

THE BIG LEBOWSKI (1998)

written by Ethan & Joel Coen
directed by Joel Coen
running time: 112 minutes

BASIC SCREENPLAY ANALYSIS

PROTAGONIST: Jeffrey “The Dude” Lebowski, aging pothead and avid-bowler.

CHARACTERIZATION/MAIN MISBEHAVIOR: Unemployed, lazy.

EXTERNAL GOAL: To be compensated for his soiled rug / To act as the ransom courier and identify Bunny Lebowski’s kidnappers / To solve the mystery of Bunny’s kidnapping before The Big Lebowski kills him or The Nihilists cut off his Johnson

INTERNAL GOAL: To take’r easy for all us sinners out there.

MAIN DRAMATIC CONFLICT: The Big Lebowski, The Nihilists, Walter

THEME: Life is a series of strikes and gutterballs.

CENTRAL DRAMATIC QUESTION: Will The Dude solve the mystery of Bunny’s kidnapping before The Big Lebowski kills him or The Nihilists cut off his Johnson?

ENDING: The Dude defeats the Nihilists.

STORY ENGINES

ACT I

In a case of mistaken identity, The Dude’s favorite rug is micturated upon. When his attacker’s original target, the wealthy Big Lebowski, refuses to compensate him for his soiled rug, The Dude steals a rug from him. Later, The Dude is hired by The Big Lebowski to act as a ransom courier when his wife is kidnapped.

ACT II-A

The Dude, along with his best friend Walter, mess up the ransom drop and the kidnappers do not get the money. Before The Dude can return the money, his car is stolen with the money inside the trunk. The Big Lebowski later confronts The Dude with a severed toe, presumably belonging to his wife. He tells The Dude he has instructed the kidnappers to do whatever they need to recover the missing money from him.

ACT II-B

After police locate his missing car, The Dude discovers a clue from the car thief that doesn’t go anywhere. He sleeps with The Big Lebowski’s daughter, Maude Lebowski. When she informs him that her father doesn’t have any money of his own, it gives The Dude TBL’s potential motive for keeping the ransom money.

ACT III

The Dude confronts The Big Lebowski about the money and discovers Bunny is alive and well at his house. Later, The Dude faces off against the kidnappers and is lucky enough to have his buddy Walter defeat them.

EPILOGUE

The Dude and Walter spread Donny’s ashes in the Pacific and get back to what they love the best: bowling.

FULL SCREENPLAY ANALYSIS

ACT I

1 - OPENING IMAGES: A tumbleweed makes its way through through the desert to Los Angeles, all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

We are floating up a steep scrubby slope. We hear male voices gently singing "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" and a deep, affable, Western-accented voice--Sam Elliot's, perhaps:

THE STRANGER

A way out west there was a fella, fella I want
to tell you about, fella by the name of Jeff
Lebowski. At least, that was the handle his lovin'
parents gave him, but he never had much use for
it himself. This Lebowski, he called himself the Dude.
Now, Dude, that's a name no one would self-apply
where I come from. But then, there was a lot about
the Dude that didn't make a whole lot of sense to
me. And a lot about where he lived, like- wise. But
then again, maybe that's why I found the place
s'durned innarestin'.

4 - Wearing a robe and sunglasses, **THE DUDE** -- a.k.a. Jeffrey Lebowski -- buys half and half at Ralphs. He writes a check for sixty-nine cents.

5 - INCITING INCIDENT: Arriving at his apartment, The Dude is attacked by men looking for his wife, Bunny Lebowski. One of the attackers, an Asian-American, pees on his rug. Sadly, it's just a simple case of mistaken identity -- The Dude is not married.

10 - At the bowling alley, **WALTER**, The Dude's best friend, insists "the other Jeffrey Lebowski" compensate him for his soiled rug.

WALTER

Jeff Lebowski. Come on. This other Jeffrey Lebowski.
The millionaire. He's gonna be easier to find anyway than
these two, uh. these two...And he has the wealth, uh, the
resources obviously, and there reason, no **FUCKING** reason,
why wife should go out and owe money and they pee on
your rug. Am I wrong?

15 - The Dude arrives at the mansion of **THE BIG LEBOWSKI** and asks him to replace the rug. The Big Lebowski becomes furious. The Dude says "fuck it" and leaves.

16 - STRONG MOVEMENT FORWARD: The Dude lies to The Big Lebowski's assistant, **BRANDT**, saying The Big Lebowski told him he could have any rug he wanted.

17 - Outside, The Dude finds **BUNNY LEBOWSKI** lounging by the pool. She offers to suck his cock for a thousand dollars.

22 - The Dude's late on his rent. He listens to voice-mails from Brandt, insisting they are not concerned about the rug and to call back immediately.

24 - END OF ACT TURN: The Dude meets with The Big Lebowski again to discover his wife Bunny has been kidnapped for a hefty ransom. Brandt fills him in on the details...

BRANDT

Mr. Lebowski is prepared to make a generous offer to you to act as courier once we get instructions for the money.

DUDE

Why me, man?

BRANDT

He suspects that the culprits might be the very people who, uh, soiled your rug, and you're in a unique position to confirm or, uh, disconfirm that suspicion.

DUDE

So he thinks it's the carpet-pissers, huh?

BRANDT

Well Dude, we just don't know.

Note: the decision is shown off camera. The Dude accepts The Big Lebowski's offer. Dialogue later reveals The Big Lebowski offered The Dude twenty thousand dollars for his service.

ACT II-A

30 - Resting on his rug, The Dude looks up to find two men and a woman standing above him. One of the men knocks him out. A dream sequence begins to Bob Dylan's "[The Man in Me](#)."

32 - The Dude wakes and discovers his new rug gone.

32 - Brandt gives The Dude Bunny Lebowski's one million dollars in ransom. Brandt repeatedly tells The Dude "her life is in your hands."

33 - The Dude picks up Walter to help with the ransom drop off, even though the kidnapers instructed only one person's involvement.

37 - FIRST TRIAL / FIRST CASUALTY: Walter throws a ringer over a bridge and chaos ensues. The kidnapers escape without the ransom money or anyone seeing them.

40 - COMBAT: The Dude's car, with one million dollars in the trunk, is stolen.

43 - The Dude receives a call from Maude Lebowski, claiming she stole his rug.

48 - **MAUDE LEBOWSKI**, The Big Lebowski's daughter, believes Bunny kidnapped herself. She hires The Dude to recover the lost money for a fee of ten percent.

53 - **MIDPOINT:** Outside his apartment, The Dude is manhandled into a waiting limousine. Inside, The Big Lebowski accuses The Dude of stealing the ransom money .

The Dude, frowning, untucks its flap, takes out some cotton wadding and unrolls it.

LEBOWSKI

Since you have failed to achieve, even in the modest task that was your charge, since you have stolen my money, and since you have unrepentantly betrayed my trust.

The wadding, undone, reveals a smaller wad of gauze taped up inside. The Dude undoes the tape with his fingernails and starts to unroll the inner package.

LEBOWSKI

I have no choice but to tell these bums that they should do whatever is necessary to recover their money from you, Jeffrey Lebowski. And with Brandt as my witness, tell you this: Any further harm visited upon Bunny, shall be visited tenfold upon your head.

Between thumb and forefinger the Dude holds up the contents of the package--a little toe, with emerald green nail polish.

LEBOWSKI

...By God sir. I will not abide another toe.

ACT II-B

54 - The Dude meets Walter for coffee. Walter insists the toe wasn't Bunny's and that Bunny kidnapped herself.

57 - The Nihilists -- presumably Bunny's kidnappers -- break into The Dude's apartment, demanding the ransom money within twenty-four hours or they will "cut off his Johnson."

58 - The Dude's car is found by the police, but the money is still missing.

65 - The Dude meets with Maude again. She insists he see a doctor regarding the bruise he sustained when she took the rug from him.

66 - The Dude visits Maude's doctor.

67 - ASSUMPTION OF POWER: After dropping a joint in his lap, The Dude wrecks his car. Attempting to get out of the car, he discovers evidence from the car thief: a high school essay on The Louisiana Purchase.

69 - Walter and The Dude locate the author of the essay, **LITTLE LARRY SELLERS**, and question him at his home.

71 - Larry won't talk and Walter becomes furious. Outside...

74 - Assuming Little Larry the owner of new Corvette, Walter beats up the car with a tire iron. The car's owner appears out of nowhere an emotional wreck and yanks the tire iron from Walter. Believing The Dude's car belongs to Walter, he beats the hell out of it in a fit of rage.

78 - The Dude is summoned to **JACKIE TREEHORN's** mansion. Bunny Lebowski owes Jackie a sizable debt and Jackie wants his cut from the ransom money The Dude collected from The Big Lebowski.

79 - The Dude gives up Little Larry Sellers as the thief of the one million dollars, but Jackie doesn't believe him.

80 - The Dude passes out moments before he realizes Jackie drugged his drink.

81 - Dream sequence to Kenny Rogers' "[Just Dropped In \(To See What Condition My Condition Was In\)](#)."

86 - The Dude's arrested outside Jackie's party. The Malibu police chief roughs up The Dude and demands he "stay out of Malibu!"

88 - Bunny Lebowski is alive and well...with all ten toes.

89 - The Dude comes home to find Maude Lebowski in his apartment. She drops her robe and says "love me, Jeffrey."

91 - END OF ACT TWO TURN: In bed with The Dude, Maude reveals her father doesn't have any money of his own. The money belonged to her mother. Maude gives him "a reasonable allowance" to live.

DUDE

It's a complicated case, Maude. Lotta ins, lotta outs. Fortunately I've been adhering to a pretty strict, uh, drug regimen to keep my mind, you know, limber. I'm real fucking close to your father's money, real fucking close. It's just--

MAUDE

I keep telling you, it's the Foundation's money. Father doesn't have any.

DUDE

Huh? He's fucking loaded.

MAUDE

No no, the wealth was all Mother's.

DUDE

But your father--he runs stuff, he--

MAUDE

We did let Father run one of the companies, briefly, but he didn't do very well at it.

DUDE

But he's--

MAUDE

He helps administer the charities now, and I give him a reasonable allowance. He has no money of his own. I know how he likes to present himself; Father's weakness is vanity. Hence the slut.

Note: discovering The Big Lebowski has no money gives The Dude a potential motive for The Big Lebowski to pocket the ransom money for himself.

92 - Maude informs The Dude she wants to have his child, but doesn't want him active in the child's life. The Dude is fine with that.

93 - DECISION: The Dude calls Walter to drive him to The Big Lebowski's mansion.

ACT III

95 - The Nihilists dine on pancakes. One of their girlfriends is missing a toe.

96 - The Dude tells Walter The Big Lebowski never put the ransom money in the briefcase and kept the money for himself.

97 - The Dude and Walter arrive at The Big Lebowski's mansion and find Bunny running around, completely naked and completely unharmed.

99 - POINT OF NO RETURN: The Dude and Walter confront The Big Lebowski about the missing money.

DUDE

We know the briefcase was empty, man. We know you kept the million bucks yourself.

LEBOWSKI

Well, you have your story, I have mine. I say I entrusted the money to you, and you stole it.

WALTER

AS IF WE WOULD EVER DREAM OF TAKING YOUR BULLSHIT MONEY!

DUDE

You thought Bunny'd been kidnapped and you could use it as a pretext to make some money disappear. All you needed was a sap to pin it on, and you'd just met me. You thought, hey, a deadbeat, a loser, someone the square community won't give a shit about.

LEBOWSKI

Well? Aren't you?

DUDE

Well. . . yeah.

102 - Outside the bowling alley, The Nihilists have torched The Dude's car. They demand the ransom money.

WALTER

There's no ransom if you don't have a fucking hostage.
That's what ransom is. Those are the fucking rules.

DIETER

Zere ARE no ROOLZ!

WALTER

NO RULES! YOU CABBAGE-EATING SONS-OF-BITCHES--

KIEFFER

His girlfriend gafe up her toe! She sought we'd be
getting million dollars! Iss not fair!

WALTER

Fair! WHO'S THE FUCKING NIHILIST HERE! WHAT
ARE YOU, A BUNCH OF FUCKING CRYBABIES?!

104 - CLIMAX: The Nihilists attack and Walter kicks all of their asses.

Note: it's funny that The Dude does absolutely nothing here. Along with Donny, The Dude's just trying to give The Nihilists all his cash and pray they go about their business. It's Walter that defeats the bad guys in the end.

105 - Donnie suffers a heart attack during the Nihilist attack and dies.

EPILOGUE

109 - Walter spreads Donnie's ashes over the Pacific, but thanks to a strong gust of wind, most of it ends up on The Dude.

110 - The Dude becomes furious with Walter, but they make up when Walter hugs him.

112 - Back at the bowling alley, The Dude talks to The Stranger. He leaves and The Stranger talks to us, closing the film.

Gazing after him, The Stranger drawls, savoring the words:

THE STRANGER

The Dude abides.

He gives his head a shake of appreciation, then looks into the camera.

THE STRANGER

I don't know about you, but I take comfort in that. It's good knowin' he's out there, the Dude, takin' her easy for all us sinners. Shoosh. I sure hope he makes The finals. Welp, that about does her, wraps her all up. Things seem to've worked out pretty good for the Dude'n Walter, and it was a purt good story, dontcha think? Made me laugh to beat the band. Parts, anyway. Course--I didn't like seein' Donny go. But then, hapen to know that there's a little Lebowski on the way. I guess that's the way the whole durned human comedy keeps perpetuatin' it-self, down through the generations, westward the wagons, across the sands a time until-- aw, look at me, I'm ramblin' again. Wal, uh hope you folks enjoyed yourselves.

He brushes his hat brim with a fingertip as we begin to pull back.

THE STRANGER

Catch ya further on down the trail.

112 - THE END.

A note from the author:

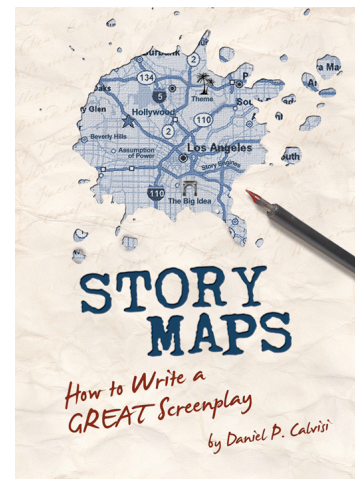
Written analysis of film is a crucial step for any screenwriter. I've found no better way to learn the craft than breaking down my favorite films and discovering what makes them tick. If you've never completed analysis of a film and/or screenplay, I recommend using this method with your favorites. Get detailed. Put in the hours. You'll be glad you did.

The analysis you've just read is based on Daniel P. Calvisi's *Story Maps: How to Write a GREAT Screenplay*. After reading a great number of books on screenwriting, Dan's *Story Maps* method helped bring it all together. With thorough commentary on concept and theme, his structure paradigm is easy to understand and apply. *Story Maps* is an insightful look at the craft of screenwriting, a must read for the aspiring screenwriter.

About the book:

Learn the secrets to writing a GREAT screenplay from a major movie studio Story Analyst who will show you how to BLOW AWAY THE READER! Master the structure and principles used by 95% of commercial movies by studying detailed breakdowns, or "Story Maps," of several recent hit movies in all different genres, including *The Dark Knight*, *The Wrestler*, *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*, *Drag Me To Hell* and the classics *As Good As It Gets* and *Sunset Boulevard*.

The book cites examples from hundreds of films, several television series and includes samples from actual produced screenplays to show you HOW TO DO IT. The book provides detailed lessons on format, capturing voice and tone on the script page and developing great characters with powerful dialogue.



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~Mark Twain