Opening Hooks and Ending Hooks

By Azalea Dabill

Opening hooks and ending hooks apply to sentences, paragraphs, scenes, and chapters. Your first and last word or first and last line are vital to enticing, drawing, and compelling a reader through your story to your adventure's finale. A question, a mystery, or a dramatic word can irresistibly pull a reader forward.

Donald Maass highlights some worthy points about hooks in the excerpt below.

Most last and first lines in manuscript scenes are quite forgettable. That's a shame. Like a handshake, an opening and closing line can create impressions and expectations. They can set a tone. They can signal where we're going or what we've done, or serve any number of other useful story purposes.

Or not. So many first and last lines don't do anything at all. I suspect that many authors are afraid of being obvious, or are trying to be artful. Perhaps they imagine that the first thing readers want is some detail about the setting, or something incidental to the action. Or maybe writers just don't know where to begin, or don't know when to quit.

Whatever the case, solid first and last lines can give a scene shape. Creating them deliberately is a discipline worth developing.

He about sums it up, I think. Lisa T. Bergren, in *Waterfall,* is a master at hooking readers. On all levels. Here is an example of a beginning and ending hook on the sentence level:

Ex. 1 Had this site really been worth my dad's *life?*

On the paragraph level:

Ex. 2 Okay, fast forward. Over the next few weeks, my mom settled in, finding us a lame apartment. . . . The only good thing about that was that we gladly hit the pillow early each night, and I was able to dream of better places for a teen to spend her summer.

On the chapter ending level:

Ex. 3 "I looked to the men who now surrounded me, staring at me. Suddenly I felt weak-kneed. I was now under the protection—or was I the prisoner?—of the dudes from the gold castle.

"I hope you're the good guys," I muttered."

In this flyer where I use block quotes (if applicable), I have changed to single-spacing for readability.