

Save The Cat!

“...and maybe yourself, too.”

Narrative Design Document by Chiara “**Sats**” Di Stefano

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Top-Down Summary

What Is *Save The Cat*?

A procrastinating author must save her winged cat from his latest escape attempt – evading her deadly high-maintenance editor in the process – and maybe evaluate what she really wants to do in life in the process. It's a 3D mainline *Mario* game meets the mechanics of *Indiana Jones and the Great Circle* so burnt-out adults can finally speak their mind to their awful bosses.

Design Pillars

Comedy	Thrill of Danger	Power
Players will have a goofy, fun time exploring their wacky new environments, all the while interacting with a cast of truly bonkers characters.	Players will experience the rush that comes from having their evil boss just barely avoid spotting them while they play high-stakes hooky.	Players will love the dynamic inspiration that comes from finally being able to speak their mind to an awful, controlling authority figure.

Aesthetics, Tone, and Theme

Save The Cat is light, comedic, and full of magic realism, with a bright, saturated colour palette and a cartoony art style. It's a kid's game for twenty-somethings, where you get to do stuff like DIY makeshift Rube Goldberg machines to dodge guards on patrol, but also have to contend with adult responsibilities like the stress of still having a toxic hobby you used to love.

You can call your cat an asshole. You can call your best friend an asshole. You can call your boss an asshole. But you can also choose to steal flowers for your girlfriend, and to be intrusive and nosy about your best friend's love life, and to send cat pictures to your mom.

Fundamentally, *Save The Cat* is about you, the player, learning to be happy.

Audience and Market

The target audience of *Save The Cat* are burnt-out people in their twenties and thirties. The game's rating is 14+ for mild swearing, and *Save The Cat* can be compared in tone to similar games such as *Duck Detective: The Secret Salami*, *Bugsnax*, and *Untitled Goose Game*.

Story And Narrative

Game Narrative

You play as Nadiyyah Blake, a struggling writer volunteering for a short story publication.

You start the game staring at the mockingly blinking cursor of an empty First Draft document when a text from your boss – the Editor – blinks you back to reality. “Remember, your first draft was due yesterday!” it reads. “I should have it by now! Kisses!” You try to dismiss the text, and it turns into a monstrous bomb yelling at you to “GET IT TO ME TODAY!”.

‘*Shit,*’ you think, as you chuck the entire phone out the window and watch it explode. Your cat then decides it’s a great idea to jump out the aforementioned window while you’re distracted. *You* then decide it’s a great idea to procrastinate further by trying to wrangle him back home instead of, you know, working on your actual manuscript.

So you race out the door and into the street, grabbing a cat toy to hopefully lure Gatsby home along the way. The cat’s left a trail of glowing feathers, so you can track him pretty easily, but he’s got a head start on you and now he’s completely out of sight. Worse still, while following said trail, you hear your Editor ordering her minions to patrol the streets for you while she stakes out your house. Great. Time to follow the feather trail while avoiding or distracting the Editor’s Interns, all the while ignoring the less-passive-than-aggressive texts your Editor insists on sending you.

Finally making it out of your neighbourhood and into the city proper, you get an idea. Your best friend owns a club, D1VA, on the penthouse level of the tallest building in the city. You might be able to spot your cat from up there *and* find a shortcut to catch the little bastard. You head there, this time dodging your Editor’s Personal Assistants, but when you arrive, the place is surrounded. Your phone rings.

“That boss of yours has my damn buildin’ held hostage!” Ren hisses. “I’m losing clientele because they’re scared of the freakin’ militia out there. What have you done this time?”

Yipes. You explain your situation to them and they sigh. “Fine. Get the guards outta here, and I’ll drag you outta that pile of bull.”

After readily agreeing, you see your chance, and, with a little stealing and a lot of luck, build a ramshackle Rube Goldberg machine to scare the guards away. You slip into the building and head up to D1VA.

Once inside, you have a moment to catch your breath. You snoop around D1VA a bit, exploring here and there and poking your nose where it doesn't belong (read: into Ren's love life). An ad on the club's Help Wanted board catches your eye: a new indie game studio is looking for experienced writers. Huh.

You settle down on the rooftop with Ren to come up with a plan. You have a calm, quiet moment with them as you search for Gatsby where you realize you're just not happy at your job. Ren asks you what you want – not what your Editor wants, but what *you* want – and, honestly, you're not sure. You've been at this so long it's hard to remember anything different.

“But you ain't happy here?” Ren asks. ‘*No*,’ you realize, as your Editor texts you yet again. You're not. And maybe you should do something about that.

That's when you spot him. Gatsby is headed to Old Woman Franciska's farm, so you set out; Ren acting as your eyes from the air. In this segment, you hone your skills detecting and avoiding your Editor, since she's realized you're no longer in your neighbourhood and is now patrolling the city, by building traps that will slow her and her minions down.

Making it to your destination, you're about to start tracking down the cat when Franciska herself shows up. Seems the Editor made a few destructive rounds of the farm when looking for you, and now the old woman has a bone to pick with the both of you. As you go rummaging through her barnhouse like a sneaky raccoon, collecting items you'll need to defeat your boss, said barnhouse comes to life and tries to murder you. Defeat the maniac farm equipment to convince the old lady that you're the lesser of two evils, and she'll begrudgingly give you the go-ahead to fight on her property, provided you come back later and clean up your mess.

It's finally time. You walk outside and shoot off a text to your Editor with your location. If she wants her first draft so bad, she can get it over your dead body. Seconds later, she arrives in a giant, cartoonish tank with robotic arms that grab and oversized pens that stab at you. You must weave and dodge around the barnyard, building traps that shoot off projectiles at her mech while avoiding her attacks and attempts to break you both figuratively and literally.

“I! Quit!” you yell after the third hit lands. Your Editor's machine blows sky high.

There's a meow behind you. Seems the cat has tired himself out. You smile, pick him up, bid Franciska a good day, and finally, *finally* head home. You return your cat. You greet your girlfriend, giving her the flowers you stole along the way. You walk back upstairs to your office.

You sit at your desk, holding the business card for the indie dev company Ren gave you. You close your empty First Draft document. You smile.

Character Descriptions

Nadiyyah Blake

A frazzled, twenty-something woman with brown skin and curly hair. Huge bags line her eyes, and her bun is held up by a stray pen. She begins the story hooked up to an IV drip of caffeine, and is, fundamentally, a burnt-out millennial. She's been volunteering at the same short fiction publication for years now, and doesn't know what she wants to do with her life.

Ren

A Japanese adult in their late twenties, dressed ostentatiously. They own the club D1VA, the hottest spot for party-goers, and are generally a recovering hot mess who still manages to give pretty solid advice. Their thick Southern accent and no-bullshit attitude makes people listen when they speak. Definitely the "tough love" type.

The Editor

A cartoonishly villainous middle-aged white woman who brandishes a megaphone and an oversized feather quill. She is hawk-eyed and severe, and texts like your passive-aggressive mother asking you if you've finally gotten a boyfriend. Manipulative, overly-sweet, and surprisingly proficient at building giant kidnapping robots when given a good enough reason.

Old Woman Franciska

A kindly-looking white woman in her seventies in overalls and plaid. Don't be fooled by her appearance, though: this old lady holds a mean grudge, and when the Editor destroys some of her precious wheat crops, she vows revenge. A mad inventor on a scale that would make Da Vinci weep, she's fond of those who clean up their messes, and not much else.

Yolanda

A grinning, dry-witted, clever Black woman around Nadiyyah's age in a wheelchair. She holds a paintbrush and is covered in paint splotches. Nadiyyah's girlfriend of two and a half years; they live together with their cat. When not painting or having a fundamentally better grip on reality than her girlfriend, she works to get her degree in Education so she can teach kindergarten.

Gatsby

A ginger tomcat, and an idiot who occasionally grows wings.

World Design

Save The Cat happens in Nadiyyah's Place, the Drive, the City, DiVA, and Franciska's Farm.

All icons from game-icons.net

Nadiyyah's Place

A cozy two storey half-duplex, Nadiyyah, Yolanda, and Gatsby live in a plant-filled home brought to life by Yolanda's vibrant abstract wall paintings and Nadiyyah's poorly-hidden love for kitschy knickknacks.

Here, you'll learn the basic movement mechanics as well as how to wield your cat toy like a makeshift tool and weapon.



The Drive

A small hipster neighbourhood for families, the Drive is a vibrant, noisy home to arts and culture. Full of little grocery markets, competing pizza places, and bustling cafés, it still makes space for greenery in the form of trees that line the pavement and wide parks full of playgrounds great for hiding.

Here, you'll encounter everyone from children biking to senior couples to bands of teenagers roving the streets. Watch out for Interns trying to find you! Underpaid and overworked, the only way you can neutralize their threat is by constructing a rudimentary spray bottle and shooting them full of coffee – good god; they need it.



The City

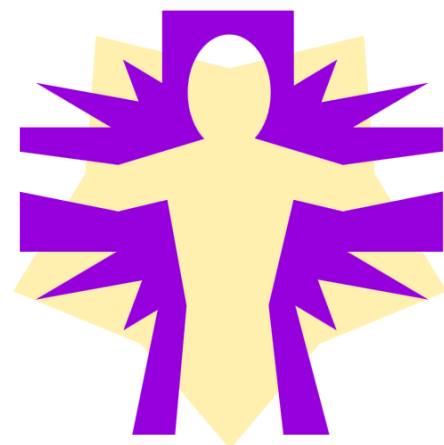
The City is, in two words, a mishmash. Nightclubs share storefronts with offices and 50's-style restaurants that reside across the street from Buddhist temples. There hasn't been much greenery here since the Editor took control of the City – hayfever, she claims – but the occasional weed manages to flourish nonetheless. Beware her Personal Assistants, who are sharp, alert, and always on the lookout for procrastinating workers.

Steal what you need from garages, hardware stores, Build-A-Bear factories, and art shops to construct elaborate machines that'll distract or neutralize the Assistants by spamming their notifications, making them think you ran the other way, or, in one memorable maneuver, slapping them with a wet fish from a local Chinese restaurant and fleeing like a bat out of hell.



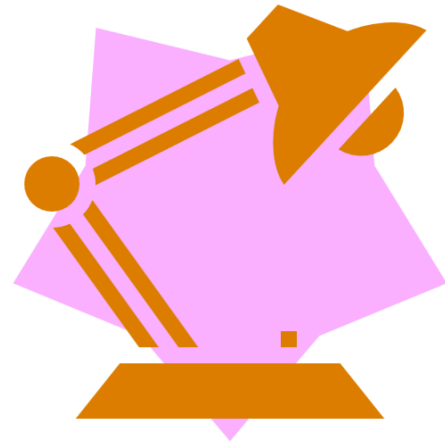
DIVA (pt. 1)

The hottest nightclub in the City, DIVA is located on the penthouse floor of a 20 storey building. A high-end restaurant turned gay club, DIVA is all open dance floors and tucked-away kitchens. An island bar in a centralized location provides an excellent place to socialize – though, considering it's the middle of the day, its neon strobe lights are, for the moment, turned off.



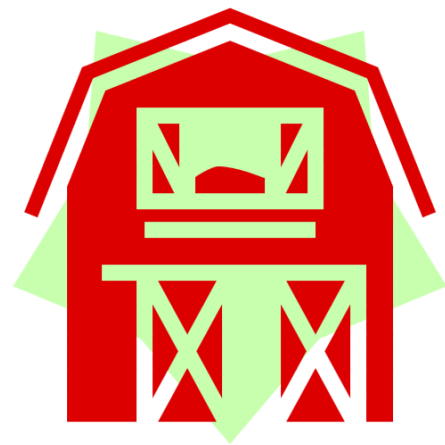
D1VA (pt. 2)

The most personal part of D1VA, however, is its private back room, only accessible if you get an invitation or know where to look. There you'll find a calm, soundproofed, wood-paneled study where the owner, Ren, does their finances, and often just hangs out. It's an open secret amongst D1VA-goers that if you're having a particularly rough night (or, perhaps, are fleeing your evil boss), you might just be gently guided into this small, comfortable space, where the owner will offer you Cheetos and gruff companionship. D1VA is where you can breathe.



Franciska's Farm

If you need anything, you can find it at Old Woman Franciska's farm, where sheep dot the countryside. The barn is half an area for space animal rearing supplies and half an engineer's dream straight out of Wallace and Gromit, and spare tools and parts clank around the place like particularly metallic tumbleweeds as giant cartoonish arms tend to the animals and accomplish simple tasks. It may be an excellent place to gather resources to build with, but its owner isn't exactly thrilled with you barging in and trampling her fields, so beware those giant arms lest they catch you up in a chokehold.



In-Game Dialogue

Scene: Entering D1VA

TRIGGER	CHARACTER	DIALOGUE
<i>Elevator doors open and the player walks out.</i>	NADIYYAH	D1VA. God, it's been too long since I've been here. <i>(beat)</i> I think I need to get out more.
<i>Player approaches the central bar, then clicks to investigate.</i>	NADIYYAH	"D1VA, home of the best martinis in the city. Shaken, never stirred." I have got to get Ren out of that Bond kick they're on. This is just getting pathetic. Let's see, what else is new here, what else... Oh, hey, what's that journal doing there?
<i>Player changes tract, moves to the speakers, then clicks to investigate.</i>	NADIYYAH	Ah, good old Bose speakers. I remember Ren trying to hook these suckers up. That was a funny goddamn afternoon. I wonder if I still have that video on my phone somewhere...
<i>Player looks up towards the neon lights, then clicks to investigate. Colour filters added to inventory.</i>	NADIYYAH	Hello, strobe lights. Hello, spot on the dance floor where I nearly broke my damn neck putting the colour filters on said strobe lights.
<i>Player's phone buzzes, but they ignore it</i>	NADIYYAH	Oh shit, that's her again. Let's just ignore you...
<i>Player returns to the central bar and clicks to open and flip through the journal.</i>	NADIYYAH	"May 15th, 2022." Oh shit, their diary? This should be good. "So I met someone interesting today. Looked to me initially to be another blonde airhead hanging around the place, but when we made eye contact and she smiled-"

	REN	Now what the hell d'ya think you're doin' with that? Get your ass outta there. Don't you have a cat to catch or some such bull?
<i>The player puts the book down and follows Ren through a cozy back room, but pauses to inspect a job board haphazardly pinned to the wall. Card added to inventory.</i>	NADIYYAH	Let's see... "Tutor wanted," no. "Dog walker?" Definitely not. Hey, what's this card? "Writer wanted for new indie game development studio..."
	REN	Hurry it up! I ain't got all day.
<i>Player walks towards Ren, who exits up a flight of stairs to the roof. Player's phone buzzes, but they once again ignore it.</i>	NADIYYAH	Ruh-roh, Shaggy...
<i>Player walks onto the rooftop</i>	REN	So, what's it this time, anyway? Wings again?
	NADIYYAH	Wings again, but it's more than that.
	REN	What, the Editor on your ass again? Thanks, Nads, I didn't notice. <i>(sigh)</i> I told ya you shoulda quit that shit gig years ago.
<i>Player passes through centre of rooftop, approaching Ren</i>	NADIYYAH	I know, but...
	REN	But what? You've been miserable ever since you started at that damned story house. Why are ya still there?
	NADIYYAH	<i>(warning)</i> Hey. I wasn't miserable at the start.
<i>Player reaches Ren</i>	REN	Yeah, I know. It's just easier to pretend that you were. <i>(beat)</i> Here. Take these, and get looking.

<i>Player equips binoculars</i>	REN	Fact remains, you're miserable now. What the hell are you still doing there?
	NADIYYAH	I just... I feel shitty, I guess, leaving it after so long.
<i>Player passes checkpoint 1</i>	NADIYYAH	Don't scoff at me; it's true, you dick! God, me trying to bare my soul here and you think it's a comedy act?
	REN	"Bare" your soul? That's what she said.
<i>Player passes checkpoint 2</i>	NADIYYAH	That's not- that doesn't even make sense, dingbat. But anyways, yeah. And I used to love it! I want to love it. It's just like... I dunno, it's almost like I still should, or something?
<i>Player passes checkpoint 3</i>	REN	Nadsi, you idiot. If keepin' at it is making you feel like shit, then your work is gonna be shit. And no "but"s. Here, listen. I'm gonna be a nice person for once in my goddamn life and give you a hand for free...
<i>Player passes checkpoint 4</i>	NADIYYAH	Liar. You still owe me after the whole noodle thing.
	REN	...And give you a hand for free, thank you very much, I'll give you a tip. There's some kid who stopped by the other day for the Help Wanted board. Put up a sign about some indie video game company she was runnin'.
<i>Player passes checkpoint 5</i>	NADIYYAH	Ooh, is this the mysterious person you mentioned in your diary?

	REN	It is a journal, and no, that's not him.
	NADIYYAH	So, you got their pronouns then, did you? And maybe even their number-
<i>Player passes checkpoint 6</i>	REN	Shut! Shut, if you know what's good for ya. Anyways, this kid came round, said somethin' about a game studio, then left. Something up your alley, mayhaps?
	NADIYYAH	Oh, you little jerk! I say "mayhaps" one time...
	REN	Anyways, have ya found that sorry sack of bones you call a feline?
<i>Player passes final checkpoint</i>	NADIYYAH	Yeah, you menace. He's out by Franciska's farm. Come on, let's go.
	NADIYYAH	So, you got their pronouns then, did you? And maybe even their number-

Final Battle Boss Barks

Proximity Change (ie: jump out of range)

"You get back here!"
"Don't you dare run away from me!"
"That's right, girl; come here..."
"Yes... Come closer..."
"Don't you dodge me!"

Escalation (boss becomes enraged)

"You insolent child!"
"I will have my draft!"
"Your head on a platter, girl!"
"You immature brat!"
"You impertinent wretch!"

Staggered State (boss has been hit)

"Now look what you've done!"
"All I wanted was your help, Nadiyyah!"
"How could you do this to me?"
"Why are you being so cruel?"
"Wouldn't giving the draft be easier, child?"

Powerful Attack (telegraph an action)

"Ready or not, I'm getting that draft, girl!"
"Prepare to meet your maker!"
"Kneel before me and weep, child!"
"I'll get you, and your little cat too!"
"This is your final warning!"

Generic Barks (can be triggered anytime)

"Nadiyyah...!"
"You little...!"
"Why, you...!"

Readables and Found Narrative

Readables in *Save The Cat* take place in the form of the subject lines of text messages your Editor sends you throughout the game. While you never physically open the messages beyond the first one, and, indeed, never have to physically take out your phone and read the subject lines, either, they serve as a way to ramp up pressure on the player character, as well as a way to alert patrols to your presence.

Game Segment	Subject Line
Tutorial (Nadiyyah's Place; The Drive)	<i>Hi there Nads. Don't forget, you should have already gotten me that draft. Much love!</i>
	<i>Hello Nadiyyah, my dear. Remember, I'm looking for your draft. Don't lose it. All the best.</i>
	<i>Hello Nadiyyah. Have you finished up your draft yet? It needs to be in to me today, you know. Sending regards!</i>
Phase 1: The City	<i>Nadiyyah. Are you still in your neighbourhood? I checked your house, but I couldn't find you. Your girlfriend really ought to be more hospitable.</i>
	<i>You aren't going to see that friend of yours again, are you, Nadiyyah? You know they aren't good for your productivity.</i>
	<i>Now Nadiyyah, I'd expected a little more responsibility from someone like you.</i>
Phase 2: Getting to D1VA	<i>Someone of your experience really ought to know better by now. This behaviour is childish.</i>
	<i>I'm growing impatient. I cannot believe you'd act in such an immature manner. Do you understand how this is affecting me?</i>
	<i>This is ridiculous. I'm getting that first draft, Nadiyyah, and I'm getting it today.</i>
Phase 3: Franciska's Farm	<i>Don't you dare ignore me, young lady.</i>
	<i>I will find you eventually.</i>