“Your Story” Beat Sheet

Act 1: The Setup

**The Hook/Opening Image (0–5%):** The introductory scene or scenes to your story’s characters and their world; a snapshot into your character’s life before the events of the story will change them forever. Should hint at and give context to the story’s main conflict, your character’s internal struggles, and how they got to this point (i.e. backstory).[[1]](#footnote-1)

[Opening Image description goes here]

**Inciting Incident (~5%):** The event or events that thrusts your character into the main conflict. This is where a “Theme Stated” beat –– or a moment/statement that hints at your main character’s transformation –– would go.

[Inciting Incident description goes here]

**Setup (5–10%):** A series of events that show your character facing the consequences of the inciting incident, which also consequently leads up to the first “pinch point” –– a major event or discovery that further turns your character’s world on its heads. Maybe your character will resist or try to cope with the change. Either way, action and tension should mount until it reaches a peak with the next beat.

[Setup description goes here]

**1st Pinch Point (10%):** A major event or discovery that further turns your character’s world on its head, hinting at the opposing/antagonistic force and raising the stakes. For a detective story, this may be when the killer strikes again; but, instead of targeting a random victim, the killer goes for someone the main character (MC) is close to, thus ensnaring the MC further into the investigation and raising his personal stakes (e.g. his loved ones won’t be safe until he catches this killer).

[Plot/Pinch Point description of events goes here]

**The Debate (10–20%):** Sequence of events that come about in reaction to the first pinch point. Usually involves a lot of backtracking and reflection about your characters’ fears and (mis)beliefs.

[Debate & Decision description goes here]

Act 2: The Complications

**Break Into Two (20%):** After your character has time to reflect, they should decide on next steps. It can be as simple as deciding to stay in a strange new world or return to their old one (hint: usually a good idea to keep them in the new world for as long as you can).

[Break into Two description goes here]

**B-Story (~20-22%):** This is when a side character or a subplot is introduced that ties directly into the main conflict and your character’s transformation. Often is the beginning of a romance subplot and/or a change in relationship with another character (e.g. friends-to-lovers).

[B-Story description goes here]

**Fun & Games (20-50%):** Also known as “the promise of the premise,” this is where you get to play with your main story idea. Your character gets to explore their new world/situation and navigate their way around it. If they formulated a plan in the previous beat (like in a heist story), this would be the execution of that plan.

[Fun & Games description goes here]

**Game-Changing Midpoint (50%):** As the name suggest, this should be a “game-changing” moment, a moment where your characters learn or experience something that throws their goals and plans out of alignment. Going home unchanged its not an option anymore; the only way now is forward.

[Midpoint description goes here]

**Bad Guys Close In (50–75%):** This sequence of reactionary events will plunge your characters further into the main conflict and the stakes have never been highest. Tension should mount, your character’s flaws should run rampant; whether the events are good or bad, their demons should be closing in and getting in the way (literally or figuratively), coming to a head in the next beat.

[Bad Guys Close In description goes here]

**All Is Lost/2nd Pinch Point (~75%):** The event or discovery that breaks your characters and shatters their world. At this point, they are defeated, all hope of getting what they want lost.

[All is Lost description goes here]

**Dark Night of the Soul (75–80%):** Also known as “the darkest hour,” this is where you main character processes everything that’s happened so far. Their fears/wants/desires are reassessed and they acknowledge something in them has to change.

[Dark Night description goes here]

Act 3: The Confrontation

**Break Into Three (~80%):** Once your character has processed everything, it is time for them to come up with a solution. They’ll realize what they must do to fix the problems raised in Act 2 and, ultimately, take steps in healing themselves.

[Break into Three description goes here]

**Finale (~80–99%):** This is where your characters will put the plans that they came up with in the previous beat into motion. For some, this is a final test, the last hurdle, they have to go through to make amends snd complete their transformation.

**Gathering the Team:** You characters will need help executing the plan. Who do they recruit? What do they need? Do they need to do something before help can be had?

[Description goes here]

***Executing the Plan:*** *The final battle is underway. Your characters are dodging blows left and right. They may face little obstacles that get in their way, but somehow they pull through, getting that much closer to the main oppositional/antagonistic force.*

[Description goes here]

**The High Tower Surprise:** Just when it looks like your characters are going to make it through, plot twist! Your antagonistic force pulls something that knocks them back down. A trap, a revelation, a special power that weakens them and renders them helpless. What will the antagonist do to knock your character down?

[Description goes here]

**Dig Deep Down:** What do your character do now to get out the antagonist’s clutches? This is when they have to dig deep and face those inner demons that plagued them throughout the story. Only when they can stop telling themselves lies and realize the truth (the theme) can they find the strength to fight the antagonist. What is this truth and what leads your character to realize it?

[Description goes here]

**Execution of the New Plan:** Now that your character has come to realize the truth, what needs to be done to end the main problem/antagonistic force? What are the last steps your character has to do to defeat them once and for all?

[Description goes here]

**Resolution/Final Image (99–100%):** A “mirror” to the Opening Image, this is a scene or series of scenes showcasing how far your characters have come after their journey. Have they changed? Does the world look different? What is their life like now?

[Description goes here]

Note: Beats were taken from Black Snyder’s book, *Save the Cat!,* andAbbie Emmon’s [Three Act Story Structure blog post](https://www.abbiee.com/2019/10/structure-my-novel-with-me/); descriptions of beats were written and paraphrased by Caroline M. Tell.

For a deeper dive into the *Save the Cat!* beats, check out [Blake Snyder’s blog](https://savethecat.com/tips-and-tactics/best-of-blakes-blogs-blakes-last-blog). For novelists, [Jessica Brody’s blog](https://www.jessicabrody.com) and book, *Save the Cat! Writes a Novel,* are must-reads.

For more on the Three Act Story Structure, I recommend Abbie Emmon’s [Youtube video “How to Use the 3 Act Story Structure,”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DziLVZJ3-8k&list=PLV6pMftb_QTmjLZj5RienPjRVVYQ5xzFe&index=3) plus her [“How To Structure A Novel with the 3 Act Story Structure” playlist](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLV6pMftb_QTkVqGM5Q_WrF0XC9YH9KJWU).

Happy learning and plotting!

1. If your story includes a prologue, the first chapter should have a separate opening image/hook. If your story follows multiple point-of-view (POV) characters, each character should likewise have their own opening hook. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)