Save the Cat Writes a Novel Beat Sheet

Opening Image (1 scene, 1%): A before “snapshot” of your main character/hero and their world

Theme Stated: A statement made by a character (normally not the hero) that hints at what the hero’s arc will be (i.e., what the hero must learn/discover before the end of the book.)

Set-Up (1%-15%?): An exploration of the hero’s status quo life and all its flaws. This is where we learn what the hero’s life and world look like before its epic transformation.

Catalyst: An inciting incident that happens to the hero which will catapult them into a new world or new way of thinking.

Debate: A reaction sequence in which the hero debates what they will do next, usually presented in the form of a question.

Break Into 2 (25%-75%: The moment the hero decides to accept the call to action, leave their comfort zone, try something new, venture into a new world or new way of thinking.

B-Story: The introduction of a new character or characters who will ultimately serve to help the hero learn the theme.

Fun & Games (25%-50%): This is where we see the hero in their new world. Also called “the Promise of the Premise,” this section represents the “hook” of the story. Why the reader picked up the novel in the first place.

Midpoint (1 Scene, 50%): Literally the middle of the novel, where the “Fun and Games” culminates in either a “false victory” or a “false defeat.” Something should happen here to “raise the stakes” and push the hero toward real change.

Bad Guys Close In (50%-75%): If the midpoint was a false victory, this section will be a downward trajectory where things get consistently worse for the hero. If the midpoint was a false defeat, this section will be an upward trajectory where things get seemingly better. Regardless of trajectory, the hero’s inner demons or “internal bad guys” are also closing in.

All is Lost: The lowest point of the novel. This is an action beat where something happens to the hero that, combined with those “internal bad guys,” pushes them to rock bottom.

Dead Night of the Soul: Another reaction beat (similar to the Debate) where the hero takes a moment to react to everything that’s happened leading up to this moment. The darkest night before the dawn, this is the moment right before the hero figures out the solution to their big problem and learns the theme.

Break Into 3 (1 scene): The aha moment! The hero realizes what they must to do to not only fix all of the problems created in act 2, but more importantly, fix themselves.

Finale: The hero proves they have truly learned the theme and enacts the plan they came up with in the “Break into 3.” Bad guys are destroyed, inner demons are conquered, lovers are reunited. The hero’s world is not only saved…it’s a better place than it was before.

Gather the Team-

Execute the Plan-

High Tower Surprise-

Dig Deep Down-

Execution of New Plan-

Final Image (1 scene, 99%): A mirror to the “Opening Image”, this is the closing “snapshot” of who the hero is now that he’s gone through this epic and satisfying transformation.

Logline Pitch: On the verge of **stasis=death** moment, a flawed hero **Breaks into 2**; but when the **Midpoint** happens, they must learn the **Theme Stated** before the **All is Lost**.

A flawed hero (who the story is about and why they need this journey); A Break into 2 (where your story is going); A Theme Stated (how this story is universal); An All is Lost (What the major stakes are.

Short Synopsis Template:

Paragraph 1: Setup, flawed hero, and Catalyst (2-4 sentences)

Paragraph 2: Break into 2 and/or Fun and Games (2-4 sentences)

Paragraph 3: Theme Stated, Midpoint Hint and/or All is Lost hint, ending in a cliffhanger (1-3 sentences)