



Let's Talk About Endings

By Noel Murray

I was chatting with a fellow TV critic a couple of weeks ago and told her that when it comes to the majority of genre fiction, I like the first four-fifths of any story far more than the finish. I love detective fiction and policers, but once Harry Bosch or whoever puts all the pieces together and stands gun-to-gun with the bad guy, my eyes tend to glaze.

With dramas and comedies—especially those that are more slice-of-life—often the ending is all, and where the author chooses to punctuate is the ultimate indicator of what the story is all about. But fantasies, adventures, these types of stories frequently get their ideas out of the way early, to clear a space at the end for action.

Right after the 2008 writers' strike was resolved, I interviewed Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse about what we had to look forward to when *Lost* Season Four returned from its hiatus. I also asked about the series' end, and whether they'd eventually have to leave behind all the flashing back-and-forth and just tell one final sustained story set on The Island. Back then, I had no idea what the endgame for *Lost* might look like—my best guess was that it was going to involve the castaways traveling through time and becoming The Others, fighting against themselves—but I did know that I dreaded the prospect of the show turning into a straightforward action-adventure

series, if for no other reason than that the creators hadn't proven themselves to be especially adept at that kind of storytelling. Crazy twists? Sure. Hot-blooded dialogue exchanges and shootouts? Not so much.

But then a funny thing happened: the show got a lot better at action sequences. I still don't think the show ever did "two people yelling" all that well, but gunplay/knifepunch/smokeyplay? Much more exciting in the last three seasons than in the first. And another funny thing happened too: Season Six introduced the controversial "flash sideways," which allowed the writers to maintain a certain amount of mystery and off-Island breathers right through to "The End." Though I shouldn't have been surprised by that, in retrospect. In our interview, Cuse answered my question about the show becoming more straightforward by saying, "In terms of abandoning mysteries, no. Fundamentally, *Lost* is a mystery

show, so I think that would be stripping the franchise of sort of its essential nature." I know some viewers have been annoyed by that choice to keep us guessing all the way to the end, but I've liked it, for the reasons mentioned above. When *Lost*'s sixth season has concerned itself with ticking off boxes, its often been at its weakest. When it's featured people getting their asses kicked in between new mysteries, it's defused a lot of my usual impatience with endings (and has felt more like the *Lost* I know and love).



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That said, last week I wrote that I hoped *Lost* would preserve some ambiguity about what The Island's power really is, and whether the people fighting for and against



it are ultimately good and evil. I said that if *The End* failed to leave some room for interpretation, my review would be more of an “ah well” than a “hell yeah.” And the verdict? “Hell yeah” streaked with a lot of “ah well.” (Along with a little, “Hell? Yeah.”). Because with *Lost*, there’s always a closely intertwined duality—even in the reactions.

The internet has been clogged with columns and comments about the questions *Lost* “had to answer” before its final episode, but for me my questions regarding *The End* are more practical.

Does it work as an episode of television?

I don’t know that a person who’d never seen *Lost* would’ve been able to watch this episode and get much out of it (unlike the best *Loss* in the past, which work as individual units of story), but as far as delivering action, emotion, wit and “whoa, what the hell?” I’d say *The End* was enormously entertaining. The best storytelling gambit in this episode? The full-arc-flashes, which put an emotional button on nearly every major character’s storyline, and allowed even the prematurely dead to have one last curtain call.

But I’m getting ahead of myself. Storywise, *The End* had two aims: to wrap up the action on *The Island*, and to explain the *Sideways* universe. In both halves, the plot was fairly straightforward, flowing from what we’ve seen over the past few episodes.

On *The Island*, Jack assumes his role as *The Protector* and leads his team to *Glowy Cave*, hooking up along the way with *Not-Locke*, *Ben* and *Desmond*. Jack, curiously, puts *Not Locke’s* *Island-destroying* plan in action, lowering *Desmond* down to *The Heart*, where *Desmond* pops *The Island’s* cork and makes the ground tremble. In the aftermath of *The Great Unstopping*, *Not-Locke* becomes mortal, and after a tussle with *Jack* on a cliff, gets shot by *Kate* and then knocked to his death. *Jack*, *Hurley* and *Ben* head back to *Glowy Cave* to save *Desmond* and put *The Cork* back in, while *Kate* and *Sawyer* boat over to *Hydra* where *Miles*, *Claire*, a not-dead *Frank* (hooray!)



Sawyer runs to the beach to flag down the Ajira plane flying overhead.

and a not-dead (but newly mortal) *Richard* are readying the *Ajira* plane for takeoff. In the end, *Jack* anoints *Hurley* the new *Protector* (with *Ben* as his trusty sidekick), he descends to *The Heart*, sends *Desmond* back up to safety, restores *The Cork*, and then dies.

In the *Sideways*, *Desmond* continues his job of bringing people together so that they’ll realize who, what and where they are. The answer? They’re in a kind of purgatory—which looks like *Los Angeles*, just as I’d always imagined—and need to find each other so that they can move to the afterlife. In the end, our main heroes wake up and convene and some kind of *Unitarian Universalist* church, where *Christian* steps out of his casket and helps *Jack* understand how to be dead, and explains that *Jack’ll* be heading into the great beyond alongside the people who brought out the best in him.

That brief description though doesn’t do justice to the many, many beautiful and exciting moments in “*The End*,” exemplified by those full-arc-flashes I mentioned above, where the *Sideways* characters remember their whole lives and deaths and achieve a kind of bliss. From the opening montage of *Christian’s* casket being unloaded

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(in between shots of the characters on *The Island* and in the *Sideways*), *The End* didn’t skimp on the lyricism. With *Michael Giacchino’s* ever-excellent score underscoring the emotion, this episode was determined to move its audience, and damned if it didn’t do a number on me throughout.

Plus it was funny (*Kate* to *Desmond*: “*Christian Shepherd? Seriously?*”) and charming (tell me you didn’t grin as big as *Hurley* when *Charlie* opened the door to his motel room), and mindful of what fans have loved about the show these past six years. *Ben* got his clock cleaned yet again. *Hurley* quoted *Star Wars*. *Sawyer* teased *Kate*, saying, “I’d ask you along, but that would take all the fun out of telling you you can’t come.” *Jack* laughed off his wounds, telling *Kate*, “Just find me some thread and I can count to five.” In the *Sideways*, *Boone* and *Shannon* and *Juliet* returned. *Desmond* sat at *Table 23*. And so on.

I’ve always liked that *Lost* has been willing to risk looking goofy.



REPORT CARD

Episode **A-**

Docked only because of the church scene

Season **B+**

Took big chances, many of which worked

Series **A-**

Flawed but still pretty great