

KD Addiction

How to Use CLIFFHANGERS to
Get Readers Addicted
to your Books.

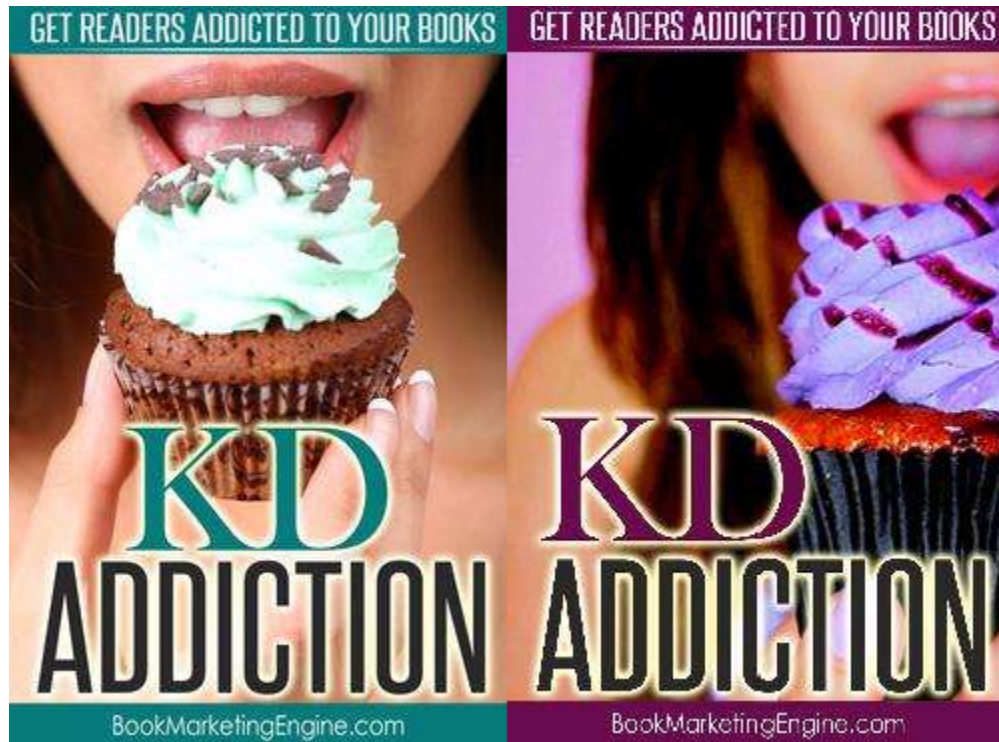


Table of Contents:

[Chapter 1: Introduction](#)

[The best cliffhangers are...](#)

[Chapter 2: The History of Cliffhangers.](#)

[1950: The Perils of Pauline popularized the term “cliffhanger”...](#)

[1873: Thomas Hardy created the term “cliffhanger”...](#)

[1830s: And Charles Dickens brought the concept to western literature.](#)

[7th Century: But Scheherazade may have invented the cliffhanger.](#)

[Chapter 3: The Arabian Nights Princess’ Four Secrets of Heart-Stopping Cliffhangers:](#)

[1. The Antagonist Secret.](#)

[2. The Foreshadowing Secret.](#)

[3. The Impossible Secret.](#)

[4. The Game Changer Secret.](#)

[Chapter 4: The 9 Types of Cliffhangers.](#)

[Chapter 5: The 14 Ways to Write Addictive Cliffhangers.](#)

[Chapter 6: How to Hide Cliffhangers.](#)

[The Zeigarnik Effect:](#)

[How Often Should I Use Internal Cliffhangers?](#)

[Chapter 7: The 5 Sins of Cliffhanging!](#)

[1. The “What does that have to do with anything?” Cliffhanger.](#)

[2. The “Oh NOW you want to get juicy?” Cliffhanger.](#)

[3. The “I have to wait HOW LONG?” cliffhanger.](#)

[4. The “That’s All?” Cliffhanger.](#)

[5. The “Deus Ex Machina” Cliffhanger.](#)

[6. The Exception to the Rule: The “Who Shot JR?” Method.](#)

[Chapter 7: 4 Killer Short-Cuts to World-Class Cliffhangers!](#)

[1. The “Sandwich” Method.](#)

[2. The “Young & the Restless” Method.](#)

[3. The C.R.E.A.M. Method.](#)

[4. The “LOST” Method.](#)

[Chapter 8: 50+ of the Greatest TV Cliffhangers of All Time!](#)

[Chapter 9: The KD Addiction Quick Reference Sheet.](#)

[Chapter 10: The 7-Step KD Addiction Process.](#)

[Chapter 11: Conclusion.](#)



than you thought.

Chapter 1: Introduction

What's your TV, or Book Series addiction?

Take a minute to answer that question.

- One TV series...
- One book series.

Now. How much does that series use **the cliffhanger**?

You might be surprised that it's a lot more

From Janet Evanovich, the Queen of Cliffhangers, in her book:
'How I Write: Secrets of a Bestselling Author':

"The intention of a cliffhanger is to leave the reader anxious to know what will happen next.

*Placing a cliffhanger at the end of a chapter encourages the reader to continue turning pages.
A cliffhanger at the end of a book - and of course that should be done only
if the book is one in a series - gives the reader something to think about
while waiting for the next installment.*

A successful cliffhanger will evoke an emotional response for the reader.

*When you have a cliffhanger ending, the reader has to
use his imagination to finish the story on his own.*

Or at least until the next book hits the stores..."





The best cliffhangers are...

The best cliffhangers are game changers.

They reveal something **terrible** and **startling** — so that even if our main characters survive the immediate peril, you the reader are left wondering how this new status quo will play out.

The best cliffhangers put a character your audience cares about in jeopardy... and leaves them there.

(At least for long enough to make things interesting...)

The best cliffhangers are STRIKING EVENTS. They leave doubt in the reader's mind about your main character's fate. And force them to come back to see what happens next.

The best stories use cliffhangers. they could be anywhere there some sort of a pause, break, in the action -- end of a chapter... end of a book... but then they have to be resolved right after the break, as the story resumes.

But where exactly did cliffhangers come from?

And when / how / how often should we use them?

Let's get into it.



Chapter 2: The History of Cliffhangers.

The term **cliffhanger** comes from the old movie serials that used to play in theaters.

Back in the silent movie era, and up through the 1950s, movie going was a big outing.

The theaters would typically play a double-feature - the main feature film, then before it, a shorter, cheaper item - like a cartoon or a

newsreel.

But the theater's soon found that by featuring an exciting, adventurous story in installments, they could get a high percentage of patrons to return the following week.

Thus - serials... and cliffhangers... were born.

The most famous of these was the silent serial: "*The Perils of Pauline*".

1950: The Perils of Pauline popularized the term "cliffhanger"...



"**The Perils of Pauline**" was the ultimate damsel in distress series.

Pauline would be the prey of all manner of dastardly men who sought her demise. At the end of each episode,

Pauline was usually in some form of mortal danger.

So the audience would have to come back the following week to see what happened to her. In one of the serials, Pauline was literally hanging from the edge of a cliff as the episode ended.

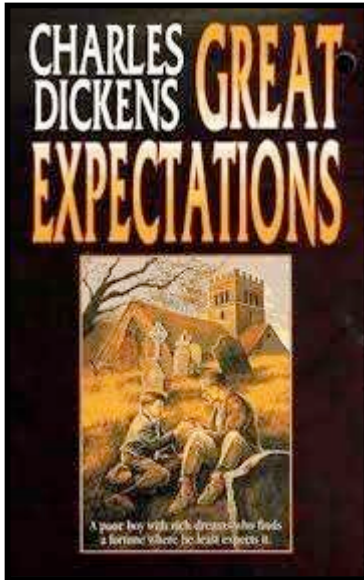
And thus - the cliffhanger was born.

1873: Thomas Hardy created the term “cliffhanger”...

Thomas Hardy was an English novelist and poet, who was influenced by Charles Dickens (among others).

Most of his fictional works were initially published as serials in magazines. They explored tragic characters struggling against their passions and social circumstances.

In 1873, Hardy wrote *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, a novel drawing on Hardy's courtship of his first wife. The actual term "cliffhanger" is considered to have originated with the serialized version of this story, in which Henry Knight, one of the protagonists, is left literally hanging off a cliff.



1830s: And Charles Dickens brought the concept to western literature.

Even before silent serial movies in the 1950s, and before Thomas Hardy's use of the term cliffhanger in the 1870s, Charles Dickens had popularized the concept of episodic writing the 1830s.

He actually wrote many of his stories as serials.

Dickens did this because more people could afford the installments, and the publisher reached a wider audience.

It was Dickens' job to create a hunger for the next installment, so he ended the present installment with a need to read on *(They weren't called cliffhangers until the 1950s.)*

Part of Dickens's great talent was to incorporate this episodic writing style... but still end up with a coherent novel at the end.



7th Century: But Scheherazade may have invented the cliffhanger.

Scheherazade is a legendary Arabic queen and the storyteller of One Thousand and One Nights.

One Thousand and One Nights is a collection of West and South Asian stories and folk tales compiled in Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age.

It is often known in English as the Arabian Nights, from the first English language edition (1706).

The work was collected over many centuries by various authors, translators, and scholars across West, Central, South

Asia and North Africa.

The tales themselves trace their roots back to ancient and medieval Arabic, Persian, Indian, Egyptian and Mesopotamian folklore and literature.

As we will elaborate on in the next chapter, the stories in “One Thousand and One Nights” are all tied together by the cliffhanger.

Chapter 3: The Arabian Nights Princess' Four Secrets of Heart- Stopping Cliffhangers:



One of the greatest cliffhanger enthusiasts of all was the **"One Thousand and One Nights / Arabian Nights"** princess storyteller, *Scheherazade*.

The story goes that every day the king would marry a new virgin. (They should have had reality TV shows back in his day!)

And after doing so, he would send the previous day's wife to be beheaded.

This was done in anger, having found out that his first wife was unfaithful to him.

The king had killed 1,000 such women by the time he was introduced to Scheherazade, the vizier's daughter.

Scheherazade had perused the stories and legends of preceding Kings. It was said that she had collected a thousand books of histories relating to antique races and departed rulers.

She had consumed the works of the poets and knew them by heart; she had studied philosophy and the sciences, arts and accomplishments; and she was pleasant and polite, wise and witty, well read and well bred.

Against her father's wishes, Scheherazade volunteered to spend one night with the king.

Once in the king's chambers, Scheherazade told a long story, deep into the night. The king lay awake and listened with awe. The night passed by, and Scheherazade stopped in the middle of the story. The king asked her to finish, but Scheherazade said there was no time, as dawn was breaking.



So, the king spared her life for one day to finish the story the next night.

The next night, Scheherazade finished the story and then began a second, even more exciting tale which she again stopped halfway through at dawn.

Again, the king spared her life for one more day to finish the second story. And so the King kept

Scheherazade alive day by day, as he eagerly anticipated the finishing of the previous night's story.

At the end of 1,001 nights, and 1,000 stories, Scheherazade told the king that she had no more tales to tell him. During these 1,001 nights, the king had fallen in love with Scheherazade, and spared her life, and made her his queen.

(Talk about “writing” like your life depends on it!)

Scheherazade understood that the cliffhanger's purpose was to keep the audience engrossed enough to want to continue, and desperate to find out how the cliffhanger resolves itself.

The stories had foreshadowing, sexual humor, crime fiction elements, horror fiction elements, fantasy and science fiction elements, poetry, dramatic visualization, fate and destiny, and all sorts of story elements found in popular fiction today.

Many of the stories depict jinns, ghouls, sorcerers, magicians, and legendary places, intermingled with real people and geography.

She even had some of the characters tell a story of their own, within the story, creating a rich, nested weaving of intricate and immersive storytelling that would leave the king enraptured.

Scheherazade's 4-Step Formula for Heart-Stopping Cliffhangers:

1. The Antagonist Secret.

Scheherazade creates antagonists early in the story, whose presence or revelations will eventually force a difficult choice onto the protagonist.

As the author, you know what the big cliffhanger will eventually be.

So with the benefit of hindsight, you can plant clues and breadcrumbs, you can develop the story, so that the cliffhanger isn't gimmicky or out of the blue... but almost... inevitable. In hindsight.

Use this perfect hindsight to build up a cliffhanger moment that will make the reader slap his forehead and say: "I can't believe that! But I see why that happened! Now what's going to happen next?"

2. The Foreshadowing Secret.

Scheherazade lays the groundwork for plot twists beforehand.

In other words, cliffhangers are carefully planned; that is their essential secret.

Step 1 - The Plant:

The hint to readers that something surprising and/or important is going to happen later in the book. The bigger the event, the more important it is to foreshadow early.

Once you've got your plant in place, all that's left is to bring the payoff on stage.

Step 2 - The Payoff:

If you planted clues about abducting, cheating, murder, absconding, or whatever else your cliffhanger entails, this is the part where you now get to let these imperative scenes play out.

If you've done a good job with your plant early on, you won't even need to reference it explicitly! Truth be told, it'll have a stronger impact when you let readers connect the dots themselves.

3. The Impossible Secret.

Scheherazade puts her protagonists in impossibly challenging situations.

In many of the stories, Scheherazade would end at such a critical juncture...

One in which the main character couldn't possibly escape the peril / the difficult choice.

You can imagine the king's mind racing, as he tries to logically work out how the main character could possibly escape this time!

There was always one... just one... escape route.

But it was so well thought through, that unless you laid the trap, you'd never find it.

Thus, to the king, and to your readers, every cliffhanger will seem impossible, short of a "Deus Ex Machina" situation.

(We'll talk more about Deus Ex Machina in a bit...)

4. The Game Changer Secret.

Scheherazade places the moments of choice at chapter breaks.

So basically she would end the story for the night at the point where the main character was at a crossroads. By looking at the moment of peril and the impossible choice as two sides of the same coin, it is a reminder that the moment of peril isn't just danger for danger's sake.

It's actually a fork in the road. It's a moment after which, nothing will ever be the same in the story. If one path is what happens... the story changes for ever. If the other path is taken, the story changes for ever in a different fashion.

Chapter 4: The 9 Types of Cliffhangers.

There are lots of fun, painful, creative, alarming, dastardly ways to put your main character in peril.

James Scott Bell teaches this subject (and others on writing) brilliantly. Bell has created a list of nine different types of cliffhanger endings.

1. Impending disaster
2. Dangerous emotions:
3. Portent - a sign or warning that something, especially something momentous or calamitous, is likely to happen.
4. Mysterious dialogue
5. Secret revealed
6. Major decision / vow
7. Announcement of a shattering event
8. Reversal / surprise
9. Question left in the air

You can learn more from his other books on writing. You'll enjoy his books "Plot and Structure", "Conflict & Suspense", "Writing from the Middle", "Super Structure", and others.

Chapter 5: The 14 Ways to Write Addictive Cliffhangers.

The key to a good cliffhanger is ending your session on a pause in the action, not right in the thick of it.

Tools for implementing cliffhangers:

Cliffhangers can be implemented with:

1. Questions
2. Dialogue
3. Descriptive Scenes

Now - here are the 15 Most Powerful Ways to Write Suspenseful, Page-Turning Cliffhangers.

1. The New Element:

- a. A new character, confession, discovery, or announcement at the end of a scene creates a puzzling situation or a golden opportunity for a plot twist.

Just as readers think the previous scene is winding down, a new element catapults readers to the next chapter for answers.

2. The Intriguing question:

- a. Use dialogue, internal or external, to explore what issues keep your character up at night.
- b. What is this character hiding?
- c. Will the protagonist ever find the solution to the big problem?

3. The Decision:

- a. Leave your protagonist, and your reader, wondering what to do next on both big and small scales. How will the big bad antagonist be taken down? Or should your protagonist go on that blind date?

4. **The Clairvoyant Reader:**

- a. Foreshadowing is a clue, a hint, a peek at events yet to come. Once we get that peek we just can't resist pulling back the curtain for the full view.

Use a perspective switch to tell the reader something big and bad is coming, unbeknownst to the character. It sets up anticipation.

- b. Will the protagonist will figure it out?

Use foreshadowing when the characters are at a crossroad, or a big change in the plot is coming. Foreshadowing works great for building suspense at any stage of a book.

In one of my favorite book series, "The Wheel of Time" by Robert Jordan, the author uses foreshadowing in a few different ways.

A few of the characters in this fantasy fiction book are dream walkers. They're able to walk in other people's dreams, and see what those people are dreaming about. This particular power is very rare among characters in the book, and even those who are able to do it have limitations.

So when it is used, the reader gets some tantalizing foreshadowing of what is to come!

Then there is a single (otherwise lowly) character, that has one power - she sometimes sees auras around people. These auras predict something that is going to happen to that person... and are never wrong.

But here's the catch - they aren't always literal, or clear. They can be symbols, they can be hazy, and so they end up giving the reader that sense of foreboding, without explicitly spelling out what's about to happen.

And judging that I'm on Book 5 of this 11 Book series (each of the books costs about \$50), you can tell that this author has me ADDICTED!

Foreshadowing is a guaranteed page-turner in any genre, from mystery, to romance, and everything in-between.

- c. Note that it works really well in thriller stories as well. The reader knows more than the main character does. It's why we love yelling "don't go in that room!"

We can hear the foreboding music!
We can see the scary lighting!
We KNOW there is nothing good in there.

Alas, the main character is clueless, and we watch helplessly as they teeter on the precipice of disaster.

5. The Almost Doesn't Count:

- a. Build up a moment, and bring the protagonist and his/her love interest (or goal) a hair's breadth apart...
- b. Then shatter the moment and fling them apart.
- c. Don't give the reader what they want too soon. This will keep them invested until the "kiss" (or emotional payoff moment) actually happens.
- d. Note that this doesn't have to be limited to romance. It can involve your main character almost getting "[the MacGuffin](#)" (The special item that he has been pursuing for most of the story)... almost getting his fingertips on it, and then having it wrenched from him and lost halfway across the world.
- e. Do that a few times, and your reader will CRAVE for the main character to just GET WHAT HE WANTS!

6. The Aftermath:

- a. Build up to the decision to throw the grenade, have the protagonist confront the killer, and then start the next chapter with the aftermath.

By breaking the moment of tension, you inadvertently create more suspense.

7. The Fade to Black:

- a. "I'll tell you what we're going to do," the protagonist says...
Then the chapter ends, leaving the reader in the dark.

The character figures out the master plan to catch the bad guy,
and the reader keeps devouring sentences to see how they DID it.

You have to stick along to the end it find out.

This can be used in combination with "The Aftermath", and "The Zeigarnik

Effect”, for a triply potent cliffhanger!

8. The Big Reveal.

- a. You know what they say. Good things should come to those who wait. So save your biggest reveals for the end.
- b. Tension should build up to the climactic moment over the course of the book, and little cliffhangers should be resolved, but save the biggest for the end, otherwise the reader will feel cheated.

9. The Provocative Question.

- a. This works for a character’s internal question, a narrative question, or a question exchanged between two or more characters.

The question is the easiest method to master and tends to focus on the “W” questions, Who, What, Where, When, and Why. I find the W questions low on the cliffhanger scale, but they’re an old standby.

This style works best when the question is one the reader is already considering.

10. The accusation.

- a. Use this cliffhanger for one character to confront another with damaging information or to announce some life changing news. “I’m pregnant.”
- b. This cliffhanger will usually create emotional tension, and drive the story toward a new short or long-term goal or plot complication. It also works for a plot reversal or setback.

11. The Demand for Action.

- a. This cliffhanger centers on an event the characters can’t ignore, and may include elements of danger. The classic example is a police officer knocking at the front door.

The demand for action works great for leading into a major event, or an event that drives a group into action, such as a river flooding over its banks.

The demand for action always precedes a dramatic part of the story.

Be careful of using a fake demand for action, (an anti-climactic problem) the

reader can interpret that as cheating.

12. The Slap:

- a. This method is the romance writer's workhorse. Ha! Just about every soap opera episode over the past 50 years, has one or both of these!
- b. The main character almost gets that kiss he's been secretly pining for... then... SLAP!
- c. Or - the two likable but rivals finally see each other face-to-face, and then... SLAP! (Or punch, as the case might be.)
- d. But what happens next? These heighten emotional tension - on the screen, on the page, and with the audience.

13. The Missing Object.

- a. We've all read these cliffhangers, it's the old trunk in the attic, the long-lost letter that slipped behind the china hutch; or any other object of significance.

It has to be something of significance though. No red herrings.

This is a suspense style of cliffhanger, good for revealing a major clue. The method works really well at the start of the ending climax, but you can also use it for a mid-book complication.

14. The Pledge.

This one is commonly an internal commitment for action on the part of a lead character. "I will avenge my father's death." Antagonists also use them when they vow to create mayhem or take revenge.

This is a dramatically charged cliffhanger, and it always follows some emotional catharsis or a feeling of being cornered. This cliffhanger always changes the character's path in a profound way. This method can work early or late in a novel.

As a kid, I would watch kung-fu movies every Friday night.

The Pledge was in EVERY SINGLE KUNG-FU MOVIE!

"You kill my bratha?! Now, I kill you!"

(Proceed to fight to the death.)

Great stuff, great stuff.... :)

You should not use this for a minor decision and you really only get one shot at this type of cliffhanger. If you overuse the pledge your character looks uncommitted.

Chapter 6: How to Hide Cliffhangers.

Cliffhangers are amazingly powerful. But their efficacy can be greatly reduced, when the reader sees them coming. Or even worse, if the audience can PREDICT what the cliffhanger is going to be!

To hide your cliffhangers, you want to do three things:

1. Get the reader invested in the lead character FIRST.

This way, his eventual life-or-death struggle actually matters.

(Read Blake Snyder's "Save the Cat" on this topic. Brilliant book.)

This way you have the reader thinking about the character and not about your technique.

2. Vary the type and intensity of the cliff-hanger.

You've already seen the various types of cliffhangers. So switch it up, each time.

And in particular, varying the intensity can throw the reader off your trail.

3. Use the Zeigarnik effect.

The Zeigarnik Effect:

In psychology, the Zeigarnik effect states that people remember uncompleted or interrupted tasks better than completed tasks.

Zeigarnik first studied the phenomenon after her professor, Gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin, noticed that a waiter had better recollections of still unpaid orders.

However, after the completion of the task – after everyone had paid – he was unable to remember any more details of the orders.

You'll see soap operas frequently use this effect to their advantage - they'll bring one set of characters to the brink of disaster, and then in the very next scene, go to a completely different set of characters! Only to bring that second set of characters to some fork in the road, and then jump back to the first set of characters, resolving their cliffhanger in the process.

The entire time, the viewer on the edge of their seat, heart in their mouth, unable to rip their eyeballs from the TV screen.

This is reflected from a note sent to Dwight V Swain, by the editor of a host of pulp fiction magazines (Howard Browne)... who was big on the cliffhanger.

Back then there was a never ending need for "novelettes" - works of 20,000 to 30,000 words to fill up the pages of fiction magazines.

"Do these stories in the style Burroughs used to use; you know, take one set of characters and carry them along for a chapter, putting them at the end of the chapter in such a position that nothing can save them.

Then take another set of characters, rescue them from their dilemma, carry them to a hell of a problem at the end of the chapter.

Then switch back to the first set of characters, rescue them from their deadly peril, seemingly doomed, and rescue the second set of characters... and so on.

Don't give the reader a chance to breathe..."

How Often Should I Use Internal Cliffhangers?

Does that mean that every novel has to have scenes, back and forth, of characters in mortal physical danger? No.

But it does mean that when you reach the end of a chapter you want to have something that compels the reader to turn the page.

Placement is essential; the next element is timing.

Charles Dickens serialized most of his novels in 20 chapter installments, in "Bentley's Monthly" magazine.

You'll find Mr. Dickens used cliffhangers at four- to five-chapter intervals.

Chapter 7: The 5 Sins of Cliffhanging!

This is very important.

There are authors out there, indies as well as traditionally published ones, who will swear against cliffhangers.

They say they loathe cliffhangers...

That cliffhangers are manipulative, cheap tricks that generate bad reviews and hate mail.

They are right. BUT ONLY IF... those cliffhangers are implemented in the WRONG WAY.

If you make any of the mistakes below, intentionally or otherwise, your book will get all the negative repercussions it rightfully deserves.

You could make that mistake.

Or... you could learn these three major mistakes... **and avoid them like the plague.**



1. The “What does that have to do with anything?” Cliffhanger.

You’ll know this one when you see it.

It’s when you’ve been trucking along just fine with the book you’re reading, and then ALL OF A SUDDEN, something completely random and seemingly manufactured drops out of thin air, to create mystery, intrigue, suspense, and a cliffhanger.

“NO, NO, NO!” screams your reader.

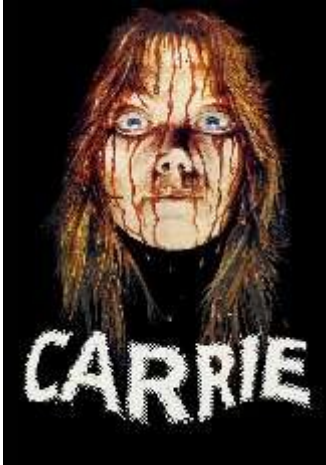
What does that have to do with anything?!?!?!?

You can’t go inserting story elements after the fact, simply to create a cliffhanger.

Instead, use the DNA already existing in the story, in a natural way, to create that mystery, doubt, intrigue and curiosity.

I think they made an entire movie around that premise... (*Snakes on a plane* ... cough)

2. The “Oh NOW you want to get juicy?” Cliffhanger.



This one occurs when you’ve been going along just fine with a book, but realize that the plot is a bit thin.

As you near the end of the book, suddenly, things start happening fast!

It’s been a long time since I saw the movie Carrie. It’s VERY FAMOUS for its ending! *(I don’t remember much about the rest of the movie, though I can say that it is critically acclaimed.)*

I’m highlighting it as a pseudo-example though, because the ending is so memorable.

And while you want people talking about the ending of your book for decades to come... Don’t suddenly end all that juicy action with a random cliffhanger...

Maintain a good pace throughout the book, and then hit them with the big cliffhangers at strategic chapter endings, plus at the book ending.

Each book of your series needs have at least somewhat of a resolution to the main conflict in the story.

So what that means is - even though you want to end your book with a cliffhanger (this prompts them to buy the next one) -- the way to do it without raising the ire of readers is to resolve most of the main conflict in your final chapter.

But then open a new, foreboding, intriguing thread.

With your reader invested in your main characters, she will simply have to know how they’re going to get out of this new, more threatening bind!

3. The “I have to wait HOW LONG?” cliffhanger.

There’s a reason people (probably yourself included) love to BINGE WATCH entire series of TV shows, on Netflix, or Hulu, or Amazon.

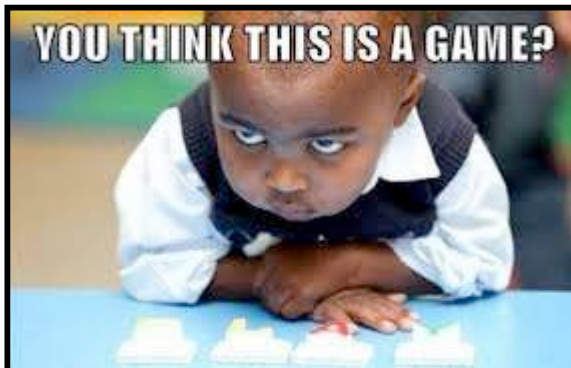
It’s because:

- a. They get the thrill of the cliffhanger at the end of each episode, and
- b. They actually get to resolve that sweet tension, by watching the next episode right away!

Even when people are watching TV series on live TV, and have to wait a full week for the cliffhanger to be resolved - at least there is a certainty that in seven days, all will be answered.

(Never mind that they know another several threads will be opened.

At least last week’s open threads will be closed.)



If you write one book, and are planning to follow it up with a series of books *that don't exist yet?*

...you are going to get positively **ROASTED, SHELLACKED, and FLAMED** in your reviews for leaving people hanging!

There’s an implicit understanding.

Readers love the tease of a cliffhanger, when they know they can scratch that itch right away, or at least very soon thereafter.

If they have to wait a year, or even a month, for the sequel?

Many of them will dedicate a litany of four lettered soliloquies in your honor.



Independence Day 2.
July 2015 (19 years later!)

But wait. Let's never say never.

If we're being smart, there's always a caveat. A loophole.

Ignore this at your peril. Know this loophole. Master it.
And determine if/when you will choose to use it.

It's definitely not for everyone. But when it works...
it takes the entire audience by STORM for months.

The loophole? "Who Shot JR."



4. The “That’s All?” Cliffhanger.

A cliffhanger is asking your reader to make an **emotional investment**. You’re telling the reader: “*Trust me. This is going to be goooooood...*”

If they don’t get a proper return worth that emotional investment... yeah.

They won’t be very happy with you.

If the build-up is big, **make the payoff juicy!**

In 'Techniques of the Selling Writer', Dwight V Swain said:

"Step by step, then, your central character is forced into a bottleneck, a funnel.

Finally, he reaches a point at which he's restricted to a choice between two specific, concrete, alternative courses of action

... In the middle stages of your story, you must be sure that this narrowing takes place. If you don't, your reader's going to see those holes, and scream because your hero doesn't duck out through one. And idiot heroes seldom please."

Want some examples how to not let your audience down with a cliffhanger payoff?

Here are the Top 10 most disappointing TV show finales, from WatchMojo.com.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIDjliQjDjQ>



5. The Deus Ex Machina” Cliffhanger.

Deus Ex Machina means *"god from the machine"*.

The term was coined from the Greek tragic stage plays. A machine would be used to bring actors playing gods onto the stage... to resolve the conflict and conclude the drama.

Deus Ex Machina today refers to a plot device in which a seemingly unsolvable problem is suddenly and abruptly resolved by the unexpected intervention of some new event, character, ability or

object.

It happens when the writer has ‘painted himself into a corner’ and sees no other way out.

I bet you can cite lots of examples of Deus Ex Machina in books, TV shows or movies you’ve seen over the years.

In one recently popular American TV show, “Heroes”, a character named Hiro Nakamura was able to time travel.



Now - time traveling is a very cool ability to have, in a science fiction story. But it has to have significant limitations.

As it was - Hiro perpetually went back in time to revive characters, undo wrongs, and so on, and so forth. It became maddening after a while.

What’s the point of main character being put into terrible positions, if Hiro Nakamura can come back and retroactively change everything?

Yeah. Don’t cop-out by breaking the rules of your story’s reality... and coming up with some fantastical, unrealistic resolution to save your

main character from impending doom.

It ticks people off.

6. The Exception to the Rule: The “Who Shot JR?” Method.



In certain cases, allowing the audience to wait for a more extended (but pre-determined) period of time, allows for the audience to actually reflect, discuss, and publicly speculate on what the cliffhanger resolution will be.

On U.S. TV soap operas, cliffhangers were actually VERY RARE. Until 1980.

And “Who Shot JR” (Dallas). The ENTIRE COUNTRY was almost begging to know who shot JR!

The speculation that summer was rampant! The buzz created for the TV show was so big, it redefined the soap opera game for ever.

(It even made the cover of TIME Magazine, for crying out loud!)

Want to know how they kept viewers waiting for the entire summer, and STILL pulled off such a positive response?

To use this method:

1. You'll need a REMARKABLE cliffhanger. One that folks will actually remark about, and speculate about.

2. You'll need to let your audience know exactly when the sequel will be available. (For digital books, I'd suggest 1-to-3 months. No more than that, though.)

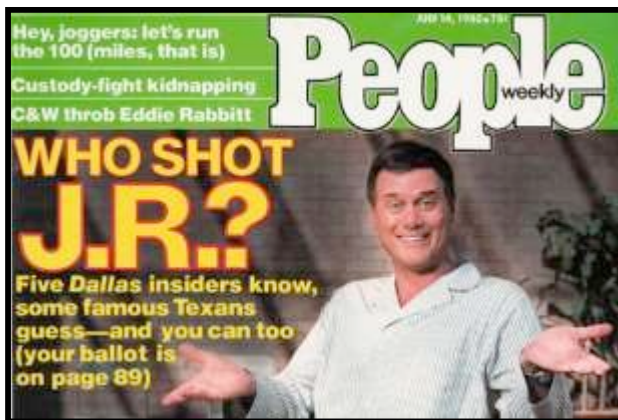
Scheherazade made the King wait... but just one night.

"Wait until tomorrow," she would tell him, when he asked how the story ended.

The king - who was compelled to learn how the story ended - in turn told the executioner, "Wait until tomorrow."

Readers will wait, if the story is good enough, for the cliffhanger resolution.

They just won't wait INDEFINITELY. They want to know when their respite will come.



3. Have a reader forum that brings your readers together (you don't have to create one - you can leverage an existing public one for your genre).

This can make your book more of a social event, and certainly adds to the drama.

Any extended wait is risky - so use this judiciously. But also recognize the opportunity.

Important: The cliffhanger be planned and organic to the story rather than a cheap trick. Nothing is so deadening to readers as a sudden new crisis or antagonist introduced for no apparent reason.

The character or situation carrying the crisis must be integrated into the tale long before the cliffhanger.

Chapter 7: 4 Killer Short-Cuts to World-Class Cliffhangers!

1. The



Sandwich Method.

The sandwich method is a very practical, quick shortcut to get the structure of your cliffhanger down.

It essentially has you start from the middle first (the cliffhanger part, or the sandwich meat)...

and then has you go back to define the beginning and ending (the bread).

i. Divide a page or notecard into thirds (draw horizontal lines)

ii. In the middle third, write the **cliffhanger**.

iii. In the bottom third, write the **resolution**.

iv. In the top third, write the **setup**.

So a cliffhanger for a scene with a damsel hanging from a cliff would look like this:

Setup	Cliffhanger	Resolution
I. Man is kidnapped by thugs working for a drug kingpin that he double-crossed.	II. In an attempt to escape, man jumps out of moving car, rolls off a cliff, and hangs by his fingers.	III. Man finally falls from cliff, but is grabbed right at that moment, by two pairs of female hands.
	With a 100 foot fall, rushing tides, and toothy crocodiles hungrily awaiting him below.	They belong to his girlfriend... and his secret lover. :)
		Out of the frying pan...

2. The



“Young & the Restless” Method.

The Young and the Restless is one of the most enduring and most popular TV soap operas of all time.

First broadcast on March 26, 1973, The Young and the Restless was originally broadcast as half-hour

episodes, five times a week.

It expanded to one hour episodes on February 4, 1980. And has been running in the one-hour format, five days a week, ever since.

Since its debut, The Young and the Restless has won eight Daytime Emmy Awards for Outstanding Drama Series.

It is also currently the highest-rated daytime drama on American television.

In fact - as of December 12, 2013, according to Nielsen ratings, The Young and the Restless had been the leading daytime drama for an unprecedented 1,300 weeks, or 25 years!

That's how popular this show is. That's how good the writers are, at hooking their audiences.

And their #1 tool?

Cliffhangers.

There are endless blogs that dedicate themselves to daily speculation on the relevance and potential outcome of these soap opera cliffhangers.

Shows like the Young and the Restless often place dramatic events right before a scene change, or right before a commercial break.

You simply HAVE to return, to find out what happened!

Use the Soap Opera method for scene changes, and for lesser cliffhangers.



Now many authors resolve their cliffhangers right after the chapter break / episode break.

But the Soap Opera method?

No.

They leave you twisting in the wind a bit longer.

Not by ignoring the cliffhanger... but by simply telling a totally different story.

Or at least... one involving different characters, in a different scene.

You'll see soap operas do something like this:

- Scene 1:

Character set 1. End in a BIG

cliffhanger.

- Scene 2: Character set 2: End in a small cliffhanger.
- Scene 3: Bring back character set 1. Resolve BIG cliffhanger. Then maybe open a new, smaller one.
- Scene 4: Bring back character set 2. Resolve small cliffhanger. Then maybe open a new, BIG one!

And so on.

The result?

A delightfully, intensely sweet roller coaster ride of conflict, mystery, suspense, doubt, resolution... intertwining and alternating, ebbing and flowing, until, at the end, the reader (viewer) is gasping for breath, and wanting more!

3. The



C.R.E.A.M. Method.

What is the C.R.E.A.M. method?

You know how CREAM rises to the top?

It's the same for well-written stories as well.

C.R.E.A.M. stands for:

C - Chapters

R - Richly

E - End in

A - Abrupt

M - Mystery

Do this with some of your favorite books:

- v. As you read novels, notice what the author places at the ends of chapters. How do these elements drive you to turn the page... or not?
- vi. In fact, go to the library, bookstore, or your personal book collection, curl up in a comfy sofa, and go through the last paragraph of every chapter, in a few of these books.
- vii. I can tell you that the ideas you'll get for your book will be mind-blowing. Naturally - you don't want to copy their ideas - you want to be inspired by them.
- viii. Remember that not every chapter needs to end in a cliffhanger. Charles Dickens used a cliffhanger every 4th or 5th chapter, in a 20-chapter book. This will and should vary depending on your genre.

4. The “LOST” Method.

Ah. The show LOST. This is the blockbuster TV show for American TV channel ABC, that ALMOST NEVER GOT MADE!

I was reading a history of the Disney Corporation recently, entitled “Disney Wars”....

(fascinating stuff, and probably my best business book read of the past year.)

Anyway, the ABC TV station was purchased by Disney in 1996.

The LOST pilot was being worked on around that time... but higher-ups simply HATED IT! The middle management executive championing the show was so convinced it would be a hit that he continued with production. Without their knowledge!

He would disguise receipts and expenses under different line item names, just so he could get the pilot done.

It’s why the pilot episode was 2 hours long - he figured, well, if they cut off funding for this show, at least we’ll have a made-for-TV movie out of it.

LOST went on to become one of ABCs’ biggest hits EVER!
Thanks, in large part, to the use of CLIFFHANGERS.

What the creators did, is end each episode in a cliffhanger.

Every episode, every week, was a cliffhanger.
And viewers LOVED IT!

Now -the premise of the show was all about mystery, and the unknown.

But they layered multiple character viewpoints and conflicting personalities and motivations over that... and added elements of magic, suspense, anachronistic technology, betrayal, dueling loyalties, legend and lore, and toward the end, even time travel!

So you can only imagine how mind-bending their cliffhangers were!

Yours may cover quite as much ground as theirs, in scope...



But your mind will be positively EXPANDED when you watch some of their episode and season endings.

Now - go watch the very last episode of shows like “Lost”, or “Doctor Who”.

These shows have some of the best episode and season cliffhangers.

In fact, the cliffhanger method has become so common for season finales, that you can pretty much watch your favorite a season finale for your TV series... and learn from their structure!

Consider that the TV network spent millions getting that cliffhanger ending just right.

Leverage their budget, and mimic their cliffhanger structure. Make it your own.



Chapter 8: 50+ of the Greatest TV Cliffhangers of All Time!

Naturally, any list like this is going to be subjective.

But for the sake of discussion and examination of some wickedly good TV cliffhangers, let's examine 10 brilliant cliffhangers from the world of television.

See the video review from WatchMojo.com, [here](#).



Or review each of the episode recaps, on Wikipedia (links on the next page).

<p>10: Battlestar Galactica. Season 1:</p> 	<p>9: 24. Season 5.</p> 
<p>8: Friends. Season 4.</p> 	<p>7: LOST. Season 3.</p> 
<p>6: ALIAS. Season 2.</p> 	<p>5: Twin Peaks. Season 2.</p> 
<p>4: Dynasty. Season 5:</p> 	<p>3: Star Trek The Next Gen.. Season 3:</p> 
<p>2: The Simpsons. Season 6:</p>	<p>1: Dallas. Season 2:</p>



More of the Greatest TV Cliffhangers Ever:

Want more amazing TV cliffhangers, to fuel and inspire the cliffhanger for your next chapter / book ending?

Check these ones out:

[Top 10 TV Cliffhangers That Remain Unresolved](#)



[Great Cliffhangers in TV History](#)



[20 Best Cliffhangers in Science Fiction](#)



[10 Most Memorable TV Cliffhangers](#)



Movies

[Top 10 Unresolved Movie Cliffhangers](#)



- "Flash Gordon" (1980)
- "The Italian Job" (1969)
- "Super Mario Bros." (1993)
- "Dawn of the Dead" (1978)
- "Prometheus" (2012)
- "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels" (1998)
- "28 Weeks Later" (2007)
- "The Grey" (2011)
- "Deep Rising" (1998)
- "Planet of the Apes" (2001)
- "The Last Starfighter" (1984)
- "Chronicle" (2012)
- "Freddy vs. Jason" (2003)

Chapter 9: The KD Addiction Quick Reference Sheet.

<p>4-Step Formula for Arabian Night Cliffhangers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Antagonist Secret2. The Foreshadowing Secret.3. The Impossible Secret4. The Game Changer Secret. <p>The 9 Types of Cliffhangers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Impending Disaster.2. Dangerous emotions.3. Portent.4. Mysterious dialogue.5. Secret revealed.6. Major decision / vow.7. Announcement of a shattering event.8. Reversal / surprise.9. Question left in the air. <p>The 5 Sins of Cliffhanging:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The what does that have to do with anything" cliffhanger2. The "Oh NOW you want to get juicy?" cliffhanger3. The "I have to wait HOW LONG?" cliffhanger4. The "That's all?" cliffhanger5. The "Deus Ex Machina" cliffhanger6. The "Who Shot JR?" Exception	<p>The 14 Ways to Write Addictive Cliffhangers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The New Element.2. The Intriguing Question.3. The Decision.4. The Clairvoyant Reader.5. The Almost Doesn't Count.6. The Aftermath.7. The Fade to Black.8. Save your Biggest Reveals.9. Ask a Provocative Question.10. The Accusation.11. The Demand for Action.12. The Slap.13. The Missing Object.14. The Pledge. <p>How to Hide Cliffhangers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Reader investment.2. Type and intensity variation.3. The Zeigarnik effect. <p>4 Killer ShortCuts to World Class Cliffhangers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Sandwich Method.2. The "Young & the Restless" Method.3. The C.R.E.A.M. Method.4. The "LOST" Method.
--	---

Chapter 10: The 7-Step KD Addiction Process.

Okay. Let's bring it all together into a simple 7-step process.

Step 1. WHEN.

Figure out where in the story you want to insert your cliffhangers.

(Remember - Charles Dickens did them about every 20% of his books.

On the other hand - Suzanne Collins uses them almost every chapter, in the Hunger Games series... but she varies the intensity so it's not one HUGE cliffhanger after the next.

Find what works best for you.)

Step 2. WHERE.

Figure out in what story scenes or settings you want the cliffhangers to take place.

Step 3. WHO.

Figure out which of your protagonists you want to include in your chapter-ending cliffhangers (and your book-ending cliffhanger).

Step 4. WHAT (Part 1).

Figure out what type of cliffhanger to use in each of those chapter endings

(See "[9 types of Cliffhangers](#)")

Step 5. WHAT (Part 2).

For each cliffhanger, select one of the [14 ways to write addictive cliffhangers](#).

That will mix up the variety and intensity quite nicely.

Step 6. HOW.

Use one of the "[4 Killer Shortcuts to World-Class Cliffhangers](#)" to flesh out each of your cliffhangers.

Step 7. HOW.

Do a cross-check to ensure you haven't committed any of the [5 sins of cliffhanging](#).

THIS IS A MUST!

BONUS. Plan your book release schedule.

How closely together will your books be released?

If you have a cliffhanger at the end of the book (and you should!), make sure:

a - The sequel is available right away, or very shortly thereafter.

b - Have some level of resolution to the immediate conflicts of the book...
but then open a new thread and let that be your cliffhanger.

You can even have an over-arching mission or conflict that remains unresolved,
but the sub goals of the main character for that book should have a level of resolution.

THIS! Is what will make your reader feel the reading investment was worthwhile.

But then...

When you do that though, make sure you open a new thread, showing even more
danger right around the corner.

**THIS! Is what will make sure your reader immediately clamoring for the very next
book in your series.**

BOOM. You got it. You, my friend, are a smart cookie.

Your readers are going to **LOVE** what you're thinking up right now!

Chapter 11: Conclusion.

Okay! You are now ready to go forth and turn your books into **irresistible world-class addictive page turners!**

Done correctly, cliffhangers will not only get readers thirstily turning from one chapter to the next... but will get them going from one book in your series to the next one!

Addictive Cliffhangers, DONE CORRECTLY, are the single biggest contributor to the profits of writers like us, who write book series.

That's where the "read-through" comes from.

So I'm very excited to see you bake this into your books!

This is going to be a game-changer for you - **I can already feel those crazy ADDICTIVE CLIFFHANGER ideas bouncing around in your head, and onto your manuscript!**

Imagine getting those breathless, emotional reviews from readers who LOVE the roller coaster ride you've taken them on... and can't wait for more!

Imagine - a month or two from now, readers snatching up pre-orders for your latest book in the series, before it's even available or completed!

This is happening to a select few authors out there.

And they are waking up every day to readers begging for that next chapter, that next installment, that next addictive ride.

As for me - I'm off to jump back into the series that has had me addicted for the past few months (**Robert Jordan's "The Wheel of Time"**). I can't get enough of it. Robert's got those addictive cliffhangers like you wouldn't BELIEVE!

And your readers won't be able to get enough of you, either.

If anyone tells you cliffhangers don't work... hopefully I've shared overwhelming proof to the contrary. They've worked for millennia. And will continue to.

If anyone tells you cliffhangers tick off readers... hopefully I've shared overwhelming proof that this does happen, but only when cliffhangers are used carelessly and without the reader's enjoyment in mind.

Used correctly, Addictive Cliffhangers are the most powerful selling tool in your writing arsenal.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bolaji O." in a cursive script.