

# ZOMBIELAND (2009)

written by Rhett Reese & Paul Wernick  
directed by Ruben Fleischer  
running time: 83 minutes

## BASIC SCREENPLAY ANALYSIS

**PROTAGONIST:** Columbus, early 20's, former college student turned Zombieland survivalist

**CHARACTERIZATION/MAIN MISBEHAVIOR:** Cowardly / Anxious / Unable to trust others

**EXTERNAL GOAL:** To find his family / To find a new family

**INTERNAL GOAL:** To trust no one / To trust others

**MAIN DRAMATIC CONFLICT:** Wichita / Tallahassee / Zombies

**THEME:** Home is where you make it.

**CENTRAL DRAMATIC QUESTION:** Will Columbus learn to trust his new group of friends and find a new family in Zombieland?

**ENDING:** Ultimately trusting each other with their lives, Columbus works with Tallahassee to save the girls and learns home is where you make it.

**ARC:** Columbus goes from a cowardly, paranoid loner, to a person who is able to trust others and move on with his life after all the damn zombies destroyed his home.

## STORY ENGINES

### ACT I

Columbus's world is turned upside down when he's forced to kill his neighbor turned zombie. Now a survivalist in Zombieland, he hitches a ride with Tallahassee. The guys stumble upon two girls, Wichita and Little Rock. Tricked, the guys are held at gun point and robbed of their weapons and vehicle.

### ACT II-A

Getting back together with the girls, Columbus discovers his home in Ohio is a ghost-town. He falls for the beautiful Wichita, wanting to be any place she's at.

### ACT II-B

Columbus realizes that everyone misses their home. He gets closer to Wichita, but she still has trust issues and decides to leave. Columbus, along with Tallahassee, decide to find the girls.

### ACT III

Columbus and Tallahassee find the girls at a zombie-filled amusement park. Columbus battles a psycho zombie clown and rescues the girls. At the end, he realizes that both the girls and Tallahassee are his new family. After all, home is where you make it.

## FULL SCREENPLAY ANALYSIS

### ACT I

**1 - OPENING IMAGES:** A U.S. flag on a turned over presidential limo. Behind it, the Capitol building is ablaze. A secret service zombie jumps over the limo and attacks the cameraman.

COLUMBUS (V.O.)

Oh, America. I wish I could tell you that this was still America. But I've come to realize that you can't have a country without people. And there are no people here. No my friends... this is now "The United States of Zombieland."

3 - Columbus narrates his rules for surviving Zombieland, images depicting the infection spreading and the ensuing chaos.

6 - Stopping for gas in Garland, Texas, **COLUMBUS** encounters three zombies, applying his rules for survival as he fights for his life.

7 - Columbus walks down a highway with hundreds of abandoned cars. He's headed to Columbus, Ohio to see if his parents are still alive.

COLUMBUS (V.O.)

I've always been kind of a loner. I avoided other people like they were zombies even before they were zombies. Now that they are all zombies, I kind of miss people.

**10 - STRONG MOVEMENT FORWARD:** Columbus encounters a black Cadillac Escalade, happy to find a human. He hitches a ride. Inside the car, he asks the driver his name. The driver insists no names and they agree to call each other by their destination cities. Just call him **TALLAHASSEE**.

12 - Coming across an abandoned Hostess truck, Tallahassee's upset when he finds it full of Snowballs instead of Twinkies. He's really got a thing for Twinkies.

13 - *FEAR OF CLOWNS SETUP:* Columbus tells us in voiceover that his greatest fear, above all else, is clowns.

14 - *FLASHBACK: In his Austin, Texas apartment, Columbus plays World of Warcraft, surrounded by Mountain Dew and pizza boxes.*

COLUMBUS

My whole life, all I ever wanted was to find a girl, fall in love, bring her home to meet the folks. Then again, since my folks are a couple of paranoid shut-ins like me, maybe this girl could bring me home to meet her folks. Then I'd finally a member of a cool, functional family.

17 - *FLASHBACK: A frantic neighbor, 406, who happens to be insanely hot, pleads for Columbus to let her in. Once settled inside, she tells a story about a homeless man who chased her and "tried" to bite her. Exhausted, she rests her head on his shoulder. Columbus is thrilled.*

**18 - INCITING INCIDENT (TOLD IN FLASHBACK):** 406 turns into a zombie and attacks Columbus. He's forced to kill her.

COLUMBUS (V.O.)

You see, you just can't trust anyone. The first time I let a girl in my life and she tries to eat me.

22 - Tallahassee stops at a grocery store, needlessly endangering their lives due to his obsession for a Twinkie.

22 - 24 - Inside the store, Tallahassee kills three zombies: one with a banjo; one with a baseball bat; one with hedge shears.

**25 - END OF ACT ONE TURN:** Columbus and Tallahassee come across two girls who aren't zombies -- **WICHITA** and **LITTLE ROCK**. The younger of two, Little Rock, has been bitten by a zombie. Wichita asks for help in killing her so she doesn't suffer.

**26 - DECISION:** Columbus is unable to kill Little Rock. Tallahassee's tricked into giving Wichita the shotgun. She turns the gun on both men, robbing them of their weapons and car keys.

COLUMBUS

Why are you guys doing this?

WICHITA

Well, better you make the mistake of trust us than us making the mistake of trusting you.

## ACT II

29 - Columbus and Tallahassee search for a vehicle. Tallahassee takes out some aggression on an innocent mini-van.

30 - Tallahassee spots a yellow Hummer. It runs and happens to be packed with tons of weapons and ammo.

32 - Columbus and Tallahassee find Tallahassee's Cadillac SUV on the side of the road, presumably broken down. Suspecting a trap, Tallahassee pulls out an automatic shotgun and goes to check it out, but finds nothing.

34 - Columbus pulls up in the Hummer. Tallahassee gets in and discovers Little Rock has taken them by gunpoint.

35 - Wichita and Little Rock take the men with them.

37 - *FLASHBACK: Wichita and Little Rock run a scam on a poor gas station attendant.*

**38 - FIRST TRIAL / FIRST CASUALTY:** Tallahassee grabs the gun from Little Rock's hands. A split second later, Wichita slams on the brakes and puts a gun on Tallahassee. Columbus pleads with everyone to trust each other:

COLUMBUS

For fuck sakes, we are being chased by ravenous freaks! We don't have enough problems?! Oh, they stole my hummer...we have trust issues! Well, get over it!

38 - After Columbus's outburst, everyone agrees to work with each other. The girls are going to Pacific Playland in California, where they believe zombies don't exist.

**39 - MIDPOINT (external):** Columbus inquires about his hometown of Columbus, Ohio and Wichita tells him it's been burned to the ground. A ghost town. Columbus is destroyed.

COLUMBUS (V.O.)

I'm not sure what's more tragic...that my family is gone, or the realization that I never really had much of a family to begin with...we're all orphans in Zombieland.

41 - Later than night, Wichita finds a truck for Columbus...

WICHITA

I hope you find whoever it is you're looking for.  
And don't let go...once you do.

**41 - MIDPOINT (internal):** Gazing into each others eyes, Columbus and Wichita share a moment.

COLUMBUS (V.O.)

It wasn't just because I had nowhere else to go.  
It was, cause, in that moment it became clear:  
where ever this girl was, that's the place I  
wanted to be.

## ACT II-B

42 - *DON'T BE A HERO SETUP*: The gang pulls up outside an Indian-themed gift shop. Though he wants to impress Wichita, Columbus does not wish to violate rule #17: Don't be a hero. In turn, Tallahassee takes out the sole occupant zombie and is nominated for Zombie Kill of the Week, only to lose to Sister Cynthia Knickerbocker for dropping a piano on a zombie's head.

43 - Tallahassee discovers Columbus is infatuated with Wichita.

44 - The gang bonds, destroying the gift shop together.

47 - They arrive in Los Angeles; grab a star map outside Grauman's Chinese Theater.

49 - Tallahassee leads them into Bill Murray's mansion.

50 - Searching the house in teams, Columbus and Little Rock find Bill's theater room and proceed to watch *Ghostbusters*.

51 - Wichita takes a golf club to a zombie about to attack Tallahassee, only to discover it's Bill Murray and he's still human.

53 - Starstruck, Tallahassee's on cloud nine. He even gets to smoke out with Bill.

53 - Tallahassee, Wichita and Bill reenact scenes from *Ghostbusters*.

54 - Pretending to be zombie, Bill attempts to play a practical joke on Columbus, but Columbus and his lightning quick reflexes kill him with the shotgun.

56 - The gang gives Bill Murray a funeral.

**57 - ASSUMPTION OF POWER (external)**: During Tallahassee's story about his long lost dog, Columbus realizes everyone, not just him, misses their home.

COLUMBUS (V.O.)

I felt so ashamed that it had taken me this long.  
Me, with the best card in the business, to realize  
I wasn't the only one running from something.

58 - *FLASHBACK*: Tallahassee enjoys time with his son -- he lied about the dog, it was really his son who died.

58 - Tallahassee shows a picture of his son to Columbus.

59 - Tallahassee teaches Little Rock how to shoot.

**60 - 62 - ASSUMPTION OF POWER (internal):** Columbus and Wichita share a story from their past. Columbus tells a story of being rejected at an 8th grade dance. Wichita offers to dance with him.

63 - A moment before they kiss, they're interrupted by Tallahassee, wanting help moving a couch. Wichita rethinks her emotions...

WICHITA

It's probably for the best, cause...I like you,  
Columbus, but my sister and I are gonna do  
whatever it takes to survive.

**64 - END OF ACT TWO TURN:** Columbus wakes to discover Wichita and Little Rock have gone.

64 - In the H2, Wichita discusses leaving with Little Rock. Their rule: trust no one; only rely on each other.

64 - The girls arrive at Pacific Playland.

66 - Tallahassee scoffs at Columbus's infatuation with Wichita. Tallahassee won't get close to anyone. He's going to Mexico.

66 - The girls turn on the power to Pacific Playland's rides, attracting zombies for miles.

**67 - DECISION:** Against Tallahassee's wishes, Columbus decides to go after Wichita.

68 - Zombies zero in on Wichita and Little Rock. It's all they can do to fight them off. They decide to go for high ground on one of the tallest rides...

69 - Seconds before they part, Tallahassee has a change of heart -- he's gonna go with Columbus.

## ACT III

71 - Fight off zombies, the girls to get the Blastoff ride, shuttling them up to a great height. When the ride begins to come down, Little Rock, thanks to Tallahassee's sharpshooting lessons, is able to shoot the control box and stop the ride from descending into the mass of zombies.

72 - Outside of Pacific Playland, the guys discover the girls could be in serious trouble. Though fighting his nerves, Columbus, along with Tallahassee, decide to investigate.

73 - Finding the yellow Hummer in the water, Columbus is devastated...until he hears the girls scream from the Blastoff ride.

73 - Tallahassee arms himself heavily. Using a bull horn, he sounds off, bringing all the zombies toward him.

73 - With Tallahassee distracting most of the zombies, Columbus must save the girls on his own.

75 - With zombies on his ass, Columbus is forced into a haunted house.

77 - Tallahassee barricades himself inside a gift hut, fighting off a small army of zombies.

78 - Columbus fights his way to the Blastoff, to find a clown zombie in between him and rescuing Wichita.

**79 - POINT OF NO RETURN & DON'T BE A HERO PAYOFF:** Out of bullets, Columbus rethinks his rules...

COLUMBUS (V.O.)

Of course, it had to be a clown. No, it had to be a clown and it had to be Wichita for me to finally understand that some rules are made to be broken.

79 - FEAR OF CLOWNS PAYOFF: Columbus takes on the zombie clown, killing him with a sledge hammer. He saves the girls, putting his life before theirs.

79 - Columbus reaches the emergency brake on the Blastoff and lets the girls down.

80 - Wichita trusts Columbus enough to reveal her real name -- Krista.

82 - Columbus and the girls find Tallahassee in a shop with a Twinkie advertisement. Hearing a noise, Columbus sends a shotgun blast through a door, destroying the only box of Twinkies.



**82 - CLIMAX:** Outside, Columbus and Tallahassee hear the SUV pull away. Columbus runs outside, screams and the SUV stops. Both girls get out and look back at the guys...

COLUMBUS (V.O.)

That face, that's me realizing that those smart girls in that big black truck, and that big guy in that snake skin jacket...they were the closest to something I'd always wanted, but never really had. A family. I trusted them and they trusted me.

83 - Little Rock throws Tallahassee a Twinkie. He cries tears of joy.

COLUMBUS (V.O.)

And even though life would never be simple or easy again, as he savored that spongy, yellow log of cream, we had hope. We had each other. And without other people, well, you might as well be a zombie.

83 - The gang pulls off in SUV together.

**83 - THE END.**

A note from the author:

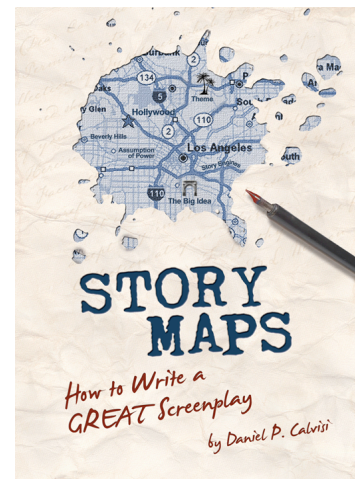
Written analysis of film is a crucial step for any screenwriter. I've found no better way to learn the craft than breaking down my favorite films and discovering what makes them tick. If you've never completed analysis of a film and/or screenplay, I recommend using this method with your favorites. Get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

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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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