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PART ONE:

WRITE STORIES THAT WORK

Lesson Four:

Attention Becomes Emotion

Grant P. Hudson

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CLARENDON HOUSE  
PUBLICATIONS

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The Become a Professional Author Course is made up of three basic parts:

### **1. Write Stories That Work**

In eight Lesson Modules, you will learn the basic structures of all successful fiction and be encouraged through practical exercises to produce stories of your own which grab, glue, guide and control readers' attention.

### **2. Sell Stories Effectively**

In four Lesson Modules, you will discover how marketing really works and work through several practical exercises so that you will have customers who like, buy and recommend your work to others.

### **2. How Clarendon House Can Help You**

In two Lesson Modules, you will be shown how Clarendon House lays out routes of opportunity for you to get published and acquire a readership of your own.

# LESSON FOUR: ATTENTION BECOMES EMOTION

ATTENTION

Successful fiction is composed of yawning vacuums which suck in attention like black holes in space suck light.

Why do we want to suck in so much attention?

Apart from the fact that we want to attract readers to our stories, we want to accomplish something else vitally important too. That something else is based on another mechanical principle:

**Strong enough vacuums convert attention into emotion.**

Read that again.

It's so simple, it's easy to miss its real power.

If your story contains strong enough vacuums, reader attention is transmuted into emotional commitment.

VACUUM

EMOTION

In other words, readers will start to **care** what happens.

Will the Death Star be destroyed?

Will the One Ring be melted?

Will Voldemort be defeated?

Will the Avengers overcome Thanos?

If the authors of the above stories had skipped straight to the climax of each of their tales — the final confrontation between protagonist and antagonist — no reader or viewer would particularly care what happens.

It would be just more noise, more CGI explosions, more drama; the stories would be shallow.

Some stories do this: they skip straight to the fight at the end before doing the work of building up readers or audiences to care. They are quickly forgotten or downgraded as stories.

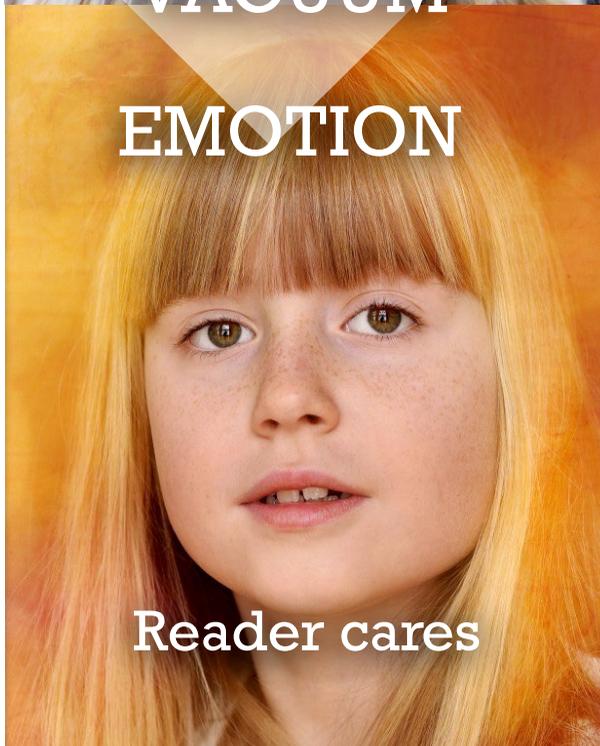
Reader doesn't care



ATTENTION

VACUUM

EMOTION



Reader cares

**The author has used vacuums so effectively that by the time readers reach the climax, their attention has converted into emotional investment.**

If there are no vacuums in a story, there is no story.

**If there aren't strong enough vacuums in a story, the story is shallow; it lacks real emotion.**

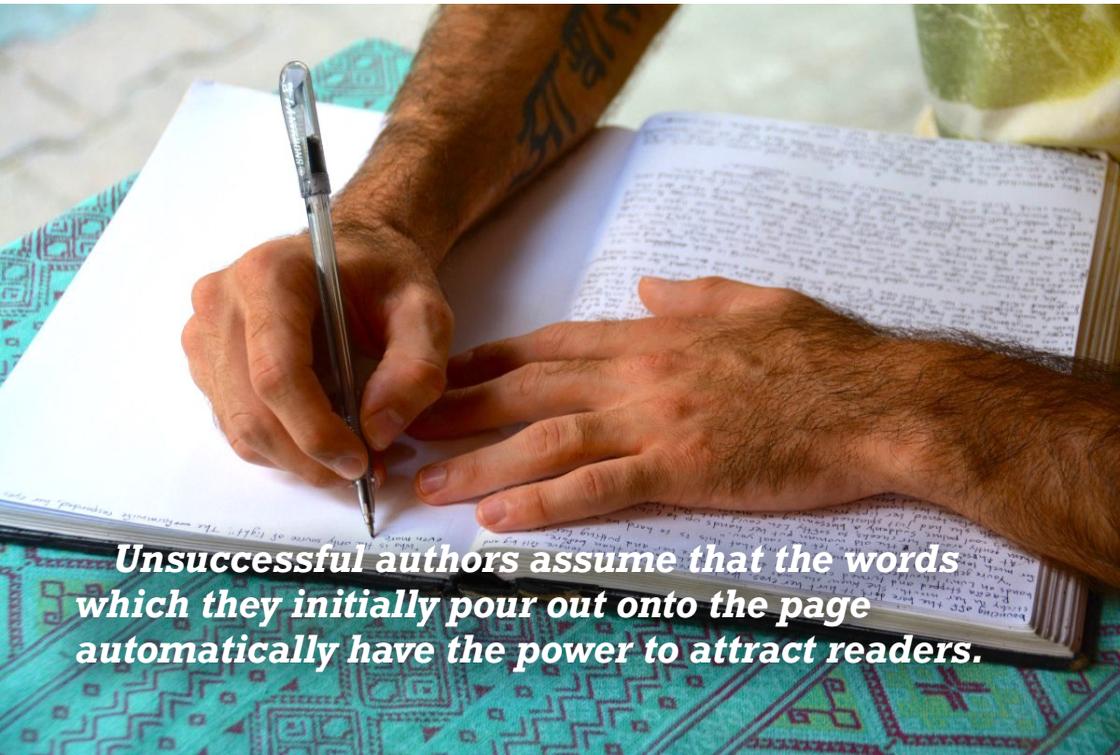
Given the above, then, what is the mistake made

by almost all writers early in their career?

It is this:

**Unsuccessful authors assume that the words which they initially pour out onto the page automatically have the power to attract readers.**

We'll find out why this happens shortly. But there's no question that it does happen: writers imagine that what they first put on the page is all it takes to be successful.



***Unsuccessful authors assume that the words which they initially pour out onto the page automatically have the power to attract readers.***

On this basis, writers sadly judge themselves as successes or failures, many of them never realising that those initial words are just the raw material which now has to be **crafted** into something that will not only attract readers but convert reader attention into emotional commitment.

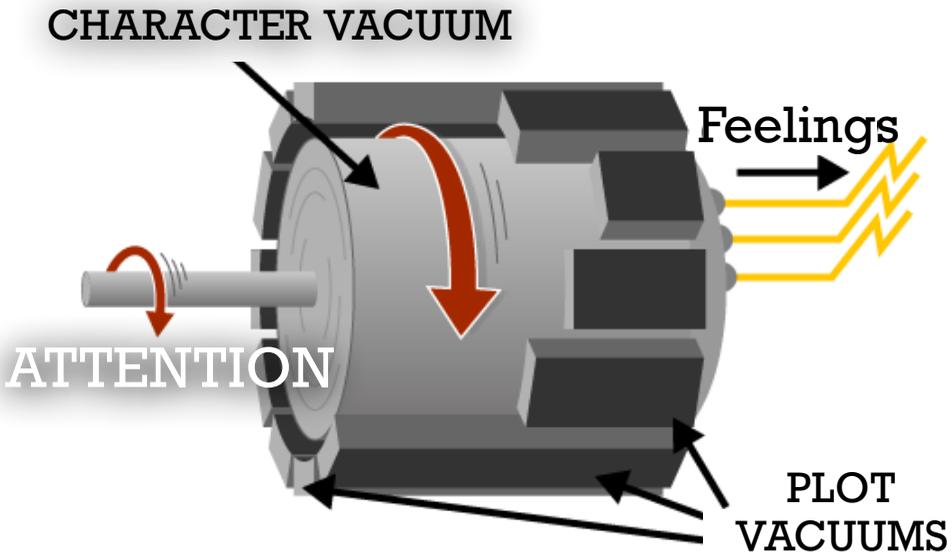
Readers want to emotionally commit to stories. They want **feelings**.

Readers love to have their attention condensed into emotion.

They buy books and go to cinemas and theatres and read fiction in magazines and watch television shows in the hope that their attention will be converted into emotion.

Right now, the important thing to recognise is that your fiction has to produce emotion — **and it has to be crafted into shape to do so**.

You have to build an **emotion generator** to convert attention into feelings.



## Where to Begin

As we have covered, the first thing you should do if you feel in despair or confused about your fiction is clarify what you are trying to say.

How can you narrow down your message so your stories really come to life for readers — and for yourself?

**Stronger, clearer, more potent fiction draws more authentically from your own heart and vision.**

Then the right use of vacuums attract the right readers for you, transforming their initial attention into burning emotional commitment which will leave them yearning for more.

## Course Exercise # 11:

Revisit Course Exercise # 6. Do you now have a better idea of what the message of your work is?

Don't worry if this is still not 100% clear. Make some notes in your Course Log based on what you have studied so far.



This doesn't mean that you have to 'dumb down' your messages or cut out any originality — quite the opposite. Once you know what it is you want to say, your messages can be multi-layered and complex while remaining totally effective.

Your message doesn't kill originality or creativity: it gives them the oxygen to breathe.

But readers won't just casually absorb your message.

They have to be directed to do so.

You might be thinking 'But I've already written my book! It's too late for me to apply all this stuff!'

If you are 100% happy with what you have produced, then that's fair enough. You could try simply marketing it in its current form. Move to Part Two. But you'll find it hard to market if you haven't stripped it down, built an emotion generator and intensified its message.





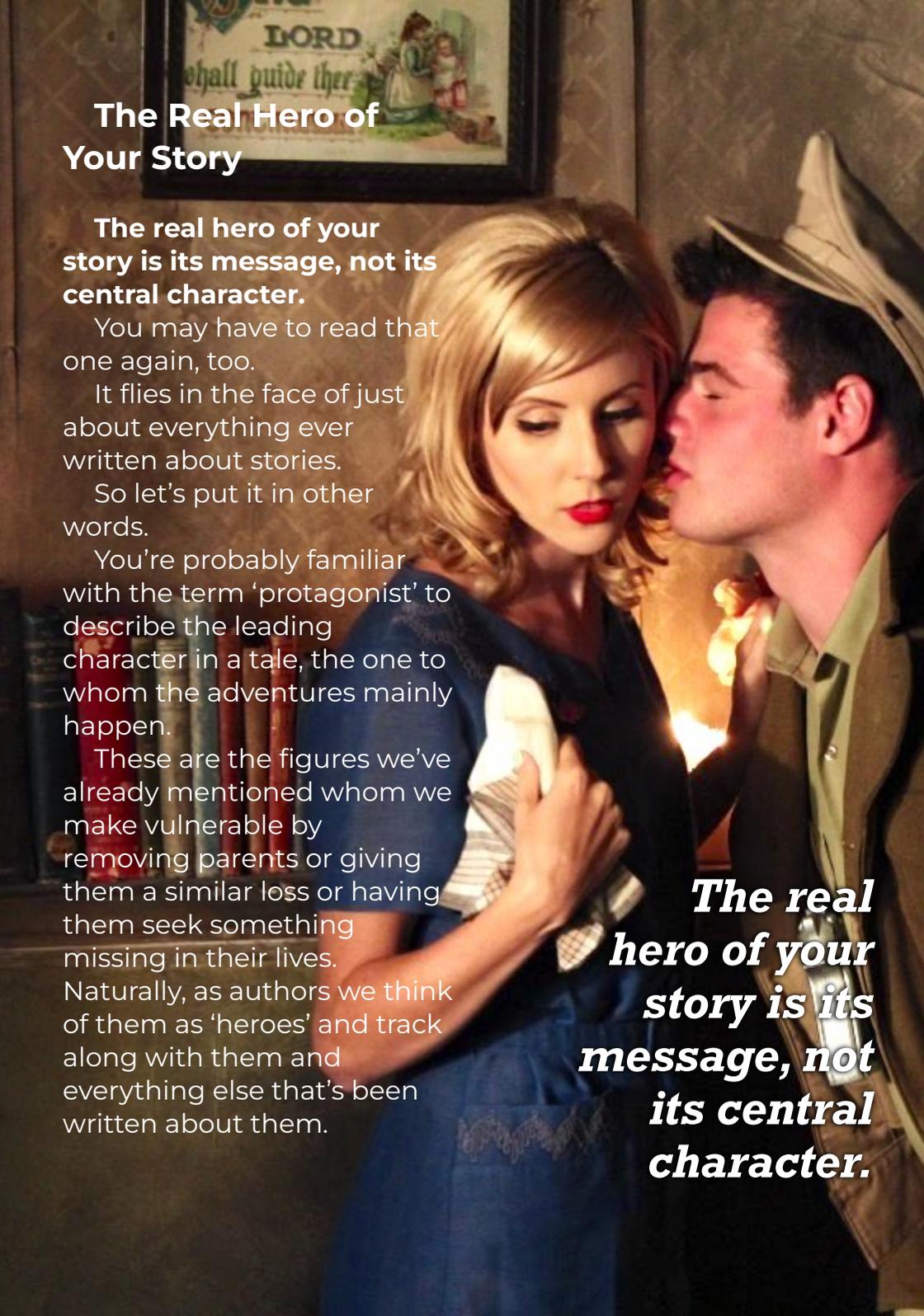
If people have read the first twenty pages of your book and are craving for more, go for it. But have they stopped reading? Have you sent out copies of your book to qualified beta readers but find that you are constantly checking to see if they have started reading it yet? Or worse: they've started, but aren't finding the time to finish?

Or even worse: they finished your book, but have only a few polite things to say about it?

The real test comes when someone who loves your genre reads your book.

If they are rave, you have a chance of success and could risk moving forward to Part Two. But if they are negative, or neutral or politely constructive, read on.

*If you are 100% happy with what you have produced, then that's fair enough. You could try simply marketing it in its current form. Move to Part Two.*

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue lace-trimmed dress, is being kissed on the cheek by a man in a military uniform. The man is wearing a tan cap and a green shirt. They are in a room with a framed picture on the wall. The picture shows a woman and a child, with the text "LORD shall guide thee" visible. The scene is lit with warm, soft light.

## The Real Hero of Your Story

**The real hero of your story is its message, not its central character.**

You may have to read that one again, too.

It flies in the face of just about everything ever written about stories.

So let's put it in other words.

You're probably familiar with the term 'protagonist' to describe the leading character in a tale, the one to whom the adventures mainly happen.

These are the figures we've already mentioned whom we make vulnerable by removing parents or giving them a similar loss or having them seek something missing in their lives.

Naturally, as authors we think of them as 'heroes' and track along with them and everything else that's been written about them.

***The real hero of your story is its message, not its central character.***

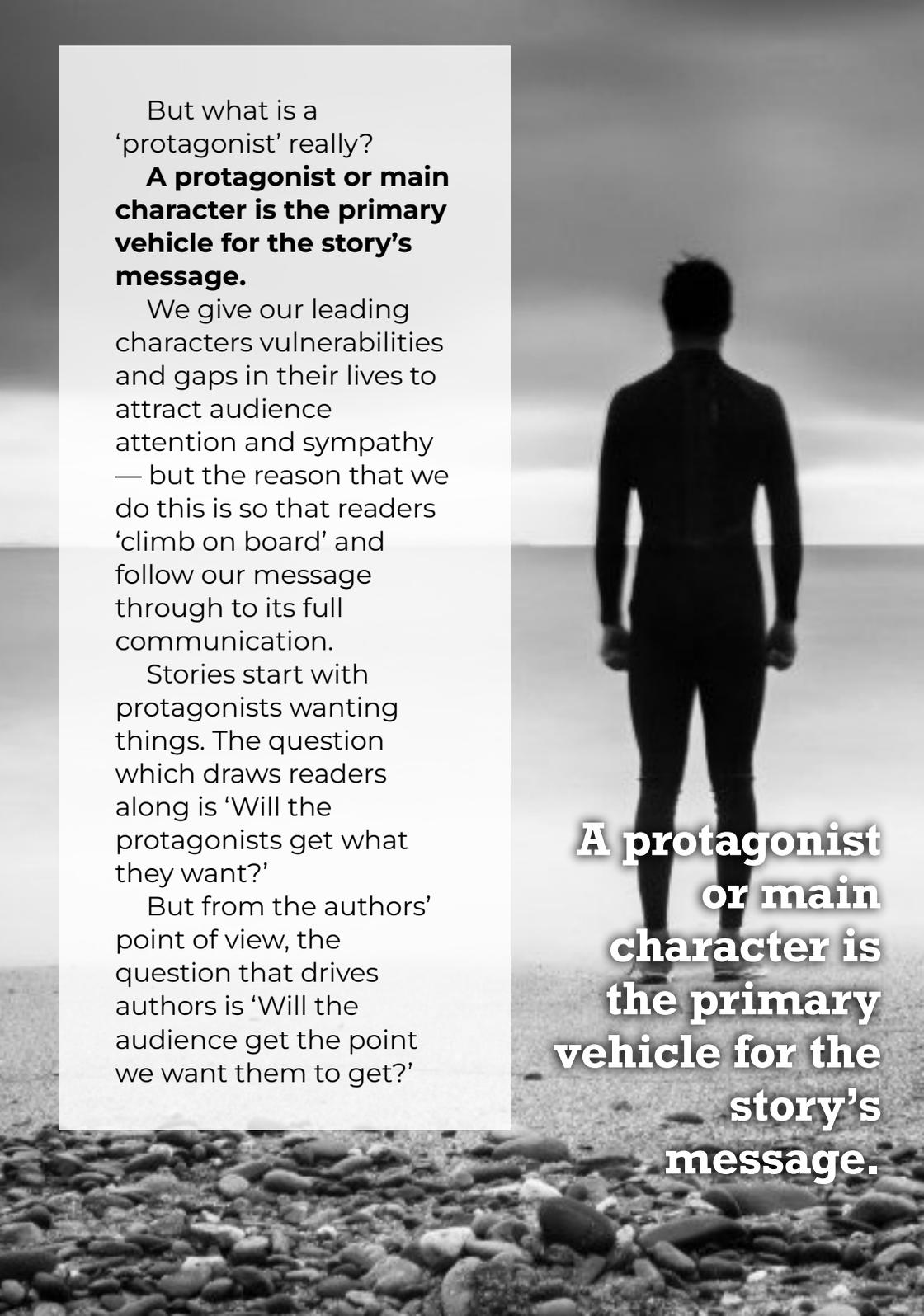
But what is a 'protagonist' really?

**A protagonist or main character is the primary vehicle for the story's message.**

We give our leading characters vulnerabilities and gaps in their lives to attract audience attention and sympathy — but the reason that we do this is so that readers 'climb on board' and follow our message through to its full communication.

Stories start with protagonists wanting things. The question which draws readers along is 'Will the protagonists get what they want?'

But from the authors' point of view, the question that drives authors is 'Will the audience get the point we want them to get?'



**A protagonist  
or main  
character is  
the primary  
vehicle for the  
story's  
message.**

Our primary tool for ensuring that they do is the protagonist.

Leading characters are vehicles for the communication of messages.

In the first few minutes of Marvel's **Iron Man** (2008), Tony Stark loses his freedom and status and ends up a prisoner in a cave. Will he escape from the terrorists? More importantly, will he attain some kind of personal wholeness? ('Learn who you truly are' is part of **Iron Man's** message.)

Will Frodo get rid of the One Ring in **The Lord of the Rings**? And will he retain his integrity when he does? ('Retaining integrity' is part of the message of the book.)



Will Harry Potter ever get away from the Dursleys? And will he find out who he truly is? ('Being true to yourself' is part of Rowling's message.)

Vacuums — in these cases, losses and threats to personal freedom— turn the main character into attention vehicles and keep readers' attention glued to the story until the end.

But for authors, the important questions are:

'Will audiences buy Tony Stark's transformation at the end and thus swallow the message about learning who you truly are?'

'Will Frodo's overcoming of the Ring's temptation throughout his quest (until the end) act as foreshadowing for the whole stories message about personal sacrifice and integrity?'

'Will Harry Potter's personal transformation resonate with readers when they reach the end of the series?'

***Readers get feelings.***



***Writers transmit messages.***

The whole reason authors want readers and audiences to stay glued until the end is so that they ‘hear’ the full message.

To get them to stay until the end, authors use **vacuums**.

The good news is that readers crave emotions.

The bad news is that authors can burden their tales with so much noise, as we have seen, that the route to the emotion is lost, even when the author has one.

It would have been possible to overload the first **Iron Man** movie — with back story, with jokes, with poor acting —to the point where Tony Stark failed to engage the audience’s attention and thus failed to act as a vehicle for the message. Imagine an actor in the role who was not as capable of holding audience attention with vulnerability like Robert Downey Jr.





The whole business of the One Ring could have faded into the multi-layered background of **The Lord of the Rings** and readers might have been switched off. Imagine a story without the vulnerable hobbits caught in a larger world they don't understand.

Harry Potter might just have been another kid with problems and failed to grab anyone's sympathy had the underlying message not been strong enough. Imagine trying to tell the tale of a secret world of magic hidden within our own without a vulnerable figure who starts off as one of us.

Remember, you're building an **emotion generator**, and one of the prime components is the vehicle that carries readers.

Readers want to arrive; authors want to deliver.

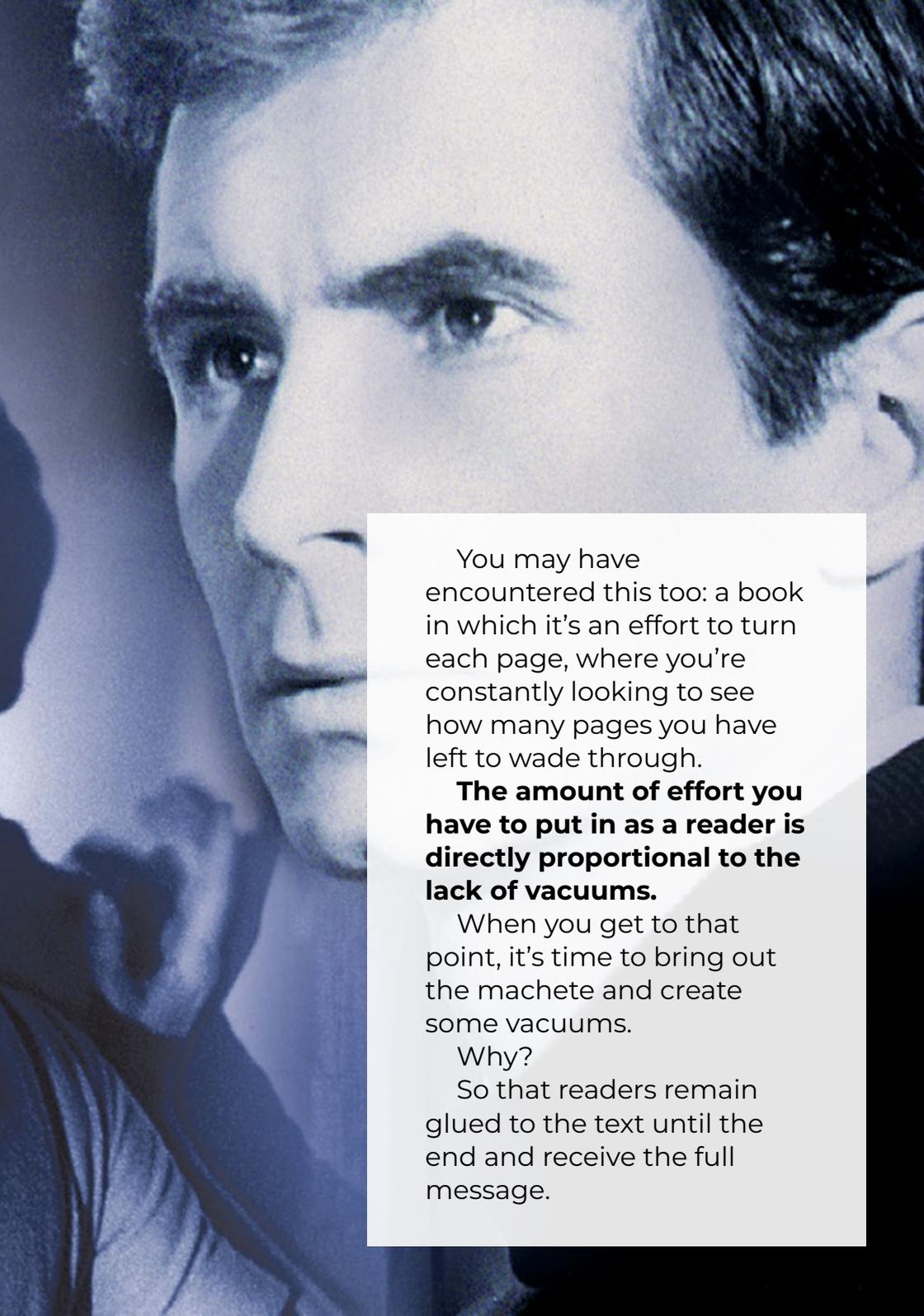
Both need a vehicle.

# DEVIL PSYCHO

You can even flip the leading character over to some other figure in the story — as happens in Alfred Hitchcock's **Psycho**, in which the original protagonist is killed early on — as long as the message of the story flips with the audience's attention. Vacuums shift from Janet Leigh's Marion to her sister, Vera Miles' Lila because Lila has the tremendous loss and mystery of her murdered sister to figure out.

Authors come to me for help all the time. I get to read many, many drafts of

many books. What I often encounter is pages and pages of figures going through the motions of action in scene after scene, but with no purpose or direction visible. Chapters can be well-written, even beautifully presented, with appropriate vocabularies and fascinating settings; images and events can be appealing, even occasionally intriguing; dialogue can be crisp, accurate, even entertaining. But the whole thing is an effort to read, like labouring through a thick forest without a map.



You may have encountered this too: a book in which it's an effort to turn each page, where you're constantly looking to see how many pages you have left to wade through.

**The amount of effort you have to put in as a reader is directly proportional to the lack of vacuums.**

When you get to that point, it's time to bring out the machete and create some vacuums.

Why?

So that readers remain glued to the text until the end and receive the full message.

At the end of a vacuum-powered story, readers close the book and sigh with satisfaction, understanding what the author was saying — not ‘trying to say through a cluttered tableau of noise’, but successfully communicating.

And then, as they put the book aside, readers start wishing for more of the same.

And authors start succeeding.

Sentence by sentence, chapter by chapter, authors should work to remove ‘noise’ and let their messages shine through.

Fairly rapidly, it becomes crystal clear what it was that really mattered to them as authors as they wrote; dross falls away; characters come to life; scenes drop into place; those bits which readers tend to skip are excised.

***The soul of a story is the invisible message, inhabiting the body of characters or images or other story elements.***





Authors find their real 'heroes': their stories' messages.

These authorial messages become their mantras, pasted to their laptop screens. Every sentence becomes easier to write; every piece of dialogue sounds alive; what happens to their characters starts to break their hearts or fill them with joy, because suddenly it all has soul.

Soul in this sense is a highly accurate word:

**The soul of a story is the invisible message, inhabiting the body of characters or images or other story elements.**

When joy happens for authors as they write, it's almost sure that it will happen for readers as they read.

## The Ghost in the Machine

So your story message is a ghost which possesses figures in your story as required. The message can shift from character to character using vacuum power.

**Story messages are the phantom protagonists of every tale.**

Frodo becomes the leading character in **The Lord of the Rings** in the first couple of chapters, and his vulnerability and sense of duty carry the story's message forward most effectively on his quest. When he faces his final temptation on the edge of the volcano of Mount Doom and fails, all of the created world of the story and its message literally hang in the balance. Is the author saying that, at the end, we will always fail in the face of overwhelming spiritual temptation? Almost. But Gollum, who has crept up the mountain being him, is not only a Ringbearer — he's one of the bearers of the story's phantom message. When his terminal act of greed in attacking Frodo destroys both the Ring and himself, Tolkien's communication is almost completed. Tolkien's world is about more than an individual's failure: it's about a providential grace, operating through all, using whatever is at hand.





Through the course of **The Lord of the Rings**, this message flits from one character to the next, partly when the Ring itself changes hands, partly when the narrative follows different figures as they move across the vast landscape of Middle-earth. When we track with Aragorn as he and Legolas and Gimli hunt orcs through Rohan, Aragorn becomes the message bearer: his struggles to make the right decisions in the face of complexities and unknowns resonate with readers almost subliminally.

When Gandalf tells the tale of his epic battle with the Balrog in the depths and on the heights of the earth, he bears the message for a while too: that the world on a mythic level contains dark and light and that grace overrides all.



In fact, every single chapter of Tolkien's masterwork echoes with the story's message in one way or another — that's why it's a masterwork. Almost all the characters act as 'message-bearers' at some point.

And almost all of them are vacuum-laden

vehicles for reader attention.

Compare Tolkien's book with its original drafts as outlined by his son Christopher Tolkien in **The History of Middle-earth** series and you will get a brutal education in just how much 'noise' a story has to lose in order to triumph.

## Keep It Simple

Vacuums and their fulfilment (or not) are what drive much of human behaviour.

Desire creates emptiness; emptiness moves us.

Think of going on a journey, sex, eating, shopping, seeking a soulmate —vacuums underpin it all.

**A story is an emotion-generating machine; its components are vacuums; its purpose is the delivery of a message.**

It might look as though what you are doing is working out what your protagonist wants and moving them through a series of obstacles, but what you're actually doing is **taking something away from your protagonist** and controlling readers' attention thereby.

Reader  
Attention

VACUUM

VACUUM

VACUUM

EMOTION

Author  
Message

Dickens in **Great Expectations** seems to give Pip the desire to become a gentleman in London, which embraces a whole host of qualities and requirements and seems ambitious in the extreme. But behind that desire is a much simpler one: he wants Estella's love. He knows that she won't even look at him unless he climbs out of his working class roots and 'improves himself'. So he takes on the education and chores and style of living necessary to become a gentleman for

a simple reason: his need for her love.

Luke Skywalker does something similar. He wants to go to the academy and become a pilot for large, vague reasons — but when his aunt and uncle are killed, this is focused into a desire to 'learn the ways of the Force, like my father before me'. Loss, and the desire to escape further loss, drive him throughout the original trilogy, more than any grand ideal. What he really wants is his father.

# Great Exp



Authors can initially feel that they have much to say and they they cannot possibly boil this all down into a simple, communicable message. But, unless conductors give the orchestras some music to play, all they will get is noise.

You might be able to list a dozen things which you would like to communicate through your fiction. Please do so, as an exercise. What you will most probably find is a common strand running through all of the things you've listed: a desire, or a point, or a flavour, or a concept, which all of the things on the list try to say in one way or another.

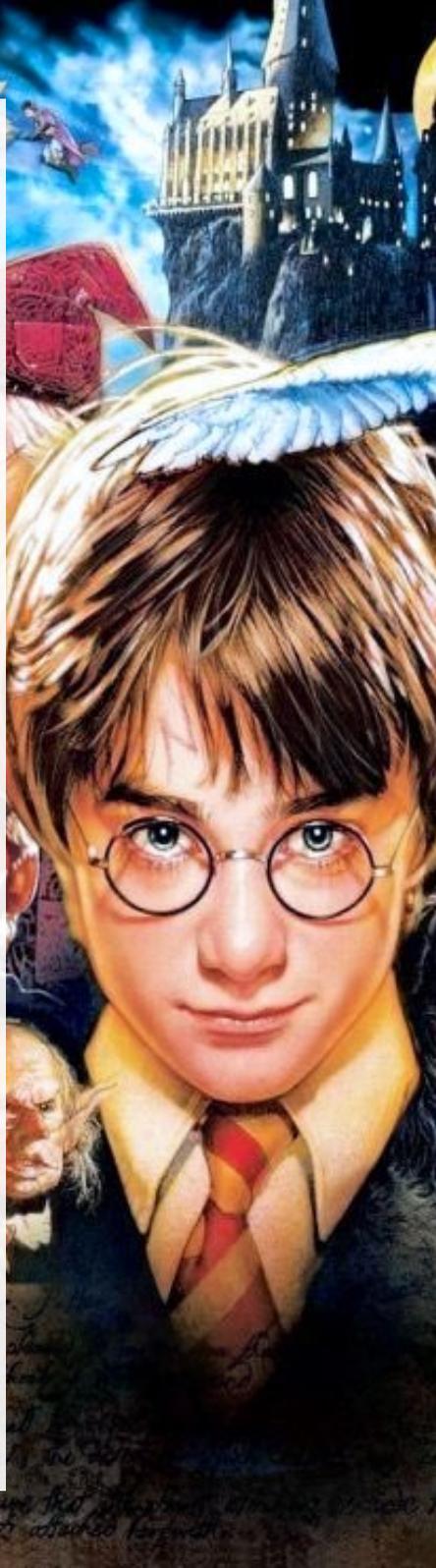
Expectations

Once you've defined a specific message, every other message and story element will fall into place around it, like instruments in an orchestra falling into tune around a piece of music.

Initially, this can be frustrating if your stories are full of different characters, different themes, and seek to fulfil many desires. Diversity can be a trap, though: a story can become cluttered by diluting characters' clear-cut needs.

It can be done: as we have mentioned before, **War and Peace** is regarded as one of the greatest stories ever written and it features a cast of thousands with dozens of central characters. But Tolstoy pulls it off: no one, at the end of the story, can be in any doubt what he was seeking to communicate, because he generates vacuums throughout the story to hold reader attention.

Note that it's easy to give a protagonist a goal like 'a better world' or 'peace on Earth' or even 'saving the planet', but those aims are too large and vague. To make the story work, work on the protagonist's **vacuum**.





Frodo doesn't set off with the Ring because he wants to 'save Middle-earth'; he does so out of a sense of duty to Bilbo and Gandalf initially. Then he becomes driven as the vacuum yawns larger in the course of the tale.

Harry Potter hasn't got the faintest notion of saving the world from Voldemort when he first goes to Hogwarts; he just wants to escape from the Dursleys and find out who he is.

Tony Stark doesn't set out to save Earth from an alien invasion; he merely wants to heal his body and escape from the terrorists' cave.

Elizabeth Bennett doesn't want to rescue her family from penury by marrying into wealth and security; she is simply trying to retain a little dignity in the face of difficult circumstances.



Macbeth, it must be said, sets out to become King of Scotland no matter what — but his story is a tragedy partly because his ambition is unreal. The specificity of it, though, still means that his story is a huge success as a work of fiction.

Countless other examples exist.

**The more focused a vacuum is, the more it grips reader attention — and that means the more effective vehicle is created for the author's message.**

You want something which readers don't have to expend too much energy figuring out.

## Condensing Attention Into Emotion

Now that you've taken away your protagonist's parents, or in some other major way created a vacuum which will 'glue' readers to that character,

turning them into an attention-vehicle, how exactly do you condense attention into emotion?

**To create emotion you must increase vacuum power until attention transmutes into it.**

What does that mean in practice?

***To create emotion  
you must **increase  
vacuum power** until  
attention transmutes  
into it.***



It's describing a process which actually occurs to us every minute of every day when we're awake.

Normally, it seems as if we have some mastery over our attention. But in fact, a great deal of our attention is controlled by external factors. We get up in the morning and place attention on the things we need to do to get the day started —with the emphasis on 'need'. Breakfast, brushing teeth, getting dressed for work (and in some people's cases, the all-important morning coffee)— our attention is directed by our needs.

Our needs — even small needs — are our vacuums.

So much for an ordinary day. But what if something attracts our attention which contains more vacuums? What if we hear about some disaster that's happened somewhere in the world? Our attention is sucked in — and, if the disaster relates to us in some way, or is to do with something for which we already feel some empathy, our attention starts to become emotional. A really big event in our day can not only pull in a lot of attention, it can transmute that attention into feelings.

**Our needs  
— even  
small needs  
— are our  
*vacuums.***



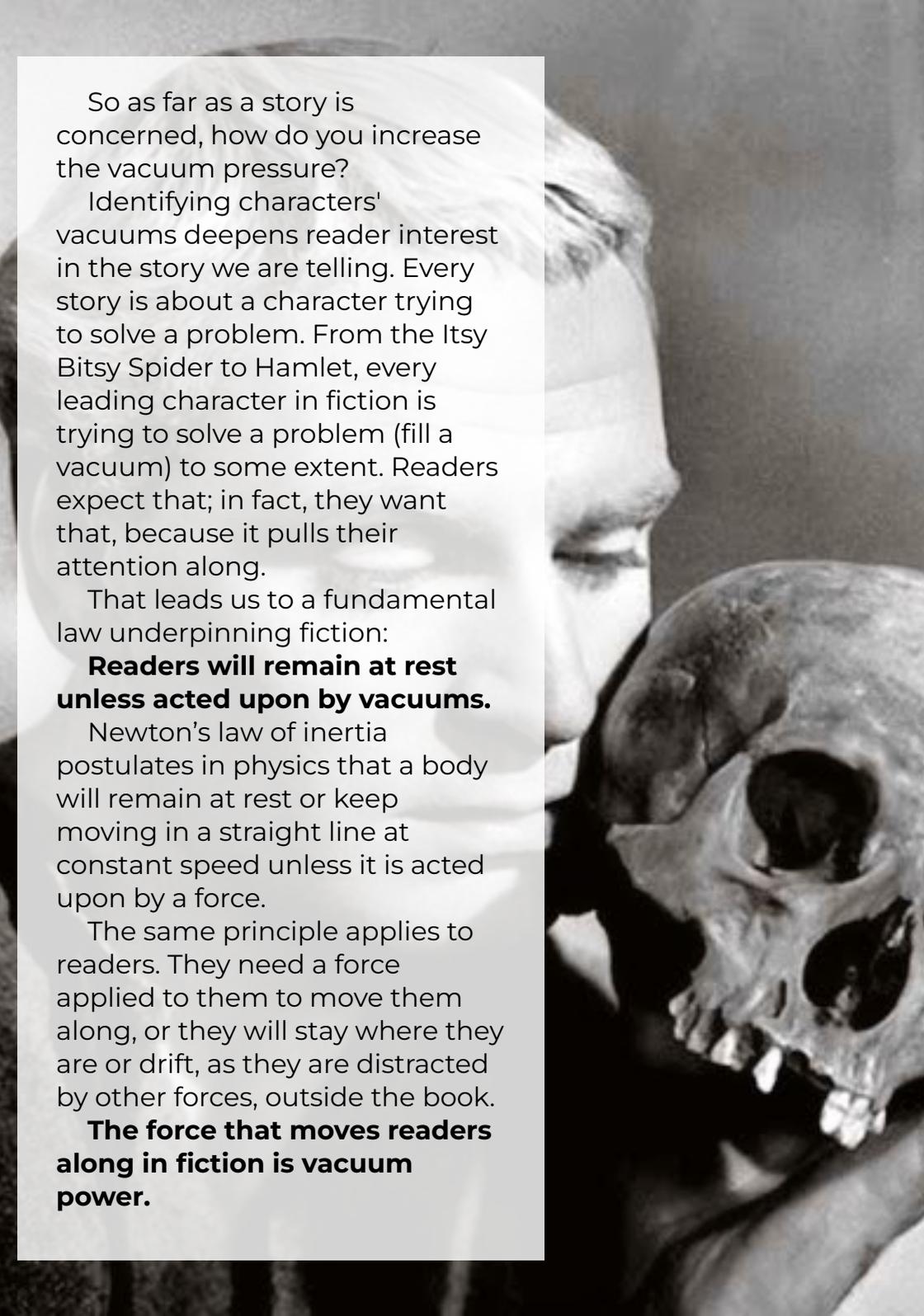
***Attention under  
vacuum pressure  
becomes emotion.***

The feelings can be good or bad: maybe we turn up at work and find out that we got the promotion we were hoping for. We had attention on it; already the attention was anxiety-ridden, perhaps; and then we get the news and the attention becomes joy.

Or perhaps we hear sad news about a work colleague and our attention becomes grief.

The important thing for our purposes as writers is to recognise this principle:

**Attention under  
vacuum pressure  
becomes emotion.**



So as far as a story is concerned, how do you increase the vacuum pressure?

Identifying characters' vacuums deepens reader interest in the story we are telling. Every story is about a character trying to solve a problem. From the Itsy Bitsy Spider to Hamlet, every leading character in fiction is trying to solve a problem (fill a vacuum) to some extent. Readers expect that; in fact, they want that, because it pulls their attention along.

That leads us to a fundamental law underpinning fiction:

**Readers will remain at rest unless acted upon by vacuums.**

Newton's law of inertia postulates in physics that a body will remain at rest or keep moving in a straight line at constant speed unless it is acted upon by a force.

The same principle applies to readers. They need a force applied to them to move them along, or they will stay where they are or drift, as they are distracted by other forces, outside the book.

**The force that moves readers along in fiction is vacuum power.**

So if there isn't a perceived vacuum at the beginning, which then leads to other perceived vacuums, pulling attention along like a motor, the story we are telling will fall flat. As soon as a problem in a story is resolved, readers stop paying attention.

The opposite is also true:

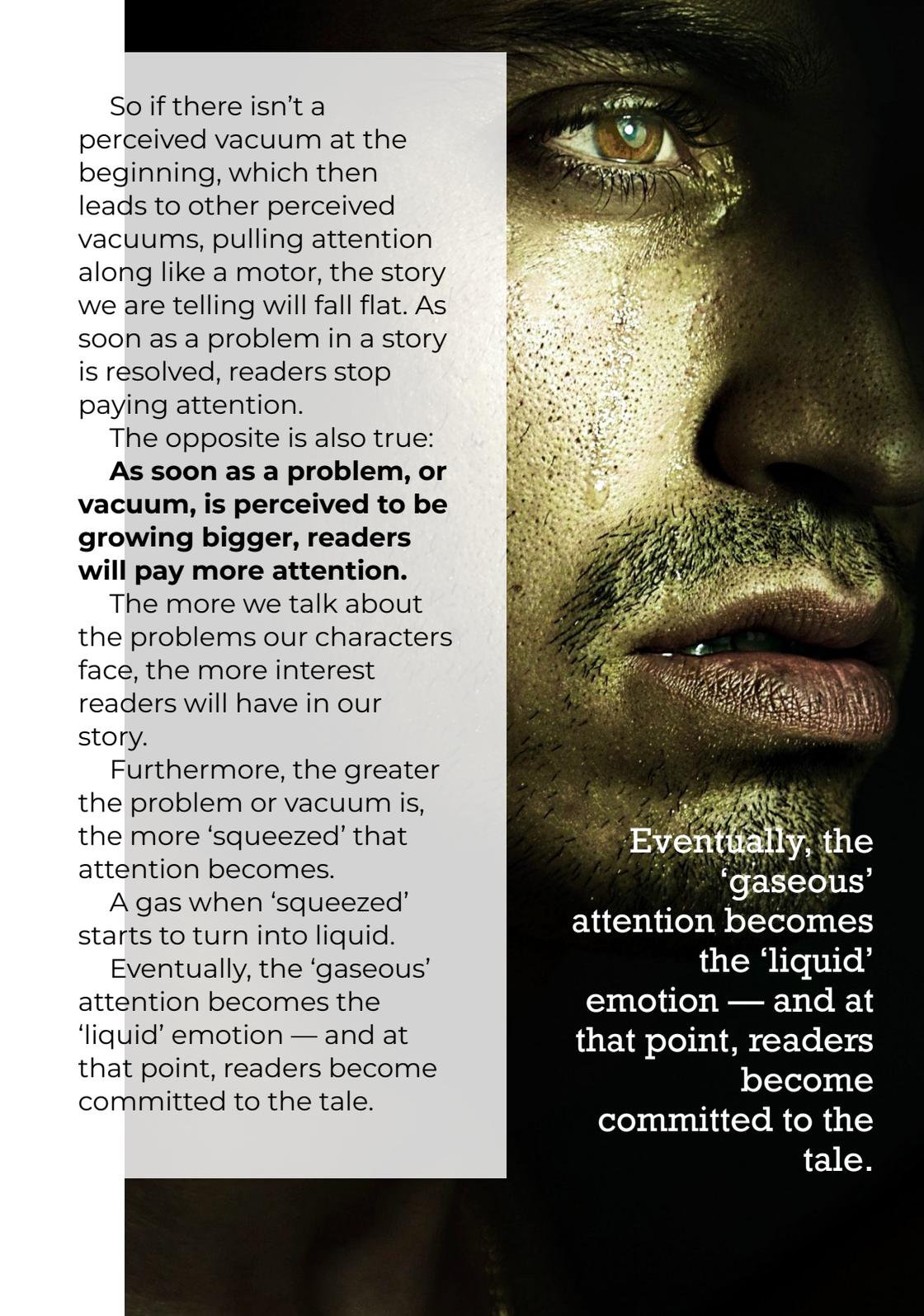
**As soon as a problem, or vacuum, is perceived to be growing bigger, readers will pay more attention.**

The more we talk about the problems our characters face, the more interest readers will have in our story.

Furthermore, the greater the problem or vacuum is, the more 'squeezed' that attention becomes.

A gas when 'squeezed' starts to turn into liquid.

Eventually, the 'gaseous' attention becomes the 'liquid' emotion — and at that point, readers become committed to the tale.



**Eventually, the  
'gaseous'  
attention becomes  
the 'liquid'  
emotion — and at  
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committed to the  
tale.**

## Sizes of Vacuum

Vacuums in major stories usually start small and escalate in both magnitude and type:

1. At the beginning, there are irritating vacuums. Frodo has to put up with annoying neighbours in **The Lord of the Rings**; Luke has to do chores around the home in **Star Wars: A New Hope**; Elizabeth Bennett has to tolerate her mother's neuroses in **Pride and Prejudice**; Harry Potter is bullied by the Dursleys in the first book in his series; and so on.

2. Then the vacuums get bigger, the losses larger: Frodo has to leave the Shire; Luke has to leave Tatooine; Elizabeth has to deal with a repugnant suitor; Harry has to face the unknowns and risks of being a wizard; etc.

**Loss of or threat to luxuries, accessories, conveniences, comforts, etc. becomes...**

**....loss of or threat to companionship, entertainment, education etc. which finally becomes...**

Reader



3. Vacuums increase as the story develops (the story 'developing' **is** the vacuums increasing): Frodo faces pursuit by sinister creatures; Luke has to rescue a princess; Elizabeth is challenged by Darcy's initial proposal; Harry confronts serious enemies.

4. By the time we approach the end of a

successful tale (successful because it has transmuted our attention into emotion), our leading characters are in real danger of some kind, relative to their worlds: Frodo teeters on the edge of doom, literally; Luke faces his father and the Dark Side; the Bennett family face ruin; Harry confronts Voldemort.

**Increasing magnitude of vacuum as the story progresses**



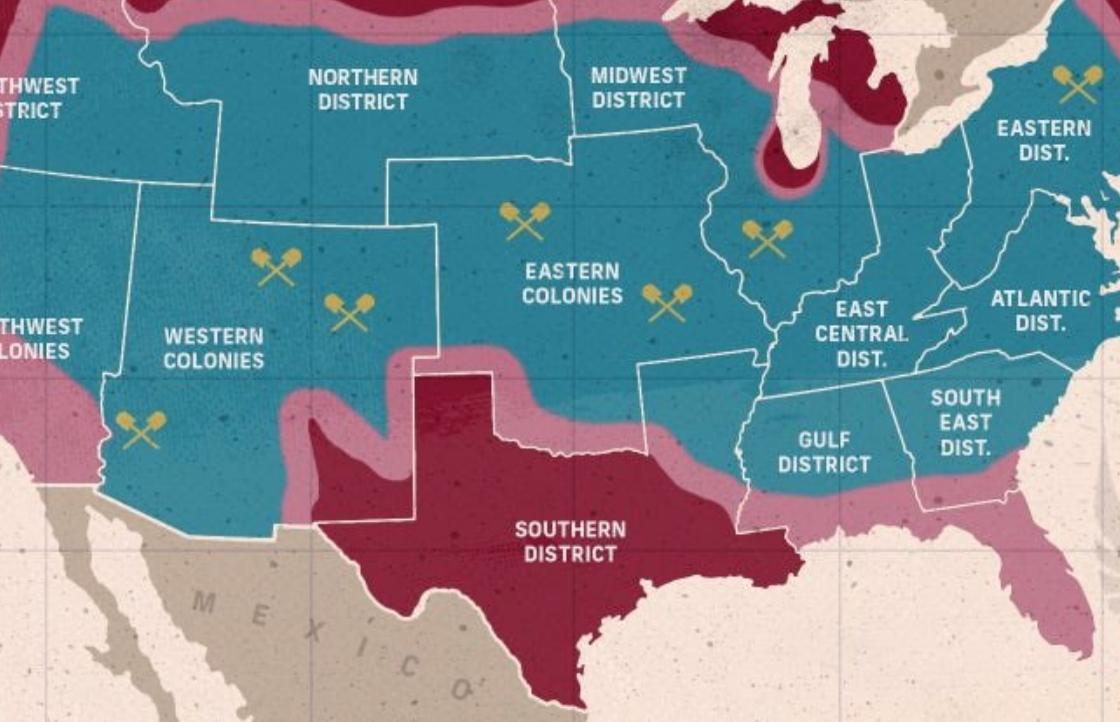
...loss of or threat to life, security etc.

You need that escalation to achieve your goals in a story.

In literature, villains wreak havoc on protagonists and their worlds, placing barriers between them and their desires — which is another way of saying ‘they create vacuums’. These barriers need to be real and solid in the worlds of the stories; they need to appear to be external.

Frankenstein’s monster murders Frankenstein’s loved ones; Claudius takes the throne from Hamlet; the hierarchy of government in **The Handmaid's Tale** present all kinds of barriers to happiness, as does the pig regime in **Animal Farm**; racists in **To Kill a Mockingbird** create all kinds of external obstacles; Heathcliff locks people away in **Wuthering Heights**; Cinderella’s evil stepsisters burden her with external tasks; and so on.





External vacuums are usually physical, tangible things which the protagonist must overcome in order to save the day or achieve goals.

It should come as no surprise that the Europe of Dr. Frankenstein, the Denmark of Prince Hamlet, Jones' farm in Orwell's allegory, Maycomb in **To Kill a Mockingbird**, the Republic of Gilead in **The Handmaid's Tale**, and so on, are all made-up — none of them really exist as solid entities in reality. Of course, it's fiction.

But all story worlds are created to have some semblance to the real world of readers in order that the illusion of fiction can have an effect on readers. If a created story world had no such resemblance, it would fail to have any effect on readers.

So the vacuums which characters face in these invented worlds have to resonate and echo for readers.



This is not simply 'convincing world-building'. Some writers concentrate with great enthusiasm on building worlds, especially in the fantasy and science fiction genres, perhaps in the belief that the more convincing their invented world is, the more gripped readers will be.

But there's an underlying fundamental which some of these world-builders miss:

**The only purpose of vacuums is to produce emotional effects upon readers.**

The purpose of 'convincing world-building' in a story — like everything else in a story — is **to convert reader attention into emotion.**

The purpose of 'convincing world-building' in a story — like everything else in a story — is ***to convert reader attention into emotion.***

James Bond defusing a bomb at the end of one of his movies grips us more powerfully if we have invested emotionally in him or the other characters in the story all the way through up to that point. In fact, it could be argued that the reason why many people find the Bond films too shallow and formulaic is because they have not succeeded in persuading us as audiences to make that emotional investment. There's a reason why Daniel Craig, as the latest incarnation of the character of Bond, was given a brief to be more 'emotional' (i.e. vulnerable, which means vacuum-burdened) in the role.

Even superheroes have to have a subjective world to make them interesting to readers and audiences. One of the reasons why Marvel Comics was so successful in the 1960s was because it introduced the notion that people with superpowers were just as emotionally vulnerable as those without. While DC's Superman was off blowing out stars with a sneeze, Marvel's Spider-Man was concerned about being bullied at college.

## **Course Exercise # 12:**

**Examine a  
piece of your  
fiction.**

**Are you jumping to  
the end too  
quickly? Or are you  
building up an  
emotional  
investment in your  
characters before  
the climax?**

**Make any  
adjustments you  
feel are needed.**



Certainly, stories have to present real-seeming external barriers to success for their protagonists —walls, prisons, political obstacles, murder, deceit— but unless those obstacles make those protagonists feel inwardly confused, incompetent, vulnerable, frustrated, afraid and so on — in other words, create vacuums for them— they won't resonate very much with readers.

Many, many authors make a critical mistake over this. By assuming that readers only want to witness external problems being resolved — bad guys blown up, traitors despatched, enemy troops killed and so forth — they fail to engage the deeper story which is happening **inside** their characters.

External problems are the outward game; the production of interior emotion is the real focus, or should be.

**The primary reason why readers read fiction is because the external worlds that authors present produce internal emotion.**



If a writer can create strings of convincing vacuums which convert reader attention into emotion, they will have done more than create a world, they will have built a bridge into the heart of readers.

We'll learn more about types of vacuum at your disposal as an author in a moment — but in terms of magnitude of vacuum, there's a kind which elevates stories into a league of their own, yielding Oscars and 'classic' status to some fiction.

Villains create so many vacuums that protagonists experience subjective feelings — and so, therefore, do readers. But vacuums which are also objectively wrong within the value framework of the story create tales which last in the cultural memory.



When Dracula goes around murdering people in Bram Stoker's gothic story, his actions are clearly morally wrong in the framework of his society (or any society); when Genly Ai is held in an Orgoreyn concentration camp in Le Guin's famous novel **The Left Hand of Darkness**, this is plainly morally reprehensible; Scrooge's miserly behaviour prior to the visitations of spirits in **A Christmas Carol** is meant to be viewed as objectively wrong.

Hamlet's avenging of his father's death resonates more deeply because his uncle is getting away with murder.

George Bailey needs to somehow overcome obstacles in **It's a Wonderful Life** because in doing so he's defining a better society than that being created by his enemy Potter.

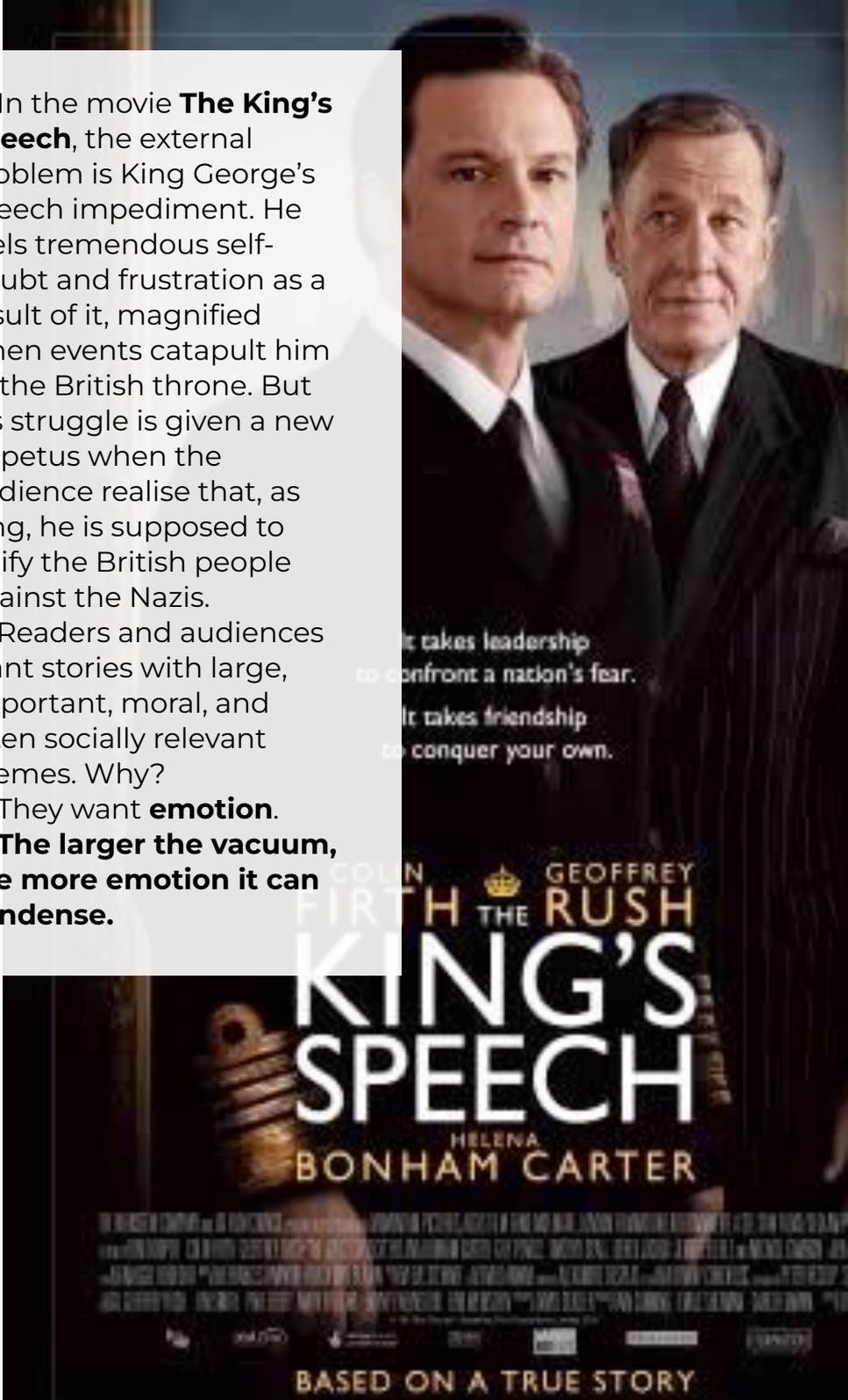


In the movie **The King's Speech**, the external problem is King George's speech impediment. He feels tremendous self-doubt and frustration as a result of it, magnified when events catapult him to the British throne. But his struggle is given a new impetus when the audience realise that, as king, he is supposed to unify the British people against the Nazis.

Readers and audiences want stories with large, important, moral, and often socially relevant themes. Why?

They want **emotion**.

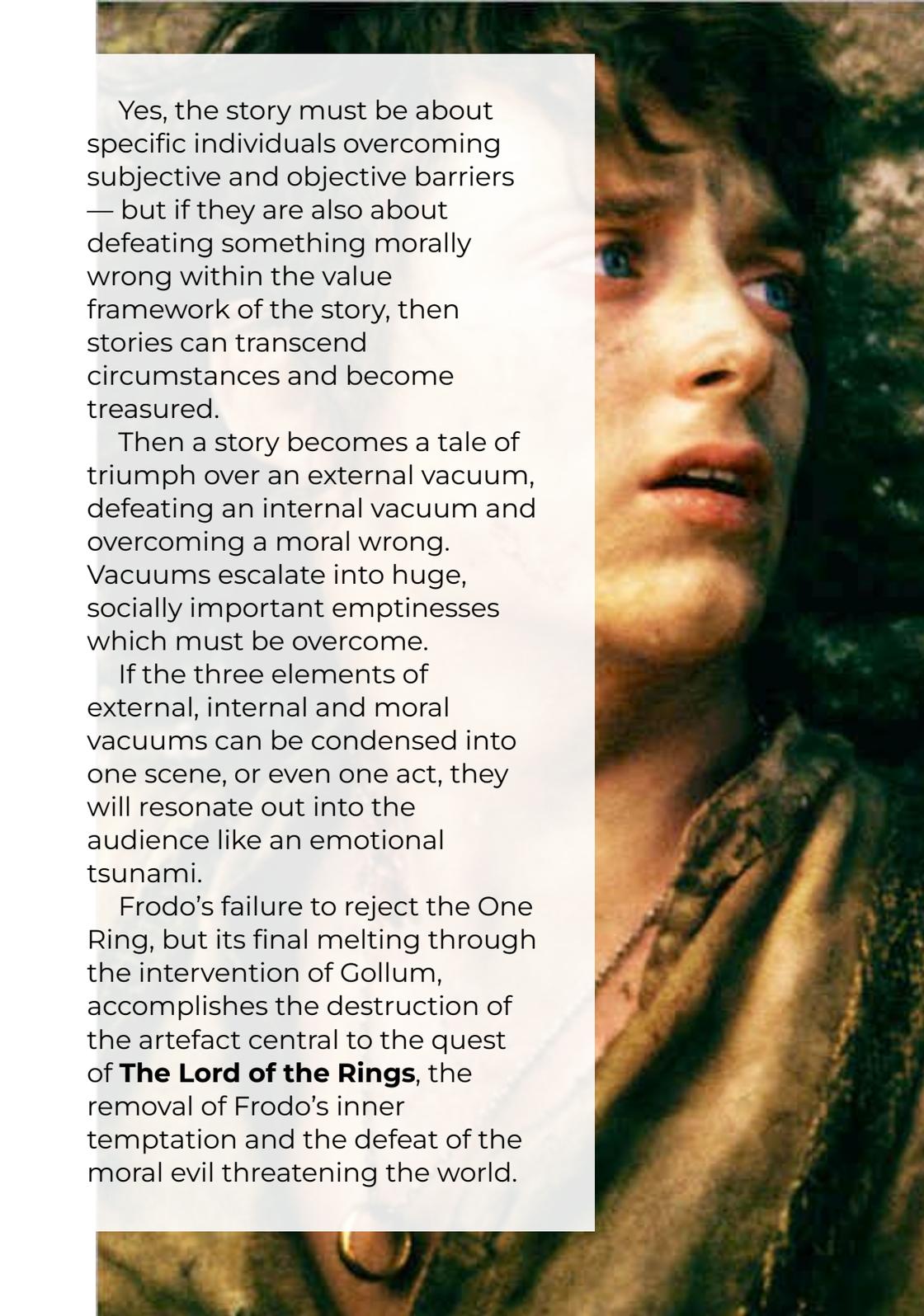
**The larger the vacuum, the more emotion it can condense.**



It takes leadership  
to confront a nation's fear.  
It takes friendship  
to conquer your own.

COLIN FIRTH THE KING'S SPEECH GEOFFREY RUSH  
HELENA BONHAM CARTER

BASED ON A TRUE STORY



Yes, the story must be about specific individuals overcoming subjective and objective barriers — but if they are also about defeating something morally wrong within the value framework of the story, then stories can transcend circumstances and become treasured.

Then a story becomes a tale of triumph over an external vacuum, defeating an internal vacuum and overcoming a moral wrong. Vacuums escalate into huge, socially important emptinesses which must be overcome.

If the three elements of external, internal and moral vacuums can be condensed into one scene, or even one act, they will resonate out into the audience like an emotional tsunami.

Frodo's failure to reject the One Ring, but its final melting through the intervention of Gollum, accomplishes the destruction of the artefact central to the quest of **The Lord of the Rings**, the removal of Frodo's inner temptation and the defeat of the moral evil threatening the world.

Tony Stark's snapping of the fingers of the Infinity Gauntlet in **Avengers: Endgame** gets rid of the armies which the Avengers are fighting, resolves Stark's own self-doubt once and for all, and triumphs over Thanos' death wish for the universe.

Elizabeth Bennett's rejection of the criticism of Lady Catherine du Bergh in **Pride and Prejudice** removes any obstacles to her engagement to Darcy, enables her to project her own self-worth, and frustrates the source of social ostracism and oppression in her environment.



## Levels of Generator

You can probably already see that the degree of presence of these elements give us at least three distinct levels of satisfaction when it comes to reading or watching fictional tales:

1. There is a simple story in which characters overcome a purely external

barrier. Two dimensional comic strip heroes outwitting cackling caricature villains abound, for example, and are popular, but have no real emotional longevity. The vacuums are simple, straightforward; the emotion is predictable, fleeting. These stories are a bit like junk food or sugar: instant, predictable 'hits' with no real nutritional value.



2. A deeper kind of story features protagonists triumphing over external obstacles and internal, emotional difficulties. These kind of tales form the bulk of the fiction which fills bookshelves all over the world. Any genre can be included: characters succeed in

obtaining love, or freedom, or happiness of some kind — but only for themselves and perhaps a few others. These include just about any popular novel or movie you can think of. Vacuums in these stories are a little more complex, and emotions are nuanced and longer-lasting.



3. The deepest sort of tale, though, is one on which the leading character defeats external obstructions, internal impediments and larger moral wrongs. From **Crime and Punishment** to **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**; from **Gawain and the Green Knight** to **War and Peace**; from **Dune** to **Robin Hood**; from

**To Kill a Mockingbird** to **Les Miserables**; these are the tales that say something meaningful to us not only about their story worlds but about our own. Vacuums grow from small beginnings to immense proportions and correspondingly produce large and lasting emotional effects



Of course, Tragedies and Ironies can also be about the same three levels of challenge, but in their cases the emotional resonance is due to the protagonists' failure to achieve an external target or an internal goal or a moral victory. Think **Macbeth** and **Hamlet**; think **Anna Karenina** or **Death of a Salesman**. In these kinds of stories, protagonists' vacuums remain empty, which results in powerful emotion too, of a negative kind.

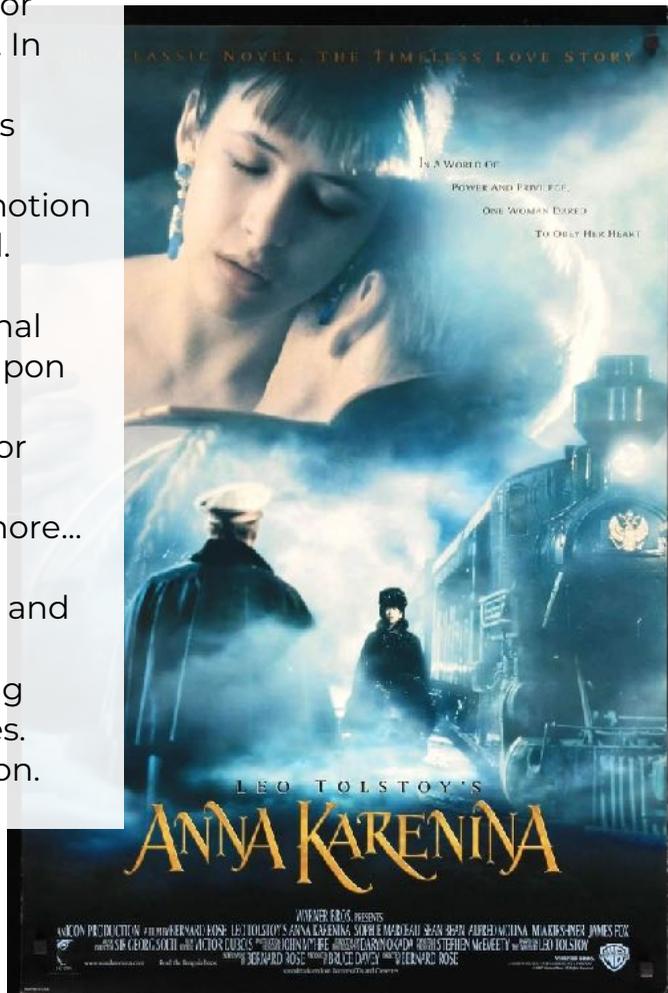
In all cases, the production of emotional power is dependent upon the manufacture of vacuums of one kind or another.

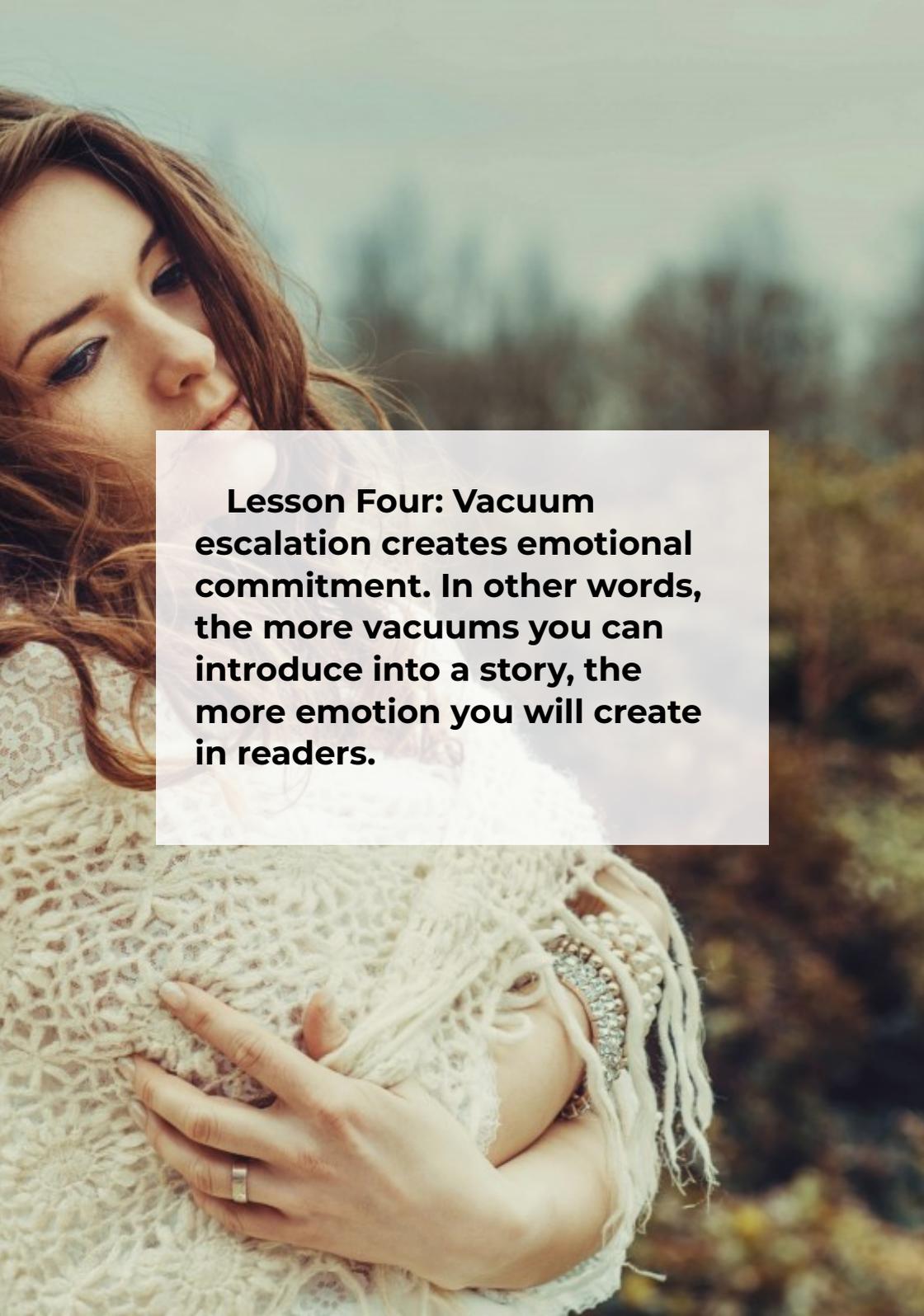
But there's much more...

We're building a machine, a generator, and there are more components. Including some very special ones.

That's our next lesson.

*In all cases, the production of emotional power is dependent upon the manufacture of vacuums of one kind or another.*



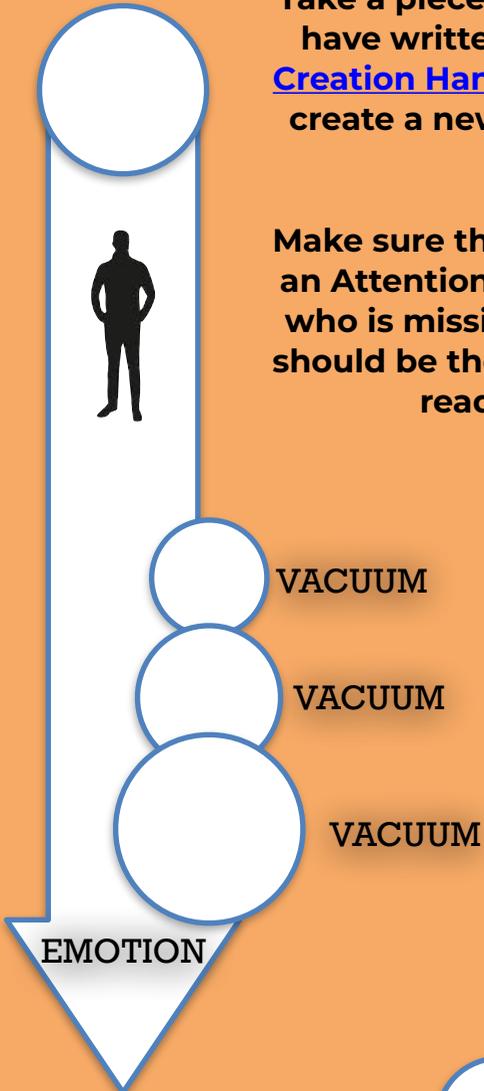


**Lesson Four: Vacuum escalation creates emotional commitment. In other words, the more vacuums you can introduce into a story, the more emotion you will create in readers.**

# Lesson Four Exercise: ATTENTION BECOMES EMOTION

Take a piece of fiction which you have written (or use [The Story Creation Handbook](#) if you wish to create a new story as required):

Make sure that your protagonist is an Attention Vehicle - a character who is missing something which should be there, enough to attract reader attention.

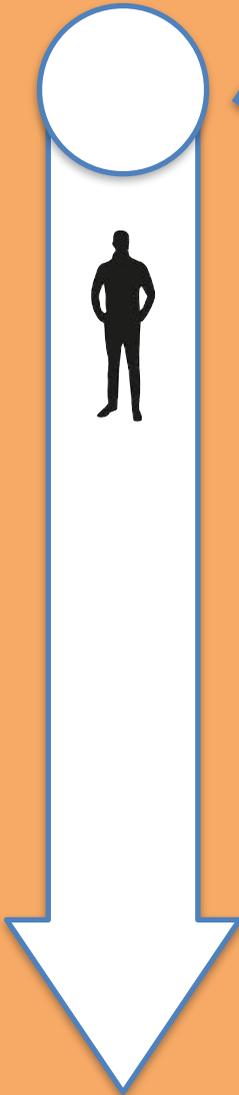


Add in a series of vacuums of increasing size to condense reader attention into emotion.

Author Message

Clarify your message.  
What will be the  
outcome of the tale?

As an experiment,  
jump to the  
conclusion of your  
story **WITHOUT**  
introducing any  
vacuums.



In other  
words, have  
**NOTHING**  
missing -  
everything is  
where it  
should be.

**What  
happens? Is  
any emotion  
generated?  
Make notes.**

Author Message

**Your next  
module:**

**BECOME A  
PROFESSIONAL  
AUTHOR  
COURSE**

**PART ONE:  
WRITE STORIES THAT WORK**

Lesson Five:  
Antagonists, Protagonists  
and Mentors

Grant P Hudson

