Breakdown

Tuesday: Plot

Wednesday: Characters

Thursday: Themes

Friday: Dialogue

Saturday: Takeaways

Today: Scene-By-Scene Breakdown. Here is my take on this exercise from a previous series of posts — [How To Read A Screenplay](#):

After a first pass, it's time to crack open the script for a deeper analysis and you can do that by creating a

scene-by-scene breakdown. It is precisely what it sounds like: A list of all the scenes in the script accompanied by a brief description of the events that transpire.

For purposes of this exercise, I have a slightly different take on scene. Here I am looking not just for individual scenes per se, but a scene or set of scenes that comprise one event or a continuous piece of action. Admittedly this is subjective and there is no right or wrong, the point is simply to break down the script into a series of parts which you then can use dig into the script's structure and themes.

The value of this exercise:

- We pare down the story to its most constituent parts: Scenes.
- By doing this, we consciously explore the structure of the narrative.
- A scene-by-scene breakdown creates a foundation for even deeper analysis of the story.

This week: *Rocketman*. **You may download a PDF of the script [here](#).**



Written by Lee Hall.

Plot Summary: A musical fantasy about the fantastical human story of Elton John's breakthrough years.

Rocketman

Scene by Scene Breakdown

By John Klein

*P1–3: We're introduced to ELTON JOHN entering a therapy session in full costumed concert regalia, admitting to drug use, sex addiction, bulimia, and alcoholism, and beginning to reminisce about his early childhood. A vision of six-year-old REGGIE (young Elton) appears before him, and the two join in singing **"The Bitch Is Back"** as they exit into a flashback on Reggie's neighborhood street, with the denizens and the therapy group following behind in a dance number. His mom SHEILA abruptly halts the number by calling to Reggie for dinner.*

P3–5: Reggie lives with his mom Sheila and his grandma IVY; he asks about whether his father is coming home but Sheila brushes off the ask. Reggie demonstrates his musical affinity by playing notes on the piano from a song he's just heard on the radio, and Ivy suggests lessons, but Sheila rejects the notion on account of the expense. A quick cross-cut to Elton in the present at therapy, discussing his parents' knowledge of his talents. His father STANLEY comes home, on leave from the RAF; Sheila and Ivy give him a terse welcome, and Reggie watches from the shadows sadly as Stanley brushes off going to see his son before bedtime.

P6–9: Stanley rejects Reggie's attempts at connection over music, and scolds him for touching his records

and for “being soft” when trying to hug his father. In the present, Elton tells a different story at therapy, claiming to be a very happy child even as we see Reggie breaking potted plants and lashing out in anger at his absent father. Nonetheless, Reggie continues with piano lessons and we see him mime Tchaikovsky to an imagined orchestra, transitioning into playing the Concerto himself for his piano teacher, who is clearly impressed. The family discusses the prospect of a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music while Sheila gets dressed for a night out; passive-aggressive sniping between Stanley and Sheila ensues.

P9–15: Reggie at the Royal Academy of Music: he sees HELEN PIENA playing Mozart, and proceeds to play back exactly what she was playing strictly from his memory. She is mesmerized and begins to teach him. Later, the entire family — Sheila, Stanley, Ivy, and Reggie — sings **“I Want Love;”** it’s clear to Reggie his family is broken in some basic emotional way, a fact confirmed when Reggie later catches Sheila making out with another man, FRED, in a car. Stanley and Sheila have a final fight over the affair and Stanley goes to leave; he almost stops to say goodbye to Reggie, but decides against it and leaves. To comfort him, Ivy sings Reggie a brief snippet of Elvis’s “Heartbreak Hotel,” leading into present-day Elton discussing his heartbreak at his father’s departure

and his then-newfound love of rock and roll.

P15–21: Sheila, Fred, and Ivy nurse young Reggie's love of rock and roll by buying him an Elvis record and encouraging a style change. Later, in a pub, Reggie's pushed to play for the patrons, and after an initial bit of nervousness, he launches into **"Saturday Night's Alright (For Fighting),"** and Reggie leaps out into the back alley, where brawls and dancing and Reggie's singing glide along in perfect time. During the song, we transition to a local fun fair, where a now-teenage Reggie (17 years old) gallivants around dancing gangs emblematic of 1960s Britain, and we end back in the pub with his family politely clapping along as he rocks out with his backup band.

P21–24: Off their pub performance, DAVE GODIN, a soul promoter, invites Reggie's band to back up soul musicians on the road. Reggie tells Helen he's going on tour and she warns him about the financial uncertainty of touring and the opportunities he's losing, but Reggie leaves while she's giving advice. Cue a montage set to **"Breaking Down The Walls of Heartache"** of Reggie's band backing up Wilson and the Twilights, and the Bluebells, slowly getting swept up in the rock and roll drugs life. One night after a show, RICHARD, a singer in the Bluebells, kisses Reggie before a performance and he's thrilled.

P24–29: During the tour, Reggie asks Wilson how he

can get to be a soul man, and Wilson tells him to “kill the person you’re born to be in order to become the person you want to be.” Later, while in the tour van, Reggie tells his bandmate Elton that he wants to change his name to also be Elton, and in the present we see Elton at therapy talking about wanting to get off the road and away from people who don’t care about their future. Off an ad, he strolls into DJ Music Publishing and gets a meeting with RAY WILLIAMS, where he coins his name: ELTON JOHN, off a picture of John Lennon on the wall. Ray hands him lyrics in an envelope and tells Elton to write music for it and see how it goes.

P29–33: Elton meets BERNIE TAUPIN, writer of the aforementioned lyrics, at a grill. They instantly connect over Bernie’s songs and “Streets of Laredo,” which segues into **“Skyline Pigeon”** and a montage of Bernie and Elton’s early working relationship and friendship: Bernie writes lyrics and Elton, at his family’s home, composes music to them. The end of the song meshes with Elton and Bernie’s next meeting with Ray and manager DICK JAMES, who is unimpressed with the various slower songs they’ve composed and implores them to become flatmates and write something catchier.

P33–37: Elton and Bernie ride together to their new flat, which they’ve got courtesy of landlord ARABELLA, who’s very into Elton which makes him

uncomfortable. She introduces them to the other members of the flat — CLINT and ARTHUR among them — and Arabella pulls a reluctant Elton into another room, presumably to have sex with him while Bernie waits outside.

P37–40: After a show, Elton and Bernie drink with Godin, Wilson, and Richard. Bernie lets slip that Elton and Arabella might get married, which surprises Richard enough for him to out Elton as gay. Initially uncomfortable with the sudden turn, Elton is relieved when it doesn't bug Bernie at all. Later, a drunk Elton and Bernie talk about breaking the news to Arabella, and Elton leans in to kiss Bernie, who gently but firmly rebuffs his friend's advances.

P40–42A: Bernie walks in on Elton trying to kill himself via the gas oven, though he's not doing a very good job of it. Arabella walks in, which prompts Elton to call off the wedding very bluntly, which sends Arabella into a tirade. Bernie and Elton run out of the flat carrying whatever of their stuff they can and wind up driving to live at Elton's family home, where Sheila tells them they'll have to pay rent now that they're back.

P43–47: While living at Elton's home, Bernie and Elton write "**Your Song**," and the singing of it transitions us into a demo for Ray, who is transfixed by it and signs the duo to a three-album deal. Dick and Ray book

Elton at the Troubadour in America, and Dick asks Elton to get some new clothes and be flashier; Elton and Bernie go shopping, and the film transitions to Los Angeles before the start of Elton's performances there.

*P47–50: Elton and Bernie meet DOUG WESTON, owner of the Troubadour, who talks up the venue and the famous musicians who have played there and expresses his excitement about Elton. Elton is completely intimidated, but Bernie and Ray get him out onto the stage, and he launches into a performance of "**Crocodile Rock**" that literally levitates the crowd.*

*P51–55: Following the performance, Doug invites Elton, Bernie, and Ray — along with HEATHER, a girl Bernie's brought along — to a party at Mama Cass's house. Elton's flattered but overwhelmed by the attention, and when Bernie leaves to have sex and do drugs with Heather, Elton's left alone, and sings "**Tiny Dancer**" as he walks around uncomfortably observing the debauchery of the party. He sits and dozes on a sofa.*

P55–59: Elton awakens at the party to the sight of JOHN REID sitting next to him with a bottle of champagne. Elton is instantly smitten with Reid's charm and confidence in Elton's talent, and the two kiss; later, they make love at the hotel. The next day,

Ray and Doug read a rave review of Elton's performance in the LA Times to Elton, Bernie, Heather, and Reid, and Reid encourages Elton while Elton longs to see Reid again as he leaves. Off-stage before his next performance, Elton and Bernie pledge to work and enjoy as much as they can about this moment for as long as they can.

*P59–62: To the tune of "**Don't Go Breaking My Heart**," we see Ray at Dick James Publishing going completely bonkers with publicity and song requests due to Elton's newfound popularity. We transition into Elton and Kiki Dee recording the song, as Reid enters the control booth where Ray sits and listens. Elton sees him and the two excitedly chat for a bit before Reid pushes Elton into a closet and asks him what he wants — what he REALLY wants. Reid and Elton launch into a 1940s/50s musical dance number set to "**Honkey Cat**" as we see Reid become Elton's manager and lead him on a lavish tour of all the things he can afford now.*

P62–65: We transition into Reid's new opulent office, where Reid is in the process of telling Dick and Ray that he's become Elton's personal manager, about which neither of them are particularly happy. Threats are leveled and Elton laments the predicament as Dick and Ray storm out. Reid assures him it's the right move and that things will get much harder, and tells Elton the press will come sniffing around about his

homosexuality, and thus encourages him to find a girlfriend and talk to his parents about what to say.

P65–68: At Reid's request, Elton visits his father Stanley, now apparently remarried with two young boys, who inquire insensitively about Elton's monetary worth and their mom calling him a "poofta." Elton is floored and emotionally can't handle the weight of the conversation, as it's clear Stanley has moved on to a better life and still can't bring himself to show his first son any affection. As Elton departs and cries in his limo, we transition to Elton crying and throwing a chair in the present-day therapy session, shocking the other participants.

P68–73: Elton and Reid fight in the car about telling Elton's mother that he's gay; Reid berates him for sulking and being pathetic, which forces Elton to stop the car and hop out to a phone booth to call Sheila and tell her. When he does, she tells him she's always known, and that he should keep it to himself and that he's chosen a life of "never being loved properly." It devastates Elton, but Reid cares little, telling him they're in a business now and slapping his face. Later, before a concert at the Royal Albert, Elton does coke and covers his baldness with a lavish headdress, and fights briefly with Bernie (who yearns for him to be himself on stage) before walking out in his over-the-top apparel.

P73–76: While playing **"Pinball Wizard,"** Elton careens in a giant abstract pinball machine from one concert and venue to the next, and we see Reid controlling it every step of the way, until he pushes one step too far and Elton goes down into a black hole marked L.A. Elton then walks out of a room in his L.A. house, where he sees Reid getting a blowjob from an unknown man on the cleaning staff. Elton chastises him and tries to throw him out, but Reid throws his contracts and insurance talk back at him and calls Elton a selfish prick...as Reid welcomes Sheila, Fred, Ivy, and their friends to the house. They're blown away by everything; Elton is clearly flustered, and Ivy notices.

P76–78: Ivy and Elton are led by SONNY to a room at a Las Vegas venue, where they meet ELVIS and the Memphis Mafia. Clearly worn down with his glory days behind him, Elvis nonetheless chats up Elton and Ivy, and while both try to be polite and muster up excitement for Elton's boyhood hero, it's clear the spark is gone, and after they leave Ivy remarks that Elvis'll be dead in six months. Cue **"Funeral for a Friend"** as they leave.

P79–82: We see Bernie leading girls into Elton's L.A. house to find a drugged and drunk Elton in his bedroom, looking similar. As a party rages around Elton, he staggers about in a daze, eventually declaring that he's going to drown himself before

jumping into the pool and sinking to the bottom, where a young Reggie plays a tiny piano underwater; the two sing **"Rocketman"** as Elton is pulled out of the pool, sent with paramedics, and — instead of going to the hospital — is propped up, dressed, and sent back on stage to finish the song in his classic sparkly baseball attire at Dodgers Stadium.

P82–85: On Elton's plane, Bernie tells Elton that they should take a break, either from writing together or from all the craziness. Bernie asks Elton if they could just disappear for a bit, but Elton bitterly says he'd like to work with other writers for a bit. The bitterness cascades into his dressing room before the next performance, where he ridicules his PAs and spouts controversial banter on stage to the dismay of his band before launching into **"Benny and the Jets."** Over the song, we see an abstract hedonistic dance display of Elton and scores of naked men and women and people wearing his former costumes; sex everywhere.

P86–89: Elton wakes up next to HUGH, whose name he clearly doesn't know. Hugh leaves in sadness over what Elton's becoming due to his insane lifestyle, but Elton hears none of it. At the studio, though, while a young woman, RENATE, mixes his music, Elton watches with two other gay men a news report about the AIDS crisis. Clearly bent out of shape about it at home later, he lashes out at Reid, who continues his

verbal abuse at the state of Elton's music and life; it's clear just how much Reid has used him for his money over the years. Elton goes his to get tested for AIDS; in the present-day therapy session, he reveals it was negative.

P89–91: As Elton (and later Renate) sings **"Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me,"** we see him get married to Renate with his family and a confused Bernie in attendance. In the present-day therapy session, Elton confesses that he shouldn't have married her; we see their loveless marriage in a short vignette of them at breakfast, where he apologizes to her.

P91–93: Elton meets up with Sheila and Fred at a high-end restaurant, where Sheila talks about buying a villa by the sea far away from L.A. because Elton is driving her away. Elton proudly exclaims his love of sex, drugs, and success, but Sheila's angered at how much she's given up for Elton to be successful. He storms to the bathroom to rinse his face, singing **"Sorry Seems to be the Hardest Word."**

P94–97: When Elton returns and sits back down, Bernie is now at the table instead of Sheila and Fred. Bernie wonders what's happened to Elton, while Elton pours his anger out at Bernie over wishing Bernie had stuck around to help him more. They're both heartbroken. Bernie walks out singing **"Goodbye Yellow Brick Road,"** gets in a taxi, and drives off as

Elton shouts at him for being a coward. At his home, Elton ODs on cocaine and has a seizure and a heart attack, and is sent to the hospital where Reid does his usual dirty work of getting him cleaned up and making sure no one knows.

*P97A-100: As he's receiving his myriad of prescriptions, Elton sees Hugh at the hospital, who tries vainly to get him to go to rehab out of concern for his friend. Elton won't have it, but at Madison Square Gardens before his next show, he sees a vision of a dead-eyed Elvis in the bathroom and realizes he's set himself on the same path. As he picks up singing the rest of "**Goodbye Yellow Brick Road**," Elton exits the Garden still in full regalia, and a taxi takes him to a private hospital...where we finally meet up with the present-day therapy session. He's at the end of his story and of his first day of recovery.*

P100-104: Elton, now clad in a simple hospital uniform, does chores and sits at another therapy session. During the session, people from every part of his life appear in their prime and try to tell Elton who he is, and he rebuffs or thanks or apologizes to them all in a simple and loving way: Ivy, Sheila, Fred, Hugh, Reid, Wilson, Richard, Ray, Arabella...and Bernie. And young Reggie, who asks for a hug, the hug he never received from Stanley. Elton obliges.

P104-105: Elton, now recovered and transformed,

leaves the hospital singing “I’m Still Standing.” His therapy group is waiting with Bernie; he gives Bernie a hug, waves goodbye to the group, and leaves through illuminated double doors.

An epilogue showcases scenes of the real-life Elton John and his happy life since rehab.

Writing Exercise: I encourage you to read the script, but short of that, if you’ve seen the movie, go through this scene-by-scene breakdown. What stands out to you about it from a structural standpoint?

Major kudos to **John Klein** for doing this week’s scene-by-scene breakdown.

To download a PDF of the breakdown for *Rocketman*, go [here](#).

You may download 100+ movie scripts from the last decade — free and legal — [here](#).

I hope to see you in the **RESPONSE** section about this week’s script: *Rocketman*.