

Save the Cat Beat Sheet — *Up in the Air*

screenplay by Walter Kirn, Jason Reitman and Sheldon Turner
beat sheet based upon the one on the Save the Cat website

Opening Image (1): We're up in the air, looking down from an airplane on cities below. Then, a series of employees being fired being fired by Ryan.

Theme Stated (5): While all the people he's firing have homes and families, Ryan doesn't have either. Indeed, he says, "To know me is to fly with me. This is where I live."

Set-Up (3-19): Ryan's story world is established as we meet all the principal characters in his life: his sisters, Kara and Julie, his new romantic interest, Alex, and his boss, Craig. Also, his work life and goals are all set up: traveling, making speeches, firing people, Julie's wedding, air miles. The Set-Up ends with Ryan finding out that the woman across the hall he used to sleep with has started seeing somebody.

B-story (11): Ryan meets the B-story character, Alex, in a hotel bar. They hit it off, sleep together and by minute 15 she's kissed him goodnight and returned to her room.

Catalyst (20): The Catalyst in the Save the Cat beat sheet is Natalie—the young lady Craig introduces to the company. She's devised a way to save 85 percent of the company budget by bringing everyone, including Ryan, in off the road.

Debate (23-26): Ryan confronts Craig over Natalie's proposal. Ryan asks Natalie to pretend fire him and "wins" the role play. Nevertheless, Craig wants him to take her on the road with him and show her the ropes.

Fun and Games (27-38): Ryan's exasperated by Natalie's traveling style, her workflow charts, her lack of skill at firing people. He shows her how it's done and waxes lyrical about his goal to hit 10 million air miles. Natalie replies she would go somewhere if she had all those miles.

Break into Two (47): Natalie fires a woman and freaks out when she says she's going to jump off a bridge. Ryan and Alex meet up again for more no-strings fun. Natalie gets overwhelmed by the trip, flying around the country firing people. Natalie watches Ryan give a lecture putting people in a backpack: "The slower we move the faster we die, we are not swans. We're sharks."

Bad Guys Close In (47-70): Here's where Natalie and Kara hammer Ryan about his unwillingness to let anyone in. All of which makes him see that Alex maybe is just what he needs to be happy after all. The section ends with Ryan and Natalie getting pulled off the road and Ryan leaving to get a different flight.

Midpoint (80): Ryan invites Alex to a family event—his sister's wedding—turning a corner toward what he needs: commitment, a family and a real life. At the rehearsal dinner, Ryan bonds with Julie's fiancé, Jim, and is put out when it's decided Jim's uncle will walk Julie down the aisle, not him. Ryan and Alex bond some more as he shows her around his old high school, before getting an emergency call from Kara.

All Is Lost (81): Ryan is forced to try and talk Jim into doing the one thing he's always avoided—get married. He succeeds and the wedding goes off without a hitch. At the airport, Alex tells Ryan, "Call me when you get lonely." He replies, "I'm lonely."

Dark Night of the Soul (88-91): Back home, Ryan looks at his empty apartment. Natalie's new business method is implemented at the office. At GoalQuest, Ryan starts his speech... and walks off stage, smiling. He knows what he wants.

Break into Three (93): Ryan runs through an airport. In Chicago, he rents a car. He drives, looking for Alex's address. He arrives at her house and she answers the door, but he sees her kids and husband. She's married...

Finale (93-102): Ryan drinks alone in a hotel room. He calls her but she's not free to start a relationship and he's not willing to go back to the "no-strings" relationship they had. On a flight, Ryan finally hits 10 million miles. He transfers them to Julie and Jim and learns that Natalie quit... which means he gets to go back up in the air.

Final Image (103): Ryan looks at all the destinations on airport flight board. In Voice Over, he tells us how if you're with your family at night and look up at the stars, one will be "my wingtip, passing over."