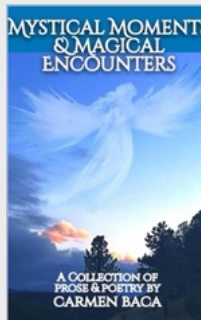
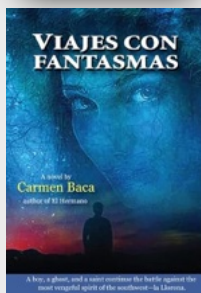
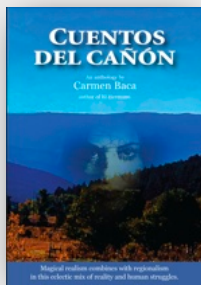


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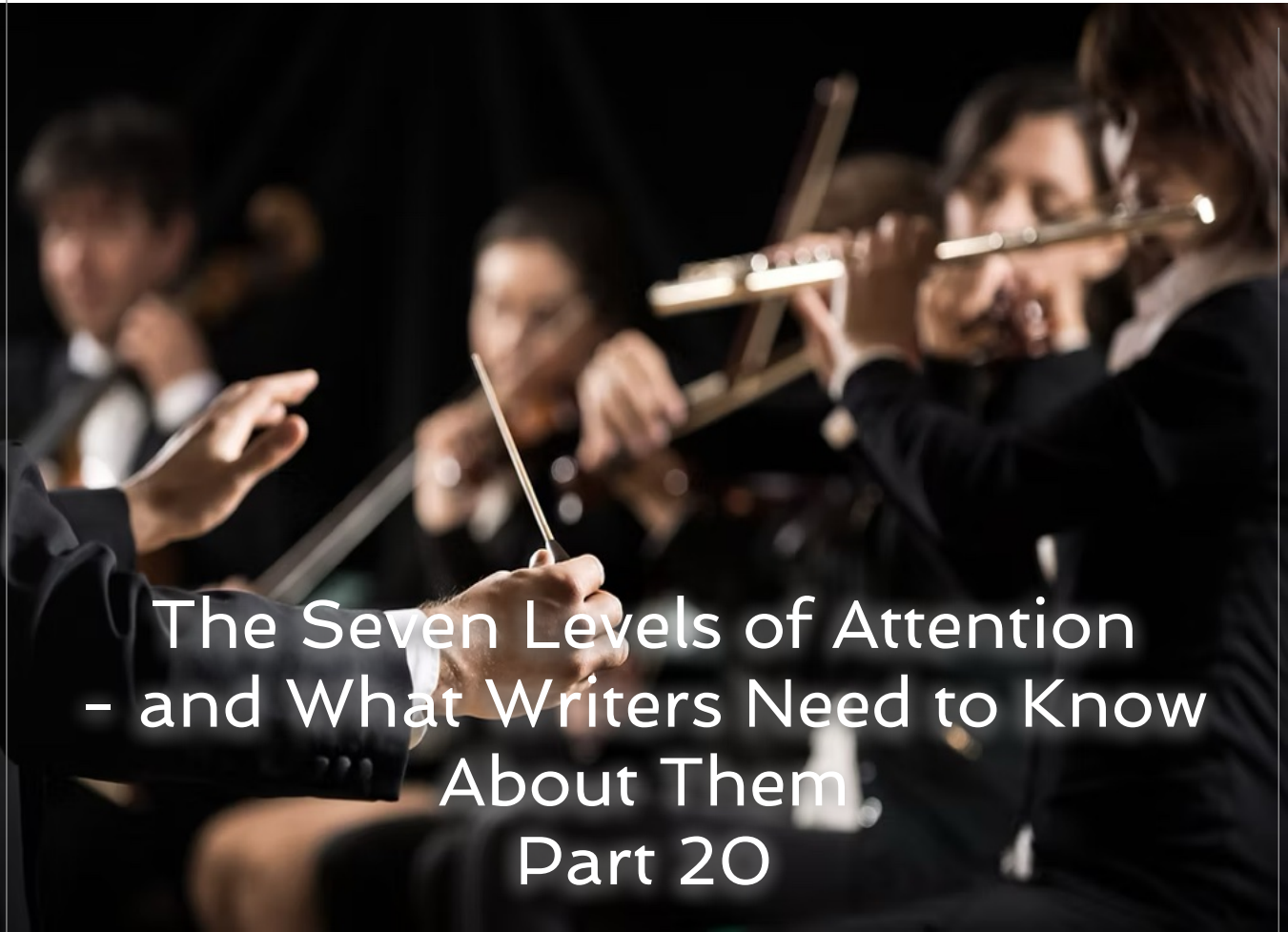
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Feedback is welcome. Drop me a line at

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Below is a popular blog item.



The Seven Levels of Attention - and What Writers Need to Know About Them Part 20

Astute readers of this series may note that the 'trick' - if it can be called a 'trick' - of mastering attention has, in the end, not much to do with going out there into the world seeking it.

Billions of units of currency, millions of hours of time, hundreds of thousands of people are engaged in the practice of attention-seeking as you read this. By 'attention-seeking' I mean literally that they are using all their energies and the latest technologies of the internet to scour the landscape, near and far, in search of this strange thing called 'attention'. Most of them are hoping that they can latch onto it with such force that it will convert to money. They want, like the ancient alchemists, to be able to transmute the lead of ignorance into the gold of cash. Like those alchemists, though, they keep missing the point.

Here's another analogy: if I had a huge inert body of plasma of some kind, and I wanted to spark it into life and turn it into something like electricity or water, it would probably take a

vast amount of energy and a not inconsiderable amount of time to do it.

But if I wanted to take something that was already in motion and make it go faster, I could probably do so relatively easily and quickly.

It's the same with attention. If we picture attention as a kind of dull, unmoving fog around a person, then the quickest and easiest way to get that fog moving might be to find those bits of it that were already moving slightly and get them moving a little bit faster.

That might be too abstract for you, though. So let's try a different tack.

Instead of going outward to seek attention, let's try going inward.

Take a piece of work that you have written at some point, new or old. What is it about that piece which attracts readers? The first thing to clarify is probably 'Which readers?' A short science fiction story is not particularly going to be of any interest to a reader seeking a Western family saga. So narrow down in your own mind the kind of reader you are picturing picking up and reading your book.

Once you have some idea of that, look again at the work. Look particularly at the cover (if it's got one) or the blurb (if you've written one), or, in the absence of those, read the opening page. What does that page contain which might 'hook' the reader's attention?

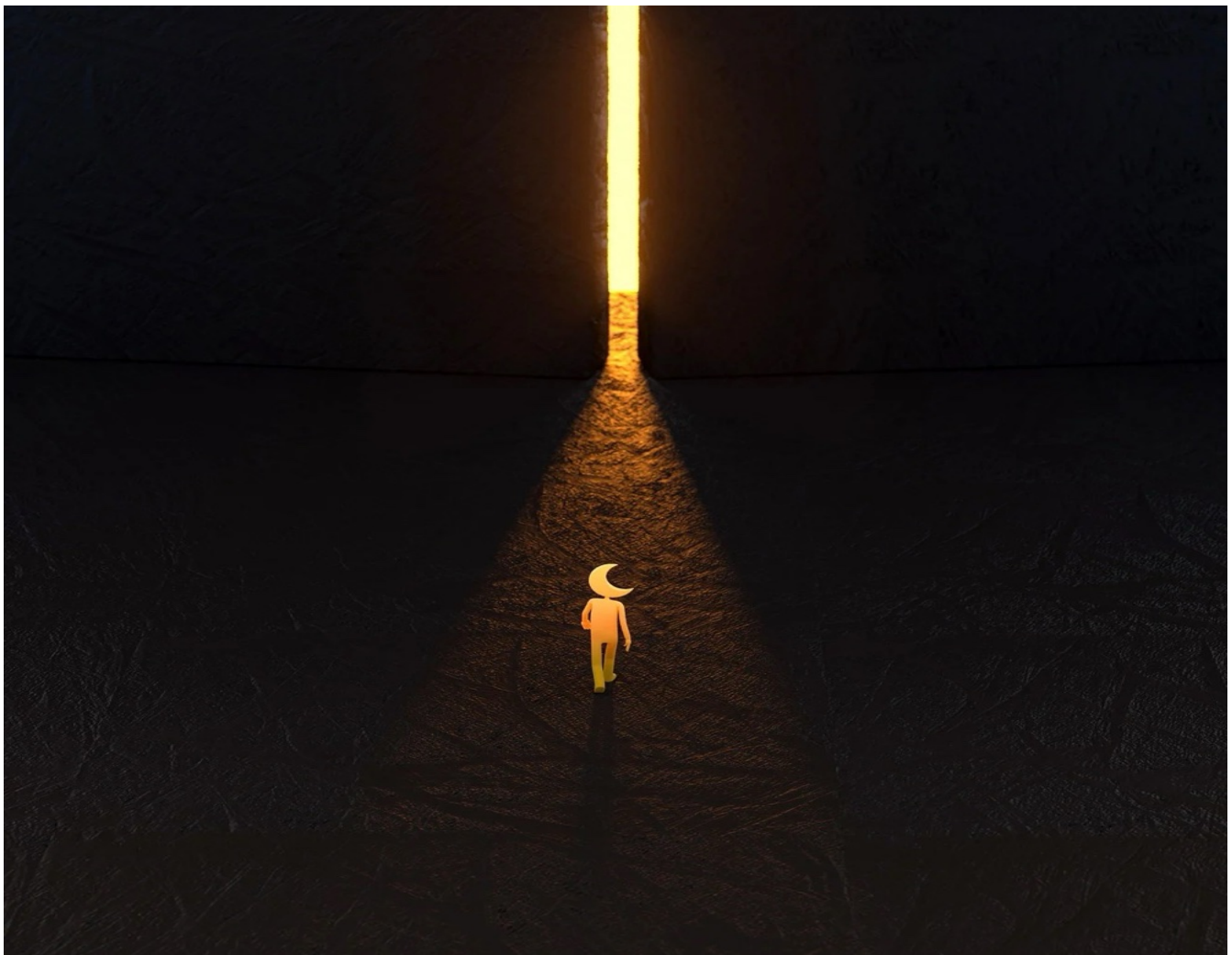
Get more specific. Look at your protagonist. What is it about him or her which is drawing attention inwards from the reader? What are you doing with your protagonist to make sure that the reader sympathises with him or her?

What happens in the first few pages to make sure that the reader is completely glued to your piece?

Now read on a bit. What is this piece 'about'? I don't mean that it's about the robot invasion of Earth in the year 2025, or the story of the Reeve family in Oklahoma in the 1890s - I mean what is its theme? By 'theme' I mean an idea that recurs in or pervades a work of art or literature, from Latin *thema*, from Greek, literally 'proposition'; related to *tithenai* 'to set

or place'. It might be about 'growing up', or 'the evils of pride', or 'the nobility of courage' or 'the power of compassion', or 'prejudice' or any number of things. If it's not really about anything, then it is probably doomed right there.

What if it is a light-hearted piece about, say, a group of university students and their mis-matched relationships? What if you can't see what the 'theme' would be in a piece like that? Well, to be successful, a piece about a group of university students and their mis-matched relationships would need to touch on universal truths about relationships, youth, and perhaps going to university. They don't have to be 'universal truths' as accepted by anyone else, but they have to be true for you (which is why 'writing from the heart' is both advocated and often successful - when you pour yourself onto the page to some degree, some truths sometimes rub off).





Right. So you have some notion of your piece's theme. How is that theme being communicated? Look at character, at dialogue, at images being used (especially repeated images and motifs); look at specific statements in the work, look at the setting, look at the use of language and individual words.

If you were writing a piece of music, you wouldn't want a note out of place - you wouldn't want something to strike a listener as 'false' or out of key. Stories are the same: if your theme is your key, your piece should reverberate with that key throughout, using character, dialogue, images, statements, settings, language, words.

Going over all this may or may not be a revelatory experience for you. But if you do all of this successfully, you will find that you have lit a beacon at the heart of your work. A curious thing will then happen. Over time, if you place this beacon in a position from where it can be

seen by a few - especially if those few are already giving you Intermittent Attention - its light will draw in more and more attention.

You won't have to seek attention: it will come to you.

In effect, what you will have done is used one of the greatest secrets that there is. You will have discovered for yourself that the most powerful level of attention is the seventh level.

By journeying into your work to the level of Deep Attention yourself, you will have cast your own world in a whole new light. This doesn't have to be on the order of a religious experience, as mentioned before: it might just mean seeing underneath the superficial layer of something, recognising a flaw in something, spotting a trend, realising a deep truth, and so forth. Once an author taps into Deep Attention in his or her work, that particular work gains more readers.

Why? Well, mechanically what happens is that the author takes this newly ignited or refreshed light and allows it to spill through everything about the piece- the cover images, the blurb, the marketing posters, the positions in which the book is placed, and so on. All those channels then light up as if they were wires and the switch had just been turned on. Potential readers who had been walking by giving the piece Momentary Attention, as well as those who were standing nearby and giving it Intermittent Attention, are now drawn even closer.

More readers; more buyers; more people giving the piece their Focussed Attention and being transformed by it in some way, small or large.

To reach out, go within.

To go down the Seven Levels of Attention, go up.

To grab the hearts of readers, grab your own.

The Seven Levels of Attention, as you may have realised, can be applied to more than selling books. Please contact me if you'd like to know more - or get my book [The Seven Levels of Attention](#).

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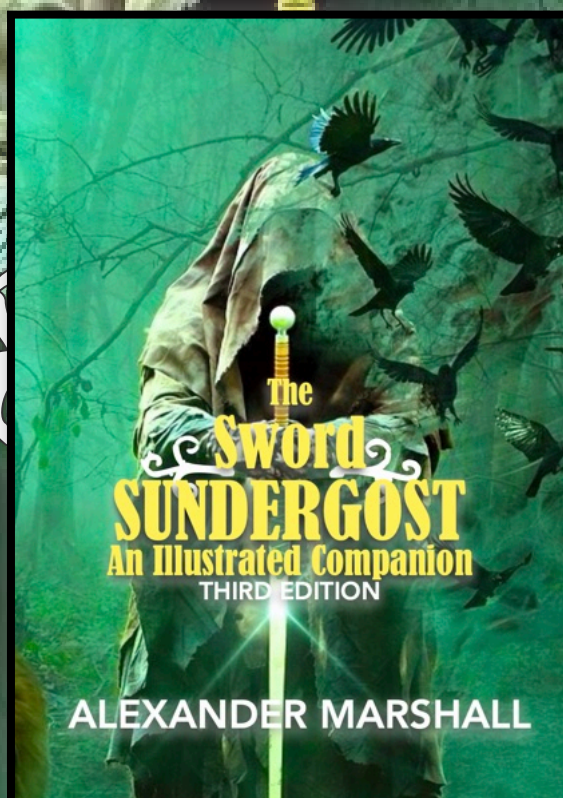
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THE BONES OF MY UNIVERSE



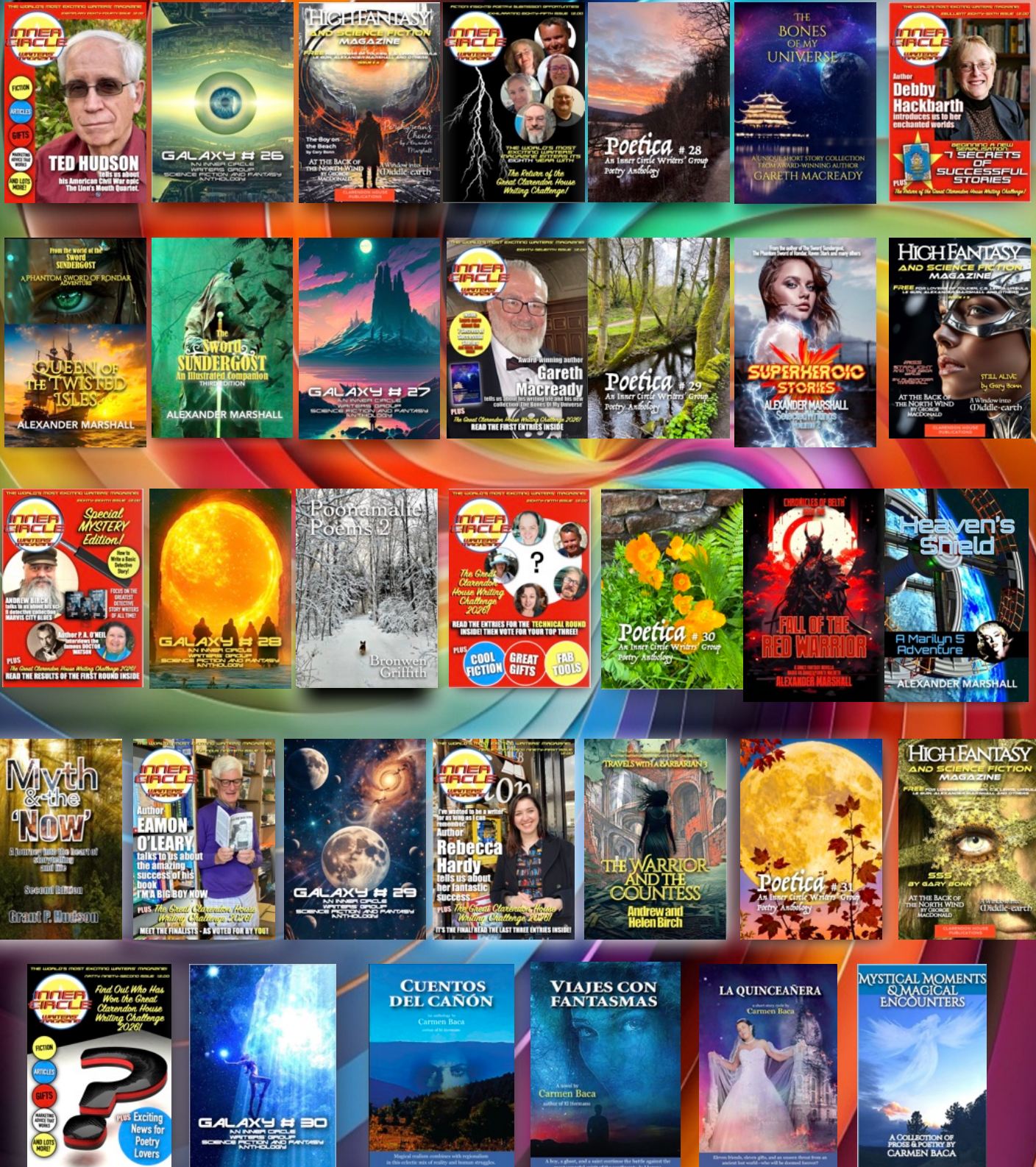
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Gareth Macready lived in Japan, working as a variety act, and built a small studio theatre there. He received the Key to the City from Osaka City Council and collaborated with Japan's biggest comedy company, advising the council on the city's inaugural PerformaFest. Ten of his short stories have been published in Galaxy anthologies. One of his short stories received an Honourable Mention from The LRH Writers of the Future Competition. His short film script, Frank Sees Grandpa, won the Best Screenplay Short at the Ardélion Awards Gala 2025.

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