



Save the Cat! Writes a Novel

Jessica Brody

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SAVE THE CAT!® by Blake Snyder is a popular screenwriting book series and storytelling methodology used by screenwriters, directors, and studio execs across Hollywood. Now, for the first time ever, bestselling author and writing teacher, Jessica Brody, takes the beloved Save the Cat! plotting principals and applies them to the craft of novel writing in this exciting new “workshop style” guide, featuring over 20 full beat sheets from popular novels throughout time.

Whether you’re writing your first novel or your seventeenth, Save the Cat! breaks down plot in an easy-to-follow, step-by-step method so you can write stories that resonate! This book can help you with any of the following:

- Outlining a new novel
- Revising an existing novel
- Breaking out of the dreaded “writer’s block”
- Fixing a “broken” novel
- Reviewing a completed novel
- Fleshing out/test driving a new idea to see if it “has legs”
- Implementing feedback from agents and/or editors
- Helping give constructive feedback to other writers

But above all else, SAVE THE CAT! WRITES A NOVEL will help you better understand the fundamentals and mechanics of plot, character transformation, and what makes a story work!

Save the Cat! Writes a Novel Details

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From Reader Review Save the Cat! Writes a Novel for online ebook

Thiago d'Everque says

Melhor que o original. As explicações de cada "beat" da estrutura ficaram ainda mais claras com as definições da autora. Para quem quiser um template bom ao redor do qual construir uma história, esse livro é excelente. A beat sheet do Save the Cat é minha favorita, especialmente aliada ao método Snowflake e ao planejamento da autora Deborah Chester.

O que eu não gostei, como não gostei no original, foram as definições dos 10 tipos de "gêneros" em que todas as histórias se encaixam. São moldes forçados demais. A maioria das histórias contêm elementos de várias desses 10 tipos misturados. Tentar encaixar histórias em um desses moldes sempre me parece como enfiar um cubo numa forma de círculo à força.

Acho que elas servem como parâmetro e sugestão do que incluir na sua história caso ela se encaixe em algum modelo, entretanto.

Recomendo.

Chris DiLeo says

At the end of this book, the author says she has "no idea what in this book will resonate with [the reader] [...] what will help with [his/her] dark night of the soul and what [he/she] skimmed over."

There is a lot in this book. Unlike many other writing books that offer brief examples of the concepts discussed, Brody offers numerous examples and at least one extended analysis of each type of story (e.g. Dude with a Problem; Monster in the House: my two favorite types of stories), as well as a truncated version of the same for easy reference.

That alone makes this well worth reading. (I listened to the audio, printed the accompanying pdf, but I also want to buy a physical copy).

The Save the Cat concept was originally a screenwriting program, (and a good book I read when I taught scriptwriting to high school students), but Brody has adapted those ideas quite well to the novel form. Though I am not a plotter with my stories in the way Brody is, I found her advice hard-earned from years of writing and the best of her recommendations have helped me examine my own work through a new lens.

Most helpfully, the book includes detailed beat-by-beat examinations of two of my favorite novels: Misery by Stephen King and Heart-Shaped Box by Joe Hill. It is, of course, easier to understand and study this book's concepts when the examples are ones you know well.

This book is ideal for story structure and character progression; it is not a book about how to write at a word-by-word level. For that, there are innumerable other books.

Finally, Brody is not proselytizing her beliefs—she is offering what works for her and seems to genuinely hope other writers are able to find something here that works for them, too.

I can say I definitely have.

Tanya Gold says

Read this for a different kind of breakdown of genres and reader expectations. Read this to get some insight into blockbuster structure. Follow the advice if you are looking to write a book with a structure that is comfortable and somewhat predictable (no judgement—these kinds of books are cool).

Lauren Faulkenberry says

Brilliant. Yes, we know about the 3-act structure, and yes, I'd heard a lot of these ideas before--the best thing about this book is that Brody has taken these ideas and made them super accessible. The beat sheets are a HUGE help for anyone who struggles with learning how to build structure and create a chain reaction of events and consequences in their plotting. I've been recommending this to all of my writing clients who struggle with structure.

Lauren Dilbo says

I found this to be such a helpful and encouraging book which really addressed the problems that I have been coming across as I've been working on the first draft of my novel. It has really helped me consider the flow and plotting of my piece in a way that I hadn't previously thought of and I feel like I now have a story that has the right foundations and will ultimately say what I intend it to. I would highly recommend any writers struggling to see their ideas through to a satisfying end to pick this up!

Jane Ederlyn says

A must read for authors.

Thomas Edmund says

I've been aware of Snyder's 'Save the Cat' screenwriting advice for some time, and thusly was pretty intrigued/excited to see that the formula has been adapted for novels.

Now don't be freaked out by the mention of the F-word! Brody successfully produces a piece that presents useful advice for both plotter and pantsers - the points raised in Save the Cat! are general enough to be

helpful to most writers, without losing any impact from vagueness.

In terms of writing advice the book mainly targets high level plotting, e.g. 3-act structure and 'big' beat sheets. There is a small amount of introductory chapters on characterizations, however the real meat of the book is in the beat-sheets and analysis of different published "genre" works. (in this book genre isn't like fantasy/romance, Brody is talking about types of story, e.g. chosen hero, underdog, buddy, monster).

Unlike other writing books I never really felt overwhelmed with the presented material, and felt almost instantly helped by the piece - most 'on writing' non-fiction I need to reflect on and process to make full sense of them (and/or I'm just so overwhelmed by the amount of stuff I have to keep in mind when writing) - In Save the Cat! I felt like the material was challenging and painted a realistic picture, in a way that was motivating and fun.

In short, while the book is a little audacious, and I'm sure some people will come up with exceptions to the proposed formulas or genres, its a real must read for novel writers!

Laurence MacNaughton says

Way back when I worked for a book distributor, Michael Wiese Productions sent me a sample copy of the original Save the Cat by Blake Snyder. I devoured that book, and it helped launch my career as a novelist.

The original Save the Cat! book series was aimed at screenwriters. This brand-new version by Jessica Brody seamlessly adapts Blake Snyder's methods for novelists. It's one of the best "how to write a novel" books of the decade.

Get it. Read it. Follow it. You'll be glad you did.

Monica says

While this book takes on the formula of Save the Cat from the screenwriting books it still has a very different soul. I've used the Save the Cat method to write my books for years, and was thrilled when I learned this book was coming. I read it all in one sitting, and despite many books built with the same 15 beats, I still managed to tag the thing to oblivion with new pieces of information that will make my novels better. Ms. Brody takes the tried and true methods and adapts them for the novelist. I will keep this on my desk and consult it before starting every single one of my books in the future.

Sebastien Castell says

If I were to stack up all the craft books I've bought over the years they would probably reach the ceiling of my office. If I were to stack up just the ones I found useful, they wouldn't be enough to prop a window open on a hot day. Suffice it to say, I'm doubtful there are any novel writing models I haven't heard of, or bought a book about, or attempted in one form or another. Hello, my name is Sebastien, and I'm a writing how-to book addict.

For those interested in such things, the ones I've found genuinely useful in my own practice have been Donald Maass's 'Writing 21st Century Fiction', Jeffrey Schechter's 'My Story Can Beat Up Your Story', John Truby's 'Anatomy of Story', Matt Bird's 'Secrets of Story' (never has one theory ever gotten so much mileage out of the concept of irony) and the umpteen Dramatica books and software editions out there (those starting out with Dramatica will do best by immersing themselves in NarrativeFirst.com which is filled with helpful avenues to enter the very deep and very dark cave that is Dramatica.)

That's not a lot of books. The vast majority of the others have either been fluff ('let your inner bluebird sing its song!') or rehashes of Syd Field's classic 'Screenplay' book only with a new unhelpful metaphor added ('Master the secrets of the Story Wrench!', 'Build your Story GPS: Goodly Powerful Story!', 'Story Psychopath: Unleash Your Inner Writer's Block Killer With The Power Of Neuroscience!') [As an aside, if you want to write your own 'writing how-to' book, just find the table of contents from any of the other ones, rename the chapters, come up with an idiotic metaphor for the title, and tell everyone to write in three acts. Don't forget to mention that the three acts are 'beginning, middle, and end'. Whoa!]

Okay, maybe this is turning into a little bit of a rant. Let me get back to this particular book.

Save The Cat! Writes a Novel by Jessica Brody is an unusual one for me to recommend. I'm not exactly a "save the cat" guy. First, it began as a screenwriting model and I'm a novelist by profession, second, like most screenwriting models (and every possible variant of 'the hero's journey') it fails to account for the length and complexity of novels, and third, loads of people in the business will loathe you for even bringing up Save The Cat. The argument goes that innumerable young screenwriters are following the formula so closely that they're putting out repetitive garbage (I suppose my own thought on that is that they were putting out loads of garbage long before Save The Cat came along, just as they were before and are now putting out plenty of amazing, rich stories as well.)

But here's the thing: none of that matters. What matters is if the model will help you get from "I could never write a book" to "Hey, look, here's my first novel." If there's one thing I'm passionate about in the world of writing it's that everyone has a book in them and writing that first book is an incredibly valuable experience regardless of whether it sells in exactly the same way that running your first marathon is an incredibly valuable experience whether or not you win the race. You run the marathon to make your body capable of new things, and you write the book to make your mind capable of new things. And here's where I think Jessica Brody's book comes into play: it's an excellent way to map out your first (or maybe seventeenth) novel and know that you're going to come to a satisfying conclusion at the end. She takes a writing model that tends to be convoluted and confusing by virtue of its bizarre terminology and yet makes it accessible, understandable, and practical.

If you just read the table of contents of most writing books, they all look as if they'll take you from beginning to end in twelve easy steps. The problem is, once you start reading them, you realize the explanation is mostly hyperbolically vague nonsense ('Now you'll really blow the reader's mind with your plot twist, by twisting the plot when they least expect it!'), their examples are almost entirely drawn from movies rather than books, and they only skim the very surface of each idea, favouring repetition over clarification and analysis. I can honestly say I never really understood all the beats in Save The Cat until I read Jessica's book – and that matters, because they're nowhere nearly as simple or obvious as they first seem. Something like the 'midpoint' seems simple – a turn at the middle of the book – but when you realize it's either the culmination of an upward (i.e. positive for the main character) trajectory or a negative one (and thus will dictate your direction in the third quarter of the book), the notion of the midpoint takes on a more sophisticated and actionable meaning. Oh, and while many if not most of Brody's examples have been made into movies, she's pulling from the actual books, which is much more helpful for novelists.

As a final note, Jessica Brody is, in fact, an accomplished and successful author in her own right. She doesn't write the kinds of books I read, but just reading sample chapters tells me she knows what she's doing, and given her works have been translated into a number of other languages and have done well for themselves shows that when she talks about writing commercially successful novels she's got the basis to back it up.

As to criticisms? Well, I'm not in love with the rah-rah style of the writing, nor am I likely to become a Save The Cat enthusiast since my brain doesn't quite work that way. But Brody actually delivers on what she promises and does it in a way that shows both expertise in her craft and compassion for her audience. Someone struggling to plot a novel can genuinely go through the book and come out the other side with a story that makes sense and has at least a decent chance of being satisfying to readers. Anyone who can help those who want to write but are fearful of making the journey reach the finish line is a hero in my book.

In case such things matter to anyone, I should point out that I don't know Jessica Brody personally and I paid for my copy of the book (twice, in fact – once on Amazon and once for my Kobo e-reader and I even bought her Udemy course).

Mike says

I have to admit I didn't really finish this. The examinations of various books seem more like filler than help, and eventually I just skipped to the last chapter.

I've read the other Save the Cat books, and in fact, I think in general - even though they're aimed at movie scripts - they were more helpful. Still, there are some good things here, but I'm not sure there's much more added to the general principles seen in the Blake Snyder books.

Kelcy Davis says

I read this based on a recommendation from a friend and because I was intrigued by the idea of all stories having 15 beats. I have some knowledge of the 3-Act Structure and the Hero's Journey and all of those structure styles you study in school, but this seemed like something I could get behind. As I read this book in bits and pieces as I also tried to complete NaNoWriMo, I found myself noticing the beats in the books and movies I consumed. So, I think it's a great way to examine stories in general!

I also liked how many examples were included in this. I am someone who learns from examples, so having them laid out for each section of the book made it easier for me to see how the concepts can be applied and utilized. I also liked that the book included advice for how to apply these directly to my writing. The troubleshooting section at the end was also nice to read because it gives some concrete steps to take when you get stuck. This book does a great job of taking you from beginning to end of the novel writing process without prescribing a formula or set style but also providing steps to take at each point you reach.

Carrie says

Great expansion on the original book by Blake Snyder, which dealt with screenwriting technique. Though I've read that one too, I didn't find it entirely applicable to novels. This book takes it that extra step, and since many books become screenplays, the two play off each other nicely. While this book isn't going to help you

write literary masterpieces, it will make for a great tool to use while outlining a book or to help with brainstorming ideas. Including the suggested elements will help ensure page-turning plotting.

That being said, not every story will fit so nicely into this "15 essential plot points" approach, and writers may find their stories cross between the ten discussed genres. Still, its contents should definitely help create the ground-floor architecture for a well-structured novel.

Michelle Stimpson says

Having read all three of Blake Snyder's "Save the Cat" books (and loved them), I seriously debated whether or not it was necessary to read this one, too. I am so glad I did. It's already highlighted up and sticky noted all over the place. Although novelists have been using the Save the Cat screenwriting method for a long time, this is the first book that actually applies the method to novel writing. And it has made all the difference in my head. I was pleased to see lists and lists of novels that I have read that help me understand how the beats work in contemporary novels as well as classic novels, in long novels as well as short novels, and in novels of all different genres (both STC genres and traditional genres).

This book has cleared up mysteries about how many scenes should each beat be in a novel? How to deal with reimaginings of other stories? How to plot out novels in a trilogy and even longer series? And even more importantly, how to write pitches and short synopsis and how to use those tools to discover holes in your plot.

I have written ten novels. I have used Save the Cat on two of them. I have yet to write a successful plot. I don't know why I'm such a remedial learner when it comes to plot, but after reading Brody's book, I feel excited to try again! Wish me luck!

Eve K says

The 2 books the author raved about the most - **Stephen King's Misery** and **J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone** - didn't even fit into the beat sheet and she had to change the rules to try to wedge them in. For example, she called one of the beats in these stories '*the reverse whiff of death*,' which isn't a thing, just to make it fit.

Aside from that, the book was slightly oversimplified for my liking, but very helpful all the same.
