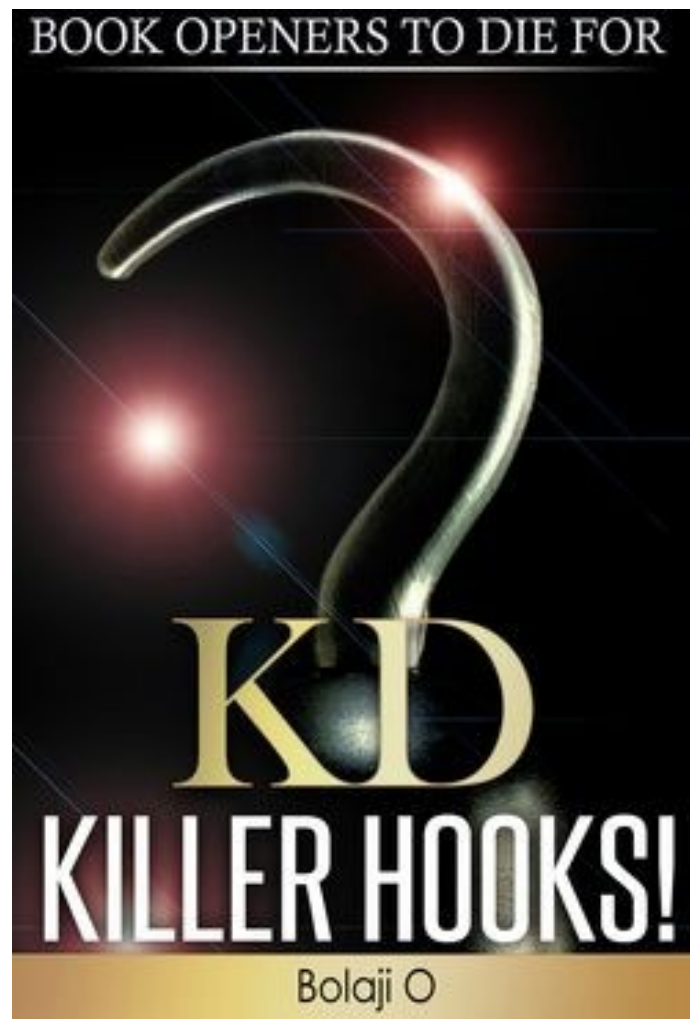


# KD Killer Hooks:

How to Write Killer Book Openings that  
*Hook Readers from the First Sentence.*



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## **A: Introduction**

The amount of time you have to grab a reader's attention is... one page.

So your story has to start with a **STRONG** opening scene.

More specifically, you need a Compelling Hook, that begins at a

**PRECISE MOMENT OF ACTION.**

**Let's get right into the KD Killer Hooks formula.**

## **B: How to Use Brain Science to Hook Readers from the Very First Sentence.**

The brain thinks in story. It's hardwired in our brain. It's how we make strategic sense of the otherwise overwhelming world around us.

Without story, we would need firsthand experience for everything.

Stories allow us to simulate intense experiences without actually having to live through them.

Rather than recording all data, our brain casts us as "the protagonist", and then edits our experience with cinema-like precision, creating logical interrelations, mapping connections between memories, ideas, and events, for future reference.

This means that for writers, we can now decode what the brain (aka the reader) is REALLY looking for in every story.

## **So what is story?**

A story is how

what happens (plot)

affects someone (hero)

who is trying to achieve what turns out to be a difficult goal (story question)

and how he changes as a result (what the story itself is actually about.)

STORIES ARE ABOUT HOW WE, RATHER THAN THE WORLD  
AROUND US, CHANGE.

If you don't emotionally engage your reader by page one, it's over.

Our brains think in story, which allows us to envision the future.

So from the very first sentence, we must construct prose that makes the  
reader want to know what happens next.

### **Brain hook checklist:**

1. Do we know whose story it is?
2. Is something happening, beginning on the first page?
3. Is there conflict in what's happening?
4. Is something at stake on the first page?
5. Is there a sense that **"all is not as it seems"**?

Starting here, a cursory glance, can tell you whether your page one passes the eye test.

But let's get into how to construct a KILLER PAGE ONE HOOK, from scratch.

## C: Why Stephen King Spends YEARS Writing

### Opening Sentences.

This is an excerpt from an interview Stephen King did with The Atlantic, back in 2013. It is riveting, and drives home the importance of that first sentence. And by extension, that first page.

#### Stephen King:

- “There are all sorts of theories and ideas about what constitutes a good opening line. It's tricky thing, and tough to talk about.”
- “But there's one thing I'm sure about. An opening line should invite the reader to begin the story. It should say: *‘Listen. Come in here. You want to know about this.’*”
- “This sentence from James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* certainly plunges you into a specific time and place, just as something is happening:

'They threw me off the hay truck about noon.'

- Suddenly, you're right inside the story -- the speaker takes a lift on a hay truck and gets found out.

But Cain pulls off so much more than a loaded setting -- and the best writers do. This sentence tells you more than you think it tells you.

Nobody's riding on the hay truck because they bought a ticket. He's a basically a drifter, someone on the outskirts, someone who's going to steal and filch to get by. So you know a lot about him from the beginning, more than maybe registers in your conscious mind, and you start to get curious."

- "When I'm starting a book, I compose in bed before I go to sleep.

I will lie there in the dark and think. I'll try to write a paragraph.

An opening paragraph.

And over a period of weeks and months and even years, I'll word and reword it until I'm happy with what I've got. If I can get that first paragraph right, I'll know I can do the book.



Because of this, my first sentences stick with me. They were a doorway I went through.”

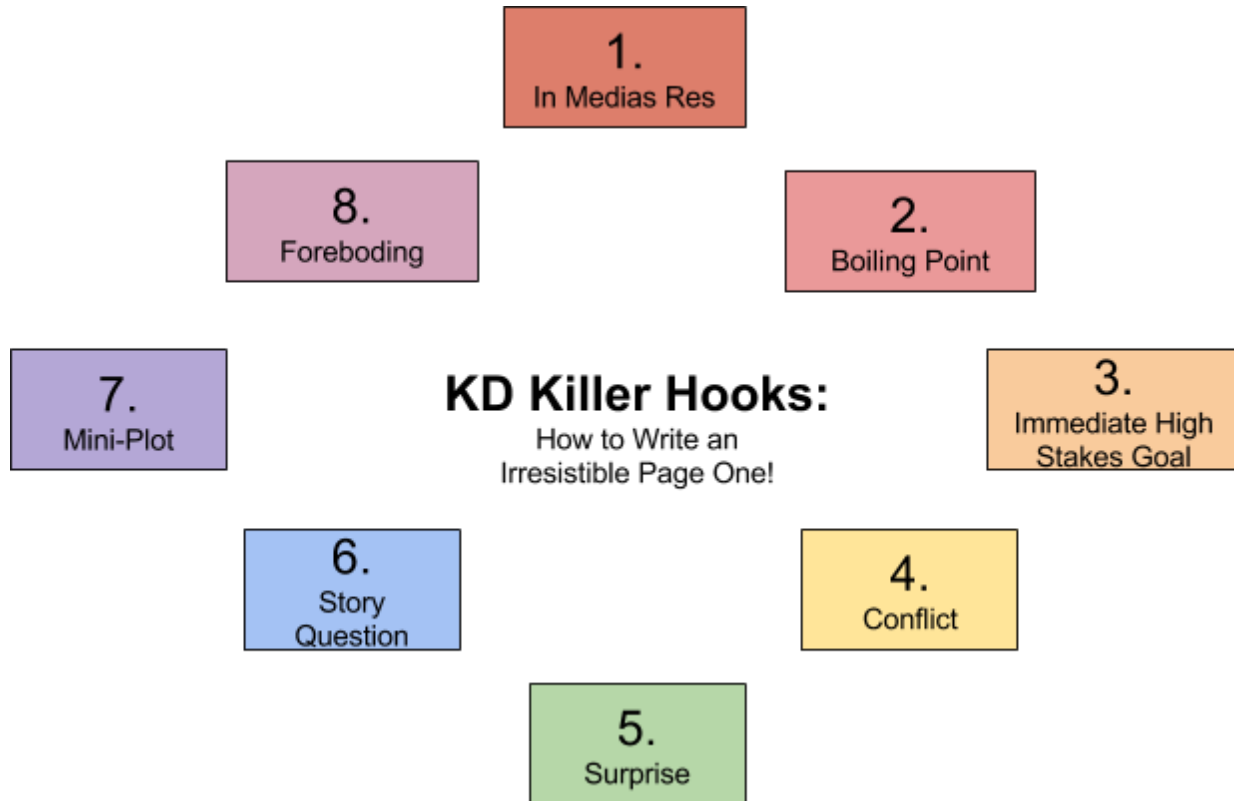
“There's incredible power in it, when you say, *come in here. You want to know about this.* And someone begins to listen.”

Wow! So, yes. Stephen reveals a LOT of his method in this interview. I'm fascinated that he writes that first paragraph in bed, in the dark. And if he can make it compelling, he knows he has a story.

If one of the best fiction writers in HISTORY focuses on developing a KILLER HOOK, a POWERFUL FIRST PAGE, for his book, we should probably follow suit.

But how exactly do we do that, and do it consistently?

## D: The KD Killer Hooks Formula:



1. In Medias Res +
2. Boiling Point +
3. Immediate High Stakes Goal +
4. Conflict +
5. Surprise +
6. Story Question +
7. Mini-Plot +
8. Foreboding

## 1. In Medias Res:

- What draws us into a story, and keeps us there, is the firing of our dopamine neurons, signaling that intriguing information is on its way.
- This means that there has to be a ball ALREADY IN PLAY.
- In medias res, Latin for *“into the middle things”*, describes a story that opens in the midst of action. Often, exposition is bypassed and filled in gradually, either through dialogue, flashbacks or description of past events.
- Examples would be Shakespeare's Hamlet:  
  
The story begins after the death of Hamlet's father.  
  
Characters make reference to King Hamlet's death without the plot first showing and describing said fact.  
  
Since the play focuses on Hamlet and the revenge itself more

so than his motivations, Shakespeare utilizes in medias res to bypass superfluous exposition.

- So no backstory, no synopsis. Drop us directly into a scene in progress, so that we're in the middle of action.
- But be sure to ground us in the hero's perspective... so it's doesn't just feel like random action happening. (*OOH! A battle! Wait... who's the good guy again? Why are they fighting? Wait...*)
- The reader needs to know, up-front, whom to root for, and what their immediate (external) goal is. More on the goal thing in a minute. :)

## 2. Boiling Point.

- What trouble has been brewing that is about to explode?
- What gets and keeps us hooked as readers, right from the beginning, is the hint that not only is trouble brewing, but it's longstanding and about to reach critical mass.
- This means that from the first sentence we need the reader to catch sight of the tantalizing appetizers that will leave them salivating for the main dish!
- Readers crave the notion that we've come in at a crucial juncture in someone's life, and not a moment too soon.

So no preamble, no prologue, let's make that first scene one where - not only is the reader "In Medias Res" (in the middle of the story), but they're arriving JUST IN TIME to see that pot about to boil over!

Can you do that for me? **Make it BOIL!**

### 3. Immediate, High-Stakes Goal.

- What is the IMMEDIATE HIGH-STAKES GOAL?

The hero has to DESIRE something. Right there on page 1. In fact, the hero must want something, and want it intensely.

- What does your protagonist have to confront, in order to solve the problem you've so cleverly set up for her? That problem is what the reader is going to be hunting for from the get-go.

Because it's going to define everything that happens from the first sentence on.

- For a story to grab us, not only must something be happening, but there must be a consequence we can anticipate.

- Not only must the reader DESIRE something, but there must be serious consequences for the hero NOT ACHIEVING that immediate desire. Wanting world peace is all fine and dandy. Important goal. But what if the hero fails - what happens? And

what does it look like the hero might have to sacrifice, to attain that goal? Raise the stakes, people!

#### 4. Conflict:

- Conflict and rising tension MUST be present on page one.

*Put the hero IN TROUBLE, right on page one. Yup. Deep trouble.*

- Something the hero cares about must be at stake. Now. How the hero chooses to deal with that conflict will be an opportunity to show characterization. So CONFLICT = CHARACTERIZATION. (Woohoo!)
- In choosing a scene of conflict, single out the hero's passion or emotional conflict, and show them grappling with it.
- During moments of conflict, even in our own real lives, our true nature is revealed. This conflict will give the reader an opportunity to not only meet who your character is on the

outside, but it will also give important glimpses into your hero's true character - warts and all.

- Remember - in most stories (not all), there will be growth in the character during the course of the story. So while you want your hero to be RELATABLE (sometimes LIKABLE - but not always)... you also want to subtly reveal some of your hero's flaws, on page one.

## 5. Surprise:

- **What is the surprise?**
- In order to distract us from the relentless demands of our immediate surroundings, a story has to grab our attention FAST.
- And NOTHING focuses the mind like **surprise**. When we pick up a book, we're jonesing for the feeling that something out-of-the-ordinary is happening.





## 6. Mini-Plot:

- **Page One should begin an immediate “first scene” arc.**
  - i. One that begins and ends in that first scene.
  - ii. This deals with the hero’s immediate goal in the conflict ahead of him.
  - iii. Focus on action, action, action, in chapter one. And page one should kick this off.
  - iv. It is good to end Chapter One with some closure. Of course, that closure will turn out to be FALSE. :)
  - v. This chapter one story arc will deal with the initial surface problem. The reason for the immediate conflict our hero finds herself in.

## 7. Story Question:

- Page One should introduce the STORY QUESTION, or THEME. The story question -- it will be answered at the end of your book. But it should certainly be introduced on Page One.
- In fact, the tension and conflict on Page One should RAISE the story question: It should naturally lead the reader to think:  
*“Yeah, based on what’s happening, I’m wondering that myself!”*
- It is important to think through how you want your story to end, thematically. So that the beginning of your can tease the theme, and possibly suggest the OPPOSITE of what your actual ending will be.
- Reveal enough information to ground the reader in the moment, while maintaining enough mystery, through the careful omission of key information - to keep the reader hooked.

- Don't intentionally make it confusing through. We want the reader to be well-grounded in the scene... but just keep out one key piece of information related to the hero's external goal... the next scene.

## 8. Foreboding:

- All good stories can be summed up as follows:  
*"All is not as it seems."*
- Which means that we're hoping for in that opening sentence is the sense that something is about to change. For the worse.
- If you can work that into your first page, or at least, your first chapter, the reader will not be able to resist turning the page to see what happens next.

## **What about the Inciting Incident?**

Without the inciting incident, you don't have a story. Your hero won't just up and decide to turn her life upside-down, because it's going to be good for her!

No. No one chooses to go on a difficult journey. We're pretty much all forced by an inciting incident.

Now - with the inciting incident being so critical to the beginning of your story, shouldn't it be on Page One?

**For the most part, YES.**

With older storytelling, there was a bit more of an establishment of the ordinary world, or "normal". So that when you once the hero's world is turned upside-down with the inciting incident, the reader feels the atmospheric change. And feels for the hero.

In more contemporary storytelling, the reader is pretty much plunged into the inciting incident right away. Contemporary readers have less patience,

generally speaking, for a “slow-burning” novel. They want to start the story RIGHT AT THAT CRITICAL JUNCTURE.

The inciting incident doesn't have to be the very first line. It may not be the very first paragraph either. But it must be part of your opening scene.

**That conflict we start with then -- is THE INCITING INCIDENT.**

- The inciting incident creates the hero's initial surface problem. And starts to tease the story-worthy problem.
- Now, the hero will take steps to resolve this surface problem. And naturally, being the devious writer you are, you will ensure that the outcome of the hero's initial attempt is, well, disastrous. (That was the reaction scene.)
- This triggers a new surface problem, that the hero must solve (your second action scene).
- Even worse results (reaction scene), leading to yet another surface problem. The hole keeps getting deeper and deeper.

## **D: What POV and Tense Should I Use?:**

**There are THREE conventional points-of-view:**

1. First Person:
2. Third-Person Limited:
3. Third-Person Unlimited (Omniscient)

### **1st-Person:**

#### **IN THE HERO'S HEAD. (I, We, Me, Mine, Us)**

In first person, the hero is telling the story to us. We get to experience events through her eyes. We also get to hear her reactions to those events, via internal dialogue.

First person point-of-view is more intimate.

You can even use the flavor of the character's speech, to provide further characterization. Slang, dialect, emotional words... these can all be unique to your main character.

So even during exposition or internal dialog, we get an even better feeling of who this character is.

describing events and his or her individual reactions to those events.

### **Advantages of First-Person Point-Of-View:**

- It feels more natural than other approaches.
- You have to deal with only one mind: the hero's.
- You can create a distinctive internal voice.

### **Disadvantages of First-Person POV:**

- You are limited to writing about what the narrator can see or sense.
- The hero (narrator) must constantly be on stage or observing the stage.
- You can't go into the minds of other characters.



If you want to write your story in the hero's actual voice -- complete with accent, dialect, slang -- choose first person.

If you want your hero to share lots of internal dialog, use first person.

### **3rd-Person Limited:**

**TOLD WHAT THE HERO DOES. (He, She, It, They, Them)**

This is the opposite of First-Person, in that it gives distance from your Point-Of-View character.

In third-person, you are being TOLD what the protagonist does.

As the author, you are able to give comments and observations on what is happening to the hero.

### **Advantages of 3rd-Person POV:**

- It allows for contrasting viewpoints. Which can be fun.

- It provides more variety for the reader, as you switch from one character to another.
- You can have a broader story scope, as you move between settings.

### **3rd Person Unlimited:**

**There are varying levels of 3rd-Person POV, depending on how LIMITED or UNLIMITED OMNISCIENCE you want to grant the reader.**

With UNLIMITED OMNISCIENCE, the author enters the mind of any character, and can take readers to any setting, anywhere.

With LIMITED OMNISCIENCE, the author enters the mind of just a few characters. For example, each chapter may be limited to the point of view of a single character.

**Summary:**

1st-person, past tense is often simplest.

3rd-person (with some range of limited vs unlimited omniscience) can create the broadest, richest, stories.

Choose which works best for you!

## **E: The Top Things to Avoid On Page 1:**

1. Don't start with an exciting but **borrowed scene** from later in the book!
2. Don't use a different **tone** on page 1, from the rest of the book!
3. Don't open with **scenery**!
4. Don't open with a dream or a **flashback**!
5. Don't be **flowery** - keep adjectives and adverbs to a BARE MINIMUM!
6. Don't have the character thinking about something just so you can use that to share back story! We need action up-front!



## **F: Test Your First Page:**

The Flogometer challenge: “Can you craft a first page that compels me to turn to the next page?”

At Flogging the Quill, people submit their first pages to a “Flogometer,” where people read the page and vote to turn the page or not. Ray, who runs the site, also gives valuable feedback. It may take awhile to be featured if you submit, so I advise looking at the examples already posted there to see if any are similar to yours – and whether they made the cut.

### **Submitting to the Flogometer:**

[Email](#) the following in an attachment (.doc, .docx, or .rtf preferred, no PDFs):

1. your title
2. your complete 1st chapter or prologue plus 1st chapter
3. Email permission to post it on [FloggingTheQuill.com](http://FloggingTheQuill.com).
4. If you're in a hurry, they provide “private floggings,”: \$50 for a first chapter, at the time of this writing.

## **G: The 66 Best Opening Lines from Novels:**

A novel is made up of many thousands of sentences, but none as deeply important as the opening line. That first line should tell the reader what to expect in terms of language, plot and character.

It should be mysterious and compelling. In no uncertain terms:

**“YOU MUST  
EVOKE  
CURIOSITY!!!”**

(If the reader isn't asking: "What happens next?" You need to re-write.)

If a bookstore browser flips to the first page and reads the opening line, he or she should want to immediately sit down in the middle of the aisle and keep reading.

1. "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."

**– Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813).**

2. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness. It was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity. It was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness. It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

**– Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859).**

3. “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

– **Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina (1877).**

4. “You don’t know about me without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, but that ain’t no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly.”

– **Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884).**

5. “All children, except one, grow up.”

– **J.M. Barrie, Peter Pan (1902).**

6. “As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin.”

– **Franz Kafka, Metamorphosis (1915).**

7. “It was a bright, cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.”

– **George Orwell, 1984 (1949).**



8. “A story has no beginning or end; arbitrarily one chooses the moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead.”

– **Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair* (1951).**

9. “When Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End announced that he would shortly be celebrating his eleventy first birthday with a party of special magnificence, there was much talk and excitement in Hobbiton.”

– **J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954).**

10. “It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn’t know what I was doing in New York.”

– **Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (1963).**

11. “It’s a funny thing about mothers and fathers. Even when their own child is the most disgusting little blister you could ever imagine, they still think that he or she is wonderful.”

– **Roald Dahl, *Matilda* (1988).**

12. “Mr. and Mrs. Dursley of number four Privet Drive were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much,”

– **J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone (1997).**

13. “Mister Haneda was senior to Mister Omochi, who was senior to Mister Saito, who was senior to Miss Mori, who was senior to me. I was senior to no one.”

– **Amelie Nothomb, Fear and Trembling (1999).**

14. “I still remember the day my father took me to the Cemetery of Forgotten Books for the first time.”

– **Carlos Ruiz Zafon, The Shadow of the Wind (2001).**

15. “A writer never forgets the first time he accepted a few coins of a word of praise in exchange for a story ... a writer is condemned to remember that moment, because from then on he is doomed and his soul has a price.”

– **Carlos Ruiz Zafon, The Angel’s Game (2008).**

16. "Death is only the beginning; afterward comes the hard part.

– **'The Death Instinct', by Jed Rubenfeld, 2010.**

17. "It was a pleasure to burn."

- **'Fahrenheit 451', Ray Bradbury, 1953.**

18. "Lolita. Light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul."

- **'Lolita', by Vladimir Nabokov, 1955.**

19. "I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974."

- **'Middlesex', by Jeffrey Eugenides, 2002.**

20. "All children, except one, grow up."

- **'Peter and Wendy', J. M. Barrie, 1911.**

21. “They threw me off the hay truck about noon.”

- **‘The Postman Always Rings Twice’, by James M. Cain.**

22. “To say that I met Nicholas Brisbane over my husband’s dead body is not entirely accurate. Edward, it should be noted, was still twitching upon the floor.”

- **‘Silent in the Grave’, by Deana Raybourn.**

23. “We only have a few hours, so listen carefully. If you’re hearing this story, you’re already in danger. Sadie and I might be your only chance.”

– **‘The Red Pyramid’, by Rick Riordan.**

24. “These were the ones that really hurt. Can you see your name in that lot, Laura? I reckon you’d sneak into the top ten, but there’s no place for you in the top five; those places are reserved for the kind of humiliations and heartbreaks that you’re just not capable of delivering.”

- **Nick Hornsby – ‘High Fidelity’**

25. "My father took one hundred and thirty two minutes to die.

I counted."

**- Melina Marchetta – On Jellicoe Road**

26. You've been here before."

**- 'Needful Things', by Stephen King.**

27. "I've never been what you'd call a crying man."

**- '11/22/63', by Stephen King.**

28. "The terror that would not end for another 28 years, if it ever did, began so far as I can know or tell, with a boat made from a sheet of newspaper floating down a gutter swollen with rain.

**- 'It', by Stephen King.**

29. "On the second day of December, in a year when a Georgia peanut farmer was doing business in the White House, one of Colorado's great

resort hotels burned to the ground.”

**- ‘Doctor Sleep’, by Stephen King.**

30. “I stepped out of the car and into the hot thick heat of August in Georgia. ‘Awesome,’ I murmured, sliding my sunglasses on top of my head. Thanks to the humidity, my hair felt like it had tripled in size. I could feel it trying to devour my sunglasses like some sort of carnivorous jungle plant. ‘I always wondered what it would be like to live in somebody’s mouth.’”

**- Rachel Hawkins – ‘Hex Hall’**

31. “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.”

**– J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit (1937).**

32. “There were two kinds of people in our town. ‘The stupid and the stuck,’ my father had affectionately classified our neighbors. ‘Those

bound to stay or too dumb to go. Everyone else finds a way out.”

**- Kami Garcia and Margret Stohl – ‘Beautiful Creatures’**

33. “Late in the winter of my seventeenth year, my mother decided I was depressed, presumably because I rarely left the house, spent quite a lot of time in bed, read the same book over and over, ate infrequently, and devoted quite a bit of my abundant free time to thinking about death.”

**- John Green – ‘The Fault in Our Stars’**

34. “Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.”

**- One Hundred Years of Solitude, Gabriel García Márquez**

35. “124 was spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom.”

**- Post-Partum Possession**

36. “As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin.”

**- Metamorphosis , Franz Kafka**

37. “Mama died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don’t know.”

**- The Stranger, Albert Camus**

38. “The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel.”

**- Neuromancer, William Gibson**

39. “When I was three and Bailey four, we had arrived in the musty little town, wearing tags on our wrists which instructed – ‘To Whom It May Concern’ – that we were Marguerite and Bailey Johnson Jr., from Long Beach, California, en route to Stamps, Arkansas, c/o Mrs. Annie Henderson.”

**- I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Maya Angelou**



40. "Call me Ishmael."

**- Moby-Dick, Herman Melville**

41. "If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth."

**- The Catcher in the Rye, J.D. Salinger**

42. *"It was the day my grandmother exploded."*

**- The Crow Road, Iain Banks**

43. "I am a sick man... I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man. I think my liver is diseased."

**- Notes from the Underground, Fyodor Dostoevsky**

44. "Far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the Western Spiral arm of the Galaxy lies a small unregarded yellow sun. Orbiting this at a distance of roughly ninety-eight million miles is an

utterly insignificant little blue-green planet whose ape-descended life forms are so amazingly primitive that they still think digital watches are a pretty neat idea.”

**- The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, Douglas Adams**

45. “We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold.”

**- Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, Hunter S. Thompson**

46. *“He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish.”*

**- The Old Man and the Sea, Ernest Hemingway**

47. “Dear Anyone Who Finds This, Do not blame the drugs.”

**—Lynda Barry, Cruddy**

48. “It was raining in Richmond on Friday, June 6.”

**—Patricia Cornwell, Postmortem**

49. “The man who had had the room before, after having slept the sleep of the just for hours on end, oblivious to the worries and unrest of the recent early morning, awoke when the day was well advanced and the sounds of the city completely invaded the air of the half-opened room.”

—**Gabriel Garcia Marquez, “Dialogue with the Mirror”**

50. “Don’t look for dignity in public bathrooms.”

—**Victor LaValle, Big Machine**

51. “The magician’s underwear has just been found in a cardboard suitcase floating in a stagnant pond on the outskirts of Miami.”

—**Tom Robbins, Another Roadside Attraction**

52. “You better not never tell nobody but God.”

—**Alice Walker, The Color Purple**

53. “It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn’t know what I was doing in New York.”

—**Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar***

54. “Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board.”

—**Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God***

55. “Kublai Khan does not necessarily believe everything Marco Polo says when he describes the cities visited on his expeditions, but the emperor of the Tartars does continue listening to the young Venetian with greater attention and curiosity than he shows any other messenger or explorer of his.”

—**Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities***

56. “He speaks in your voice, American, and there’s a shine in his eyes that’s halfway hopeful.” —**Don DeLillo, *Underworld***

57. “On the morning the last Lisbon daughter took her turn at suicide—it was Mary this time, and sleeping pills—the two paramedics arrived at the house knowing exactly where the knife drawer was, and the gas oven, and the beam in the basement from which it was possible to tie a rope.”

**—Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides***

58. “A screaming comes across the sky.”

**—Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow***

59. “We wanted more.”

**—Justin Torres, *We the Animals***

60. “Since it’s Sunday and it’s stopped raining, I think I’ll take a bouquet of roses to my grave.”

**—Gabriel Garcia Marquez, “Someone Has Been Disarranging These Roses”**

61. “When the blind man arrived in the city, he claimed that he had travelled across a desert of living sand.”

**—Kevin Brockmeier, ‘A Brief History of the Dead’.**

62. “In the town there were two mutes, and they were always together.”

**—Carson McCullers, ‘The Heart is a Lonely Hunter’.**

63. “One September evening when Walter Lasher returned from the city after a hard day’s work and was walking to his car in the station parking lot, a man stepped out from between two cars, walked up to him, and slapped him hard in the face.”

**—Stephen Millhauser, “The Slap”**

64. “I’ll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my homeworld that Truth is a matter of the imagination.”

**—Ursula K. LeGuin, ‘The Left Hand of Darkness’.**

65. “It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not.”

**—Paul Auster, ‘City of Glass’.**

66. “Nobody died that year.”

**—Renata Adler, ‘Speedboat’.**

Whew! There you have it. Over SIXTY of the best fiction opening sentences. Peruse them, print them out if you like, as you re-work your opening sentence. Every time I add a new one I find to this list, I read the entire list again, and get tons of new ideas for book openers!

Have fun!

## H: The 40 Best Opening Scenes from Movies:

I love watching good movies. Across genres.

In the movies I'm about to share, you'll get to experience some of the best writing anywhere - particularly for opening scenes.

Take note of how these writers / directors create atmosphere, mood, tension, conflict, a boiling point

**The Shining:** ([Opening Credits](#) | [Opening Scene](#) | [Trailer](#))

Creepy drive on a winding road, up through the hills, into the mountains, into some remote area. This drive wouldn't necessarily have been creepy, aside from the music which sounded like a funeral march. However, as the car goes high and higher into the mountain, the terrain becomes more and more sparse. More and more harsh. And a sense of anticipation and curiosity builds. The anticipation is palpable. The tension is thick!



## **Halloween (The Original) ([Opening Scene](#))**

Anticipation. Suspends. Dread, at sharing the main character's perspective, hidden in the shadows. Seeing the unsuspecting residents of the home. Knowing no good can come of someone creeping around a house like this. But being powerless to stop it. The clothes strewn on the floor of the bedroom build further dread. The first victim calls the main character's name, in anger at first. For the obvious intrusion. Then, in dismay. He stabs her... then runs out of the home. Only to be unmasked by a man. Only then does the camera pan back, to reveal that the killer is... a CHILD?

## **Star Wars IV: A New Hope ([Opening Scene](#))**

The vastness of the space landscape amazes you. Then the "car chase" with spaceships blows you away. The size of the pursuing ship is otherworldly! Nothing can survive such a juggernaut! They already have your attention before showing a single character. Inside the small ship being pursued, you can see the panic everywhere. The preparation to be boarded. The ship is loaded onto the larger ship, and noises of oncoming stormtroopers builds dread. The director takes his time. All at once, the gunfight is on! Lasers, smoke, and stormtroopers are everywhere! Dead

bodies quickly litter the corridor. These rebels are no match for the sheer numbers of the stormtroopers. All at once, Darth Vader (one of the greatest villains in history) enters the scene. With his all-black contrasting the stark white of the stormtroopers, his importance against the backdrop is immediately clear. This is the man in town. The man to beat. Consider yourself HOOKED!

### **Clockwork Orange. ([Opening Scene](#))**

Music builds behind a plain bright red canvas blinks away, to show the main character, a young man (with make-up on?) and a crazed look. He slowly lifts a glass of milk to his mouth to drink. The camera continues to pan back, revealing similarly dressed colleagues next to him: bowler hats, dingy white attire, glasses of milk, and the most sinister looks you ever saw, in their eyes. Promises of murder and mayhem. A further pan back reveals nude mannequins being used as tables. A very disturbing scene. They're at a Milk Bar. The Milk Bar sold milk PLUS. Milk plus a cocktail of drugs, that would get you ready for a bit of the old "ULTRA-VIOLENCE". The casual tone by which the main character's voice shares the dark

purpose behind the innocent drink, fills the viewer with dismay, revulsion, and intrigue.

### **Lord of War. ([Opening Scene](#))**

The journey of a bullet, from the factory, to a shipment yard, to a plane, to a dock in what appears to be an African country, to an African rainforest on the back of a truck, into the bullet chamber of a gun, and then you see the gun's barrel pointed at someone. Bullet fired. The target is. A child. Red explosion, end of scene. Unbelievable opening scene.

### **Social Network ([Opening Scene](#))**

The dialog in this opening scene is unbelievable! You simply just have to watch this. Mark Zuckerberg's character is stunning! You've got to watch this. You can see how this inciting incident spurred a young Mark Zuckerberg on to invent Facebook. Brilliant! The very first sentence grips you. I really like the use of another character for the main character to play off of.

## **Vertigo. ([Opening Scene](#))**

Close-up of hands grabbing ladder rung. Then vaulting to a rooftop. Two policemen give chase. Shots ring out. You can see the entire cityscape in the dusk, as this man flees for his life.

The police continue to give chase. He slips, and is hanging by mere fingertips, dozens of floors above the ground! And that's when he experiences vertigo!

The camera shows the viewer this disorienting visual. The first policeman doubles back, and reaches for his colleague.

*"Give me your hand!",* he exhorts!

And then, the man who came to help... falls... dozens of floors, to his death.

Leaving the main character to witness it all, and to forever bear the guilt.

WHAT AN OPENER! Action, high stakes, consequences, internal turmoil... ignore this one at your own peril.

## **I: Conclusion:**

You now have everything you need to write killer book openings that HOOK readers from the very first sentence.

### **I'm excited for ya!**

It's high time your Page One did the rest of your amazing writing justice.

Let's get those book browsers converted into book buyers, post-haste!

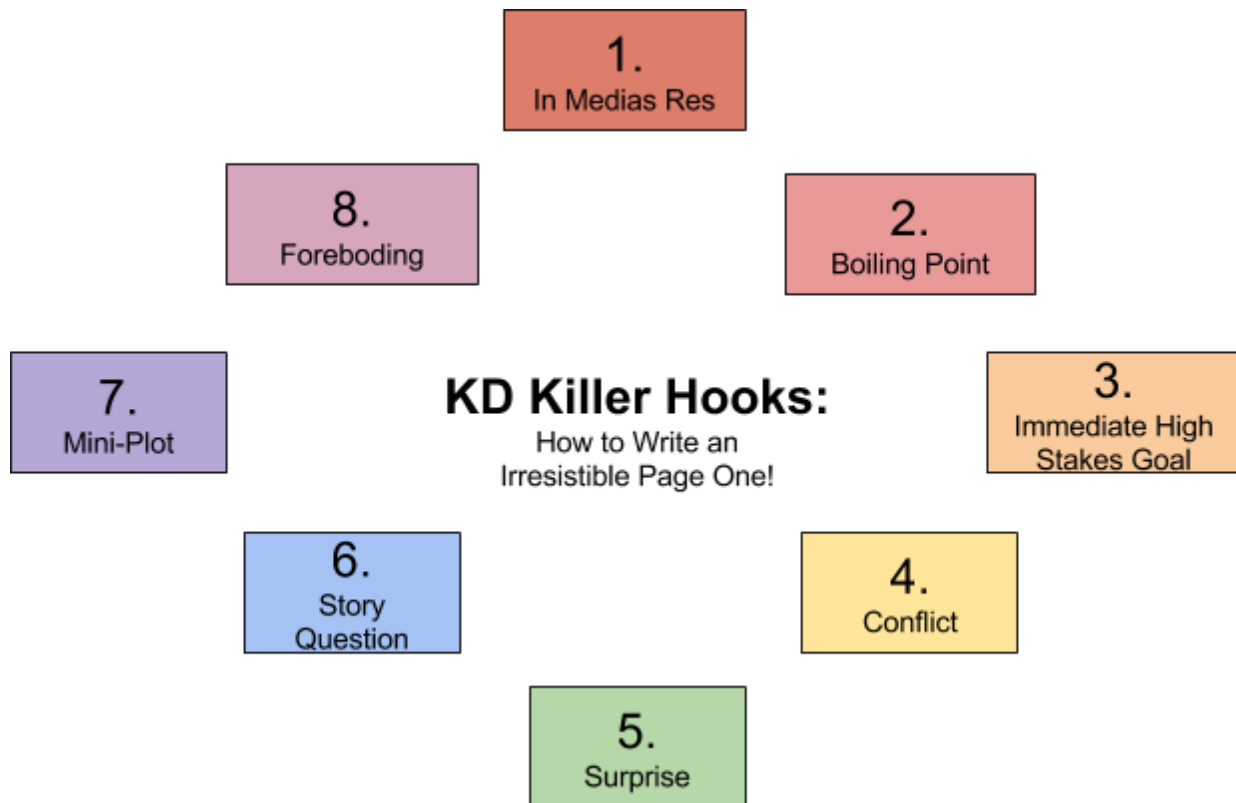
So if you're sick of writing great books that never get read...

If you're tired of pouring EVERYTHING into your book, only to have it languish in obscurity...

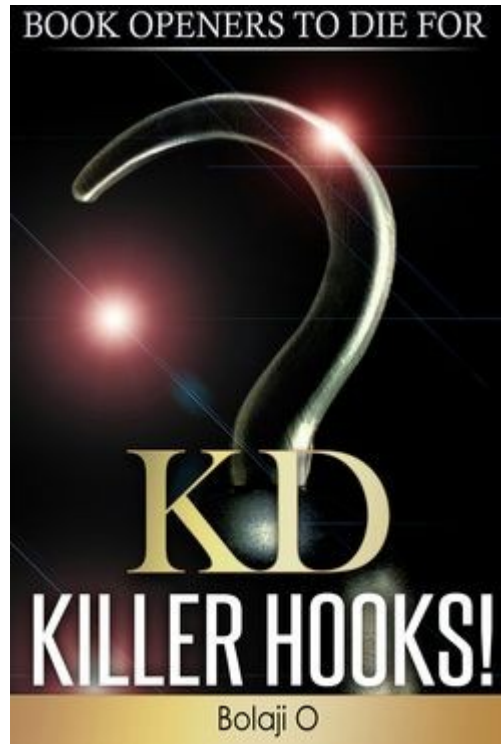
If you'd like to KNOW before you finish that BOOK BROWSERS are going to turn into BOOK BUYERS...

Use the KD Killer Hooks formula.

Here's to your success.



1. In Medias Res +
2. Boiling Point +
3. Immediate High Stakes Goal +
4. Conflict +
5. Surprise +
6. Story Question +
7. Mini-Plot +
8. Foreboding



*Bolaji O.*



