



How to Write a Damn Good Thriller: A Step-by-Step Guide for Novelists and Screenwriters

By James N. Frey

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A quick look at any fiction bestseller list reveals that thrillers make up most of the titles at the top. HOW TO WRITE A DAMN GOOD THRILLER will help the aspiring novelist or screenwriter to design, draft, write, and polish a thriller that is sure to grab readers. Frey uses examples from both books and movies and addresses the following hot topics:

- *Germinal ideas
 - *Breathing life into great thriller characters
 - *Crafting a gripping opening
 - *Maintaining tension
 - *Creating obstacles and conflicts
 - *Writing a mean, lean thriller scene
 - *Adding surprise twists
 - *Building a smashing climax
- and many more.

In his trademark approachable and humorous style, Frey illuminates the building blocks of great thrillers and gives the reader the tools to write his or her own.

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- Sales Rank: #345754 in Books
- Published on: 2010-03-30
- Released on: 2010-03-30
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.47" h x 1.07" w x 5.74" l, .85 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 306 pages



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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

The author's fifth guide to writing "damn good fiction" offers a useful and entertaining look at the process of writing a thriller. Some readers may be confused, at first, by his seemingly overbroad definition of a thriller (the Iliad? Miss Congeniality?), but thrillers, Frey argues, should be defined by their key elements: heroes with impossible missions, theatrically extreme villains, a series of obstacles, a rousing climax. The author leads us through the process of putting together a thriller by creating several stories and then showing us how to elaborate their plots and how to design their characters. It's an interesting approach, sort of a hands-on seminar. He also refers frequently to various well-known thrillers (The Boys from Brazil, Jaws, The Day of the Jackal, etc.) and explains why they work the way they do. By adopting a practical approach—showing us in specific terms how to build a character, for example, rather than simply giving us general pointers—Frey makes the prospect of writing a novel feel considerably less daunting. --David Pitt

Review

"Jim Frey invented and owns the territory of disciplined fiction writing. Because he absolutely knows his stuff, he demands and tolerates nothing less than solid craft from his writing students, without settling for the niceties of mediocrity that won't get you published. If you want to understand what it takes to write a great story, and with unflinching clarity, Jim Frey is the guy." ?Larry Brooks, *author of Darkness Bound, Serpent's Dance, Bait and Switch, and Pressure Points*

"I have James N. Frey's books on my shelves and the spines on both are falling apart from use. He absolutely forced me to understand things like "premise" that I otherwise would not have had a clue about. I firmly believe his books are among the best, if not the best books on the craft. He demands a lot of writers, but we both know that is absolutely essential if you are seeking to get published in this difficult market. I would be first in line to buy his new book on thrillers, though I'm certain it will cause me hours of angst because of all the things I don't know. Never met him, but would shake his hand if I did and thank him. He forces writers to think, and we don't like to do that, we like to write, but it is absolutely essential." ?Robert Dugoni, *New York Times bestselling author of Wrong Death, The Jury Master, and Damage Control*

"For over twenty years, James N. Frey has been providing insightful, straightforward how-to guidance on how to achieve greater dramatic effect and power in writing fiction. His gift for clarity and his passion for craft resonate on every page. Don't be put off by the bare-knuckles title. This is a wise book. Anyone interested in writing thrillers would be foolish to pass it over." ?David Corbett, *author of Blood of Paradise, Done for a Dime, and The Devil's Redhead*

"Whether you plan to write a thriller as a novel or a screenplay, this book will help you throughout your creative process. All the tricks of the trade and all the insights of a master storyteller are laid bare for your use in this compulsively readable and relentlessly pragmatic book. *How to Write a Damn Good Thriller* is a practical guide, a useful admonition against the trivial and clichéd and a fun read all wrapped up together. Read it, use it, then thrill us with your story." ?David Howard, *author of The Tools of Screenwriting and How to Build a Great Screenplay*

"James N. Frey's *How to Write a Damn Good Thriller* is a must-read for anyone who dreams of writing a great thriller for the screen. Scorning simple-minded formulas, Frey shows with absolute clarity how to

create well-orchestrated, highly motivated, complex characters and pit them against each other in a high-stakes conflict. This book is destined to be the thriller-writer's Bible.” ?*Phil Gorn, screenwriter and award-winning director of S.F. and Ultimate Reality*

“*How to Write a Damn Good Thriller* is an inspiring, entertaining read, packed with great advice about crafting your thriller, from finding a concept, through creating believable villains and heroes, to building an exciting climax. I've written four published thrillers, and Frey's book has me psyched to get started on the next one. I wish *How to Write a Damn Good Thriller* had come out years ago. It would have saved me a lot of time and trouble.” ?*Patrick Quinlan, author of Smoked and The Takedown*

About the Author

JAMES N. FREY is the author of internationally bestselling books on the craft of fiction writing, including HOW TO WRITE A DAMN GOOD NOVEL, HOW TO WRITE A DAMN GOOD NOVEL II: Advanced Techniques, and THE KEY: How to Write Damn Good Fiction Using the Power of Myth. He is also the author of nine novels, including the Edgar Award-nominated THE LONG WAY TO DIE. He has taught at the University of California, Berkeley, Extension, the Squaw Valley Community of Writers, and the Oregon Writers' Colony, and he is a featured speaker at writers' conferences throughout the United States and Europe. He lives with his--he says, "truly heroic"--wife, Liza, in Berkeley, California.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jared Hoskins:

The book *How to Write a Damn Good Thriller: A Step-by-Step Guide for Novelists and Screenwriters* can give more knowledge and information about everything you want. Exactly why must we leave a very important thing like a book *How to Write a Damn Good Thriller: A Step-by-Step Guide for Novelists and Screenwriters*? A number of you have a different opinion about e-book. But one aim in which book can give many details for us. It is absolutely correct. Right now, try to closer with the book. Knowledge or data that you take for that, you are able to give for each other; you can share all of these. Book *How to Write a Damn Good Thriller: A Step-by-Step Guide for Novelists and Screenwriters* has simple shape but the truth is know: it has great and big function for you. You can seem the enormous world by available and read a publication. So it is very wonderful.

Tim Walton:

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Julie Harris:

This How to Write a Damn Good Thriller: A Step-by-Step Guide for Novelists and Screenwriters is great book for you because the content that is full of information for you who also always deal with world and still have to make decision every minute. This kind of book reveal it data accurately using great plan word or we can claim no rambling sentences included. So if you are read the item hurriedly you can have whole information in it. Doesn't mean it only gives you straight forward sentences but tricky core information with splendid delivering sentences. Having How to Write a Damn Good Thriller: A Step-by-Step Guide for Novelists and Screenwriters in your hand like obtaining the world in your arm, info in it is not ridiculous one. We can say that no book that offer you world throughout ten or fifteen second right but this reserve already do that. So , this is certainly good reading book. Hey Mr. and Mrs. stressful do you still doubt that?

Susan Woods:

Reading a guide make you to get more knowledge from it. You can take knowledge and information from your book. Book is published or printed or highlighted from each source that filled update of news. In this particular modern era like now, many ways to get information are available for you. From media social including newspaper, magazines, science publication, encyclopedia, reference book, novel and comic. You can add your understanding by that book. Do you want to spend your spare time to spread out your book? Or just looking for the How to Write a Damn Good Thriller: A Step-by-Step Guide for Novelists and Screenwriters when you required it?

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