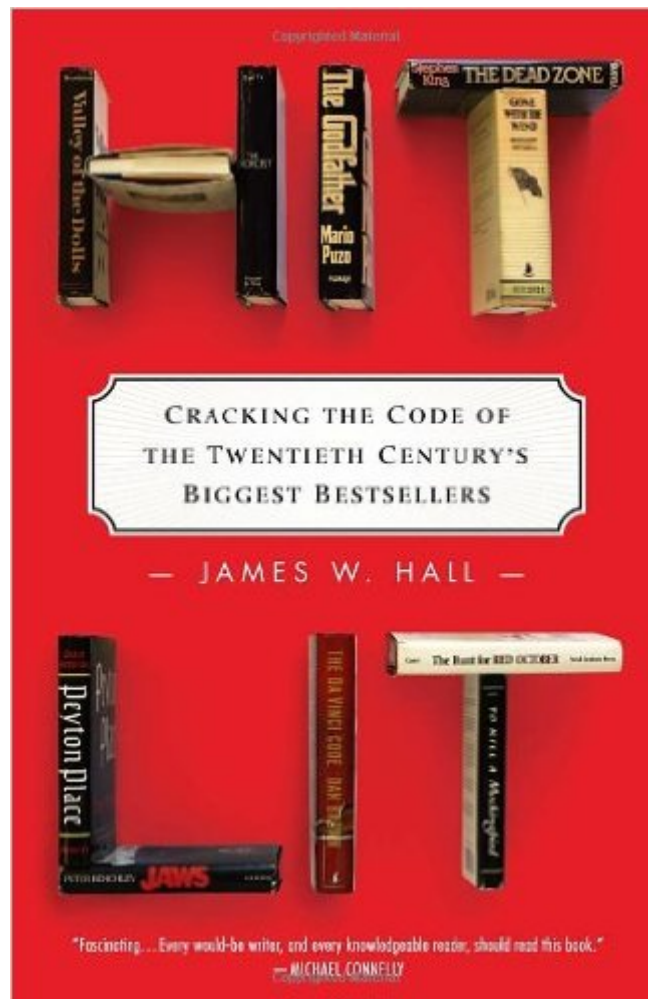


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Hit Lit: Cracking The Code Of The Twentieth Century's Biggest Bestsellers



Synopsis

DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF WHAT MAKES A MEGA-BESTSELLER IN THIS ENTERTAINING, REVELATORY GUIDE • What do Michael Corleone, Jack Ryan, and Scout Finch have in common? Creative writing professor and thriller writer James W. Hall knows. Now, in this entertaining, revelatory book, he reveals how bestsellers work, using twelve twentieth-century blockbusters as case studies—including *The Godfather*, *Gone with the Wind*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Jaws*. From tempting glimpses inside secret societies, such as submariners in *The Hunt for Red October*, and Opus Dei in *The Da Vinci Code*, to vivid representations of the American Dream and its opposite—the American Nightmare—in novels like *The Firm* and *The Dead Zone*, Hall identifies the common features of mega-bestsellers. Including fascinating and little-known facts about some of the most beloved books of the last century, *Hit Lit* is a must-read for fiction lovers and aspiring writers alike, and makes us think anew about why we love the books we love.

Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks; 51372nd edition (April 10, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0812970950

ISBN-13: 978-0812970951

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars • See all reviews (32 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #86,992 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #9 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Books & Reading > History of Books #33 in Books > Business & Money > Economics > Commerce #52 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Reference

Customer Reviews

What if someone with years of experience analyzing literature took a dozen blockbuster bestsellers, broke the novels down to their component parts, and figured out what they had in common? Is it possible to reverse-engineer the stories to see what makes them popular? Can we predict what books will become bestsellers? Could you use the data to construct your own bestseller? *Hit Lit* contains some of the very elements you'd expect to find in those blockbusters - a tantalizing premise, the promise of a secret revealed, some familiar stories, and the chance to learn something new. James W. Hall, a university English professor, recruited a group of students to read (or re-read)

twelve super-bestsellers, novels that sold millions even before movies were made of them (and movies were made of all twelve of these books). They analyzed the books the way they normally deconstruct Henry James or Jane Austen classics. They found that the bestsellers were similar to each other in many ways. They were often small stories told against sweeping backgrounds (*Gone with the Wind*, *The Hunt for Red October*), and they featured heroes who acted without spending a lot of time thinking (Shakespeare's *Hamlet* could never be a bestseller, apparently).

To start with, I thought it was pretty good over all. James Hall (the author) studied 12 bestselling books that were published in the last century and tried to find common aspects that all books had that made them mega sellers. (And he was looking at megasellers, not purely bestsellers, as well as break out books - books written by previously not very well known authors, so that only the book - not the name on its cover - explained why it became a huge seller.) Some of the aspects I thought weren't very relevant, IMHO. (For instance, he mentions religion as being critical to the book - which I find kind of interesting as religion only played a very minimal role in, say, *Gone with the Wind*. And sex also was key, according to him, despite that I don't really remember it being all that important in, say, *The Hunt for Red October*. Plus, these two elements are so prevalent in novels that it would be hard to find one that didn't even have a hint of sex or religion, you know?) But I do think that he made a lot of really solid ones including:

1. To become a mega-bestseller (vs. just a decent seller), you need to appeal to people who don't read books on a regular basis. (Or at least don't buy books.) Even if every single person in the US who normally buys books bought a copy of your book, you wouldn't sell as well as any of these books did. So you need to appeal to a group beyond the regular book buying contingent. This means that your book can't have super fancy, hard to understand language, or elements that would mostly appeal to a serial reader. (For instance, a super unique plot is going to appeal more to someone who's read thousands of books than it would to someone who only reads once in a while. The same is true for vivid imagery, lovely writing, etc.

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