

# Script Analysis: "All Is Lost" — Scene By Scene Breakdown

[Scott Myers](#)

The practice of reading scripts is critical to learn the craft of screenwriting. One key to this practice is to work with a scene-by-scene breakdown of the script.

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.

Today: *All Is Lost* (2013). You may read the script [here](#).



Written and directed by J.C. Chandor.

IMDb plot summary: After a collision with a shipping container at sea, a resourceful sailor finds himself, despite all efforts to the contrary, staring his mortality in the face.

***All Is Lost***

***Scene-by-Scene Breakdown***

*Written by Chris Faulkner*

*P — 1: The movie opens with a V.O., a black screen, and the sound of gentle waves. The protagonist, who is never named, is reading a letter he wrote. Basically, it says he is sorry for all his failings as a person. The letter also hints at the difficulties ahead.*

*P — 1b-2: The first visual is the protagonist asleep in the bow cabin. He and the audience are awakened by terrible crashing and ripping noises. The boat has hit something. Water is already seeping into the cabin. As he jumps up there is a short, humorous sequence of a kids sneaker floating through the cabin. It is one of only a very few humorous spots in the movie. He rushes to the main cabin and finds that the water is coming in through a gash right by his electronic gear [the navigation table]. His radio, GPS, radar, and SAT phone are all getting soaked with sea water.*

*P — 2b: He proceeds to the cockpit [above deck] and we finally see that a partially submerged rail car has crashed into the boat and is still attached to the hull. At first he tries unsuccessfully to remove the container manually. Next, he jumps onto the container and ties a rope to it, almost falling off it.*

*P — 3: He jumps back onto his boat and goes down to the main cabin to retrieve a yellow sack with an as-yet-unidentified item. Back on deck it is revealed to be a*

*collapsible parachute-style sea anchor, used to slow small vessels in heavy winds/seas. He attaches it to the rope attached to the container and throws the anchor into the water. The container is very loudly removed from the hull when the sea anchor is fully deployed. He starts to leave the container behind him, but has second thoughts.*

*P — 4: He has to risk allowing more sea water into the boat in order to go back to the container and retrieve ... the sea anchor. You get the sense that it will play a major roll later in the movie. He also loses his best knife; another event that will have significance later. As he fights to bring the sea anchor back on board, you get a sense of the very difficult struggle coming later.*

*P — 5: Back in the main cabin he is surveying the damage to his electronics. Another slightly humorous scene as a bag of cereal floats by him. The humor is quickly lost, however, as he looks at the food storage cabinet and obviously has to decide between eating, or continuing to work on his damaged boat. He starts ripping up some interior wood and gathering the supplies needed to repair the hull. The wood and fiberglass material is applied to the hull at great risk to himself.*

*P — 6: He operates a hand pump in the cockpit to begin draining some of the sea water. The visuals begin to rotate between him eating, pumping, and*

*fiber-glassing. After two days of this, he falls asleep [finally] as night falls.*

*P — 7: The next morning he views the repair; it looks terrible, but seems water tight. He tests it by stopping the boat and watching the patch as it settles into the water: it holds.*

*P — 7b: Next we see him bringing his electronics up on deck to air dry them and inspect them. The radio is already corroded in the interior. He splashes fresh water on it to try to clean off the salt water. However, it's obvious the electronics did not survive. He begins to collect maps and a book about celestial navigation. It is evident he has relied on his electronics and doesn't know much about manual navigation.*

*P — 7b-8: Suddenly the radio crackles to life with a foreign language. This is one of a very few times the protagonist has actual dialog, as he tries desperately to raise them on the radio. But, it just goes stone-cold dead as we see the power light turn off. Noticeably shaken, in a moment he has to move on to a more pressing matter: the wind is picking up. On the horizon he spots dark clouds. Looking at his disabled weather radio, he realizes he cannot determine the severity of the storm, or any other details about it.*

*A title card is inserted here, which I think is telling about the major theme of the story "Man vs. Nature".*

*P — 9: The storm begins, but he doesn't seem too concerned as he eats a can of beans cooked on the stove (significant later), has a scotch, and reads the nav book.*

*P — 9b-10: There are a few quick shots of sleeping, coffee, the working stove, etc.; then he sees a small squall on the water that seems ominous. He goes into the engine compartment and digs out one of the large batteries and carries it topside. He seems to have some idea about restoring electrical power. However, once topside he spots the huge storm hinted at earlier. He throws the battery overboard.*

*P — 10b: He sings while preparing his small vessel for the storm. His prep includes shaving, which is a visual that is repeated several times from this point forward.*

*P — 10c: Down in the main cabin, we see him prepping his foul weather gear. The storm waves toss the boat unexpectedly and he falls into the navigation table and the nav charts fall on him. He laughs, but it is not the comic relief that a fall would normally cause in a different movie.*

*P — 11: At this point the screenwriter notes that the noise level during the storm scene is horrendous, almost physical from this point forward until the end of the storm. He dons his foul weather gear and goes on deck; the volume of the storm doubles! He realizes he*

*must reduce sail and heads back down to get the smaller sail.*

*P — 11b: The interior noise is different, but just as loud, as the ship creaks and groans from the pounding of the waves. He retrieves a storm jib and a storm harness which can be attached to the boat to prevent falling overboard. The visuals highlight the fact that the boat is moving in unpredictable ways, as alternating waves push the boat suddenly in different directions.*

*P — 12: The weather just keeps getting worse. He has two sails to remove; the wind and the waves both fight his efforts to haul them in. As he manages to bring in the final sail, a wave washes him overboard.*

*P — 12b: He is under water and panicking. The storm harness is keeping him attached to the boat, but he is being dragged along by it. He uses the harness line to pull himself back on-board. After great struggle, he manages to also bring in the sail that went with him into the water and fly the storm jib.*

*P — 13: The swells are now at twenty-five feet. He goes down into the main cabin. He pulls off his soaked foul weather gear and vomits at least a gallon of sea water. He is so beat by this time that he simply passes out as the storm rages.*

*P — 13b-14: Later he is awakened by the sickening feeling that he is falling off a cliff. The boat then*

suddenly and harshly crashes into the base of the swell. He grabs the sea anchor and heads topside. Before he can get there the boat crests another giant wave, slides down, and this time, rolls over when it hits bottom. Parts of the boat are being ripped off. He looks out a porthole and realizes the main mast lines have been ripped from the deck. He knows he has to get topside quick, so he ignores his foul weather gear and heads through the hatch.

*P — 14b: Topside he sees just how terrible the waves are. He hooks and releases the sea anchor, but just as he does two waves converge and roll the boat again. He did not attach his storm harness and is free-floating under water. The boat flips again and we hear braking metal and the thunder of a massive fifty-foot wave crashing around him.*

*P — 15: As the boat flips again, he ends up on board and in the cockpit. There is a slightly humorous moment as he looks around not believing his tremendous luck. He immediately buckles his safety harness. He now surveys the damage topside and notices the the main mast is broken and there are holes in the deck where it was attached. Luckily, the sea anchor seems to be working.*

*P — 15b: He goes back down into the main cabin and we see that water is pouring in through the holes in the deck. He starts to collect materials in case he must*



*abandon ship. The waves are still wreaking havoc, throwing the boat around in unpredictable ways. He is slammed into a bulkhead and knocked unconscious.*

*P — 16: He wakes up to a bloody gash on his forehead and the realization that the boat is sinking. He groggily gathers some food and the life raft case and heads topside.*

*P — 16b-17: He attaches the rope from the life raft case to the railing of the boat and tosses the case into the ocean, where it expands into a full sized life raft with a cover. The seas are finally calming as he attaches the sea anchor to the life raft and jumps onto the life raft*

*P — 17b: He makes it to the life raft, but falls asleep with the rope still attached to the sinking vessel.*

*P — 17c: He wakes up the next morning and realizes the life raft is still attached to the sinking boat. When he looks out of the raft, he sees that the boat is still miraculously floating, albeit, just barely. He looks around the raft and decides to get more supplies from the boat before it finally sinks.*

*P — 18: Back in the cabin, the water level is only about one foot below the ceiling. He gathers several items, all of which will be significant later, and bandages his head. After bandaging, a sudden movement of the boat makes it sound/look like it's going to sink with him in it.*

*However, he races out of the cabin and back onto the raft.*

*P — 19: At the last moment, just before the sailboat sinks, he releases the rope connected to it. An extreme wide shot shows his tiny raft alone on the vast ocean.*

*P — 19b: A scene under the raft shows algae already starting to form. Meanwhile, inside the raft he looks around at the clutter of stuff and tries to decide what to do next.*

*P — 20: He decides he should study the navigation book and try to figure out where he is. He is shown eating a cold can of beans [compared to the hot-off-the-stove beans from a couple days ago].*

*P — 20b: After yet another dramatic fade-to-black, the protagonist wakes to find himself laying in a few inches of water. He realizes now that it is not going to be a comfortable ride. His watch is still working and he uses it to time sextant readings. He then charts his position and we see that he is in the middle of the Indian Ocean. There are sea lanes nearby and he retrieves the sea anchor to encourage the little raft to hurry into them in the hopes of rescue.*

*P — 21: The visuals show a larger colony of algae on the bottom of the raft and a school of small fish are collecting around it. A larger fish zooms in and grabs one of the small fry.*

*P — 21b: The scene immediately cuts to the interior of the raft, where the protagonist is suddenly awakened by the fish bumping into him as it gobbles the little guy. He doesn't know what it is that woke him, so he drinks, eats, and shaves [there it is again]. He hears a sound outside and looks, but sees only sunny skies. Then he turns around and sees a large storm approaching. He re-launches the sea anchor.*

*P — 22: The author takes a moment here to explain that the audience is seeing significant physical changes to the protagonist. He has lost about twenty-five pounds and the gash on his head does not seem to be healing.*

*P — 22b: The visuals show a whole ecosystem of algae, little fish, bigger fish, and sharks. Also, the storm is shown from the underwater viewpoint and it is getting worse.*

*P — 22c: Next we see the protagonist sitting, waiting for the brunt of the storm to hit. When it hits the little raft is tossed every-which-way. There is a cut scene showing the raft from under the water; the serenity below the storm is a sharp contrast to the violence that the audience knows is occurring in the raft.*

*P — 23: Back inside the raft, the wind is collapsing the top and then it is rolled by a wave and fills with water. He tries to bail the water, then stops and curls up into a*

*fetal position and his eyes open and close until he finally falls asleep; then, the ominous fade-to-black.*

*P — 23b: We are back underwater looking up at the little raft and the sea anchor adrift in the large ocean.*

*P — 23c: Back on the raft we see that the raft is tentless and he has lost most of his supplies. He is clinging desperately to the sextant and chart.*

*P — 24: He eats a survival ration [an even worse condition than the cold beans] and looks around the vast empty ocean. He has an intense emotional moment realizing the situation he is in. He recovers from the moment and constructs a mini desalination system. A closeup shows the audience that his invention is successful; he will at least have fresh water. He smiles about his success; this is the first happiness we have seen from him since the laugh on board the sailboat.*

*P — 25: He hears sounds under the boat, discovers the mini ecosystem beneath the waves, and begins fishing. Next he takes another reading at Noon [his watch must be very high-quality!] and discovers he is now in the shipping lanes. When a fish is hooked on the fishing line, he draws it in and eats it raw [somehow, even worse than the survival packet].*

*P — 26: He spots a black dot on the horizon. It soon grows into a large commercial container ship heading*

*his way! As it approaches, it almost hits him and then continues steaming right on by. Meanwhile, he is waving his arms and yelling, but to no avail. The ship fades away into the horizon. Fade-to-black.*

*P — 26b: Later that night an oil tanker steams by. He shoots a flare after it passes, but no one sees it.*

*P — 27: The next morning he begins fishing again. As he pulls in a catch, a large shark jumps out of the water and takes it right off the hook! He is left looking battered and defeated on his little raft.*

*P — 27b: An underwater shot shows several sharks circling under the raft.*

*P — 28: He looks terrible: salt water blisters; the gash on his head is infected; dehydrated; even more weight loss. He presses on despite all this and takes another reading. When he plots it, we see that he is now out of the shipping lanes and far, far away from land.*

*P — 28b-29: He pulls in the sea anchor. The raft is beginning to lose air and sink. He stares at the salt building up in the makeshift desalination bucket and ignores a large shark jumping out of the water after another fish [frame-of-mind reference].*

*P — 29b: He now writes the letter we heard at the beginning of the movie and sets it adrift in a jar [wonder where it ends up?]. Sunset — another day at*

sea; fade-to-black.

*P — 29c-30: He wakes up with his legs cramping. It is night, but with a full moon. In the dim light he sees a small ship in the distance. He tries yelling two times, but there's no gas left in the tank. Desperately he lights a small fire on his desalination widget. But, it's not enough. He balls up the sea anchor and throws it on the fire. That works, but now the entire raft starts burning. He jumps into the water, waits a few moments and says his peace.*

*P — 31: Despite the severity of the sit, the visuals from an underwater POV of the burning raft, the full moon, and his floating body are beautiful. Something floats into the edge of the frame.*

*P — 31b: It looks like he is about to go under, but he pops back up and sees a dinghy approaching from the small ship. A young man reaches out his hand and grabs the hand of the protagonist and ... fade-to-black.*

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?

If you'd like a PDF of the *All Is Lost* script scene-by-scene breakdown, go [here](#).

Major kudos to **Chris Faulkner** for doing this week's

breakdown.

For an in-depth analysis of the movie script, go [here](#).

For 100+ movie scripts broken down scene by scene, go [here](#).