

*NOTE: Hello my friends, thank you for staying and for wanting a copy of my notes. During our discussion, I cut several issues out for the sake of time (for example, the importance of Character Consistency, Character Development, while important and examples of “promises kept” they were not right on point for a discussion about endings). I have nevertheless kept them in my notes and am sharing them with you. Also, and I do regret this, we did not have time for a “Workshop” I have included that workshop at the end of my notes so that you might tackle it at your pleasure – do give it a shot. Thank you so much for your warm welcome and kind words.*

### **THE END**

By Nick Chiarkas

As our closing presenter, I thought I would embrace that position by touching on the importance of a good ending.

The “right” opening to your novel is the crucial “hook” to keep your readers going. Likewise, the “right” ending is critical to bringing your readers back. And, although I love the idea that, “Art is never finished, only abandoned” (Leonardo da Vinci), as an author I nevertheless must decide when to type “The End.” To be clear, when writing a non-fiction book, I pretty much know at the start where it will end. But as a novelist, deciding when the book will end is more an agreement between me, the story, and one or more of the characters.

*My father’s suit...*

Aristotle - the ending must be a surprise and inevitable; Patterson would say the ending should be the most imaginative ending that fits with the story, and so on...after a bit research, I think there are 3 primary rules for a good ending.

#### **Let’s go with 3 rules (think PAS):**

1. **P - Promises Kept** – By the end of the novel, in addition to answering questions raised, and promises made, you must unravel the “story” with reasonable surprise. I’ll come back to this.

2. **A – Agreement** – Where, along the way, you place, “The End,” must be an agreement between you, your main character/s and the story.
3. **S - Satisfied Reader** – While surprise and twists are important, at the same time, you must ensure that your reader will not feel cheated (depending on the genre - no bolts of magic, dreams, etc.) – A satisfied reader will return.

If your novel is the first (or second, etc.), in a **series (or sequel)**, some questions and foreshadowing will remain after “The End.” However, it is crucial that they are not detrimental to a free-standing story unless you are writing a series of “never-ending-never-resolved” cliff-hangers. A good surprise ending will lead to fans.

### **Maybe visit “promises” (foreshadowing or other) for a few minutes -**

In “Weepers” I made four promises to my reader.

**1 First, through foreshowing I promised the coming of an event.** For example, in chapter one, which takes place on Christmas Eve, 1951, Angelo, seven-years-old, asks his father why no one has stolen the three Christmas trees on the Journal American Newspaper loading platform. His father answers, “They belong to Uncle Nunzio.” *Bang! 3 promises/foreshadowing --- The reader has not yet met Nunzio, but knows he should not be messed with, this is a bad neighborhood, and there is a relationship between Angelo and Nunzio.*

*I make a check-off list of all of my foreshadowing, as well as other promises, for my final draft review.*

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT SHOW CHANGE – 2 Second, through character development, I promised a change or some other action in one or more characters. For example, in chapter two, Angelo’s mother, Anna, tells Father Joe (her priest) that Angelo is changing and becoming more like the projects in which, they live. *I now have an obligation to my reader to show that change to a reasonable degree and at a believable pace.*

CHARACTER CONSISTENCY – 3 Third, through each major character, I promised a consistency that rings true. So, while in my first draft, “the end,” was a resolution for all main characters, such an ending would have been a betrayal to Angelo, Anna, and a couple of other characters. *To make that ending ring true, I would have had to jump ahead by means of a*

*prologue* (this is done all the time in books - JK Rawlings Harry Potter, on TV, Movies), *that I fear would have felt like a ploy to my reader*. In addition, since “Weepers” is both a stand-alone novel, and the first in a four-novel series, I had to decide which sub-plots to wrap-up, and which ones to dangle in an effort to create anticipation for future novels in the series.

MUST SOLVE THE PRIMARY ISSUE/MYSTERY – 4 And fourth, I promised the resolution of mysteries. Describing “Weepers” in 15-words I would say that a, “NYPD cop killing in 1957 has unexpected ties to a young father’s disappearance in 1951.” *So, here I must unravel the killing of a police officer, the disappearance of a young father, and the six-year link between them*. I must do this with suspense, reasonable surprise and intrigue. And at the same time, my reader must not feel cheated (no bolts of magic, dreams, etc.).

Finally, as I said above, “Weepers” is the first of a four-novel series, but I also want it to stand-alone. Therefore, some questions and foreshadowing remain, however, it is crucial that they are not detrimental to a free-standing story.

Additional thought on a series –

I do not think all series/sequel fiction should also be able to stand-alone. This is something that each author of a series must decide for herself. In some respects, it is a choice between ending with a cliff hanger (without annoying the reader) or complete the story with a few dangling questions and a sense of continued character development. *For example, while I believe that I have kept my promises in Weepers, and resolved the primary mystery, in Chapter 30, two priests are talking about Angelo (a key character) and the Weepers:*

Once they left the liquor store, Father Casimiro said, “Joe, we saved Angelo from the Knights, and the other gangs. But we both heard about what happened last night in the Cherry Street Park. So do we count this as a success? Did we save him?”

“Good question, Robert. I guess it depends on what the Weepers become.”

Father Casimiro and Father Joe walked past the Weepers’ storefront and waved to the boys inside.

I want the reader to love the ending, and the story, and the characters enough to want more.

Now, all of this assumes the reader is starting with the first book in the series. Brilliant authors, like many of you in this room, manage to do this as an art and have also developed an

extraordinary ability to give just the right amount of backstory threaded seamlessly (I prefer that to “organically”), throughout each subsequent novel in a series to inform the reader who picks up a third novel first. This reader will understand the story as “free-standing” while at the same time wanting to read earlier books in the series. This is not easy, even for the best writers, but when it works, you have a winning series. (Think Connolly, Patterson, DeMille, and so on).

A final thought, when there is a time gap, (from book one to book two) ask yourself 3 things,

**1.** what have they (main characters) been doing over the past, let’s say, three-years, **(a)** that is consistent with the characters, **(b)** of interest to the reader, and **(c)** moves the series arc along.

**2.** In what ways have the main characters effected the environment of the story, including each other. And finally,

**3.** how do you show all this to your reader without using an “information dump” not even a “as you know, Bob” dump.

**Now, back to “The End” – *Here are seven thoughts on ending your story.***

1. Most of the time, even if you create an outline, the ending will not be what you originally thought. Your writing will cause it to change. I do have a friend, who writes the ending first and creates a rough first draft backwards from that ending. She is a brilliant writer. I can’t do that.

2. Plant seeds along the way – Your ending must flow out of the story, plant seeds along the way, but don’t give the end away – you don’t want your reader to finish the story before you finish it. Remember the reader is sitting across from you wanting to play the cat and mouse game with you she wants to feel involved in the story. She wants to know. But, like telling a joke, if everyone predicts the punchline it won’t work. – Think “switching heads”.

3. I would bet that your favorite book endings surprise you, but they fit with the story and you want to read more from that author.

4. Someone asked if there has to be a happy ending. Again, no. And don’t shy away from an ambiguous ending it is okay, but tough...

5. Always write more than one ending (see the secret below #7).

6. Think about your favorite movie, TV, and book endings and ask, why did it work for you. And finally, the secret...

7. The secret to great endings – Here it is, the secret (from James Patterson) to a great ending of a book as well as a chapter within the book. Write down everything that could happen, think through everything that happened in the story, bullet point every conceivable ending - each one down a clean page. Then pick the most outrageous one that still makes sense with respect to the story and the characters. That's your ending.

### **WORKSHOP AN ENDING**

Use the story of “My Father’s Suit” and write down five alternative endings. Take 5-minutes, and then we will discuss.

You can also do this with any story you’ve read or movie or TV, etc., And certainly do it with your writing -short story, novel, poem, etc.