

CLIFFHANGERS – A Perfect Strategy to Use in Thrillers: A Study on Dan Brown's Works

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Abstract—Dan Brown has been considered as the master of thriller fiction and it's believed that it is his ability to harmoniously blend facts along with his fantasies is his strength. This research paper tends to point to another strategy of Dan Brown which kindles the interest of the readers and provides them the curiosity which is the obvious driving factor a thriller should possess. Cliff hangers are usually regarded as a puzzling end which makes a reader ponder over the narrative and Dan Brown in all his fiction uses this feature along with short chapters, which makes the reader hold on to the book until they find the end. Along with a good storyline, this writing strategy makes Dan Brown's books gain universally great acclaim.

Index Terms—Dan Brown, Cliff Hangers, Writing Strategy, Thrillers, Short Chapters

Dan Brown the contemporary American author is well acclaimed for his magnum opus *The da Vinci Code*. Apart from *The da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown has written six other fiction which also have a high regard among the readers. Dan Brown was born to a mathematics professor and a church organist, and it is evident that it is his upbringing that gave him abundant knowledge of religious and scientific facts. He uses a harmonious blend of art, history, religion, science, and technology to craft gripping plots, the soul of his works. Most of his books are made into blockbuster movies which shows the fandom he has.

Diligent research, adherence to history, focus on minute details, realistic description of places and works of art, short chapters, and most importantly the technique of employing cliffhangers serve as the building blocks of Dan Brown's writing style. A good work of art should possess a great plot, striking characters, and a catchy style of writing, and Dan

Brown being aware of the significance of style, gives utmost care to penning short chapters with interesting episodes.

The distinctive feature of employing short chapters helps him to create a fast-moving narrative held with suspense. This in turn keeps the readers engaged and contributes to making the story more dynamic. Fast pace along with cliffhangers creates a sense of urgency within the readers' minds and makes them curious to know what happens next. Several other writers like Stephen King, Lee Child, etc use short chapters in their works but Dan Brown made this technique his signature style.

S. No	Title of the Book	No of Chapters	No of Pages
1	<i>Digital Fortress</i>	128	512
2	<i>Angels and Demons</i>	136	736
3	<i>Deception Point</i>	131	576
4	<i>The Da Vinci Code</i>	105	592
5	<i>The Lost Symbol</i>	133	672
6	<i>Inferno</i>	106	624
7	<i>Origin</i>	128	640

The above table provides evidence of the statement that employing short chapters is the signature style of Dan Brown. A cliffhanger is a particular point or part of a fiction that is very exciting or scary because one does not know what would occur next. It is a technique employed by writers to induce curiosity and retain the interest of the readers. Usually, Cliffhanger generates a huge excitement to find the identity of the perpetrator and to know the consequences. Cliffhanger is not an invention of the twenty-first century rather it was used even during the Victorian age. Literary masterminds like Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy used

cliffhangers when they published their works as series in magazines. Each episode will end with suspense which urges the reader to read the next one. One can find it in fiction like *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. This technique is not only employed in fiction but also used in television series like Grey's Anatomy, Game of Thrones, etc where a season ends with a point where a major character dies or a significant act of twist happens. This makes the audience wait eagerly till the release of the next season.

Dan Brown's ability to build suspense is made possible through cliffhangers which make the reader bite their nails at the end of almost every chapter and keep them hypnotised to the book till the end. For example, in *Digital Fortress*, the first work of Dan Brown a chapter ends at a particular point where Susan is about to tell the name of the mastermind. Similarly, in *Origin* his latest work, a chapter ends with the assassination of Kirsch before he reveals the greatest secret of humanity. Such instances make the reader hold on to the book so that they can find the secret. But Dan Brown being the master of thrillers, introduces another suspense before revealing the answer to the previous one, and this in turn keeps the reader continue reading the book. The introduction of a new suspense is constant in Dan Brown's works and that gives life to the quest of finding what happens next.

In *The da Vinci Code*, Sophie solves the cryptex, and when she is about to reveal the location of the Holy Grail, the antagonists Teabing and Silas ambush her. At the beginning of the next chapter, Langdon wakes up at a secret tomb and there is no trace of Sophie or the location of the Holy Grail. The readers then are left with two suspense, they need to know about what had happened to Sophie and also about the whereabouts of the Holy Grail. This is exactly how Dan Brown weaves different narratives of suspense together.

"Langdon looked at Sophie. "We had the correct Pope on our second hit. Alexander."

He paused. "A. Pope."

In London lies a knight A. Pope interred.

Sophie stood up, looking stunned.

Jacques Saunière, the master of double-entendres, had proven once again that he was a frighteningly clever man." (Brown, 487)

These are the last lines of chapter 95, where Langdon and Sophie decipher the location of the Holy Grail. But the next few chapters focus on Silas' encounter with the teacher and when the plot again shifts towards Langdon and Sophie, it is not the location or code that is revealed rather it is Teabing's revelation as a villain.

In *Angels and Demons*, Robert Langdon goes on a chase to find the true mastermind behind the murders of the candidates in Pope election. There is this particular occurrence in which Langdon is about to find the culprit by putting all his findings together and at that exact moment the villain reveals to him a devastating secret that shatters the entire beliefs of Langdon. The chapter concludes without revealing the entire secret which makes the audience restless and engages them with the storyline until the final reveal.

In the work *Inferno*, when Langdon and Sienna are in the quest for the virus inferno, there is a point where Sienna talks about her connection with the villain Zobrist and the chapter ends and the consecutive chapters reveal that Langdon was made to have artificially induced amnesia also then the capability of the virus inferno gets revealed. All such cliffhangers make the readers to rush through the pages so that, they can know the truth and reason for all the above-stated issues.

One can witness the most interesting internal cliffhanger in chapter 103 of *The Lost Symbol*. The chapter abruptly ends at an instance where Langdon is stuck inside a confined space running out of oxygen and readers are left with the suspense of whether Langdon is alive or dead.

Reflex overruled reason.

His lips parted.

His lungs expanded.

And the liquid came pouring in.

The pain that filled his chest was greater than Langdon had ever imagined. The liquid burned as it poured into his lungs. Instantly, the pain shot upward into his skull, and he felt like his head was being crushed in a vise. There was great thundering in his ears, and through it all, Katherine Solomon was screaming.

There was a blinding flash of light.

And then blackness.

Robert Langdon was gone. (Brown, 535)

Some critics find Dan Brown's works stereotypical and filled with excessive usage of cliffhangers whereas others find them as the model to get inspiration from. Dan Brown is well aware of the readers' psychology and one can know that from his choice of plots. He introduces critical conspiracies in his work which captures the attention of the people. Reader Response Theory which gained a lot of attention during the 1960s goes in hand with Dan Brown's strategies. He focuses more on the audience rather than on the text. He provides the audience with everything they need to enjoy a thriller fiction like fiction blended with facts, conspiracies about serious issues, a potential hero accompanied by a female companion of equal strength, vivid descriptions, and inclusion of organizations and the latest technological references which convince the readers that they are in quest to know something. Also, after the completion of reading it confuses the reader that probably they are no longer able to distinguish between what is real and what is not which makes him the master of thrillers.

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