

The Clarendon House Library

The Clarendon House Library consists of a range of materials covering the fields of fiction writing, essay writing, personal relationships, education, small business and more. What makes these materials unique is that they are based on an understanding of key fundamentals which underlie each of these fields which, if applied correctly, can transform each one into a successful enterprise.

All the materials are easy to read, informal in style and get swiftly to the point that the reader is most interested in. Many come with charts, diagrams and templates so that the reader can rapidly adapt what is learned and apply it quickly to, for example, a small business, a work of fiction, an essay or a personal relationship.

Clarendon House Publications is a small, independent publisher based online and in the UK. It is for anyone interested in writing (including fiction, essays, copywriting and anything to do with Doctor Who, comics, J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, literature) and much more.

We hope that you will benefit from using these materials and look forward to receiving your feedback at

www.clarendonhousebooks.com

-The Editors

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CLARENDON HOUSE PUBLICATIONS

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PART OF THE GOLDEN AGE OF
INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING
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Grant P. Hudson was born in Sheffield, South Yorkshire. In 1967, his family emigrated to Australia where he was educated. Returning to England in 1993, he worked as a management consultant, personal counsellor and many other things. He taught literature in a small independent school in Sussex and became the Head Teacher there before going into semi-retirement in 2014.

He is the founder of Clarendon House Publications, an online venue for independent writers, self-publishers and others around the world, and the author of several books including *How Stories Really Work*.

He lives in Yorkshire with his wife and family.

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How to Succeed in Business as a Writer

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Introduction to the Whole Course

If you're really serious about writing, you need to know something about the secret language of fiction - how stories really work.

And you also need to realise that you don't need a publisher! In this Golden Age of Independent Publishing, you can do it all yourself - you just need some guidance at the beginning and then you'll be unstoppable!

As far as the fiction writing is concerned, we're not talking about three act structures, or even particularly about 'writer's journeys' and all the other kinds of advice that you'll find out there. This course is all about the *physics* that makes all those other things work in stories - the principles that lie behind almost all other advice you'll ever read about.

How powerful do your ideas have to be?

What makes characters attractive - and what doesn't?

How can you get *guaranteed* emotional commitment from readers?

What invisible force drives plots forward and glues the reader to each page?

How can you make sure that you don't disappoint your readers?

Without confident answers to these questions, you have very little chance of attracting readers.

Everything in this course is based on an extensive 40-year study of English literature and popular fiction, ranging from Shakespeare to contemporary movies like *Star Wars* or the Marvel superhero films or American television sit-coms. Work examined during the course includes that of master authors like Dickens, Austen, E. M. Forster, C. S. Lewis and many others.

Why are successful works of fiction successful? Their secrets are here.

With the *How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published!* e-course, you're getting a tailor-made, comprehensive programme of help for your fiction, installing successful features of the world's greatest writing, and including the key factors about

The Role of Ideas

Character Construction

Attracting Readers

Emotional Commitment

Plot Structuring

Quality of Style

Fulfilling Expectations

PLUS how to get your work actually published!

This course is based on a personal writing and publishing consultancy which normally takes six months to deliver, and is priced at £1,995.00. It's available so cheaply because I've tried to reduce every aspect of the consultancy to simple actions which you can do yourself. My eventual task is to make myself redundant! By the time you have finished this course, *you* will be the expert!

As the course continues, it becomes more and more 'tailor-made' to fit your needs - in other words, you start off with high quality and it gets even higher!

All submissions from the course are looked at 'live' using over 40 years of experience in studying fiction of all kinds - there is no algorithm that can provide you with the individual assessment of your writing that you need.

You will get feedback on how to use your ideas, how to develop your characters, how to attract readers and get emotional commitment from them, and a whole lot more.

In the second part of the course, you'll get into print for real and then learn how to market your own book to the masses!

That's right - the *How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published!* e-course will not only teach you about the secret language of fiction, how stories really work, the role of ideas, making characters attractive, getting emotional commitment from readers and so on - *but you'll also get published!*

Once you have your story ready, based on the advice you'll get in this course, you'll have a proof-read manuscript that has been edited into shape.

You'll get instructions on how to get your manuscript formatted, page numbered and so on.

Then you'll get published! To your specifications! i.e. what size of book, how many pages, what cover and so forth.

But the *How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published!* e-course doesn't stop there: you're getting a Marketing Programme with options to appear on Amazon, Barnes & Noble and so on

AND

TWO sets of bonus material:

How to Succeed in Business as a Writer

This bonus package, worth £1,995.00 in itself, is the simplified version of a business mentoring procedure especially adapted for writers. You'll learn the basics of how to operate your writing life as a business, how to manage readers as customers and much more.

AND

How to Achieve Your Personal Goals!

In this package, worth hundreds of pounds in its own right, you'll be taught how to apply the basics of success to yourself and your immediate family and friends.

The reason that I can include so much for a price that is relatively low in the independent publishing market is that I use Lulu.com, one of the world's best publishing platforms. The course will walk you through each step of the self-publishing process to make sure that you get the product you want.

Please understand that this e-course contains unique, exclusive material. You simply won't find this anywhere else on the planet because it's based on my own thirty years of research and work in the field of literature. It's been 'field-tested' with students over fifteen years; the first book about all this, *The Master Authors' Secret Handbook*, was written in response to student demand.

You can download a thousand books and guides to creative writing and you won't find this stuff anywhere - though in many cases the other books and guides are drawing from this material without realising it!

What will you take away by the end?

1. A profound knowledge and insight into how stories really work, based on the genius of master authors through the centuries: how to design attractive characters, how to glue readers to the page, how to build a workable plot and how to fulfil your readers' expectations.

2. A completed, published book! There's nothing quite like receiving in the post a professionally bound and formatted hard copy of your book. And you'll be able to order as many copies as you like and open the doors to the public finding and buying your work!

3. A Marketing Plan guiding you towards a better future as a writer

and much more!

What skills will you master?

1. You'll be able to energise your creative ideas to a point where you risk exploding!

2. You will learn the secrets of the master authors - ranging from Shakespeare and Dickens through to modern television and screenwriters.

3. You'll pick up the special skills needed to proofread and edit a work.

4. You'll be able to self-publish any kind of work you wish in the future.

5. You'll understand how marketing and sales work, what makes them tick and how to apply them to your book(s).

and so much more that I'd use up all the ink on the internet telling you about it.

Think about what you're doing, though. When you spent the money on this course, you expected something from it.

A. The first test is that you've read this far.

Maybe something I've said above has emotionally connected with you; maybe the things you will learn from doing this course match the things you feel you need to know more about.

B. The second test is more specific. Would you answer Yes or No to the following questions?

Do you wonder if you'll ever make it as a writer, even though you think you have something special to offer?

Do you feel overwhelmed by all the advice you've read about writing and getting published?

Do you worry about all the things you've read that you need to do - blogging, social media, selling your work and yourself, emailing people - to succeed as an independent writer?

Are you uncertain that you can write a story that really works for readers?

Are you worried that, even if you complete a workable story, publishing it will be a hill too steep to climb?

Despite all these obstacles, do you want to make a difference with your work?

Are you uncertain that what you're doing at the moment is right?

Do you feel a little lonely as a writer? Is it difficult to communicate to others about your writing dreams?

Do you have some inkling that you can do it but are simply going on hoping that this next year will be the one in which you succeed?

If you said Yes to most (or all) of the above, you can relax: you're in the right place. This course will help you.

This course is *not* a good fit if you're looking for a 'get rich quick' writing course, or a 'quick-fix' for your writing. The course won't work for you if you find that you are always coming up with reasons why things won't work, or if you're not a self-starter and don't follow through; or if your writing isn't a priority for you.

For those who answered Yes: I used to be just like you - overwhelmed by everything I thought I needed to do to write a book and get it published. I was always hopeful that I could make it happen, but after working for a few years, I realised I was on the wrong track. I had a faint inkling of what I was supposed to be doing, I knew that my current career wasn't it, and I was exhausted from working ten- to twelve-hour days and getting emotionally stretched from the stress.

If you're like I was, you want:

- to work hard, but from home, surrounded by home comforts, to your own schedule
- to bounce out of bed each morning, excited about the working day ahead
- the possibility of making money according to how hard you work.

I found a way to make all three of these happen, and through this course I want to help you to do the same.

Through this course, I can teach you how to get truly passionate about your writing and how to profit from it, so that every personal and professional goal you have comes within your grasp.

Some Details

- This is a twelve-week course, but you can do it in whatever units of time you wish.
- The first week is an overview and provides help in planning your time so that the rest of your life doesn't get in the way of you getting the most out of the course. Let's face it: unless you tackle this first, you just won't get anything done!
- Each week for twelve weeks, you'll work on **a new module with exercises to do**. All modules are contained in the complete course pack, a pdf downloadable document, so you can read and work on them wherever you are.
- You can **ask questions** during each module, and I'll answer them personally ASAP. Unlike some other courses that are out there, this isn't a case of you just getting the modules and then me abandoning you.
- During the course, there will be two **distinct feedback sessions by email**. During the feedback sessions, you can ask questions and get individual answers.
- During certain weeks, you'll be able to **submit your work for a tailor-made critique**.
- After the course ends, you'll have **access to the course with all its modules for as long as you like** in case you need to go through them more than once or can't work through them all during the course.
- On application at the end, you'll receive an invitation to join **a private Facebook group**, so that you can connect with other writers if you wish to. Through the comment sections, Facebook group and feedback sessions, you'll have the opportunity to connect with each other, get support and encouragement and get personal feedback.

What people said about my earlier book *The Master Author's Secret Handbook*:

'It's beautiful, informative, essential reading for anyone who wants to write fiction. It's almost a responsibility point, you're committing a crime if you don't get it into peoples' hands!!!' -B. R.
(Author)

What's In Each Week

Week 1: Building Your Creative Enthusiasm

Do you want your work to be more successful?

Would you like your life to be more enjoyable?

Do you want to wake up every morning excited to get writing?

Do you want readers addicted to your books?

If so, instilling passion into your writing life is a must. During this week, I'll cover:

- Why passion really matters and why you'll have trouble without it
- Why you should have clear values that guide your fiction, and why doing so will make your readers even more excited to buy from you and tell their friends about you
- How making a difference with your work will make you more motivated to succeed

In this week, we also move your writing life forward into as-yet-untapped regions.

- You'll get to know your ideal reader and why your success is dependent on getting to know him or her even better
- Get a snapshot of your strengths and weaknesses and rework your writing so that you utilise your strengths

And importantly:

- How all of the above just won't happen unless you take very practical and do-able steps to control your life so that other things don't get in the way of your writing!

Week 2: The Invisible Force

Now we get to the heart of the matter: the unseen force that motivates readers to turn the pages of a successful work of fiction.

This week, you'll learn:

- what a story *really* is and what it is actually doing to and for readers
- the magnetic power that draws readers into a work of fiction even before the introduction of any character

With lots of examples, case studies and exercises, you'll see how to fill your fiction with this power.

Week 3: Characters - What They Are and How to Create Them

Now that you have an idea of what it is that drives fiction forward, you're ready to learn how to use it to create a successful, attractive and powerful set of characters.

This week, you'll discover:

- what the thing called a 'character' *actually* is, and the secrets of how to rapidly build a convincing one that attracts readers
- what the archetypal characters are in any masterpiece of fiction and how they work together
- how to create a protagonist who isn't just a cipher or shallow copy of someone else's character
- the crucial role of the antagonist in a story and what all antagonists have in common (it's quite a lot, as you will see!)

During this week's lesson, you'll be asked to apply what you've learned to grow your own protagonist - and get feedback from me and any advice if needed.

Week 4: The Thing Called a Plot

Learn about the four mechanisms which together create an engine that drives readers forward.

This week, you'll gain an understanding of

- the things called 'plots', what they are and how they are actually made (rather than how you might suppose they are made)
- the 'nuclear reactor' that drives all successful stories through to their conclusion
- how the four basic genres - Epic, Tragedy, Irony and Comedy - are composed and how they work to create different effects

and much, much more.

Week 5: Case Studies

By now, you'll be burning to learn more. This week, you find out how master authors through the centuries have applied all of the above to create the masterworks which have survived the test of time.

From Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, to C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* to Dickens' *Great Expectations*, to the American TV series *Friends*, you'll get to appreciate the majesty of a working piece of fiction - and then you'll be coached to apply their triumphant features to your own work!

Week 6: A Summary of Progress

This module condenses everything you've learned so far into a Grand 50-point Checklist.

Here's where some students need the most help, however - they've learned the basics and seen how they have worked for others, and even tried to make it work for themselves. But it might not have been as easy as it looked!

This is when you get your **first tailor-made feedback session** and some hands-on help in applying the material to your own fiction.

You'll be asked to summarise any work you're currently writing and to send samples to me. In return, you'll get specific suggestions and input, normally charged for separately but included in the cost of the course.

Bonus:

What is it that you are attracting from readers when you develop a successful character and plot? Get a glimpse of the physics analogy which could change how you look at everything you're doing.

Week 7: The Five Stage Fiction Model

Now things are getting serious. This week, you'll start to put it all together and really grasp how ideas, characters, plots and writing style complement and support each other in ways that you have probably never imagined.

Exercises this week include word-and-sentence level work, studying what the master authors have done in the past to grip you as a reader and then replicating that in your own writing.

- Discover how a master author like J. R. R. Tolkien holds your attention through a whole crucial chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*
- Find out how Charles Dickens uses the language and structure of his short story 'The Signalman' to make sure it has maximum emotional impact

and much more!

Week 8: Fulfilling Expectations

The all-important stage of ending your story! How to make sure that you wrap things up in a satisfactory way based on what you promised in the beginning.

What exactly is your reader looking for?

Do you want to provide it? Or are you willing to withhold it a little longer and create more of an effect?

Take a look at how the great authors in history - and modern screenwriters - ensure maximum impact at the end of their stories.

Then work backwards through your entire story to revise it, align everything and focus on laser-precise results.

Week 9: Editing and Formatting a Manuscript

Here you'll learn how to proofread your work and how to set it up so that independent publication is as smooth as possible. There are tricks in this lesson that will save you hours of time and frustration!

Submit your finished work for a final checkover from me and any last recommendations, then get ready to publish!

Week 10: Publication Part 1

Step by step, this week walks you through the stage of actually submitting your manuscript and independently publishing it!

At each stage, if you tried to do this on your own, there are so many things that might put you off - but with the help of the course, you'll soon be ordering a proof copy of your very own book!

Hard to believe but true: within a few days of pressing the button, you'll get your very own copy of the book you've worked so hard to create!

Week 11: Publication Part 2

Now that you've proof-read a hard copy of your own book, you're ready for some final insights into the world of independent publishing. What about distribution? What about getting endorsements? What about pricing and revenue? It's all here!

Week 12: What's Next?

But the *How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published* e-course doesn't stop there: you'll get a Marketing Programme with options to appear on Amazon, Barnes & Noble and so on

AND as mentioned above

you'll receive TWO sets of bonus material:

How to Succeed in Business as a Writer

This bonus package, worth £1,995.00 in itself, is the simplified version of a business mentoring procedure especially adapted for writers. You'll learn the basics of how to operate your writing life as a business, what to watch out for with employees, how to manage readers as customers and much more.

AND

How to Achieve Your Personal Goals!

In this high-quality package, worth £249.00 in its own right, you'll be taught how to apply the basics of success to yourself and your immediate family and friends.

You'll also get:

An Invitation to a Private Facebook Group

You'll have the chance to connect with the other creative writers in this course. Give each other encouragement and feedback through the Facebook group.

How Much Time Will It Take

Worried about the time commitment?

In the first part of the course there are tools for managing time and other commitments, but remember that you don't have to do this course in twelve weeks if you don't want to. The weekly modules are yours - you can manage them however you wish. I'll still be around!

How long does each module take? That's difficult to answer: for someone starting from scratch, quite a few hours; for someone who already has some fiction written, less time.

Let's work this out: an average novel is about 80,000 words long.

If you're a reasonably fast typist, that's about 100 hours of work.

Think about these factors, though:

a) you won't be writing the novel all at once. There are some things to learn first, and a bit of practice involved.

b) once you've learned a few vital things, you'll save tons of time later, as well as bucketloads of frustration and dissatisfaction with your own writing.

In Week 1, when we look at time management, you learn tricks to manage your time and to make the most fantastically productive use of time you didn't even know you had. I don't mean that you will be writing in your sleep - but I do mean that you will be writing thousands of words when you didn't think you had 'enough time'.

So 'How much time will I be spending on the course each week?' is too subjective to answer. Obviously, you will need some hours. But remember, if you don't get a week's module done in full, you can pick it up the following week. This isn't school; no one is breathing down your neck.

At the same time, this isn't just you on your own, either. You need some self-discipline, yes, but you will have me around, asking you how you are doing from time to time.

There is a *huge* amount of material in this course - much, much more than a normal writing course. If you're not open to trying new things, or if you have excuses for why you're not getting things done or why things aren't working in your writing, it will take longer. Be ready to take real action and rearrange a few things.

Have a question that isn't covered here? Simply email me at

grant@clarendonhousebooks.com

and I'll get back to you ASAP.

Frequently Asked Questions

When does the course start and finish?

The course starts as soon as you sit down to do it. It is a completely self-paced e-course - you decide when you start and when you finish and how much time you spend on it. You can lock yourself away and do the whole twelve weeks' worth of work if you like - but I recommend spacing things out a little and doing the course over the twelve weeks.

How long do I have access to the course?

You have unlimited access to the whole course for as long as you like - across any and all devices you own. You can download the materials and even print them if you like, so you can keep them offline.

What if I am unhappy with the course?

It's hard to imagine that you would be, but if you are, contact me in the first 30 days and I'll give you a full refund. Just email:

grant@clarendonhousebooks.com

Ready to begin?

Good luck!

-Grant P. Hudson B.A. (Hons.)

Week 2: The Invisible Force

The Heart of the Matter

Vacuum Power

Your Ideal Reader

Empowering Your Fiction

In this week, we move your writing life forward into as-yet-untapped regions.

You'll get a snapshot of your strengths and weaknesses and be able to rework your writing so that you utilise your strengths.

But now we get to the heart of the matter: the unseen force that motivates readers to turn the pages of a successful work of fiction.

This week, you'll learn:

- who your ideal reader is and why your success is dependent on getting to know him or her even better.
- what a story *really* is and what it is actually doing to and for readers.
- the magnetic power that draws readers into a work of fiction even before the introduction of any character.

You'll see how to fill your fiction with this power.

WARNING: If you are purchasing this module separately from the rest of the course, welcome, but beware! You won't get the complete benefit of the 'How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published' e-course unless you do the whole thing! By all means extract what wisdom you can from this week's 'episode' - but take the plunge and get the whole course as soon as you can!

You can get it [here](#).

(You can get Week 1 [here](#).)

The Heart of the Matter

I'm going to assume a couple of things here from last week's lesson:

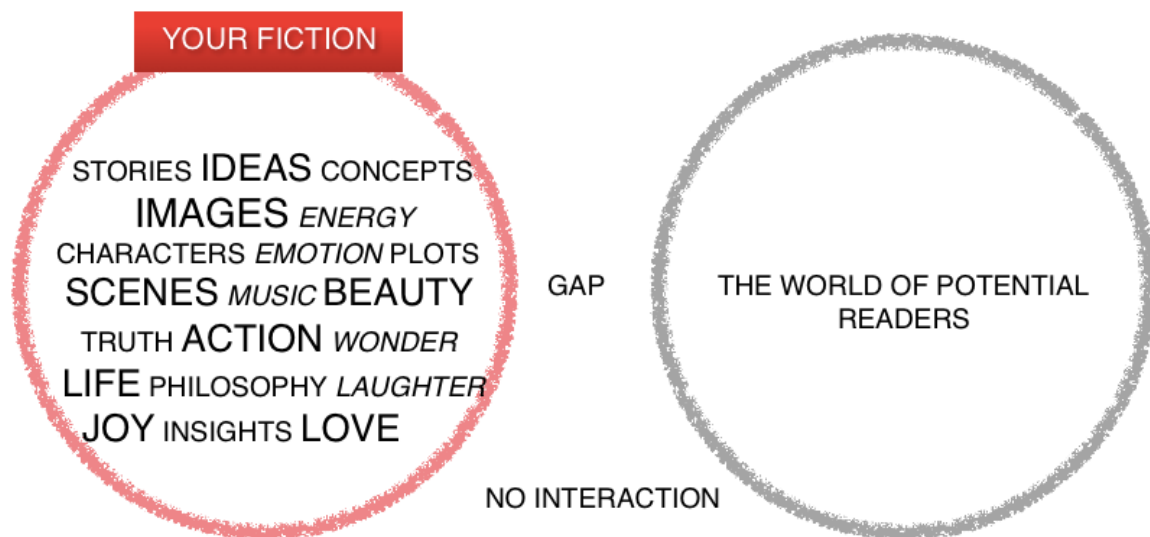
1. That you have some kind of work of fiction either written or swimming about in your head and
2. That it involves something that you want a reader to experience.

These are fairly safe assumptions. You may not yet have fully come to terms with **Hyper-Critical Situation # 1: You're Not Writing** - perhaps you haven't yet managed to get enough out of your head to constitute a piece of work. But at the very least, if you are reading this week's module, you've got something that you're working on, even if it's still trapped inside.

And based on last week's understanding that fiction is, at its best, is a way of conveying something to a reader, you've probably started to think about what it is that you want your readers to experience.

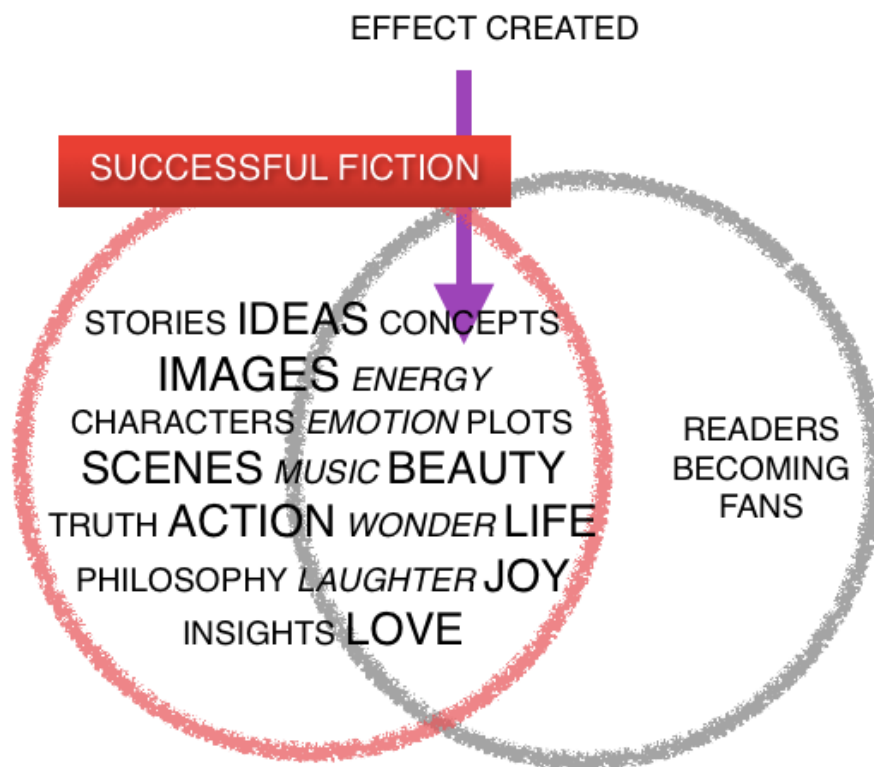
Perhaps you've never thought about 'creating effects on readers' like that before. Most would-be writers haven't - indeed, many actual writers haven't. But it's true to say that the best fiction out there has one thing in common: *it successfully conveyed something to a reader*. That 'something' might be joy, elation or a sense of victory; it might have been sadness, pity or a feeling of loss. Perhaps it was a sense of desperation or despair; perhaps it was laughter, relief or contentment. Or maybe it was a combination of many of these things and others, subtle or unsubtle.

Undeniably, though, all successful fiction conveys *something*. The least successful fiction is merely the ramblings of the author, and fails to connect to any reader or to bring about any transfer of knowledge, emotion or thought. You end up with this, as we saw last week:



Conversely, the most successful fiction feels as though it is taking place in our own minds rather than that of an author whom we have never met; it connects with us on levels we didn't know we had; and from it we gain insight, awareness and ideas that are hard to describe in any way other than through the story itself.

That looks something like:



To put it another way:

A successful piece of fiction exactly matches needs in a reader, even if the reader wasn't aware of those needs in the first place.

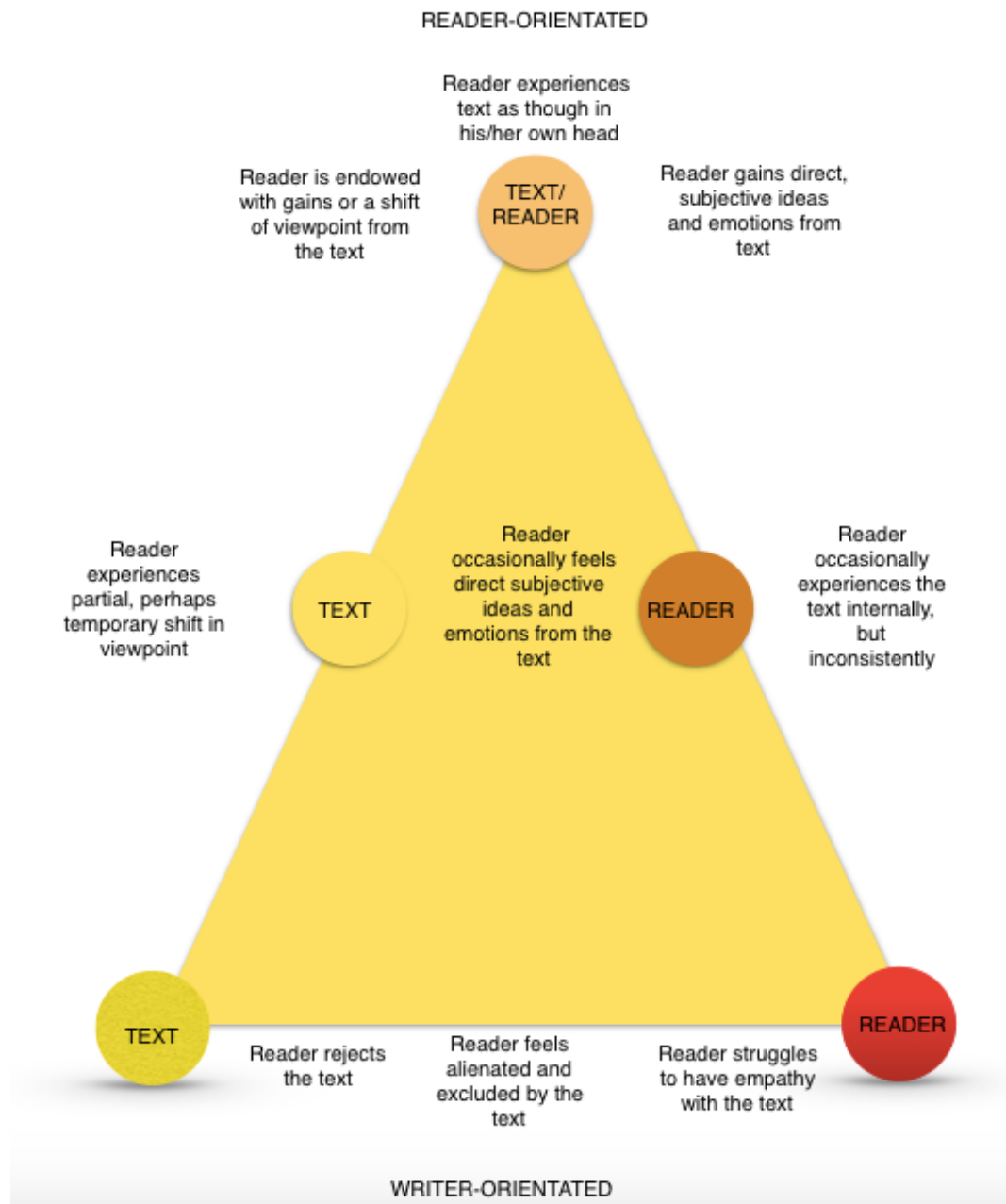
It has to match the needs before it can be called a success.

That might include a need for a whole range of vicarious experiences; it might be a need for communion with our fellow human beings, for emotions, for insights, for wonder, for sensations, for escapism or for confrontation or anything in-between. When the need is matched, the fiction is successful. The reader may not be fully conscious of his or her needs - in fact, in most cases, readers are not aware of these needs to any great degree - but nevertheless the needs are there.

What's the difference between success and failure in fiction?

***The difference between success and failure in fiction is that
successful fiction is written for readers;
failing fiction is written for writers.***

Take a look at this scale. Any work of fiction lies somewhere on this Spectrum of Fiction:



The game of this course is to move your fiction up this spectrum, so that each and every piece of fiction you construct is achieving powerful effects upon readers.

How can this be done? Partly by encouraging you to 'unlearn what you have learned', as Master Yoda says in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Fiction is a fantastic, wonderful and magical machine which can take you just about anywhere and have you experience just about anything - but it's a machine, nonetheless.

Like a machine, it has component parts, and like a machine, it only works if those components are all present and are assembled in the right sequence. Like a machine, fiction only works if it has the right fuel. Like a machine, fiction can break down unless all of these things are kept smoothly running by the writer.

Are we talking about things like words and grammar? They are a small part of this, less than 1%. We are talking about the principles that lie *behind* the 'hero's journey' or the three act structure or

climaxes and so forth. We are talking about concepts which, once you properly appreciate them, will change the way you look at stories forever. These things are not mystical; we're talking about understanding the things that lie behind great works of fiction all over the world.

Though all creative works are very different in character and nature, *they all follow patterns which can be understood and managed.*

In learning those patterns you are learning the *secret language of fiction.*

Then, in studying what drives the reader and the text together so that they meet at the top of the triangle above, you are learning about the *hidden force that attracts readers.*

The end product of a successful work of fiction is to bring together the reader and the reader's needs or wants in an exact match.

Many writers, in ignorance of this, tend to believe that readers are going to be somehow interested in what the writer has to offer regardless of their needs. They build a 'writer-centric' model. And then grow more and more frantic as it fails. 'Fiction' that is writer-centric appears to be mainly just creative writing put together by people in the hope that someone will read it. But you can't just create pieces of writing in whatever way you like and expect them to be read.

Whether you want your reader to be excited by your fast-paced political thriller or to walk away with a changed view about a social theme or to contemplate an experience with a warm glow of satisfaction, you need to ensure that *your reader follows you all the way*, that you 'get' what he or she wants, and that you provide *exactly that*. Otherwise you'll end up very much at the bottom of the Spectrum of Fiction above.

The effects you want to create have to match reader needs to be successful.

This course is about being able to build a properly effective 'reader-centric' piece of fiction.

Does this mean that you have to write for others only?

That you are somehow prevented from writing for your own satisfaction?

No. What it means is that you will understand, perhaps for the first time, what it is that readers need - *including yourself as a reader*. Your fiction will be immediately transformed into a more effective, more powerful and more interesting piece of work *for you as well as for other potential readers.*

How do you make sure that the effects you want to create find the audience that needs them?

The Component Parts of a Successful Text

When you learned English, you were taught about the component parts of the language: nouns, verbs, adjectives and so on. Then you went on to learn how to make them work together so that you could communicate.

Now that you are learning the secret language of fiction, you need to understand its basic components. Once you have understood these, you will be able to learn how to make them work together to create a working story that attracts readers.

1. Ideas

As touched upon in Week 1, ideas are key. You need to have an idea for a story, but also to have ideas that will drive your story. Much more on this will follow later.

2. Characters

It's not enough to have an idea as a writer, even if it's a good one, if your work is to be more than just a disguised essay about ideas.

One of these primary things is the item we currently know by the term 'character'.

'A character? That's just a person in a story - someone that things happen to, or who makes things happen, right?'

Yes, but there's so much more to this that, once you have studied **Week 3: Characters - What They Are and How to Create Them**, you will never see a single character in a story in the same way again!

3. Creating Desire

It sounds too glib and simple, but readers have to really be engaged with a story for it to work in conveying your ideas. Increasing the desire of the reader produces the required level of commitment.

There have to be within the story fundamental *attractors* which power the whole thing. No story, no matter how great the idea or characters, can survive longer than one page without these things. What exactly they are and how they function is given in detail in later weeks, but you're going to learn their core principles shortly.

When you take what you have known up until now as *character*, and then combine it with what you're about to find out about *attractors*, you have in your hands explosive material.

Even having a slight grasp of these attractors is a key step in bringing your fiction to life.

4. Emotional Commitment

What desire produces is *commitment*. Commitment leads to a willingness on the reader's part to *forgo* something. Readers in fact give writers permission to create effects on them. With some readers, this is easier than with others. Some readers resist having an effect of any kind created on them. It makes you wonder why they read at all - but they do, and if they do, you can get them to *commit*.

Outwardly, this is the cash the reader pays to buy the book; inwardly, this is the emotional or spiritual commitment that the reader invests in the work because they see or feel a return on their investment. Without this capacity to obtain a deep commitment from the reader, a story will fail. Even if you've managed to hold the reader's attention until the end of the tale, the book will be cast aside and probably never read again.

If you want to write something which is *loved*, which is read *and re-read*, which actually has an *effect* on readers, which is then recommended to others, you need to be able to extract commitment from them.

5. Building a Plot

In any fiction writing the story has to be built, created, assembled, in a particular sequence. The writer has to actually put the time in and put the words onto a page or screen. This is the 'coalface', the interface between writer and reader, where words appear in the right order so that what the writer originally envisaged actually takes shape in the mind of the reader.

Within the tale itself, the plot has to move the reader forward and deliver an effect. Even in Jane Austen's *Emma*, for example, which students sometimes complain about as the novel in which 'nothing happens', there is a strand or sequence of motion or movement, commonly appearing as *events*, through which the reader moves towards the conclusion, where the final impact of the work is delivered.

Call this 'craft' or 'structure' or 'plot' - it's the series of choices, made by the writer, which actively and carefully shift the reader's attention around over a period of time.

All stories have Time in common, whether in prose or drama or even poetry: there is a movement, a progression from one thing to the next. But it is very much *their own time*, not necessarily - in fact, rarely - the time of the world around the book. This is the playing field where the writer furnishes what the reader wants, even if the reader doesn't know it yet.

There are specific plot mechanisms - four, in fact - that a successful writer uses to hold the reader gripped until the end of the story. You've never heard of them before in this way - but you have fallen under their spell every time you have read, heard or seen a story that has had an effect on you.

As a matter of fact, they're working on you right now, and this isn't even a work of fiction!

6. Fine Tuning

As the quality of the cup of tea must be assessed, so must any writer have some way of judging the quality of what he or she is producing and delivering and ensuring that it matches the readers' needs. This sounds like common sense, but it becomes a little more opaque when you ask yourself 'By what criteria are we judging how close we are to a reader's needs?'

And 'What exactly *are* a reader's needs?'

Within the story itself, how does the aspect of quality manifest itself? What is happening on each page that tells us that we are getting nearer and nearer to (or further and further away from) what was desired in the first place? You're going to know all about this by the end of this course.

7. Fulfilment

And when you reach the right level of quality, you approach the readers' needs and then fulfil them. Sounds simple, but it's only easy when you know what you're doing. Just as when you first learn to speak and write in English, you'll be judged by the effectiveness of your communication: does your intention reach the reader? And does it match with what the reader expects (even if they couldn't verbalise that expectation before it was met)?

Many aspects of this are fully explored in coming weeks. You'll learn how to use specific tools to ensure that your original effect actually arrives at the reader with full force and is welcomed.

Strengths and Weaknesses in Your Existing Fiction

Before we begin, let's take a look at your existing fiction and see if we can place it on the Spectrum of Fiction above.

Answer each of the following questions as honestly and thoroughly as you can and at the end you will be able to see exactly which areas of your writing are doing well and which are letting you down. You will notice that some of the questions address similar issues from slightly different angles. This is so that the analysis can get an overview of your concerns and a more accurate picture of where your fiction's strengths and weaknesses lie.

Of course, this is all based on your viewpoint and your answers, but because of the multiple questioning, it will produce a vital snapshot of where things are at right now.

If you can't print this page off, or don't want to, simply note your answer to each question on a piece of paper, taking care to number each one. Mark the one which you feel is most appropriate in response to each question.

MOSTLY YES = Y

SOMETIMES, MAYBE OR PARTLY = M

MOSTLY NO = N

1. As a writer, do you have well-laid-out plans for the next 5 to 10 years?

Y M N

2. Are you finding it difficult to develop convincing or attractive characters?

Y M N

3. Is your writing effectively bringing in droves of readers?

Y M N

4. Do you experience problems getting emotional commitment from readers?

Y M N

5. Are you happy with the plot structure of your work?

Y M N

6. Is your writing style of sufficient quality?

Y M N

7. Do your readers quickly appreciate what your work 'is all about'?

Y M N

8. Do you find it easy to set writing goals and work towards them?

Y M N

9. Do characters often seem weak or ineffective?

Y M N

10. Are you attracting lots of readers?

Y M N

11. Do you struggle to inject emotion into the story?

Y M N

12. Do you experience plot construction problems?

Y M N

13. Do you monitor the quality of your writing in some way?

Y M N

14. Are you able to deliver a powerful ending?

Y M N

15. Does your writing regularly meet targets?

Y M N

16. Do you have solid, realistic characters?

Y M N

17. Do you feel that trying to attract readers is a waste of time?

Y M N

18. Are you struggling emotionally with your work?

Y M N

19. Are you concerned about the motion of the plot?

Y M N

20. Do you have a definite style -a way of effectively communicating with readers?

Y M N

21. Do you suffer from problems to do with the ending of the story?

Y M N

22. Do you think your fiction reflects your vision of life?

Y M N

23. Are your characters generally working out?

Y M N

24. Have you got an active way of attracting readers and holding their attention effectively?

Y M N

25. Does your fiction have healthy emotional content which works on readers?

Y M N

26. Do you often make significant changes to the plot?

Y M N

27. Do you get many rejections?

Y M N

28. Do you set up the story well and then have trouble delivering?

Y M N

29. Are you in apathy about your writing?

Y M N

30. Are you confident that your characters have appeal?

Y M N

31. Are you troubled by a loss of readers?

Y M N

32. Do you feel your emotional content is about right?

Y M N

33. Is the plot exciting and effective in holding the reader's attention?

Y M N

34. Are there often questions from readers about what a particular sentence or section means?

Y M N

35. Is it hard to see how to wrap the story up?

Y M N

36. Are you happy with your writing?

Y M N

37. Do you have a method of keeping track of your characters' motivations?

Y M N

38. Do you feel that your story could be more targeted to a particular audience?

Y M N

39. Are you anxious about emotion in the story?

Y M N

40. Could the plot be speeded up?

Y M N

41. Have you developed a unique writing style?

Y M N

42. Do you have a number of ways of concluding the story?

Y M N

43. Are you overloaded or stressed by your writing?

Y M N

44. Do you understand your main characters' motivations entirely?

Y M N

45. Do you understand your readers?

Y M N

46. Does your story contain hardly any emotion?

Y M N

47. Have you ever 'walked through' the plot to make sure it makes sense?

Y M N

48. Is there a way of improving your writing style?

Y M N

49. Does your story conclude in such a way that readers have to work out their own ending?

Y M N

50. Do you have well-developed minor characters?

Y M N

51. Are your characters hard to motivate?

Y M N

52. Are you spending enough time on looking at things from the reader's point of view?

Y M N

53. Is it hard to make emotion work in your story?

Y M N

54. Are you confident enough in your style?

Y M N

55. Do you regularly review your ending to see if changes need to be made?

Y M N

56. Is your writing well known?

Y M N

57. Is there at least one character you are completely happy with?

Y M N

58. Do you write fiction easily?

Y M N

59. Do you have an effective set of characters?

Y M N

60. Is the emotional level lower than it should be?

Y M N

61. Is your plot disorganised?

Y M N

62. Is there room for improvement?

Y M N

63. Is your ending easily understandable even if it was translated into another language?

Y M N

64. Can you see yourself writing fiction for much longer?

Y M N

65. Do your characters work well together?

Y M N

66. Are you always worried about attracting readers?

Y M N

67. Is there an excess of emotion in the work?

Y M N

68. Do you have enough characters to produce a good story?

Y M N

69. Have you reached the top of your game?

Y M N

70. Is your writing universal (appealing to almost anyone)?

Y M N

Look over your answers and make sure that you have answered them as honestly and as accurately as possible, then proceed to scoring your answers.

Scoring System

Here is the score sheet for your answers.

A. Carefully total up your overall score. You may be tempted to adjust some of your answers based on what you will now see as the 'correct' answer. Please don't! Only an honest assessment will be of any use to you.

	Y	M	N
1	10	5	0
2	0	5	10
3	10	5	0
4	0	5	10
5	10	5	0
6	10	5	0
7	10	5	0

8	10	5	0
9	0	5	10
10	10	5	0
11	0	5	10
12	0	5	10
13	10	5	0
14	10	5	0
15	10	5	0
16	10	5	0
17	0	5	10
18	0	5	10
19	0	5	10
20	10	5	0
21	0	5	10
22	10	5	0
23	10	5	0
24	10	5	0
25	10	5	0
26	0	5	10
27	0	5	10
28	0	5	10
29	0	5	10
30	10	5	0
31	0	5	10
32	10	5	0
33	10	5	0
34	0	5	10
35	0	5	10
36	10	5	0
37	10	5	0
38	0	5	10
39	0	5	10
40	0	5	10
41	10	5	0
42	10	5	0
43	0	5	10
44	10	5	0
45	10	5	0
46	0	5	10
47	10	5	0
48	10	5	0
49	10	5	0
50	10	5	0
51	0	5	10
52	10	5	0
53	0	5	10
54	10	5	0
55	10	5	0
56	10	5	0
57	10	5	0
58	10	5	0
59	10	5	0

60	0	5	10
61	0	5	10
62	0	5	10
63	10	5	0
64	10	5	0
65	10	5	0
66	0	5	10
67	10	5	0
68	10	5	0
69	0	5	10
70	0	5	10

B. Now add up the scores for each question as follows:

Question 1 + 8 + 15 + 22 + 29 + 36 + 43 + 50 + 57 + 64 = _____

This gives you a score for elements in your writing life such as planning, coordination, management and your personal vision but also touches on the core ideas which you have developed (or not) to power your story.

C. Add up the totals for the following questions:

Question 2 + 9 + 16 + 23 + 30 + 37 + 44 + 51 + 58 + 65 = _____

This gives you a score for the stage of development of character motivations and other fundamental elements.

D. Add up these totals:

Question 3 + 10 + 17 + 24 + 31 + 38 + 45 + 52 + 59 + 66 = _____

This gives you a score for the area of reader acquisition and anything to do with attracting attention.

E. Add up these totals:

Question 4 + 11 + 18 + 25 + 32 + 39 + 46 + 53 + 60 + 67 = _____

This gives you a score for anything to do with commitment from readers. How effective is your fiction in grabbing and holding reader attention?

F. Add up these totals:

Question 5 + 12 + 19 + 26 + 33 + 40 + 47 + 54 + 61 + 68 = _____

This gives you a score for anything to do with the actual production of stories themselves, including the delivery of a workable plot. Are elements working together to produce a viable plot which moves the reader forward?

G. Add up these totals:

Question 6 + 13 + 20 + 27 + 34 + 41 + 48 + 55 + 62 + 69 = _____

This gives you a score for anything to do with the quality of the writing, or making it fit the readers' needs exactly at a word and sentence level.

H. Add up these totals:

Question 7 + 14 + 21 + 28 + 35 + 42 + 49 + 56 + 63 + 70 = _____

This gives you a score for anything to do with the overall effect, or making sure that your initial idea actually gets to the reader and is well-received.

The analysis can now give you a graph of each aspect of your writing and its relation to other aspects.

Look at the following example graph.

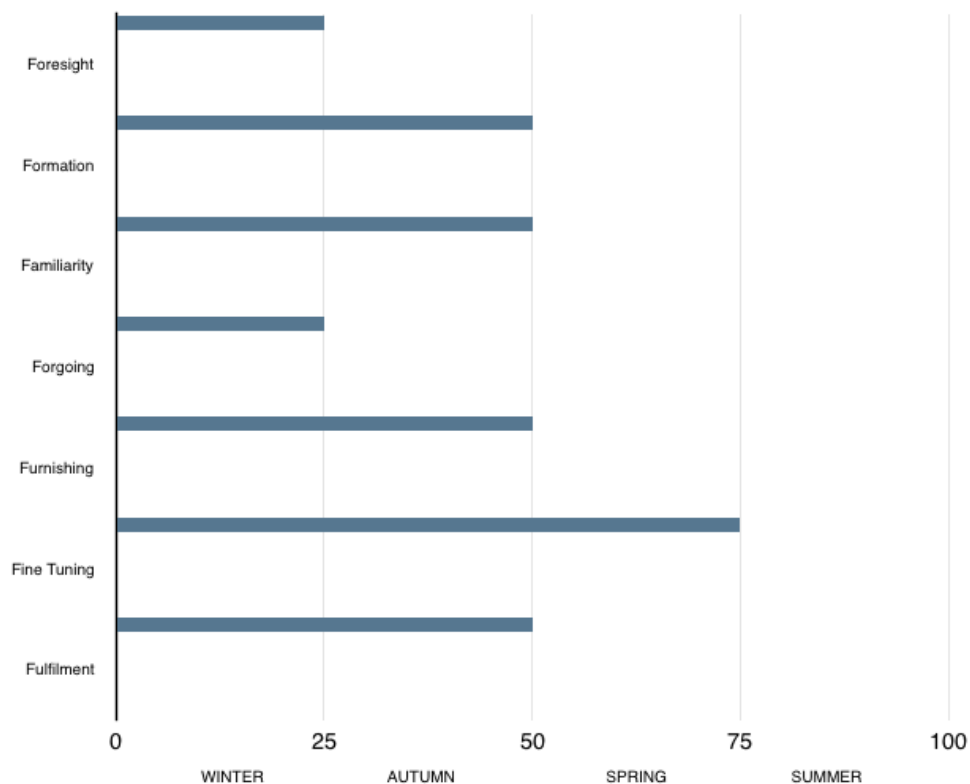
Note that the right part of the graph, between 75 and 100, what could be called a 'Summer' position, would be the best position for any writing or any of these aspects of a piece of fiction. Here, everything comes together: ideas are strong, even profound; characters are well-constructed and perhaps even beautiful; emotional commitment occurs relatively easily, but without becoming sentimental. We commit to the story, we even love the story and it seems to fulfil needs in us as readers that we didn't even know we had. These are the great stories, including the re-read classics, the mighty works of prose and drama which are immortal. These are the tales that take us to the heights.

Between 50 and 75 would be the next best position, the 'Spring' position. Here, almost everything comes together: ideas are good, though perhaps not wide-ranging; characters are sufficient to attract our attention; emotional pull exists, but is perhaps over-stated in places. We commit to the story to a degree, and it serves us well. These are the good stories. We may re-read them, we may be very fond of them despite their flaws.

Between 25 and 50 would be a worsening position, or 'Autumn'. Stories start to fail here: ideas are noticeably lacking or slightly awry; characters are weak or improperly constructed; readers feel detached. Reading these tales feels a bit like a chore - readers resist commitment. Nothing has much impact and it doesn't seem like the writer is that interested in us. The work lacks power, simply put. We take away little sense of fulfilment, and are critical of the work once we're done.

And obviously between 0 and 25 would be the worst position, 'Winter'. These tales strike us as dire; they lack reality, characters are unattractive not because they are meant to be but because they have been poorly constructed; we reject the story almost entirely, find the plot difficult to engage with or follow and the whole thing is a real effort to get through. Far from serving any needs we may have as readers, these stories seem lost in their own world and communicate little of any significance to us, even if we try very hard.

Obviously, the thing to aim for is the right part of the graph, 'Summer': something that will last and live in people's hearts.



Firstly, in the example above, look at Column 1: ideas are weak, perhaps half-formed or unclear even to the writer.

Somehow, in Column 2, the writer has come up with characters that work to a degree, though they lack the power to get into the top half of the graph.

Column 3 shows a similar level of desire - the story is attracting some sympathy, but not enough. This is shown in Column 4 - readers, or the writer himself or herself, hasn't committed sufficiently to the piece as a whole. This pale level of emotional investment means that the work is barely surviving - it lacks life and meaning.

Nevertheless, as we can see in Columns 5 and 6, something is happening: the story hangs together (just) and some readers at least feel that their needs are being met as the tale goes along. But Column 6 doesn't get to the top half of the graph.

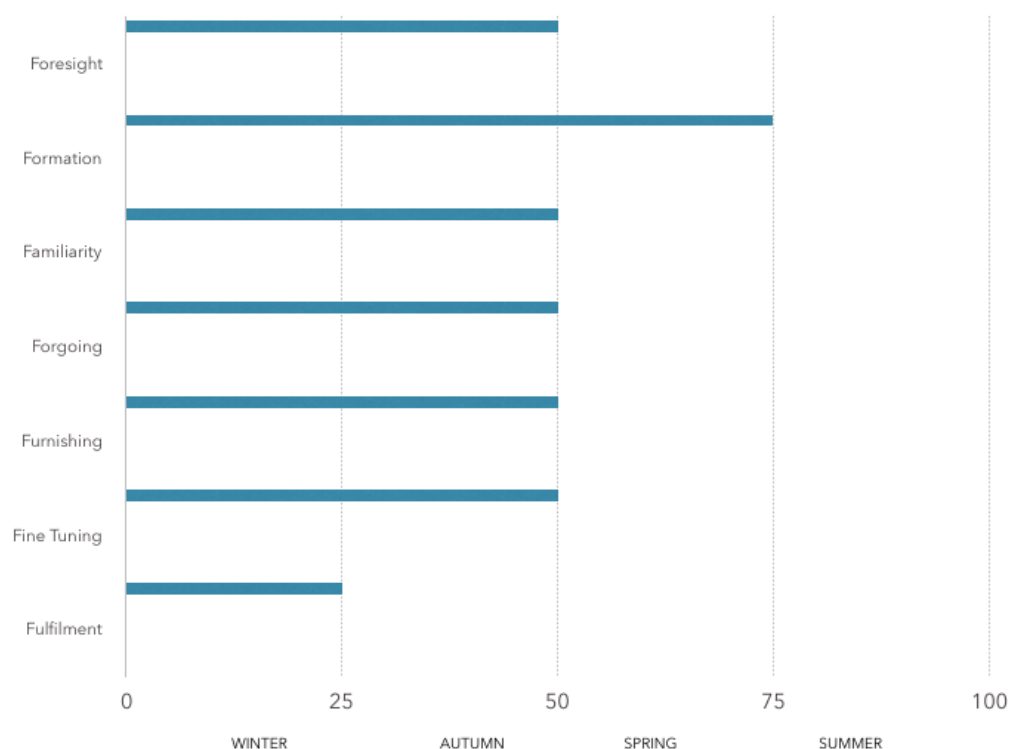
In summary, it looks like this writer is struggling to produce a reasonable story with a lot of work going on to keep it running, but the overall product isn't having a powerful enough effect on enough people, perhaps not even on the writer, leaving emotional commitment low.

It's a common kind of graph: what it shows is a writer working hard but without knowing any of the fundamentals outlined in this course.

Feeling this to be the case, the majority of writers judge that the remedy is to *insert more into* the story - more scenes, more action, more witty dialogue. The truth is that the story would benefit from *having things taken out of it*. But more on that in a moment.

Stringing a good story together based on what you feel the reader wants to read is easy enough; creating living characters who extract a meaningful emotional commitment from readers and developing a story which satisfies needs that the reader didn't even know he or she had? That's not so easy - not at least until this course.

Another example graph follows.



In this writing, we can see that, while the writer's ideas are still weak (as shown by the 'Foresight' column) and the plot is flagging (as shown by the 'Furnishing' column), there are relatively strong characters ('Formation' column) producing just enough reader commitment to get the reader reading the book which then just about adequately produces a result.

What should this writer concentrate on?

It looks as though there are sufficiently well-developed characters to produce some reader commitment, so boosting the power of the plot should push the whole piece up into the top band.

Weak ideas right at the start tend to produce fiction which, while satisfactory, will be cast aside and probably never read again. Think of the 'pot boiler', the mass-produced thriller, the near-copies of great books - these are the works which sustain a reader through a reasonable story using certain techniques, but in the end fail to produce the strong emotional impact or even life-transforming sensation of greater works. Core ideas are weak, in other words.

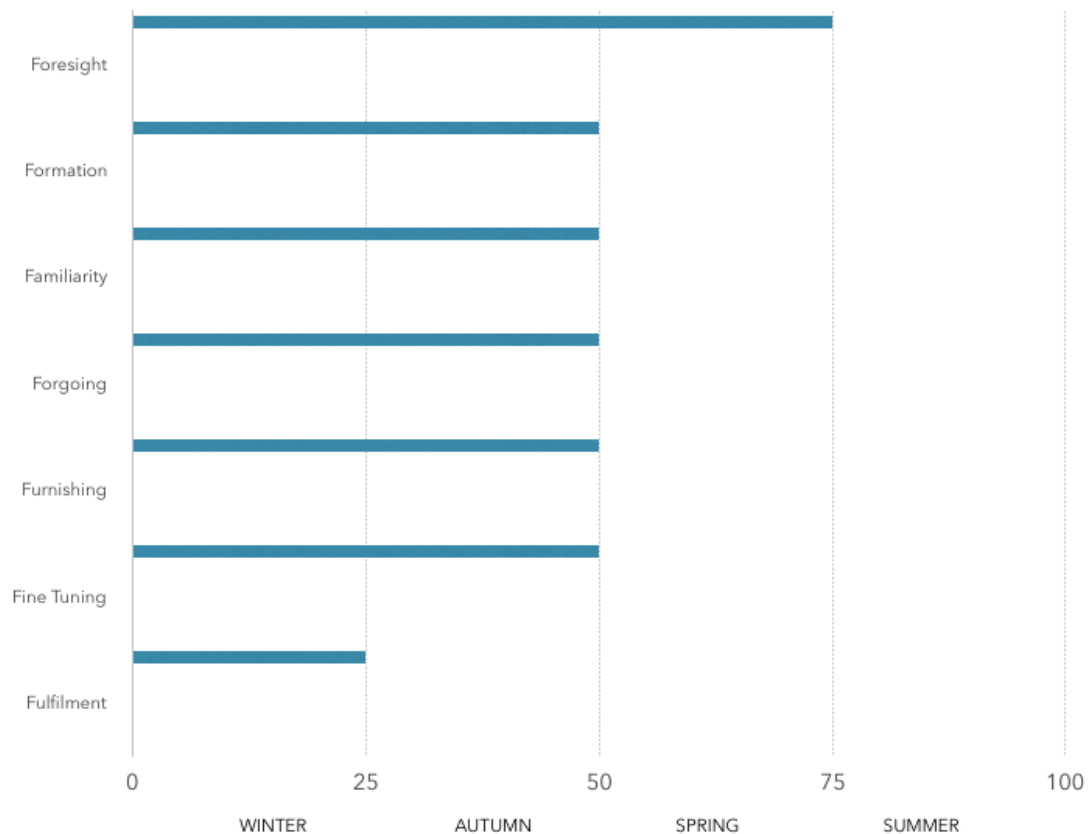
Another example follows.

This is a piece of writing in much better shape than any looked at so far.

The graph shows that the writer is reasonably confident that his or her vision is being accomplished (and even that he or she *has* a vision in the first place); that there is almost an abundance of strong, emotionally attractive characters and other elements to get the job done.

The area that is letting this particular piece down is *Fulfilment*. This is on the edge of being in the lowest position and would need to be addressed as a priority to ensure that the piece does well overall.

How could this happen?



Usually, this results when a writer has slipped up at some point during what is an otherwise well-constructed and emotionally powerful piece. We've all read novels like this: everything is going along fine, we are entertained and make a commitment to the work, and then suddenly there's a mis-step - a character that shouldn't have died at that point is killed; a scene strikes us as being emotionally inappropriate; an important plot point is left hanging. We can, as readers, 'patch this up' in our heads - and this is significant ability and trait which comes to the fore when we have emotionally invested in a work - but our sense of *fulfilment* suffers: we know, deep down, that the work is flawed.

Television shows are prone to this. We follow episode after episode of our favourite programmes and then there's 'that episode' where 'that' happened - we don't agree, we don't like it, and we find ourselves 'self-editing' the show to some degree to get rid of the offending scene or event or character change or whatever it is. We carry on liking the show, we loyally watch the rest of the episodes - but from that point on we know that it can never quite reach the top level of fulfilment in our minds.

Of course, as we have mentioned, these diagrams are only a snapshot of the position of any piece of writing, as revealed by the person answering the questions. But the graphs do externalise the views that are in the head of whoever is doing the questionnaire. It becomes instantly and clearly visible where in the writing that person sees the problem as lying.

The graphs show an 'X-ray' of any piece of writing, based on the answers to the questions. You can see through the meat to the bones. Without all the parts of that 'skeleton' in place, at some point your fiction will collapse. More to the point, the lowest column on any one of the graphs is where the most attention is needed.

In your own writing, whatever has shown up as the lowest column is the hottest section to handle: address it fully and the whole operation will be transformed and secured.

But handle how exactly?

Vacuum Power

What is your writing there to do?

Is it there to make you money?

To manufacture works that you then have to work extremely hard to sell?

To scour the world for readers while you still have some strength left?

Flip it around. Look at it from the viewpoint of a potential reader.

Your fiction exists to *fill a vacancy for a reader*.

If you have that vacancy correctly defined, the reader will simply flow towards your work. In the absence of a definition of the vacancy, you may abandon the effort altogether. Your reader almost certainly will.

Your potential readers are motivated by a force *which largely remains invisible to you, even when it's acting upon you too*.

Using it, you can tap into the things which drive every single reader and completely transform your fiction.

Every single successful piece of fiction, whether a novel, a play, a short story or a film, uses this power.

What is this 'hidden force'?

What motivates people? Goals? Targets? Money?

No.

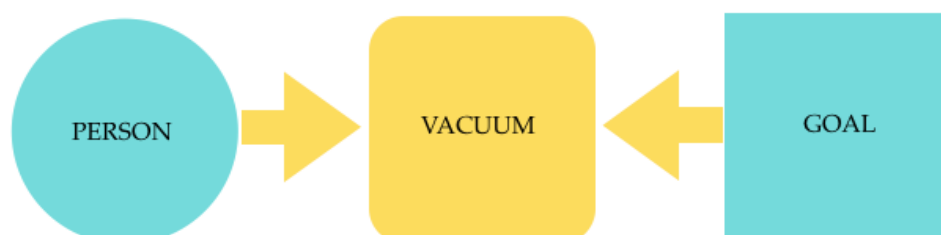
Nothing.

Literally, 'nothing'.

By 'nothing' is meant a *gap*, something *missing*, an *emptiness*. This could also be termed a *mystery*, an *absence*, a *loss*, a *lack*, a *want*, an *unavailability*, a *deficiency*, an *omission*, an *exclusion*, or a *need*.

Yes, of course we can set goals and of course they have to be desirable. But what is it that actually starts someone moving, physically or mentally, towards that goal?

The vacuum between where they are now and the goal.



That's what pulls people forward.

You need a goal, a mountain top, something to aim for, certainly. But that target, whatever it is, *is defined by its absence*. Right now, you don't have it; right now, there's nothing there; right now, there's a *vacuum*.

It can be simply stated - so simply, that at first your mind may reject it.

Set a goal - any goal - and you immediately activate the pulling power of its absence.

Why is this such a secret?

Because an emptiness, a nothing, is almost by definition, *invisible*. When we think of something we want to achieve, we picture it perhaps, or write it down, or discuss it with someone. But none of those things have much power to move us, despite what all the books on visualisation say.

What moves us is the vacuum power of the goal or target that is not yet there.

Just as a vehicle is sucked into the slipstream of a juggernaut on the motorway, or a boiled egg is sucked into the emptiness of a heated bottle, or an astronaut is sucked out into the vacuum of space through a broken hatch, so we are moved by the power of emptiness.

Desire creates emptiness. Emptiness moves us.

You have a goal. You can write it down, picture it, mock it up in a stage and hang it on your wall. You can do any number of things with it. But what pulls you into actually moving towards that goal is *the emptiness between you and it*.

Everyone has these emptinesses. They are needs. We have small needs like the need for a snack or a cup of tea; we have larger needs like the need for a rest or companionship; and we have huge needs like the need for water, health and life itself. The best term to describe them is 'vacuums' because we are all familiar with the basic idea of the power of vacuums in one way or another either from school or because we've used a vacuum cleaner.

A vacuum, if it's strong enough, can make anyone do anything.

This is such a simple idea that it is easy to dismiss. But simplicity is power.

Understand this one and the world is yours to command.

This should change your ideas of what a writing goal is. Or even what a goal is generally.

What are some usual goals?

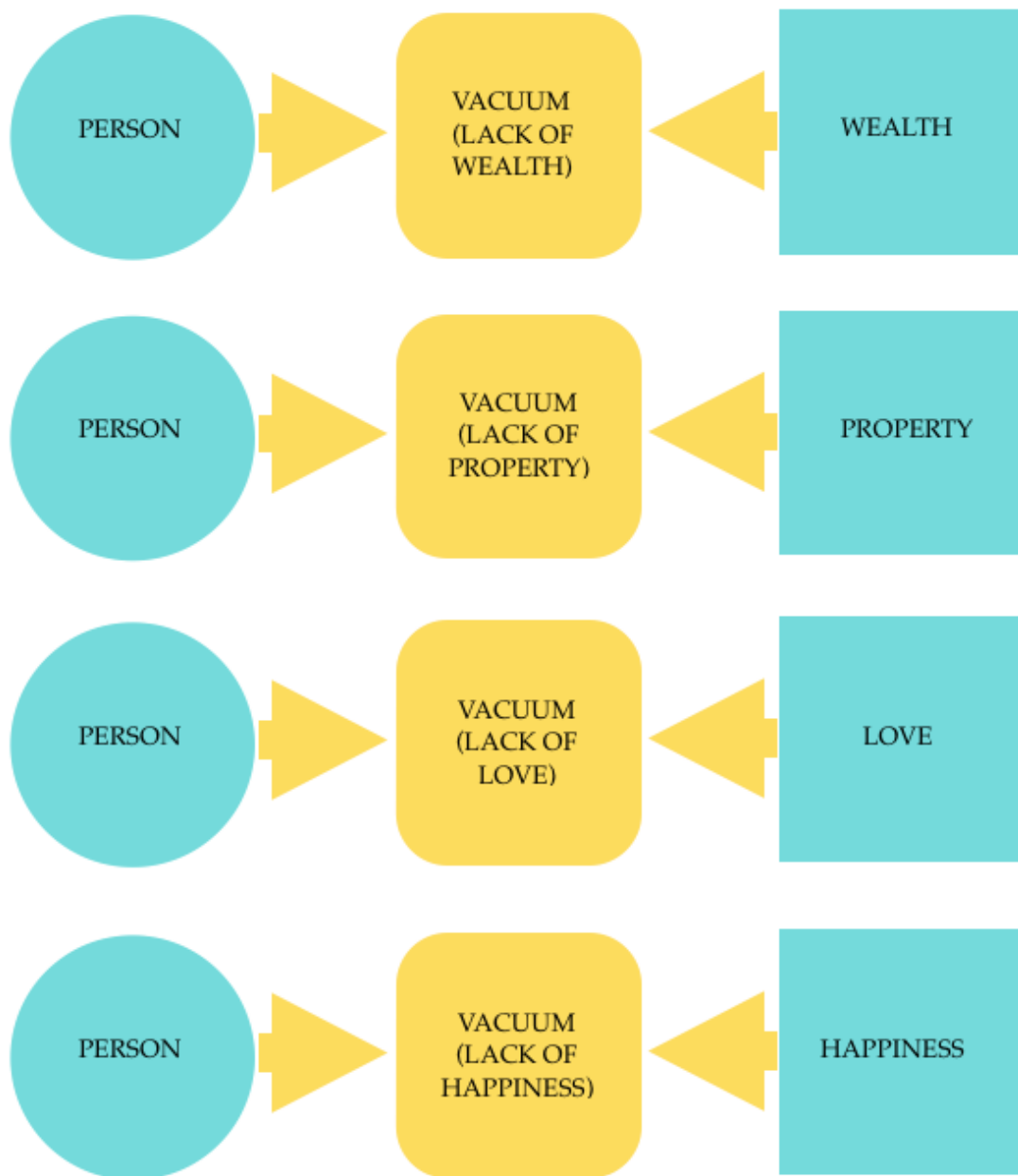
Wealth?

Property?

Love?

Happiness?

What lies between a person and these goals?



The bigger or more intense the vacuum, or lack, or absence, the more powerful the pull.

Setting a Goal

The usual advice that you can read in a thousand other books about achieving goals is to set the goal and then break that goal down into achievable targets and plan how to achieve those. That's all very well and can work - *but what drives this is the emptiness between the starting point and the goal.*

Actually sometimes breaking the goal down into smaller, do-able parts works to *reduce* its vacuum power. Remember this diagram from Week 1:



And remember what usually happens in real life:



Larger goals and challenges can often possess more vacuum power.

To put it even more simply will reduce it to an almost absurd tautology. But here goes:

If I want a new kitchen table and a new kitchen table exactly like the one I want suddenly appears in front of me, what happens to my want? It vanishes. I have no need to go to the furniture shop. I have no need to move at all.

If I want a new kitchen table, what is it that makes me get up and go and get one? The *absence* of that table, the fact that it is *missing*, the *vacuum* created by its absence.

It would be as though there is a vacuum, shaped exactly like the table I want, sitting in the middle of the room. What will it take to fill it? Something will have to happen; things will have to occur in the universe; action will have to take place. Is this action caused by the table?

No, quite the reverse. If the table appears, there is no need for action.

The action is caused by the *absence of the table*.

People motivated to achieve wealth are motivated by the absence of wealth.

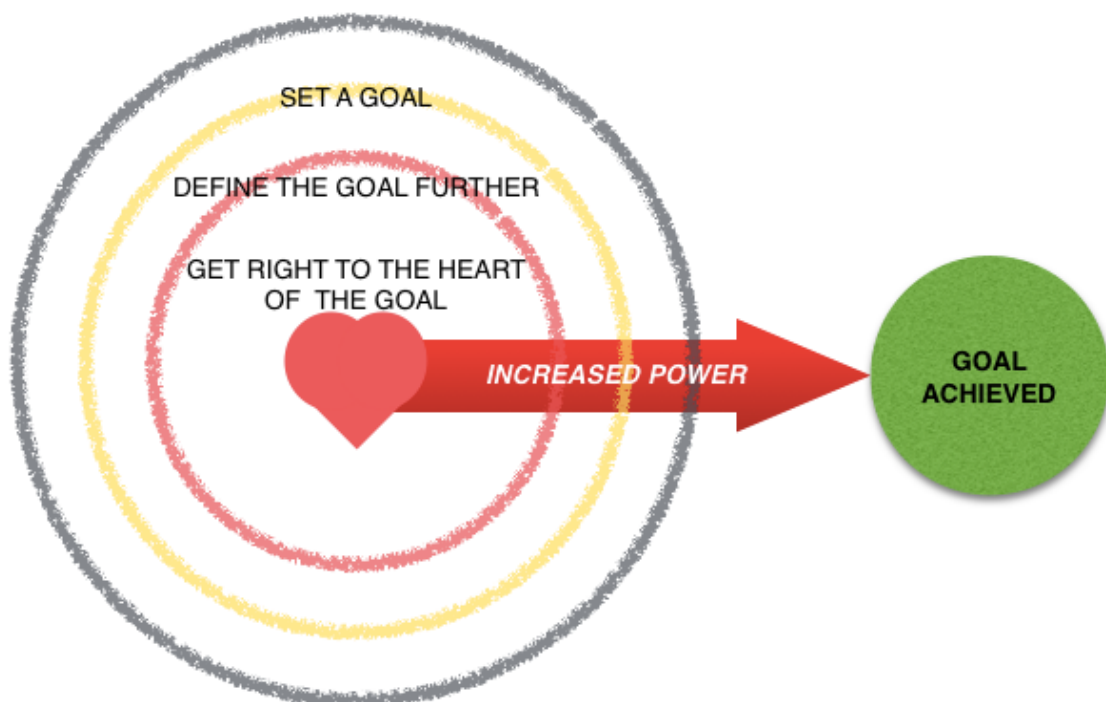
People motivated to acquire property are motivated by the absence of property.

People motivated by achieve love are motivated by the absence of love.

People motivated by a desire for happiness are motivated by the desire more than the happiness.

It's such a simple principle, but the world of fiction writing will open up to its full richness if you can apply this principle completely.

This diagram from Week 1 reminds us of what really powers goals effectively:



You'll be able to appreciate now that this increased power comes from the fact that a *bigger vacuum is contacted and used to drive thing forward*.

Why isn't this more widely known?

It sort of is. It's the principle behind every successful novel, every movie deal, every closed sale, every satisfied reader or viewer.

People are motivated by emptinesses, lacks, missing things, absences.

For the purposes of this course, we are going to call these things *vacuums* because what we know about vacuums in the physical universe will help us to understand how they work.

Definitions of a Vacuum

Here's some text book definitions of a 'vacuum':

vacuum: 'A space entirely devoid of matter; a space or container from which the air has been completely or partly removed; a gap left by the loss, death, or departure of someone or something formerly playing a significant part in a situation or activity.'

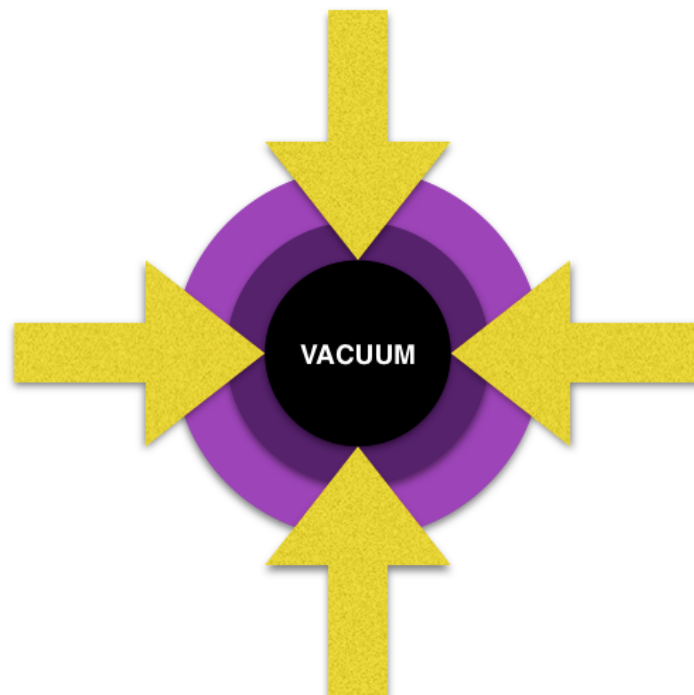
Of course, as we know 'Nature abhors a vacuum' and vacuums tend to suck things into them or to have an attractive power with regard to their surroundings.

We can slightly re-define this for our purposes based on what we know about the properties of vacuums.

A vacuum is defined as that emptiness or absence of something which draws anyone or anything in the vicinity of the vacuum towards whatever it is that is missing.

Thus a need, a desire, a yearning, a longing, has the power to draw the person who has it towards the object of that need, desire, yearning or longing.

This is the primary force which underlies how human transactions work, including transactions between a reader and a piece of fiction.



If you need further convincing, let's step back for a moment and look at what happens in fiction today.

Vacuum Power in Fiction

The word fiction is usually defined along these lines:

fiction: literature in the form of prose, especially novels, that describes imaginary events and people.

It comes from late Middle English (in the sense 'invented statement') via Old French from Latin *fictio*(n-), from *fingere* 'form, contrive'. The whole idea behind the idea is that it is to do with *things that are made up*.

And so it starts from a 'writer-centric' perspective, at the bottom of our Spectrum of Fiction: whatever a writer wants, thinks or feels should happen next is 'fiction'.

And so fiction writers sit at their desks or in the chairs and write whatever they imagine.

And that's fiction.

The biggest problem with all that is that *there is absolutely no guarantee that anything that emerges from a writer's mind will be of any interest whatsoever to a reader*.

90% of writers, whether they are young or old, new or have been attempting to write a book for years, experience this:

They write and write and write and then don't know where the thing is going and end up running out of steam and abandoning the story.

Page after page, chapter after chapter, draft after draft, manuscript after manuscript.

This is why writers give up. Or, if they persist, why they are still failures even years down the line.

Perhaps this is why *you* have given up, or lost heart at times.

After all, the aim of every writer should be to just write, right? Commitment from readers will eventually come, right? It's all a numbers game and, with a bit of luck and a fortunate encounter with a positive publisher, success will come, right?

Wrong.

Writing for its own sake as an aim of fiction is based on a completely inaccurate understanding of what successful fiction is.

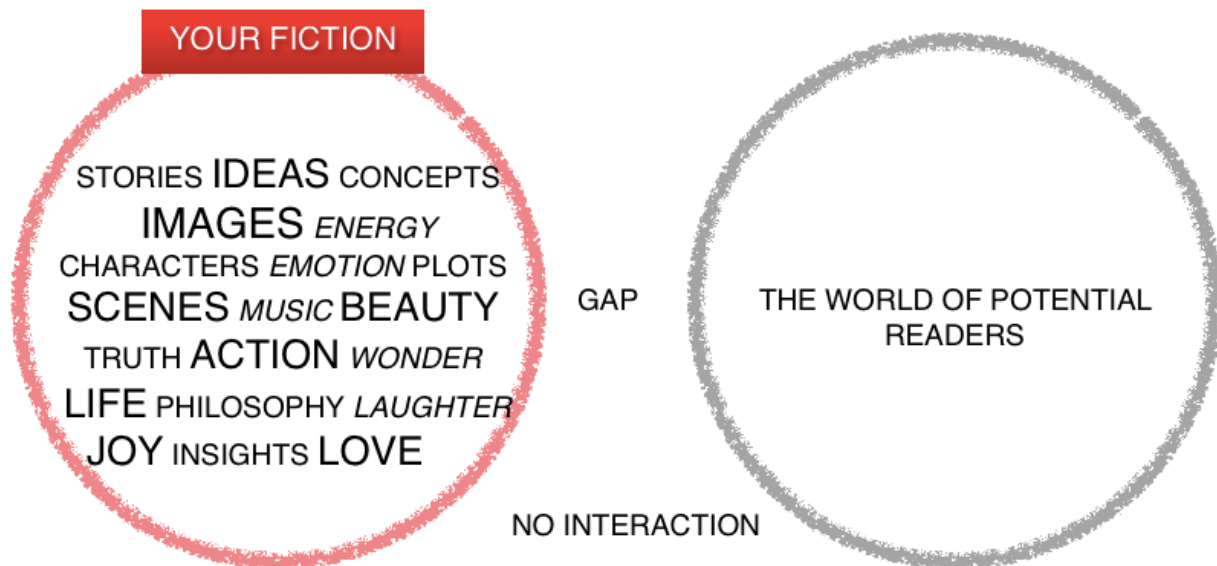
If you think that simply by putting words on a page or screen straight from your head you will eventually end up 'striking it rich' in terms of reader commitment, then by all means continue to pour out your imagination onto the page or screen. Less than 1% of successful writers succeed that way *and they eventually succeed because they hit by accident upon some of the principles described in this course*.

Reader Commitment

If you more correctly see that reader commitment is something that is generated and passed on as the result of *something else*, then suddenly you can appreciate that just generating volume writing for its own sake produces a lot of wasted paper.

Writing page after page after page without consulting the needs of readers produces in the writer a deep sense of alienation, self-deception and a mounting feeling that the universe is unfair and doesn't recognise genius.

Successful works of fiction are vacuum-fillers.



Do you recognise those thoughts and feelings?

Let's not be misunderstood here: there's nothing wrong with writing straight from your head or with producing lots of it. But if you set 'just writing' as the uppermost goal of a writing life, *it will ultimately lead to the downfall of yourself as a writer.*

Chances are that you will end up with **Hypercritical Situation # 2** as described last week:

What should the uppermost goal of a fiction writer be, then?

Everyone has vacuums.

Everyone has goals, and everyone, therefore, is surrounded by emptinesses which precede or cluster around these goals: needs, or as we are going to call them, *vacuums*. These vacuums draw a person towards anything which looks as though it might fill the vacuum. Thus a person might need a new watch or be desperately searching for a cure for migraines or be looking to order a pizza for a large family, or be seeking a lost friend or fleeing a war in search of sanctuary. Each of these things is a vacuum of a particular kind. There are lots of kinds and sizes of vacuums, as you will learn, but for now it's the basic principle that we have to take in.

If everyone is walking around driven by their needs, what are they looking for?

Something that will *fulfil* their needs.

What should your fiction be in that case?

Something that will fulfil their needs.

If your writing is built around that datum, all shall be well.

But the idea of vacuum power opens the world up to new possibilities. The first thing to do, obviously, is to establish what exactly your readers needs are and then work to find those readers whose needs match what you can provide. But how do you generate interest and energy and movement and forward progress?

How do you attract hordes of readers and guarantee that they will be happy?

You can see that setting goals is one thing - harnessing the vacuum power around those goals is something else.

To be truly and spectacularly effective, *goals should harness the maximum number and size of vacuums of everyone involved.*

And if you look at any goal that anyone has ever achieved, it's usually by tapping into the goals and vacuum power of those around them too.

A writer who has these all aligned and active would harness enough power to take over the world.

A writer who even bothers to ask what the vacuums of his or her readers are, let alone activates or aligns them, will ignite attractive power and become effective.

That looks like a re-definition of fiction itself.

Fiction is an operation of ideas built around vacuums.

The Power of Fiction

What exactly is a 'vacuum filler' in a work of fiction?

Consider the most powerful, memorable moments in your own reading. Think for a moment about the scenes in your favourite books or films which created 'goosebump' sensations for you. Try to recall the exact incidents which had the most lasting effect on you as a reader.

Here are some examples:

- the sense of imparted wisdom and humanity at the end of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- the awestruck silence at the end of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*
- the feeling of emotional and social satisfaction at the end of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*
- the chilling moment of unsolved mystery at the end of J. B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*
- the uplifting emotion of triumph at the end of Richard Donner's first *Superman* film
- the glimpse of transcendent worlds at the ends of C. S. Lewis's novels *Perelandra* or *The Last Battle*.

Of course, vacuum fillers produced by fiction are too numerous to list. That's because they exist in microcosm by the thousand in any successful work of fiction, and also come at the end of every successful story that there has ever been, to one degree or another.

These moments, these experiences, have something in common. For the majority of stories, they concern a gap being repaired, an emptiness being filled, a hope fulfilled, something missing being found.

J. R. R. Tolkien coined a word for this in his 1947 essay 'On Fairy Stories': *eucatastrophe*.

Eucatastrophe means the sudden turn of events at the end of a story which ensures that the protagonist does not meet some terrible, impending doom which has been growing more and more imminent as the story goes on.

Tolkien formed the word by affixing the Greek prefix *eu*, meaning *good*, to *catastrophe*, the word traditionally used to refer to the 'unraveling' or conclusion of a drama's plot. It describes that uplifting and unexpected moment when 'everything goes right' beyond anyone's hopes.

As a devout Roman Catholic, Tolkien calls the Incarnation of Christ the eucatastrophe of 'human history' and the Resurrection the eucatastrophe of the Incarnation.

Here are some examples of eucatastrophe:

- the destruction of the Death Star towards the end of *Star Wars: A New Hope*
- the final critical scene atop Mount Doom in *The Lord of the Rings*
- the closing scene of Frank Capra's classic film *It's a Wonderful Life*.

You will probably have thought of several more. Though events were plummeting towards death or at least devastation, something occurs which not only restores order but which suggests the operations of a benevolent Providence over the world of the story.

These kinds of moments occur in so many stories: *Watership Down*, by Richard Adams, *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen, *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë, *The Wind in the Willows*, by Kenneth Grahame, *Anne Of Green Gables*, by L.M. Montgomery, *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens, *The Wizard of Oz*, 1939, *Groundhog Day*, 1993, *Back to the Future*, 1985 and so on.

Not all stories contain them, though. *Tess Of The D'Urbervilles*, by Thomas Hardy, *A Passage to India*, by E. M. Forster, *Wuthering Heights*, by Emily Brontë, *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens, *Animal Farm* and *1984* by George Orwell are examples where far from everything going right the reader experiences, and is sometimes left in, at least one nightmare moment where everything has in fact gone terribly wrong. What is happening in these stories?

As we will see, stories which end in joy or triumph and those which end in sorrow or nightmare are all part of a universe of stories which all use these same common patterns and techniques.

They all use vacuum power.

Sometimes the vacuums are left empty. Instead of eucatastrophe, there's just catastrophe.

The truth is that the power of any work of fiction, whether it ends in positivity or not, depends upon these moments of fulfilment. They are usually to do with the filling of a vacuum of some kind, or, if the story is to have a negative ending, the emptiness which comes from *not* filling a vacuum.

When the gaping emptiness which is craving fulfilment is *not* filled and left open and hollow, that also has a resonant effect - but it is still dependent in the first place on there being a huge gap that needs to be filled.

Prior to that climactic moment of fulfilment, the reader was drawn in and made some kind of emotional commitment to the story, otherwise the fulfilment scene would be hollow and would fail. At some point in all the stories we have used as examples, readers made an investment of time and feeling:

- the destruction of the Death Star would be just another special effect unless somehow our emotions had been elicited
- the final scene on Mount Doom would be an empty volcanic explosion in *The Lord of the Rings* had we not committed ourselves to feel something earlier in the tale
- the finale of *It's a Wonderful Life* would not much concern us, having to do with the life of a small town businessman, as it does, had we not been drawn in to sympathise with George Bailey on deeper levels.

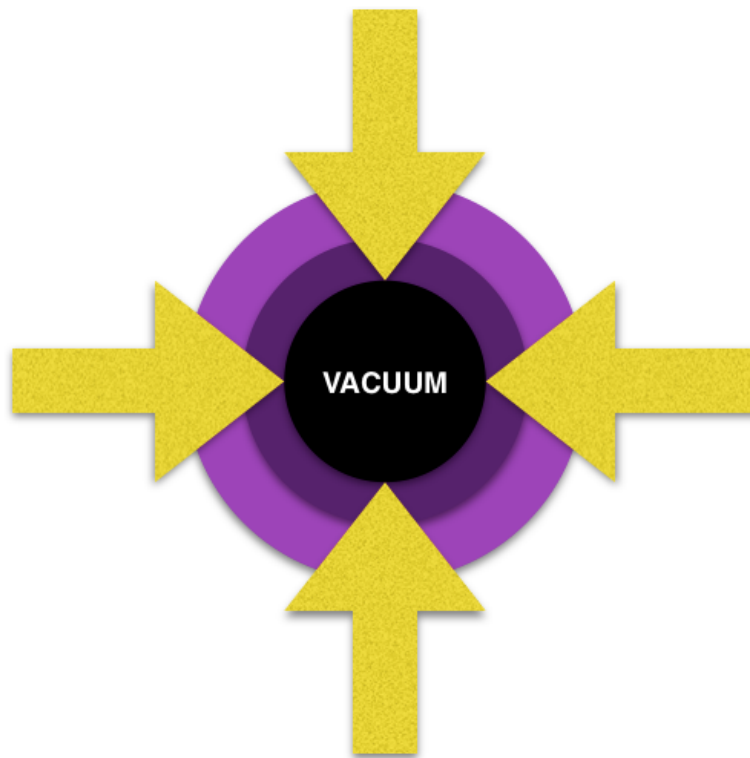
Similarly, Tess's end in *Tess Of The D'Urbervilles*, could hardly have any effect had we not begun to profoundly wish that her life had turned out otherwise. *A Passage to India*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Great Expectations*, and so on all leave us with heartfelt revelations of some kind, hard to reduce to words, but scarcely less powerful than the triumphant endings in earlier examples.

These works are all doing the same thing.

Effective works of fiction construct vacuums for the reader, whether or not the vacuum is filled at the end.

This has very little to do with the common image of writers pouring their souls onto the page and somehow, some kind of arcane magic then affecting readers to like their work.

It has a great deal to do with engineering into place a variety of specific vacuums which all act to draw in reader commitment and set up the reader for the positive or negative legacy of the end of the tale.



A person's attention will *automatically* be pulled towards a vacuum in the same way that water is pulled down a drain, or that a stone, thrown up in the air, is pulled down again by gravity. Vacuums exert a mental force equivalent to a physical force in the outer world.

But these things are not just randomly generated. There are specific kinds of vacuums in every work of fiction: specifically, five types, used in different ways and to varying degrees to create almost every story you can think of.

You'll learn about the first type - the character vacuum - next week.

Before then, let's try to define your ideal reader.

Your Ideal Reader

Let's put all the readers in the world into one group:

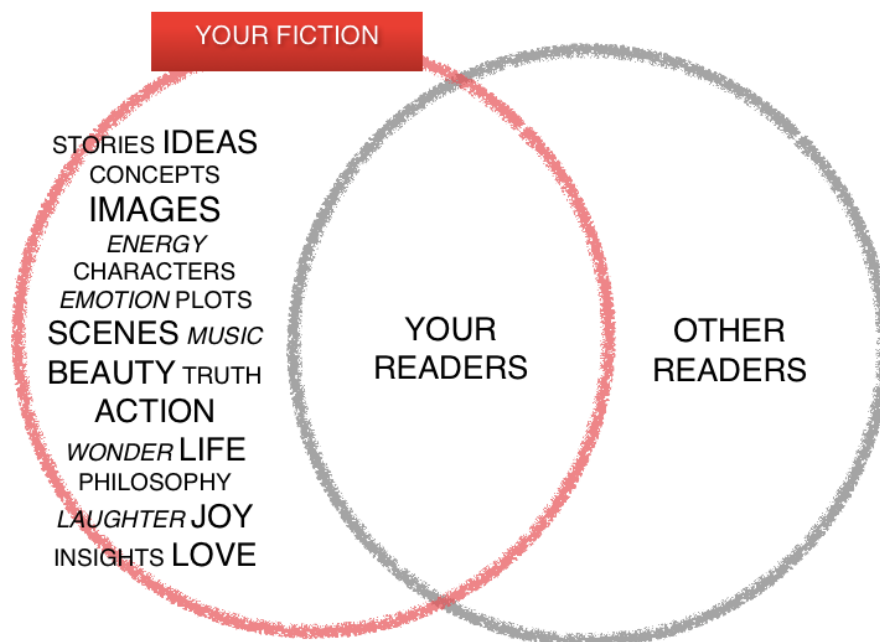


Then, into another circle, let's put your fiction:



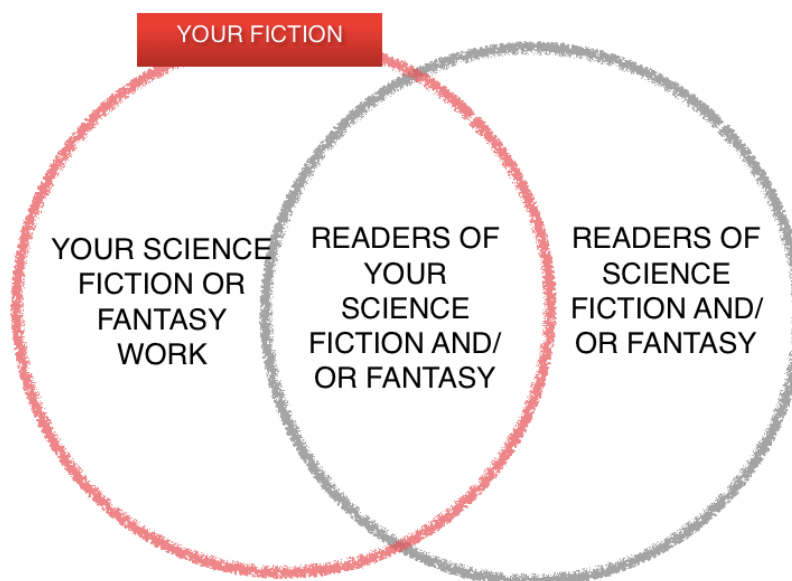
Based on what we've been saying about readers' needs and vacuums above, you could hardly expect that all the readers in the world are going to be interested in your fiction. Not all readers have the needs or wants or desires or expectations that your fiction evokes.

But some do. Some of the larger group above will find that their needs, wants, desires and expectations will find an exact match in your writings. These are your readers, your niche audience, the people who will find satisfaction in your work:



These readers break down in a variety of ways into different categories.

If you're writing in a particular genre, your potential readers might consist of people who like to read that genre. For example, if you write fantasy or science fiction, your readers could be further defined like this:



Perhaps you write a particular kind of fantasy which features, for example, unicorns. Those readers who like the fantasy genre more broadly contain a sub-set of readers who especially like unicorns.

Perhaps you write unicorn tales for children; any younger readers who like unicorns are more likely to be attracted by your work.

You can break this into sub-sets all you like. You can list out the particular features of your existing fiction right now - naming the genre, listing some of the things it contains, describing some of the action - and you will in so doing be naming out the sub-set of readers who might be interested in your work.

So far that's fairly obvious stuff. If we start with 'unicorn tales for children', then, we can see what happens as far as vacuum power is concerned. A simple, short and undemanding children's tale about unicorns will possess a quotient of vacuum power and that will attract a certain number of readers, from the broad category of 'All Reader In The World', down to 'Readers of Science Fiction and/or Fantasy', down to 'Readers of Science Fiction and/or Fantasy which Contains Unicorns' down to 'Young Readers of Science Fiction and/or Fantasy That Contains Unicorns'. Each group gets smaller and smaller as we take each step.

Eventually you could get down to an exact, smaller category 'Young Readers of Science Fiction and/or Fantasy That Contains Unicorns Who Particularly Like The Way That You Write The Story'.

From a potential readership of billions, you have compartmented off various categories down to perhaps a few thousand.

You would be left with something like this:



And there's nothing wrong with that. If you can find out where that particular small group of readers lives, and can manage to get your work in front of them, you can probably make a reasonable success of a career as a fiction writer by satisfying their needs. They are your 'Ideal Readers'.

However, if you apply vacuum power, you can write a story which not only satisfies the needs of this very small audience, but which taps into the needs, desires, wants, yearnings and

emptinesses of a much larger group. You are connecting with not just one sub-set of readers but many, all at the same time.

For example, J. R. R. Tolkien's famous trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings* became a huge international success partly because it was able to appeal to a very wide range of different groups of readers. Some of these groups were even opposites to other groups who were drawn to it: the book's tale had an attraction for those conservative readers who hankered after a long-gone peaceful and agricultural society, pre-Industrial Revolution; but it also charmed the 1960s 'hippy' youth, who wondered about how much society could be changed. The 'pipeweed' smoked by the hobbits seemed like old-fashioned pipe-tobacco to one group, but like marijuana to the other. Similarly, the book attracted those fascinated by the creation of other fictional worlds as well as those interested in language. And it satisfied much deeper yearnings too, as we will see.

You can see this principle at work in modern popular cinema: one broad category or genre, like the Western, is combined with another, like science fiction, to create a film like *Cowboys versus Aliens*, in the hopes of bringing in audiences interested in both. That particular film didn't do well at the box office primarily because it lacked the even more basic vacuum power of a good plot and interesting characters, but you get the idea. More recently we have seen the same kind of thing happen in the film *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, hoping to combine the audiences of fans of Austen's historical romance with horror fans.

More subtly, the Harry Potter books were such a success partly because they combined the pre-existing genres of the school story and tales about magic.

On a smaller scale, you can see the same idea at work in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, in which the fans of one character, like Captain America, are added to the fans of another, like Iron Man, in a 'blockbuster' movie *Captain America: Civil War*, in which both characters (and many others) appear.

The trick is to tap into more than one set of vacuums or needs at the same time.

In general, though, the conclusion is that your work will have an ideal audience. It may be a small audience, it might be reasonably-sized. But the way to guarantee success is to use vacuum power to tap into more and more and larger and larger vacuums to increase the size of your 'ideal readership'.

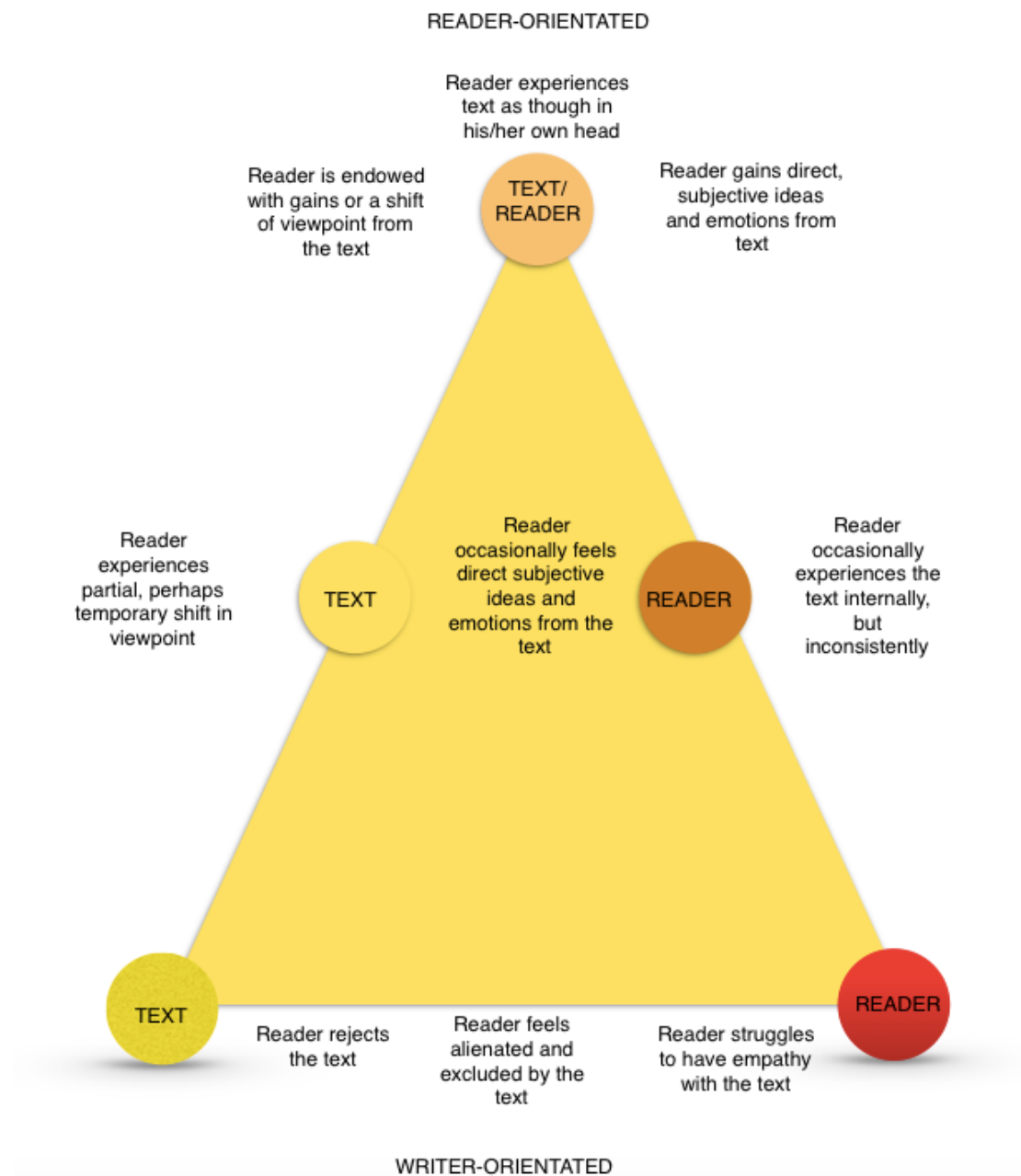
This is examined with great precision in forthcoming weeks.

Meanwhile, to wrap this week up, let's look at how you can use what you know so far to improve your fiction.

Empowering Your Fiction

Take some time to answer the following ten questions. You can be brief, or you can spend some time on these questions - your answers will add enormous value to your work if answered properly.

1. What is it that you want your readers to experience?
2. Where would you place your work on the Spectrum of Fiction?



3. What would you say are your main ideas for your fiction?
4. Who are the main characters that you have created?
5. What in your work attracts readers?
6. Are you able to obtain a deep commitment from a reader?
7. Are you able to actively and carefully shift the reader's attention around over a period of time?
8. Within the story itself, how does the aspect of quality manifest itself? What is happening on each page that tells us that we are getting nearer and nearer to (or further and further away from) what was desired in the first place?
9. Does your intention reach the reader?
10. Do your stories fill readers' vacuums (or intentionally leave them unfilled)?

Keep the notes that you make. Later, I will need to see them as part of your First Feedback Session!

Assignment for Week 2

Answer the above questions under 'Empowering Your Fiction' in as much detail as you can.

End of Week 2!

Well done!

We've begun to move your writing life forward into as-yet-untapped regions.

- You have a snapshot of your strengths and weaknesses and can rework your writing so that you utilise your strengths.
- You've glimpsed the heart of the matter: the unseen force that motivates readers to turn the pages of a successful work of fiction.
- You've learnt what a story *really* is and what it is actually doing to and for readers.
- You've been introduced to the magnetic power that draws readers into a work of fiction even before the introduction of any character.

You're ready to move on to Week 3. Hold onto something!

Week 3: Characters - What They Are And How To Create Them

What a Character Actually Is

The Archetypal Characters

How to Create a Protagonist

The Crucial Role of the Antagonist

Your First Feedback Session!

Now that you have an idea of what it is that drives fiction forward, you're ready to learn how to use it to create a successful, attractive and powerful set of characters.

This week, you'll discover:

- what the thing called a 'character' *actually* is, and the secrets of how to rapidly build a convincing one that attracts readers
- what the archetypal characters are in any masterpiece of fiction and how they work together
- how to create a protagonist who isn't just a cipher or shallow copy of someone else's character
- the crucial role of the antagonist in a story and what all antagonists have in common (it's quite a lot, as you will see!)

During this week's lesson, you'll be asked to apply what you've learned to grow your own protagonist - and get feedback from me and any advice if needed.

WARNING: If you are purchasing this module separately from the rest of the course, welcome, but beware! You won't get the complete benefit of the 'How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published' e-course unless you do the whole thing! By all means extract what wisdom you can from this week's 'episode' - but take the plunge and get the whole course as soon as you can!

You can get it [here](#).

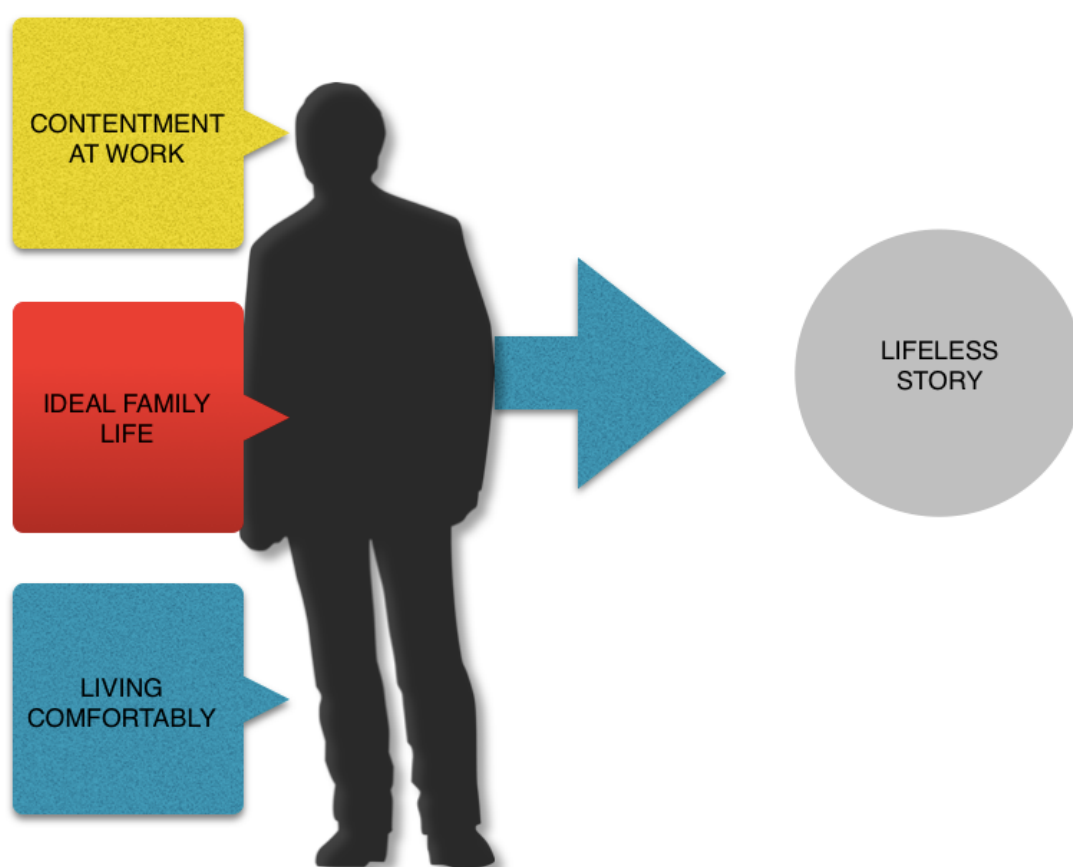
What A Character Actually Is

The classic definition of a character is along the lines of 'a created being who has needs, just like a person, with a background or biography full of fascinating details', all designed to make the constructed person more interesting to the reader.

Though something like this has been used both to describe characters in fiction and to offer advice to creative writers for as long as there have been stories, it is actually misleading.

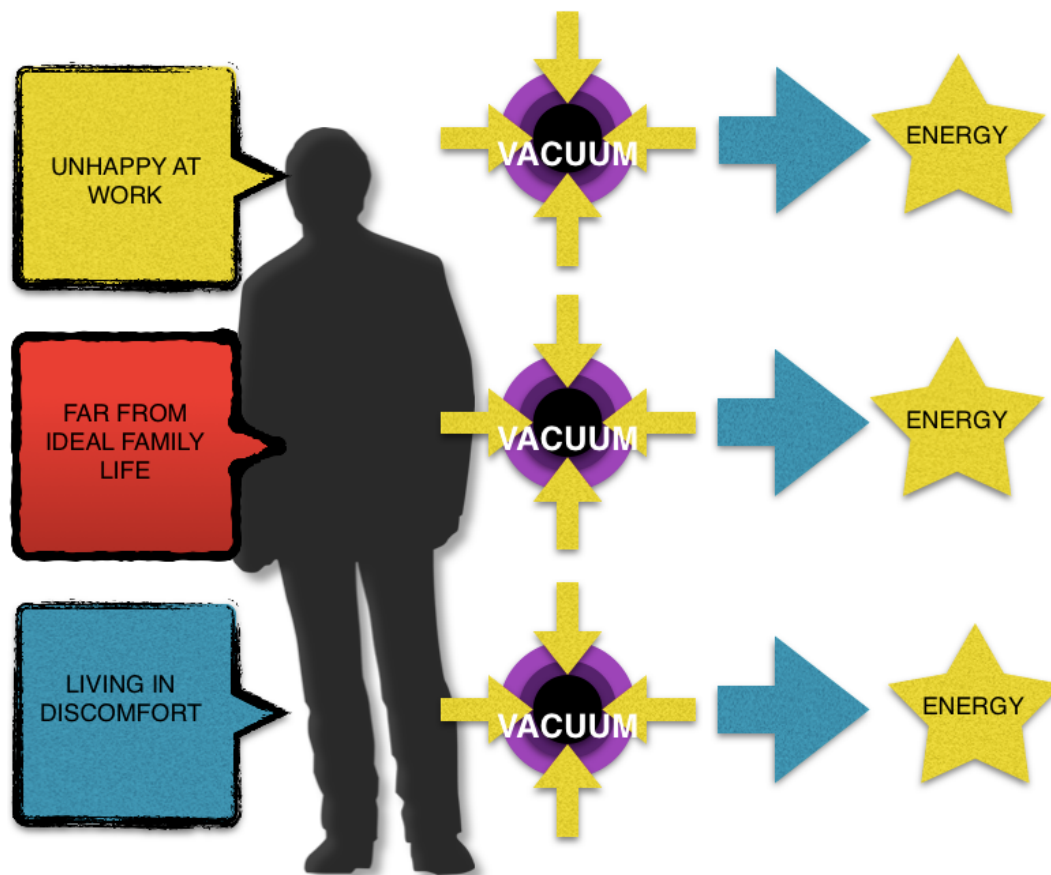
The entity which we have been accustomed to calling a 'character' is actually *a construction of vacuums*.

If you design one of these 'characters' to have a well-rounded life, being content in a job, living comfortably with an ideal family life, your construct will not generate much energy in any story.



Any entity that we call a 'character' only becomes interesting *when something is taken away from him or her*.

If a constructed character has a damaged life, is unhappy in a job, lives uncomfortably and has a far from ideal family life, *he or she will generate energy in your story*. The character - and more importantly, the reader - will have attention on his or her vacuums and will be pulled by them into the story, either in the short or long term.



So whatever you do, don't make your characters too comfortable. As Kurt Vonnegut said 'Be a sadist. No matter how sweet and innocent your leading characters, make awful things happen to them -- in order that the reader may see what they are made of.'

The more you take away, progressively, from a character, the more the reader is drawn into the vortex of emptiness that remains.

'Plot-driven' or 'Character-driven'

Stories are conventionally divided into two broad types: 'plot-driven' or 'character-driven'.

Both plot-driven and character-driven stories are vacuum-driven.

It's simply a matter of placing the vacuums correctly. How do you successfully construct characters and motivate them?

Motivation is always vacuum-driven.

What we are used to calling 'motivation' is the phenomenon arising from *something being missing*. The missing item, mood or state is what pulls people - including artificially-constructed people - into doing anything. If people seem to lack motivation, they lack vacuums; if they are super-motivated, they have powerful vacuums. In fiction, these vacuums can largely be determined by you or not as a writer.

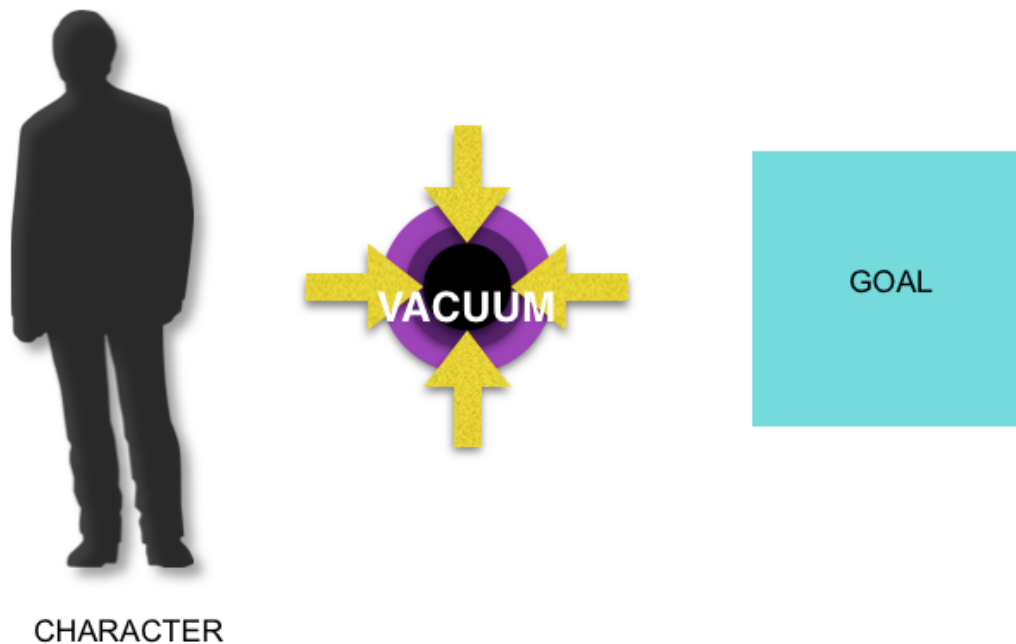
Does this mean *removing* family, health, salary, comfort, job satisfaction and much more from the happy character in order to create an 'absence' which will then create motivation?

Yes!

Does it mean trying to solve the discontentment of the unhappy character? No! Not at first anyway, and sometimes not at all.

'Characters' come alive and lead readers forward through a rhythm of vacuums and vacuum fillers - they lose, they find; they don't have, they have; they lack, they get.

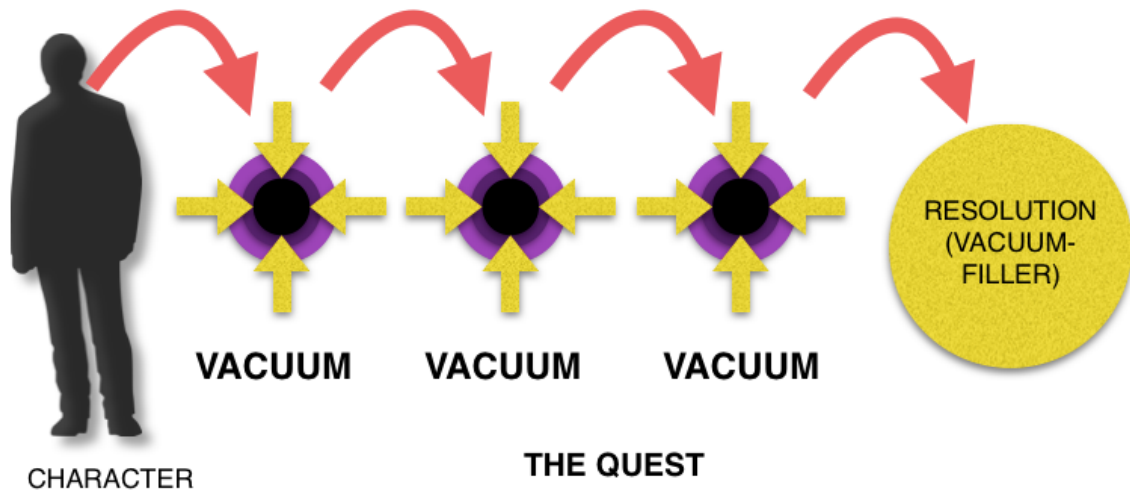
But mainly they *lose*.



Before he gets anywhere near the Death Star in *Star Wars: A New Hope*, Luke has lost almost everything: his old lifestyle, his real parents, his foster parents, and his newly-found mentor. The removal of each one creates a vacuum which pulls him into further action as a character. Prior to returning home after visiting Ben Kenobi, Luke has no plans to follow the old man or learn the ways of the Force, even though his missing father had done so. He even rejects Ben's offer to go with him and 'learn the ways of the Force'. Only when he sees his home in flames and the charred remains of his foster parents does he make that forward-moving decision.

Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings* has also given up everything - or had it taken from him: the Shire, his friends, his health, his freedom, and at the end even one of his fingers. The heavy burden of loss and threat of loss is what moves him forward. Whenever motivation seems lacking, he suffers another loss: he loses consciousness and physical well-being after the stabbing on Weathertop, he loses Gandalf after the journey through Moria, he loses the rest of the Fellowship after Boromir's betrayal, and so on. Each removal serves to magnify the vacuum power and move him on as a constructed character (and move us on as readers).

George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life* has a persisting ambition to leave his small home town and make something of himself. This is progressively taken away from him until he is a shell of a man towards the end of the film - but then, after he himself is 'edited' out of his own life and becomes a ghost or walking vacuum, the vacuum is filled with powerful eucatastrophic effect at the end of the film.



Character constructs like Tess in *Tess Of The D'Urbervilles*, Adela Quested in *A Passage to India*, Cathy in a *Wuthering Heights*, or Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*, are similarly 'walking vacuums', their lives emptied and hollowed out by events. In their cases, the emptiness is *not* filled, leaving a distinctly different flavour to the stories in which they feature.

In all stories, though, the things which we have been accustomed to call 'characters' are really *constructs* - and the primary building material for each is *vacuums*.

Creating successful fictional characters means *creating or finding vacuums which will pull in reader attention*.

In the same way that a reader is pulled along by vacuums of his or her own creation or those created by others in life, so is a character almost physically pulled into action on a scene-by-scene basis. The vacuums are either

- his or her own, directing energies and attention onto personal concerns or things that he or she wants or needs to have in the context of the story ('character-driven')

or

- are created by others and then impinge upon the character ('plot-driven').

If you want more productive work from either a happy character or an unhappy character, *find and create vacuums*.

The reason that a journey or quest motif is so common in fiction, especially fiction for younger readers, is that a journey or a quest is based on a simple *vacuum*: the hero needs to get somewhere where he or she isn't at the beginning; or to find something which he or she doesn't have at the beginning. The 'quest' belongs to a particular category of plot vacuum that we will get to shortly.

The gap between the existing state of affairs and achieving the target is the vacuum that pulls the character along.

Obviously, you need to set such targets realistically. Use judgement and establish agreement with the character and you will find forward motion occurring. This is the force draws your protagonist out of his or her initial environment and into the new worlds that the rest of the story has in store.

Your characters have to have vacuums - missing things, losses, damage, needs - which then attract reader attention. And then your plot has to have vacuums - missing things, losses, spaces - which move things forward. We will examine the four main types of plot vacuum next week.

The closer you can get the character vacuums to coincide with the plot vacuums, the better your story will be.

For example, in *Great Expectations*, Pip thinks that if he journeys to London and learns to become a gentleman, he will win Estella whom he loves but who torments him.

Or, from *The Lord of the Rings*, if Frodo journeys to Mordor with the Ring, he will save the Shire and everyone in it from the devastation that Sauron will bring.

Or, from *Pride and Prejudice*, if Lizzy Bennett can find a husband, she can rescue her family from imminent ruin.

Sometimes a story is completely plot-driven. *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*, for example, is a series of events which are naturally pulled forward by vacuums which don't have much to do with individual characters. It's been said that Indiana Jones could be entirely missing from the film and the events would still occur much as they do anyway. In this case, his character vacuums - his hunger for artefacts as an archaeologist, mainly - run alongside the events of the story.

In *Wuthering Heights*, on the other hand, the plot springs largely from the vacuums of the characters: it is Heathcliff's and Cathy's passion for each other which drive the events and almost all other relationships in the story.

Either way, the driving force is *something missing* - a vacuum or set of vacuums. If the vacuum is made real enough, and is strong enough, the character will swing round and align his or her actions with the plot and you will have a believable, powerful story.

If a character possesses no vacuums, it's probably time to inject vacuums into him or her or let that character go before any more damage is done to your story. The vacuum-less character simply doesn't align and can't be aligned with whatever it is that you want to write about. He or she is 'dead'.

Writers often think that a character they have devised is 'not working' and so try to *add* qualities, characteristics or even accessories in the hope of generating interest. The opposite is true: *remove* qualities, characteristics and accessories and they will leap into life.

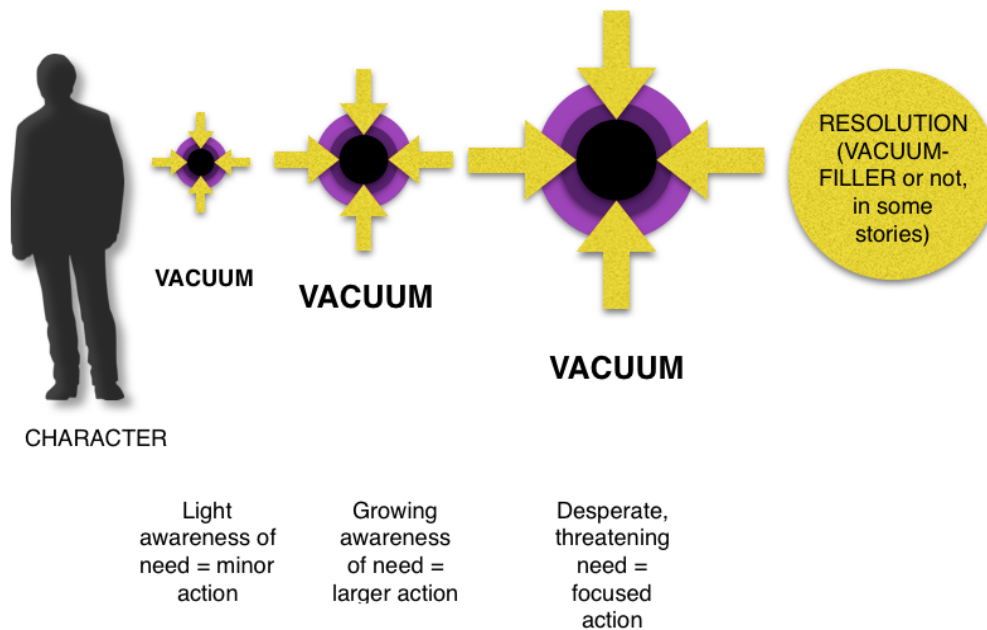
Character motivation is the art of locating the vacuum which has sufficient pulling power to produce needed action.

Dealing with characters, therefore, is much the same as dealing with readers: it's all about *creating or finding vacuums and filling them*.

Growing Vacuums

Character constructs develop along particular lines. At first, a character may have no awareness of anything missing in his or her life; then there may be a vague awareness, followed by a larger or growing need, leading to a desperate desire.

Take a look at this diagram:



The stage of desperate need occurs when you have obtained the emotional commitment from the reader and you simply have to *point the reader in the right direction and remove barriers between the reader and the vacuum filler*. This has to do with, and defines, the 'climax' of the story. This is when the vacuum filler, the moment of fulfilment, takes place.

A work of fiction that does all or most of these things will attract readers through these character constructs and drive them through right to the end of the story.

Harry Potter had no inkling that he was a wizard at the beginning of his adventures. He just knew somehow that something was fundamentally wrong in his life. J. K. Rowling had taken away his freedom and happiness, creating an initial character vacuum. Once he discovers something about his true heritage, and realises what was missing, he is motivated and becomes active. The rest of the Harry Potter stories are chiefly powered by the four kinds of plot vacuum, as we will see next week.

If this is the case, then, why do so many works fail?

What is going on in the fiction world that these apparently simple principles don't get applied and readers are soon lost even if they are initially acquired?

If everything above is known and obvious, then surely it's too easy and anyone could be a successful fiction writer?

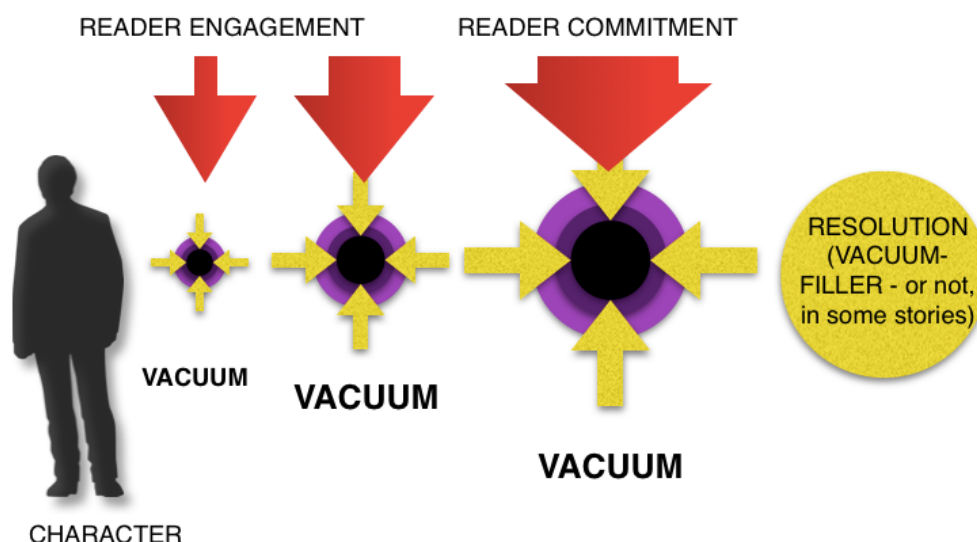
Something seems to go wrong right at the heart of many attempted works which causes the above simplicities to be obscured and everything to become so much more hard work and struggle than it needs to be.

The answer is that, apart from not knowing about vacuums and how to build them, writers also often fail to build *enough* vacuums.

Vacuum building doesn't end with engaging the reader.

Surely engaging the reader is the entire point and purpose of vacuums? Yes, obtaining engagement from readers is a major part of what you are trying to do - but it's not the whole picture. Vacuum building *doesn't* actually end with getting a reader's attention: you can actually go

on and on using the vacuum generation approach described in this book to get *commitment* after *commitment* after *commitment* - which is the key to escalating reader engagement - as long as you focus on *getting a finely-tuned vacuum filler, otherwise known as a moment of fulfilment, into the heart of your reader.*



In other words, if a work's whole attention is on obtaining the reader's engagement once as a final product, then the work will end up eventually losing readers in the longer term. You have to become an experienced practitioner at creating vacuums and then filling them - and then creating *even more vacuums.*

Together, vacuum building and getting readers are, once you grasp these principles, becoming a science, like physics. And if you learn that science and apply it, you'll get dependable results every time with your fiction. But like any science that is trying to be a technology, it has to *do* something.

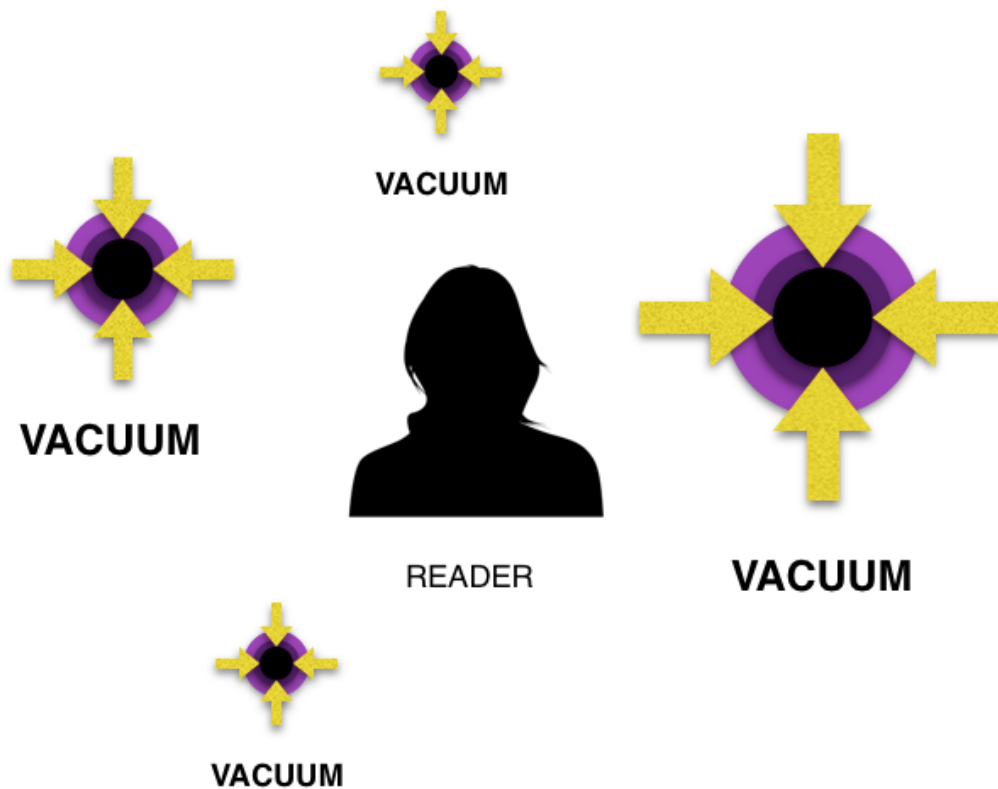
Different Kinds of Vacuums

Please remember that whenever we use the word 'vacuum' we are talking about *need*. The point of using the word 'vacuum' and not 'need' - and calling it *vacuum power* rather than 'need power' - is that the word 'vacuum' suggests qualities and characteristics which are more helpful in understanding what is happening with readers than the word 'need' does.

What do we know about vacuums from basic science? As we have seen, a vacuum is defined as a space or container from which the air has been completely or partly removed. What happens in the vicinity of vacuums? Surrounding air or objects are pulled toward a vacuum until it is filled. The bigger the vacuum, the stronger the pull. Vacuums create attraction. They have a *pull*.

Readers of various kinds are walking around the world, carrying with them their own inner needs. They may not be aware of these vacuums; they may only have some slight inkling of them; they may be urgently aware of them and trying to deal with them; or they may feel that the vacuums are not pressing.

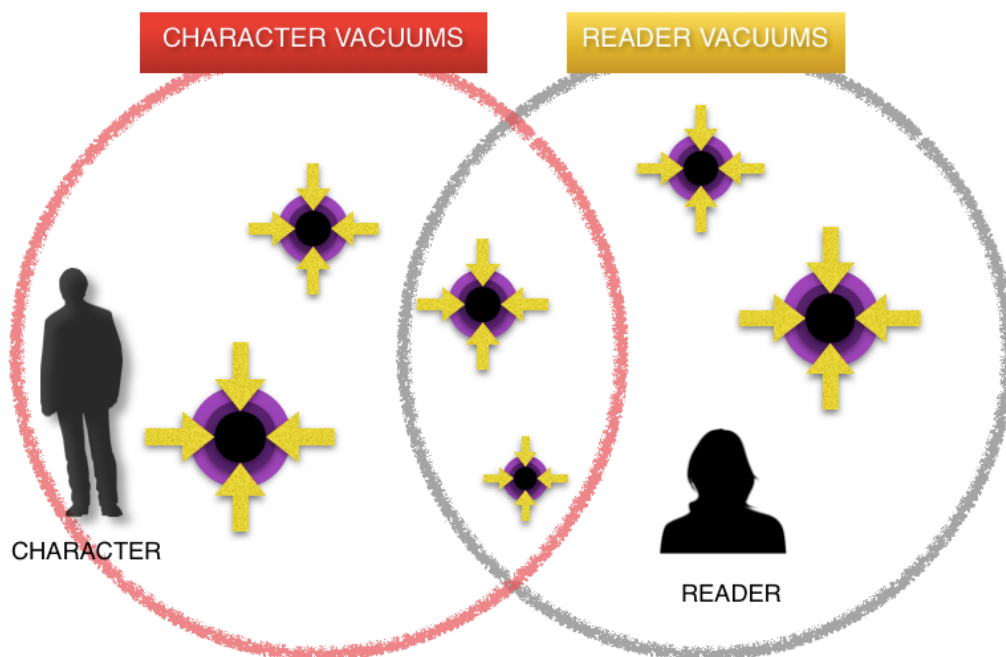
That's what makes a reader a reader: a reader is someone with an *actual* or *potential* vacuum.



That means just about anyone who is alive, right?

Right.

So the job of a successful fiction writer is to find or create character vacuums that resonate with reader vacuums.

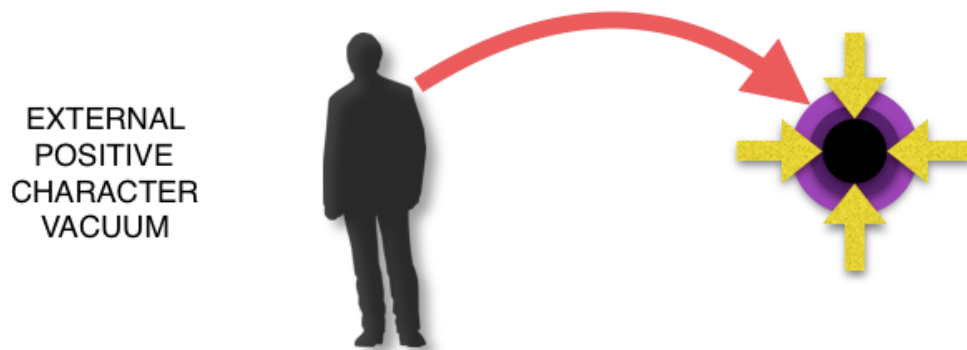


The 'vacuum' could be a need or casual desire for escape, a need to feel an emotion, a desire for a deeper understanding; it could be vicarious sensation, a sense of relief, a get-away from mundanity, a new look at things, or even peace of mind. The range of effects that could be described in terms of vacuums is infinite.

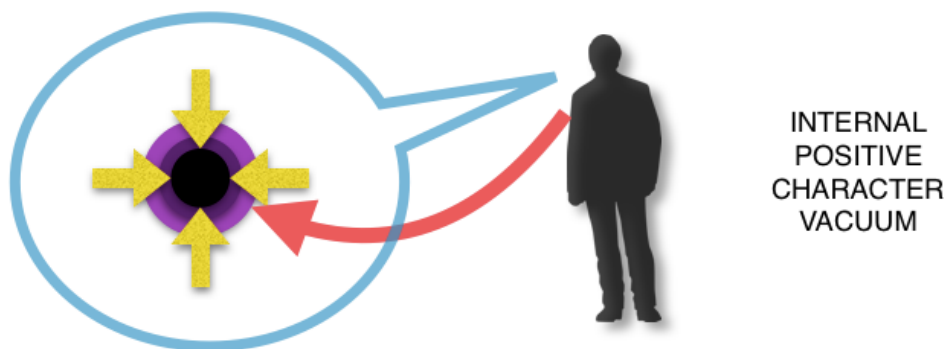
But for now it will help to examine specific types of *character vacuums*.

There are four basic kinds of character vacuum:

External positive character vacuums: these could include escape to a better place, a healthier world-view, a better relationship with someone and so on - things external to the character.



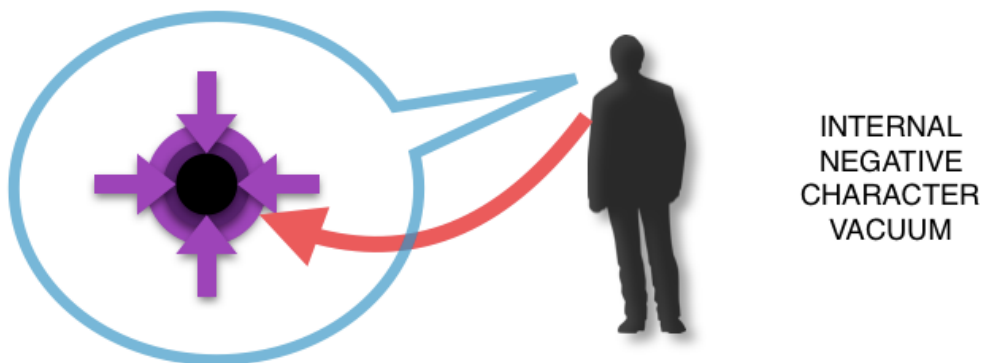
Internal positive character vacuums: these include things like a peace of mind a character would like to achieve, a state of fitness they want to reach, an emotion they'd like to express and so forth, part of the character's internal world.



External negative character vacuums: these could be things like declining health, insecurity in the character's environment, a hungry family or a forthcoming redundancy - real, external factors.



Internal negative character vacuums: including the fear of a future health problem, hunger, pain or personal depression or anxiety and so on - mainly psychological aspects.



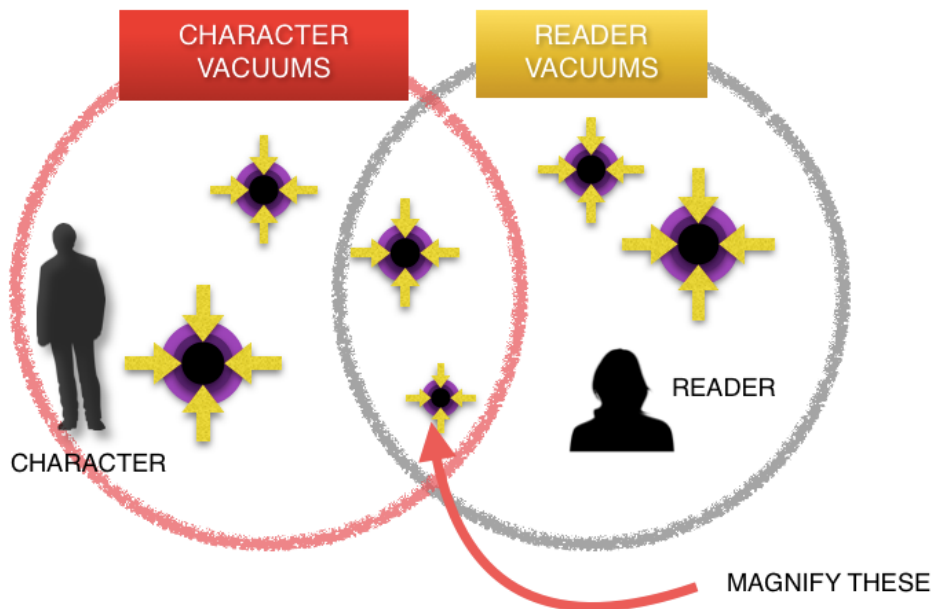
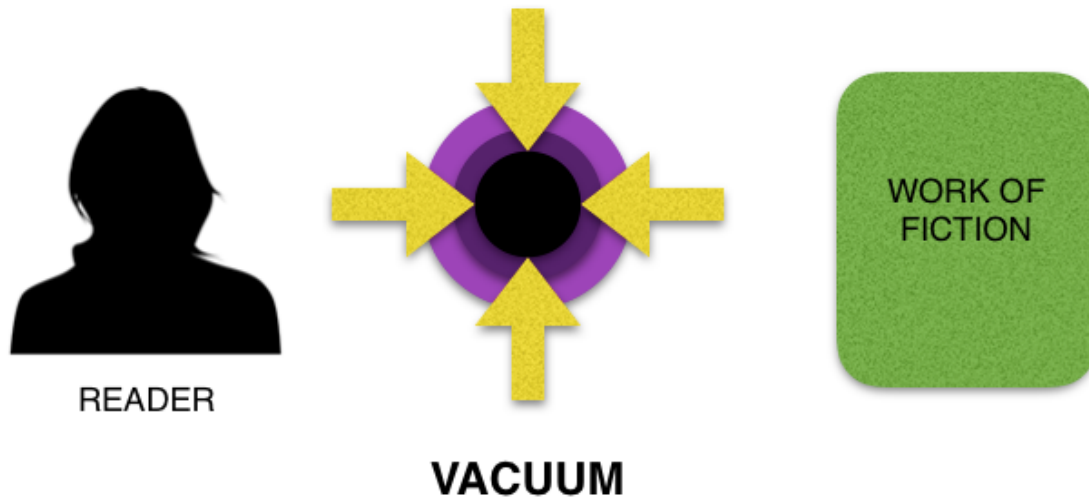
Positive/negative, internal/external: master the recognition of character vacuums and vacuum generation becomes easy and predictable.

Positive character vacuums are not much used in fiction, except in stories for small children. Examples include a character seeking a toy or to go on a picnic - something with virtually no negative connotations except that it isn't present or hasn't happened yet.

Understandably, negative vacuums have more 'pull' as readers grow older and gain more experience of real-life negative vacuums.

Vacuums either pull the work toward the reader or the reader toward the work.

The job of the successful piece of fiction (made much easier by the observant writer) is to create vacuums that overlap with the vacuums of the reader and then magnify them.



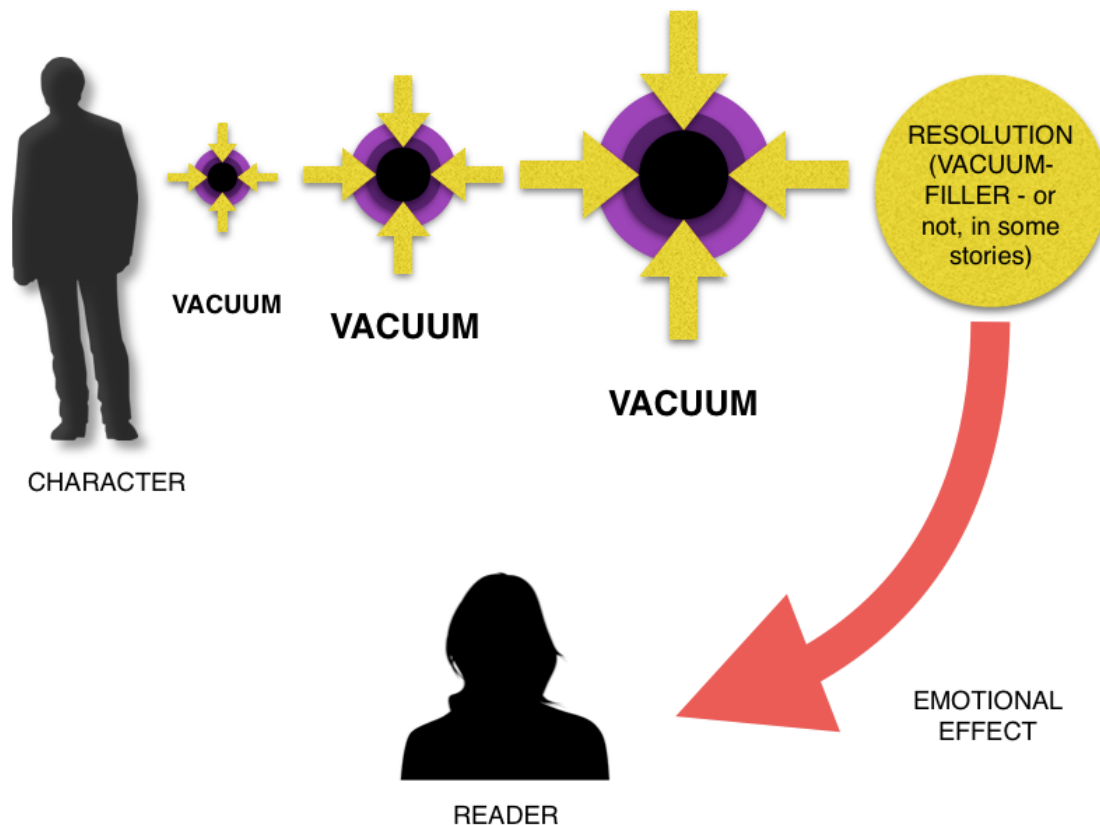
Filling the vacuum produces a moment of fulfilment for the reader. A large vacuum being filled produces a bigger, more emotionally fulfilling effect.

The more creative and energetic the work is in creating and filling vacuums, the more successful it will be. If a work successfully fills a vacuum, readers will either return to have more vacuums filled (even ones that they didn't realise were there!) or they will recommend other readers to come and read, through a contagion of vacuums.

Provide good adventure, effective tragedy, an enjoyable comedy, a powerful new thriller, a great children's story, a perfect new filmscript, or even lasting peace of mind and the reader who wanted it will return to you again and again. And they'll want their family and friends to come to you too. But what makes the adventure 'good' is vacuums; what makes the tragedy 'effective' is vacuums; what makes the comedy 'enjoyable' is vacuums, and so on.

Specific examples of all of these things, with lots of detail, follow later.

How exactly do you find or create vacuums?



Levels of Vacuum

Using these things - whether they were fully aware of them or not - successful works have grown into huge bestsellers.

Agatha Christie is the world's most successful crime writer with estimates of over two billion copies of her stories sold. How has she done this? *By creating and filling vacuums.*

The Harry Potter books became a commercial success stories that have made millions for their author, J. K. Rowling. How have they done this? *By finding and filling vacuums.*

Shakespeare and the other giants of literature have conquered the literary world over the centuries. How have they done this? *By finding and filling vacuums.*

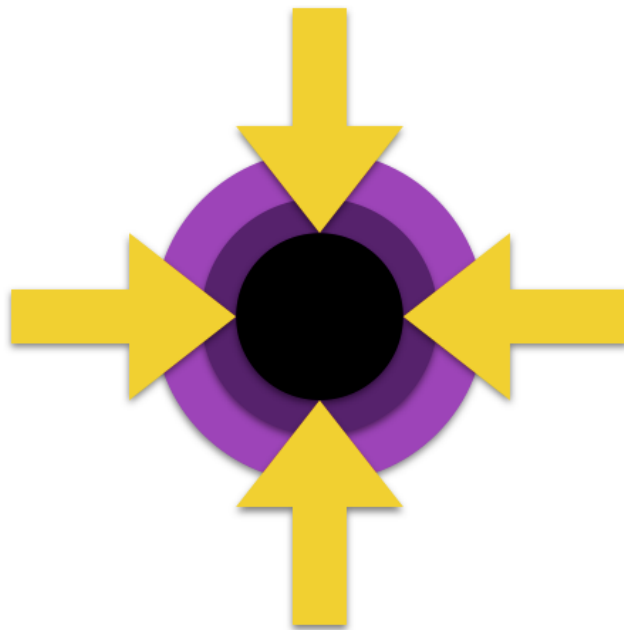
You can probably think of countless examples, because there are countless examples:

Pride and Prejudice, Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, Tess Of The D'Urbervilles and other nineteenth century novels; *To The Lighthouse, A Passage to India, To Kill a Mockingbird* and other 20th century masterpieces; *The Lord of the Rings, Dune, Watership Down, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and other works of fantasy and science fiction; modern films ranging from *Vertigo* in 1958 to *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* in 2014 - all these works of fiction have as their engine and beating heart the power of finding or creating vacuums of one kind or another and then filling them or purposefully leaving them empty. Some of these examples we will look at specifically in later weeks.

You've been introduced to the four basic types of character vacuum above. But there are other categories of vacuum which you need to understand. These are the building blocks for character constructs and also for some plot vacuums, as you will see.

Some vacuums are inherent, automatic or basic. We have to eat, we all need shelter, we all have health requirements, we are all alive. Characters respond on a primal level when threatened with

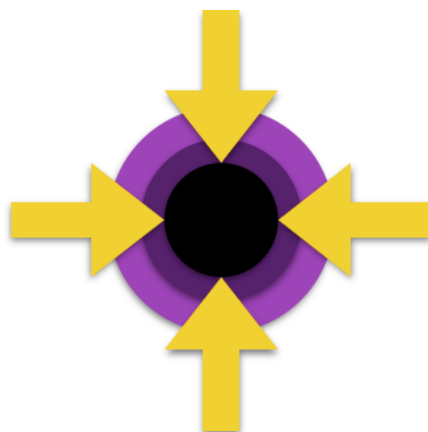
starvation, loss of homes, ill health or death. Think Dickens, think disaster movies, think vampire novels to a degree (vampirism being a form of death).



BASIC VACUUMS
to do with primal
survival, life and
death, food, shelter,
ill health and so on

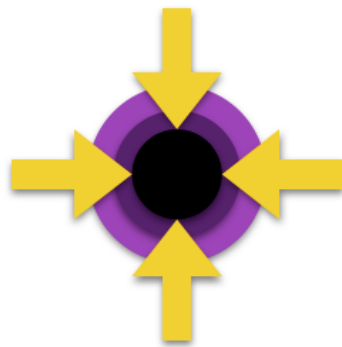
Some vacuums are not necessarily basic, but are so common that they are part of living: the need for companionship, the urge to be entertained and the desire to be educated are examples. These form the fabric of human society. Myriads of works of fiction exist to provide the sense of these to readers through carefully constructed characters.

In this group of vacuums, the mere fact that there are so many possibilities and variants opens the door to your success rather than restricts you. Examples of authors using vacuums of this kind are almost infinitely numerous: Jane's need for companionship in *Jane Eyre*; Pickwick's urge for justice in *The Pickwick Papers*; Anne's desire to be educated in *Anne of Green Gables*. A work that lacks these vacuums is going to seem hollow and shallow.



COMMON VACUUMS
to do with
companionship,
education,
entertainment and so
on

Then we get into the realms of the universal: things that characters don't need but might want, conveniences, comforts, luxuries, small things that just about everyone has lacked at some point of time or all the time.



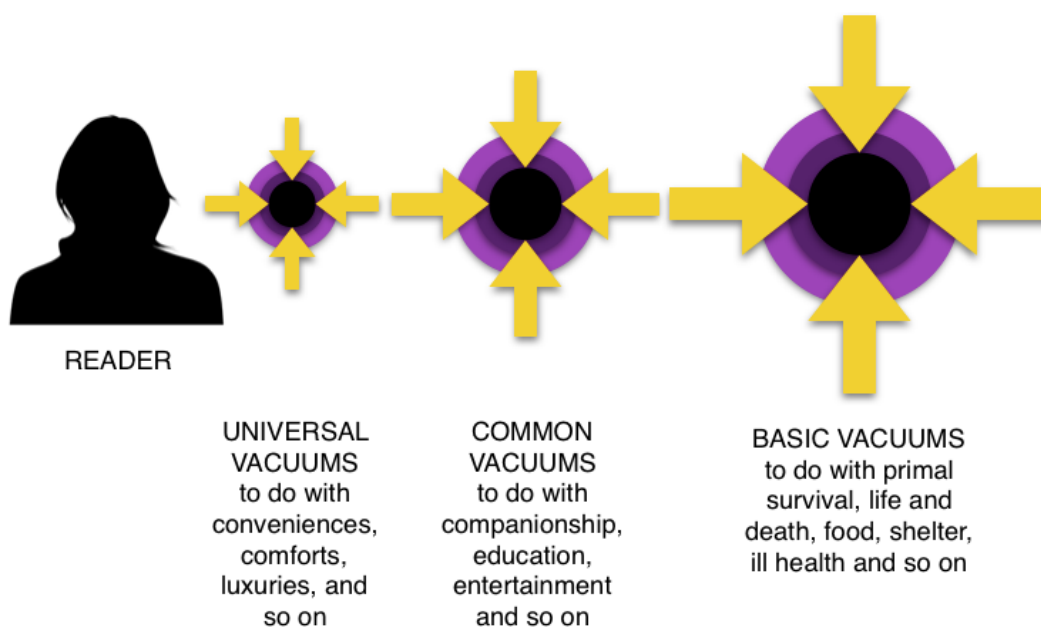
UNIVERSAL VACUUMS
to do conveniences,
comforts, luxuries, and
so on

Universal vacuums open the door to stories in a profoundly significant and almost all-embracing way, as we shall see.

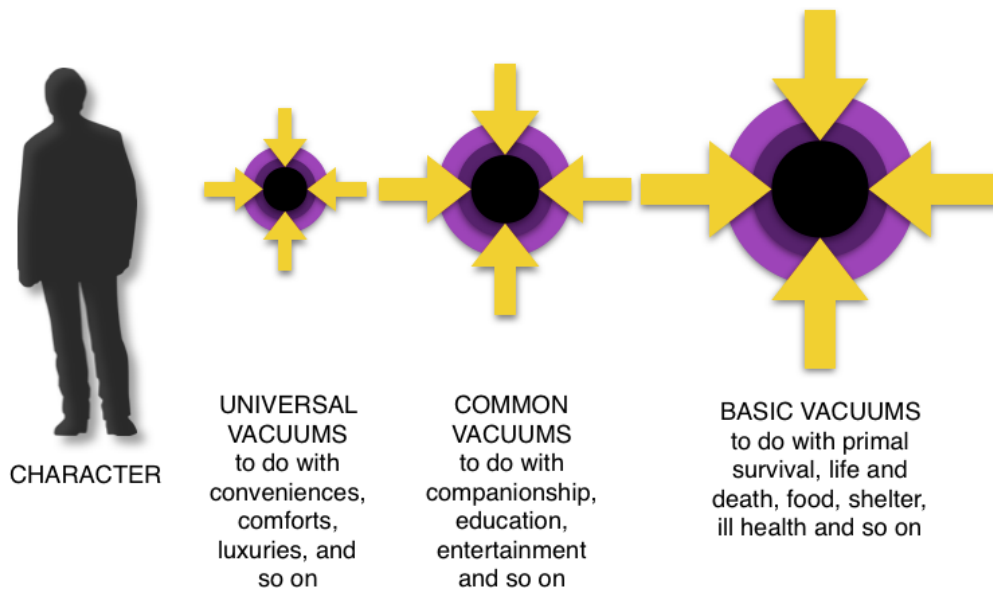
This all becomes a little clearer when we put these levels of vacuums together with the reader, as in the following diagram.

All readers share universal vacuums.

That's why they're universal.



All readers at some point have suffered an inconvenience or discomfort. This means that they more readily grasp that level of vacuum when it is presented in a *character*.



You can create a potentially infinite number of convincing characters by creating and filling vacuums of these kinds.

World-famous authors have applied these levels of vacuums to build up the vacuum power in some of their leading characters. They do this by beginning with *universal vacuums* and underpinning them with *common vacuums* and then the much more serious level of *basic vacuums*.

Basic vacuums, to do with life and death, shelter, health and security, are the foundation: on top of those, common vacuums like companionship, entertainment or education are overlaid. Sometimes there is no need for further vacuums; sometimes universal vacuums are interwoven into the construct to create a complex 'character'.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, as we have seen, Frodo loses home, friends and then suffers physically as he progresses through his adventure. The magnitude of the vacuum gets worse: he loses luxuries and accessories first, then later companionship, and, as his quest nears its end, he is threatened with pain, starvation and death. But he begins by being mildly inconvenienced by his neighbours.

Always the basic vacuums underpin the lesser ones.

The same kind of sequence is followed in almost all other tales: in *Watership Down*, by Richard Adams, the rabbit characters lose home and friends then later suffer pain and privation, always pursued by the shadow of death. In *Dune*, by Frank Herbert, protagonist Paul has to leave his home planet and loses shelter and companions before being threatened with death, all on the way to gaining wisdom. In the sequel *Dune Messiah* he even loses his eyesight. Jane in *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë finds her situation progressively worsening and suffers greater and greater loss before her magical moment of fulfilment.

Master authors use these levels of vacuum whether they call them that or not - they are a scale of needs which readers recognise and respond to. The greater the need, the more its 'pulling power'. Some character vacuums are more complex than others, being woven of many kinds of vacuums, but all result in an increase in reader sympathy.

In *Tess Of The D'Urbervilles*, by Thomas Hardy, the character of Tess Durbeyfield, the novel's protagonist, is created by placing her in the path of destruction. Chief among the vacuums first presented is that of her immediate family, impoverished and uneducated. Tess, a beautiful, loyal young woman who lives with them in the village of Marlott, possesses a sense of responsibility and is committed to doing the best she can for her family, although her inexperience and lack of wise parenting leave her extremely vulnerable. Thus she gains character vacuums which attract reader sympathy like magnets.

Her life becomes complicated when her father discovers a link to the noble line of the d'Urbervilles. Tess is sent to work at the d'Urberville mansion, but slides further and further into misfortune after she becomes pregnant by Alec d'Urberville. The irony is that Tess and her family are not really related to this branch of the d'Urbervilles at all: Alec's father, a merchant named Simon Stokes, simply assumed the name. At the end of this sad tale, the gradually increasing vacuums that have been opened up in Tess's character are not filled, capturing Hardy's dark message about life and society.

In *A Passage to India*, by E. M. Forster, the similarly tragic heroine Adela Quested is seeking entertainment and education before her deeper aching and more basic needs are touched upon in the Caves of Marabar, and her life falls apart as she goes on to suffer great physical pain and loss.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee we are warned in the opening sentence that the child character Jem is going to suffer physical injury and then we are led through a deepening pattern of vacuums to find out how.

These patterns and correspondences are not a coincidence, they are a tool. In the 2014 film *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, the protagonist Steve Rogers has the massive character vacuum of the loss of his entire time period mentioned in the opening scenes before plot vacuums pull the story along.

It doesn't matter what the medium is: characters in stories are constructed from the same basic material - emptinesses, needs, desires, of varying magnitudes.

So character vacuums are weaknesses, wounds, losses and deep needs on a scale of relative strengths: basics like shelter, health and security underpinning common needs like friendship or knowledge, overlaid with lesser needs like comforts or conveniences.

Any significant character in any piece of fiction anywhere is composed of a mixture of these. Character vacuums are a vital tool in creating an effective work of fiction: well-rounded, fully biographed characters who have no burning needs of any kind are dead on the page.

It's almost as though the construct you're creating is made out of holes. The best and most memorable protagonists always are.

But how do character vacuums relate to the plot? Is a character vacuum enough to power an entire tale? What else moves the story forward?

Plot vacuums are of course going to get attention in due course. But before we look at them in detail, there's one particular type of character worth examining as he or she normally acts as a bridge between character and plot.

From Character to Plot

Initially, a story's central character usually has only a vague idea of real needs, as we have mentioned. They begin with universal vacuums, inconveniences, interruptions, losses of minor comforts. They may experience a common vacuum - the loss of a friend or family member or positive situation. Then, lo and behold, someone turns up to point out what the underlying basic vacuum is.

These characters, who have remarkably similar qualities and attributes across all of literature as we will examine in detail in a later chapter, can be summed up as *vacuum definers*, or *attention commanders*.

An 'attention commander' is a kind of character, who by reason of their position, behaviour or relationship to other characters in a story, is an authority figure or opinion leader for the central character construct who we are taking to be our protagonist. The mechanics of how this works are explained in a later section. For now, the thing to understand is that these senior characters *command attention* - they can direct where others look and what others notice.

In the examples above, this figure either appears and directs the protagonist towards the underlying basic vacuum that must be addressed.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, it's obviously Gandalf who points to the imminent loss of life and freedom across Middle Earth.

In *Watership Down*, it's Fiver with his premonitions.

In *Dune*, the vacuum definer is Paul's witch-like mother.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the vacuum-defining old man is clearly Atticus.

In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, it's Nick Fury.

Where these figures are weak or missing (though they are usually present in some form nevertheless) we have a different kind of tale with a bleaker conclusion.

Tess Of The D'Urbervilles has Tess Durbeyfield suffer so much largely because her father, who would normally be the vacuum-defining figure, is so weak; in *A Passage to India*, Adela lacks anyone to act as a definer for her, other than Fielding or the more remote Professor Godbole, after her life has already collapsed. That's why these stories belong to a different genre altogether, though they still follow the same principles.

Find the appropriate authority figure for your potential protagonist and he or she can be made aware of a vacuum that he or she didn't even know was there - which brings in the substance of the *plot*.

Remember, we are talking here about protagonists who initially know almost *nothing at all* about their real needs. They have few vacuums, external or internal, operating upon them in any way, or are trapped in a kind of 'vacuum stasis' at the beginning of the tale. They aren't looking for anything else, aren't necessarily thinking about anything else, are barely aware of anything else, except a sense of restlessness or some kind of universal vacuum.

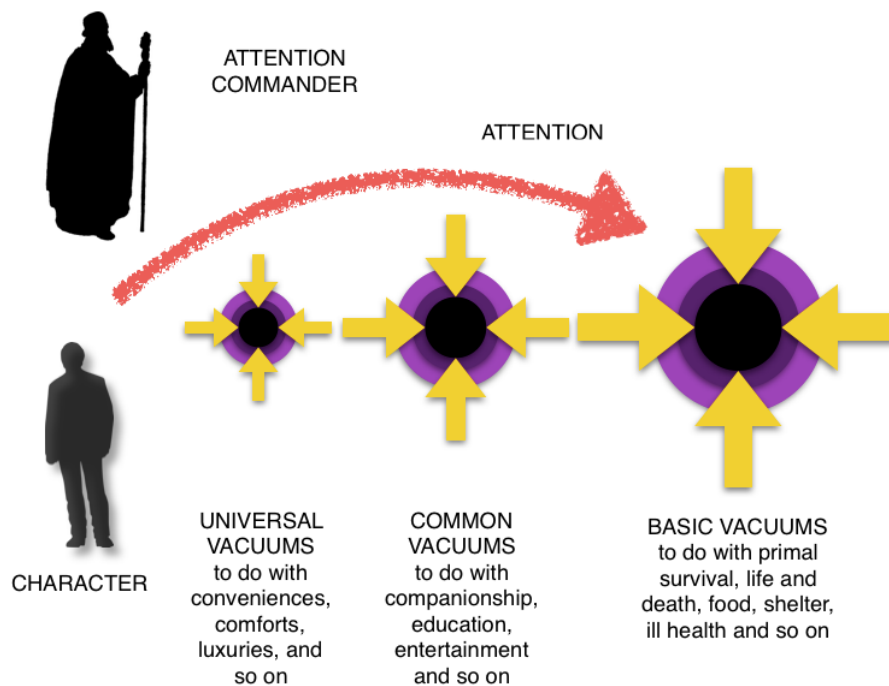
The underlying basic need has to be put in front of them and made real.

It has to impinge upon them from 'outside', as it were. It has to hit them with authority, it has to grab their attention which is currently on other, lesser things, as in the following diagram.

Most writers through the ages use the archetype of the old man with a stick. You will immediately spot him as such in most of the stories we have touched upon: Gandalf the wizard, Obi Wan Kenobi the Jedi, Dumbledore the wizard, and so on.

This character is slightly less obvious in many other works, as we have seen: Professor Godbole in *A Passage to India*, Atticus in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Jaggers in *Great Expectations*, the wizard in *The Wizard of Oz*, Clarence the angel in *It's a Wonderful Life*, Doc Smith in *Back to the Future*, Nick Fury in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *The Avengers* and so on. In all of these works, and in many more, easily recognisable or not, the figure of the old man - who usually has a stick or object of power with him - fulfils much the same function: he informs the protagonist (and therefore the reader) of the nature of the basic vacuum which is central to the story.

They can be good or bad, positive or negative. Jaggers' motives in *Great Expectations* seem totally different to Clarence's in *It's a Wonderful Life*. All that really matters is that *attention can be commanded by them*.



When they speak, people listen. When they endorse, people 'pay attention'. When they point out an underlying basic vacuum, it sparks the plot into life.

Suddenly, protagonists experience an awareness of such a thing as a basic vacuum - because someone they innately respect, even if only a little, has said that they favour something, need something, have to draw our attention to something. A need, however slight, is awakened and a real plot vacuum is born. Encourage it to grow and the character begins to move and the reader begins to develop momentum through the work.

You'll learn much more about characters and how they relate to plots later. First, you have to see how combinations of the vacuums you have learned about so far create the wide variety of fiction that you see around you in novels, plays, films and short stories.

Vacuums interact with each other to create different effects. Firstly, they create the four basic genres of fiction itself; secondly, they create a set of characters who are recognisable across the whole range of fiction. As this week is all about characters, let's look at them first.

The Archetypal Characters

If we are correct that, as we suggest in earlier weeks, the main purpose of fiction is to communicate something to the reader, to create some kind of effect, then along with writing in the same language as the reader (coupled with basic spelling and universal grammar) we have these 'patterns of expectation' or templates to assist in getting that message across.

As we have seen, character vacuums are universally used to attract the reader. Even an 'unattractive' character like an antagonist has character vacuums.

Then, when it comes to types of plot, happy or positive messages use Comedy or Epic; unhappy or negative messages use Tragedy or Irony.

If you like, rather than write a simple message on a piece of paper and hand it to readers, fiction writers have developed over many centuries a system of 'codes' so that readers know basically which of their emotional needs will be served. Someone in the mood for an uplifting experience will know through certain signs that such-and-such a work offers them a comic or epic experience; those in a more thoughtful or downbeat mood will spot the indications that certain works will provide them with certain outcomes more suited to their tastes at that time.

These templates are recognised in much the same way as the letters of the alphabet are recognised, words are recognised or grammar is recognised.

If you as a fiction writer are not interested in serving a reader's needs. but simply want to write 'from your own head', disregarding the reader entirely, then chances are that, just as you still use letters, words and grammar, you will still strike one of these patterns taking shape in your fiction.

Chances are slender that you will perfectly match each and every point of the template that you need to be successful with readers, though. More normally, a writer needs to know these points by heart in the same way that a musician needs to practice certain musical forms to have any hope of capturing a listener's ear.

Let's assume that you do want to communicate some kind of effect, intellectual, emotional, spiritual or some combination, to a set of readers. Then you will want to become familiar with these templates and put into them your own ideas and images.

Where do you start?

We've been taught in and out of school that a character is a fictitious personality who, to be successful, must appear to be 'as lifelike as possible'.

We've been similarly taught that a plot, in order to attract readers, must contain 'conflict'.

We've been taught that any work of fiction has to have at least three acts with a dramatic curve heading upwards to a climax, followed by a denouement that completes the tale.

We get taught these things in schools, even in writing classes for adults; we read about these things in critical reviews or fan letters; we are drowned in the terminology that comes with these things, particularly the words 'drama', 'conflict', 'verisimilitude' and 'climax'.

All of these ideas are at best only partial truths.

Similarities in Protagonists

We've already examined the thing that we know by the term 'character' and found that many protagonists are almost identical:

- Frodo the halfling protagonist in *The Lord of the Rings*, is an orphan who is stabbed, stung and loses a finger in the course of his journey

- Paul Atreides in the science-fiction classic *Dune*, by Frank Herbert, loses his father and is later struck blind in his adventures
- Will, the child protagonist, loses his mother and then his fingers in the second of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy by Philip Pullman
- Jem, one of the child protagonists of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, having already lost his mother, has his arm broken as part of his journey.

Jane, the eponymous heroine of *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë, Heathcliff, the wayward protagonist of *Wuthering Heights*, by Emily Brontë, Pip, the child hero of *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens, Anne in *Anne Of Green Gables*, by L.M. Montgomery, and Harry in *Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone*, by J.K. Rowling are all orphans and are all wounded either physically or emotionally on their journeys. Harry receives his scar while still a baby.

In the film world, examples are again too numerous to mention: George Bailey in Frank Capra's classic *It's a Wonderful Life*, loses his father and is afflicted with deafness in one ear; Luke Skywalker thinks that he is an orphan and even loses the relatives who were raising him in *Star Wars: A New Hope*.

Fiction is quite a brutal world.

That heroes of tales are often orphans is nothing new, strange though it may seem to look at rawly like this. But the question that few seem to ask is 'Why are so many of these protagonists orphans? Why are so many of them savagely wounded in some way in their stories?'

One obvious answer is 'to gain sympathy from the reader.' Orphans are immediately sympathetic figures for most readers. Wounds and scars increase that sense of sympathy and wanting to help, increasing the identification with the star of the story.

But as we have seen, it is actually even simpler than that.

The loss of one parent or both creates a *vacuum*.

The loss of appendages, limbs, or health creates *vacuums*.

Vacuums attract attention.

By robbing their protagonists of the standard support of one or more of these things, successful fiction writers immediately attract reader attention. This has very little to do with verisimilitude - when you think about it, in real life not that many people are actually orphans or are brutalised in the way that protagonists are. It has everything to do with *vacuums*.

The first law of character development is: create vacuums.

Vacuums 'suck' attention from the reader.

If this is done skilfully enough, the reader will stick like glue to what we are used to calling a 'protagonist'. And that more or less defines what a protagonist is: the point at which a story most sticks the reader's attention.

The usual method of doing that involves robbing a child of its parents. We don't need to know much about this child-figure at all - normally protagonists are remarkably sketchily drawn when closely examined. The important thing in terms of establishing them with the reader is *to create a powerful enough vacuum around one figure*.

A protagonist is defined as that constructed figure who attracts and holds the most reader attention.

Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*, loses his parents in a boating accident. There is remarkably little else that we know about him, including very little physical description. He responds fairly ordinarily to the situations presented to him in the tale - he is anxious when one would expect him to be anxious, afraid when it would be appropriate for him to be afraid, and so on. In other words, there's nothing particularly interesting about him. What we pick up on and follow is that he is losing things: as we have seen, he has to give up his home, his country, and his friends in the first part of the book. In other words, *the vacuum gets bigger around him* as the story progresses. Soon he loses his mentor Gandalf, his companions, his protector Aragorn and then parts of his body. And of course he is being continually plagued by the Ring, which constantly tempts him with the vacuum of invisibility and more sinister things. (The Ring is a marvellous fictive device for linking the protagonist with the basic vacuum - in the case, the destruction of the entire world through Sauron, the Dark Lord.)

Just when our attention might begin to drift from him as the protagonist onto his more amusing companions Sam or even Pippin or Merry, Frodo is stabbed on Weathertop by a Morgul-knife. His drifting in and out of full consciousness from that point, far from making him less interesting, actually serves to guarantee to the reader that he *is* the protagonist - he is definitely the vacuum point which sticks our attention the most. We don't hear much from him in some chapters; the dialogue and direction falls to others - but that doesn't matter. We know as readers that our 'hero', our central character, is Frodo. Why?

He is the one with the most vacuums.

Gandalf says of Frodo that 'He may become like a glass filled with a clear light for eyes to see that can.'

As the story goes on, it is Frodo who takes on the burden of the Ring though he does 'not know the way' (another vacuum); it is Frodo who acts as our point of interest, even on the hill of Amon Hen when the battle between the will of Sauron and another voice from afar that speaks in Frodo's head is fought on his almost neutral 'canvas'.

Then as a flash from some other power there came to his mind another thought: Take it off! Take it off! Fool, take it off! Take off the Ring! The two powers strove in him, for a moment, perfectly balanced between their piercing points, he writhed, tormented. Suddenly he was aware of himself again. Frodo, neither the Voice nor the Eye: free to choose, and with one remaining instant with to do so. He took the ring off his finger.

Later, when he has again given up all the rest of his companions and journeyed closer to Mordor, he gathers to himself the character of Gollum, who could be described as a living vacuum, a creature who has lost himself. This strengthens the 'glue' which sticks us to the travelling trio of hobbits as they enter the land of further vacuums, Mordor.

To save his protagonist from becoming too repetitively two dimensional in his responses, as we've said, Tolkien then has Frodo stung and later maimed with the loss of a finger - all drawing attention from readers.

Only at the end of the quest does Frodo regain whatever little personality he had at the beginning:

Then as he had kept watch Sam had noticed that at times a light seemed to be shining faintly within; but now the light was even clearer and stronger. Frodo's face was peaceful, the marks of fear and care had left it; but it looked old, old and beautiful, as if

the chiseling of the shaping years was now revealed in many fine lines that had before been hidden, though the identity of the face was not changed.

In fact, Frodo becomes emptier and emptier until in the last part of the book, his quest over, he even rejects participation in the society around him. This isn't a 'bad' thing - this is just him acting out his role as a protagonist: *a virtual walking vacuum*.

As we have seen, what normal terminology calls a 'protagonist' is actually an increasing 'black hole' of vacuum power, at least until some point in the story - towards the end - when fortunes change and vacuums get filled - or not, depending on the author's intention.

If the character vacuums are filled, we're reading a Comedy or an Epic; if they are left empty, we're reading a Tragedy or an Irony.

- With Pip, from the Ironic *Great Expectations*, vacuum power increases from the first page and isn't unambiguously filled on the last
- Elizabeth Bennett, from the Comedy/Romance *Pride and Prejudice*, has losses that grow in significance until the turning point of the story when they begin to be fulfilled
- Jane Austen's Emma seems content at first but her character vacuum is her ignorance of her own failings. She plunges from one embarrassing mistake to the next until, in telling the tediously garrulous Miss Bates to shut up, her whole life empties
- Hamlet loses his father, his mother (to a false marriage), his girlfriend, his kingdom and, arguably, himself. His attraction as a protagonist is created by all this vacuum power
- In Henry Fielding's Epic novel *Tom Jones*, Tom is a foundling, discovered on a doorstep, makes his way through loss after loss and only at the end turns out to be well-born, and marries the girl of his dreams
- Michael Henchard in the Ironic *The Mayor of Casterbridge* by Thomas Hardy is the most tragic tale of a man who does a great wrong (he sells his wife and daughter) and pays for it later. His life is ruined by Fate - and laid open to vacuums
- Charlotte Brontë's heroine in the Romance *Jane Eyre* is completely admirable and compelling but over the top of her unjustified loss and emptiness that the reader almost comes to believe in supernatural intervention so that at the end of the story she can be fulfilled.

Based on this survey of a wide variety of texts - and I am sure that you can think of many more - we can safely conclude for the moment that what has been so far called a 'protagonist' is actually *the point in a story which most attracts the reader's attention with vacuums*.

Dress that character with minimal verisimilitude - fail to describe him or her, give them only a skimpy history, sketch in only a pale outline of a person - *but make sure that you take plenty away from him or her from the start, and continue to do so throughout the story*.

What are you trying to do with this odd-sounding tactical move?

What is the purpose of all these vacuums?

The object of pumping characters full of more and more vacuums is *to strengthen the flow of reader attention until it becomes strong enough to prompt emotional commitment*. Given enough of that commitment, a reader will be further prompted into the physical action of turning page after page to find out how this central character vacuum, which has grabbed and held so much reader attention, will eventually be filled.

We say we 'love' our heroes - we're actually just stuck to their vacuums.

In Comedies, the vacuum is usually filled through marriage (see Elizabeth Bennett, Emma, Tom Jones and Jane Eyre above); it becomes obvious in the course of the play or novel or film that the protagonist is literally 'incomplete' without a partner.

In Epics, the hero has normally become so much of a walking vacuum that his lack can only be filled through transcending the world of the story in some way. Frodo has to leave Middle Earth and journey to the Blessed Lands; Luke Skywalker has to become a Jedi; Harry Potter has to mature into a fully-fledged wizard. Many child protagonists have to simply grow into adults. In all cases, they have to be transformed into something totally different from what they were *in order to make the point that their 'wounds' are now healed*.

In Tragedies, the vacuum is usually not filled, or filled too late or imperfectly - that's why it's a Tragedy.

In Ironies, the vacuum opens out to be overwhelmingly bigger at the end, and the hero is often lost in it altogether - that's why it's an Irony. Examples include Hamlet, Macbeth, and Hardy's Michael Henchard above.

Whichever category the story falls under, the mechanical principle is the same:

There has to be enough focused vacuum power to get the reader committed, to glue the reader, to bring the reader and the writer's message together.

It's not only the protagonist that this applies to. It applies to everything in a story. In terms of the things we have been used to calling 'characters', *every single one is created using vacuum power*.

Here's another interesting thing: if you don't particularly have to worry about verisimilitude when you're designing your protagonist, you have to worry about it even less when you're constructing all the other things that we have formerly called 'characters'. What you are actually using are *templated archetypes*, almost like the figures in a Tarot card set.

The Comic Companion

Take the ever-present 'comic companion', mentioned earlier. He or she is virtually the same figure from tale to tale.

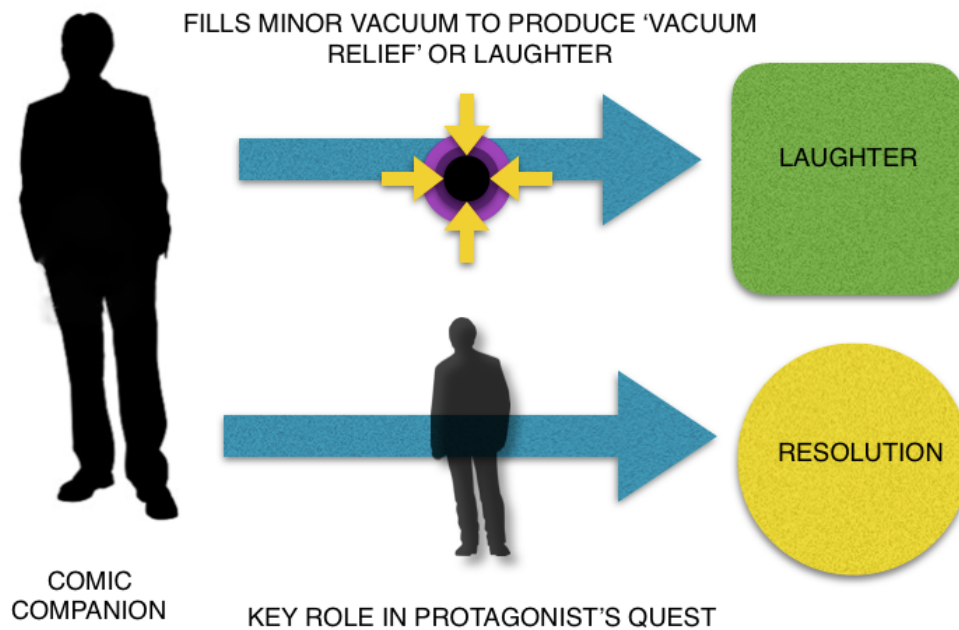
Sam in *The Lord of the Rings*, has remarkable similarities to Dill in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, or Piglet in *Winnie the Pooh*, or Herbert in *Great Expectations*, or Ron in *Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone*, or R2-D2 and C-3PO in *Star Wars*, or the porter in *Macbeth*. Why are these figures there? Why are they so alike?

One standard answer is 'to provide comic relief'. But the real answer, the universal answer, is *to fill a minor vacuum*.

What does that mean? If the protagonist is all about being a vacuum - an ever-increasing vacuum, progressively being robbed of more and more, physically, emotionally and even spiritually, in order to draw in the reader's attention relentlessly - then a comic character provides interludes when a relatively unimportant vacuum is filled. This acts to break things up a little, to relieve the relentless build-up of emptiness, and to highlight the protagonist's vacuum.

A side vacuum, not essential to the overall plot, is temporarily filled, bringing with it that well-known symptom of vacuum-filling: laughter.

The reader, drained by the trials of the protagonist who is losing more and more as the story goes on, experiences a moment of relief. That moment of relief serves to make the protagonist's vacuums stronger by contrast.



'Comic relief' is 'vacuum relief'.

The comic figure also has something essential to do in the end: they have a key role to play in the protagonist's quest.

Don't take my word for it - look at these examples.

The Lord of the Rings

In Chapter Two of *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo has just learned how the entire fate of Middle Earth has fallen upon his shoulders and that he will have to give up everything that he loves - home, friends, comfort. Who is cutting the grass outside his window as he learns this in a deep conversation with the wizard Gandalf? Sam, who is comically lifted through the window by the wizard and comically regards the whole prospect of the trip as a blessing.

Sam later plays a key role in the quest to destroy the Ring, taking the burden of the Ring at a vital moment in the story and thus saving the Quest.

To Kill a Mockingbird

After an onslaught into her childhood from the adult world, with racism explicitly appearing, Scout is confronted by the word 'rape' and the threatened loss of her friendship with her brother Jem. Who should reappear at that moment in the novel but Dill, the comic figure, who comforts Scout that night.

Dill is the one who prompts the children to seek out Boo Radley earlier in the novel, which has huge consequences later.

Great Expectations

After the great ordeal towards the end of the story in which Pip finds out the awful truth about his benefactor and then loses him, who steps forward to fill Pip's vacuum with some comfort but Herbert, the comic figure in Dickens' novel.

Herbert then provides Pip with support at a vital moment in the plot.

Star Wars

As for *Star Wars*, comic companions R2-D2 and C-3PO are constantly acting as vacuum-fillers in their appearances after or during major battle scenes. They act to rescue the heroes at crucial moments.

Macbeth

The porter in *Macbeth* appears with his word-play and lewd jokes just after Macbeth's horrific, treasonous murder of Duncan, as a result of which Macbeth believes he has lost his own soul. (It's also the porter who symbolically lets in Macduff, the character who will bring an end to Macbeth's reign.)

In all these cases, we have yawning abysses of our protagonists - active, expanding vacuums, serving their real purpose of sucking at the reader's attention, drawing out commitment like a vampire drawing blood - and the momentary relief of a templated comic figure, who is less affected by the mounting vacuum and who fills a minor vacuum unexpectedly, prompting the response which we have come to know as 'comic relief' but which is actually mechanically better described as *a temporary filling of vacuums*.

The Female Companion

What about the romantic partner figure - in Epics and Tragedies often a woman, in Ironies and Comedies, sometimes a man? Are they also some kind of templated 'type'? What do they have to do with vacuums?

A Passage to India, by E. M. Forster, is a masterpiece of a novel in which the vacuums run out of control, as they tend to do in Ironies. The resulting emptiness is best symbolised in the book by the Marabar Caves, which contain nothing but a sense of meaninglessness.

Nothing is inside them, they were sealed up before the creation of pestilence or treasure; if mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil. One of them is rumoured within the boulder that swings on the summit of the highest of the hills; a bubble-shaped cave that has neither ceiling nor floor, and mirrors its own darkness in every direction infinitely. If the boulder falls and smashes, the cave will smash too – empty as an Easter egg.

The caves grip the imagination of the female characters Adela and Mrs. Moore, effectively driving Mrs. Moore to her death and Adela temporarily insane. Neither finds peace or wholeness again - Adela returns to England shattered by her experience, unable to marry the man she went to India for.

Because it's an Irony, in *A Passage to India* the vacuums win and the female figure is left empty, tormented (Adela suffers physical agonies, Mrs. Moore mental ones) and unsatisfied.

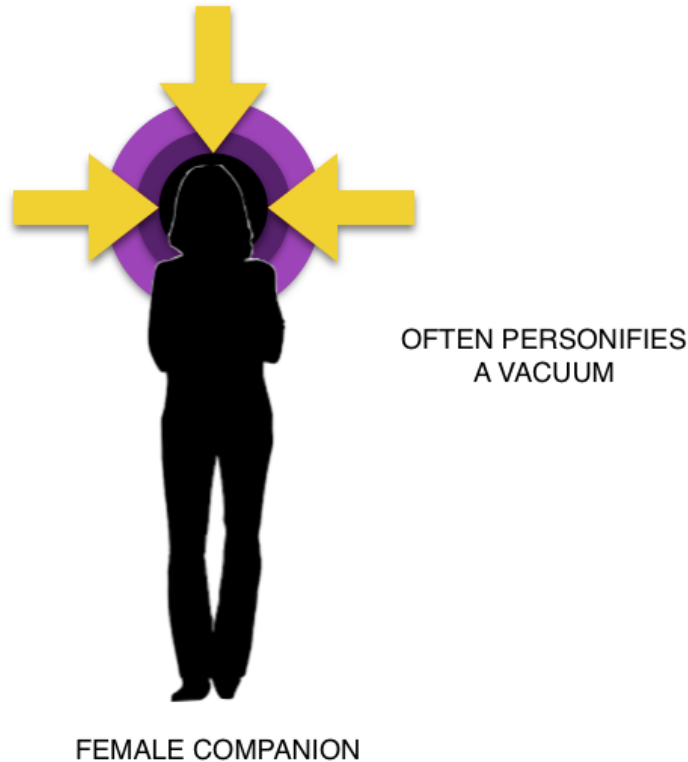
Pride and Prejudice, by Jane Austen, on the other hand, is a prototype of the romantic novel. Here, Lizzy, potentially a tragic figure, ends up overcoming her vacuum and is fulfilled, marrying Darcy at the end.

Jane in *Jane Eyre*, on the other hand, walks around the novel much like a living vacuum for most of the story, but there's a deeper female vacuum lurking upstairs in the mad wife, and (though it almost sounds like a lewd joke) Jane's vacuum is eventually filled by Rochester.

Cathy in *Wuthering Heights*, ends up unwell, dead and then a ghost - haunting the moors like a phantom vacuum.

In *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth ends up walking, empty of soul, in her sleep and then committing suicide; in *Hamlet*, Ophelia loses her mind and also throws her own life away; in *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham is a hollow ghost and Estella an emotionless shell.

Are you beginning to see a pattern here?



Put aside the idea that a character in a work of fiction is a creature designed to reflect reality in terms of appearing lifelike and 'real' to readers, and instead think of what you call characters as *constructions made of vacuums*.

Accepting that then empowers you to further see this pattern:

Female figures in fiction are often personified vacuums.

In Comedies and Epics, these personifications are matched with a corresponding vacuum-filler and the character is either married or matched up in a satisfying way; in Tragedies and Ironies, their personification becomes more intense, resulting in suicides, hauntings, madness, prolonged emptiness and other kinds of living death.

A Winter Comedy like *It's a Wonderful Life*, containing as it does a tale-within-a-tale, or an Irony within a Comedy, shows us both extremes: in the Ironic sub-tale, Mary is a barren spinster doomed to work in a library; in the enclosing Comedy, she is completely fulfilled by marriage to George whom she has hungered for all her life.

A Winter Epic like *Alien*, possessed of dark overtones but basically following an Epic template, has its female protagonist threatened with rape by a robot and consumption by a monster before allowing her to escape either at the last minute. Ironically and in keeping with the Ironic mood, the hungry vacuum-driven alien is cancelled out at last by the larger vacuum of space.

The Black Widow in the Winter Epic *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is composed almost completely of vacuums: mysteries, unresolved backstory clues, hints of betrayal, a good example of personified vacuums.

Forget about characters as living, breathing people: start thinking of them as *constructs* built with the raw material of *emptinesses*. It's almost the other way around from what we have been brought up to think: the resulting figure in a story resembles a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, but is actually the outward manifestation of a *composite of vacuums*.

Nothing of this has any real connection to 'real life' or masculine or feminine genders necessarily.

We are talking about *fictional constructs and the effects that they are used to create in stories*.

The Warrior Figure

Obvious as Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings*, or Hans Solo in *Star Wars*, less obvious as Fielding in *A Passage to India* or Sirius Black in *Harry Potter*, the warrior figure has some common traits too across the world of fiction. Warrior figures tend to start off as duplicitous - they are presented to the reader as potentially villainous, not quite to be trusted, shadowy. This ambiguity is their characteristic quality.

That uncertainty about them is of course a vacuum, a gap, an unknown.

In Comedies and Epics they often emerge as the love interests for the female figures - examples abound, including Darcy and Captain Wentworth in Austen's novels, who begin somewhat overshadowed but who are redeemed by their heroines later.

In Tragedies and Ironies, these warrior types are often the 'heroic' counterparts to the anti-heroic protagonists: Laertes to Hamlet, Malcolm to Macbeth, Boo Radley to Bob Ewell in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Samuel L. Jackson's Jules Winnfield to John Travolta's Vincent Vega in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*.

They eventually shake off the suggestions of duality, though. Their vacuums are filled and they become kings, generals or leaders, doers, men of action and command.

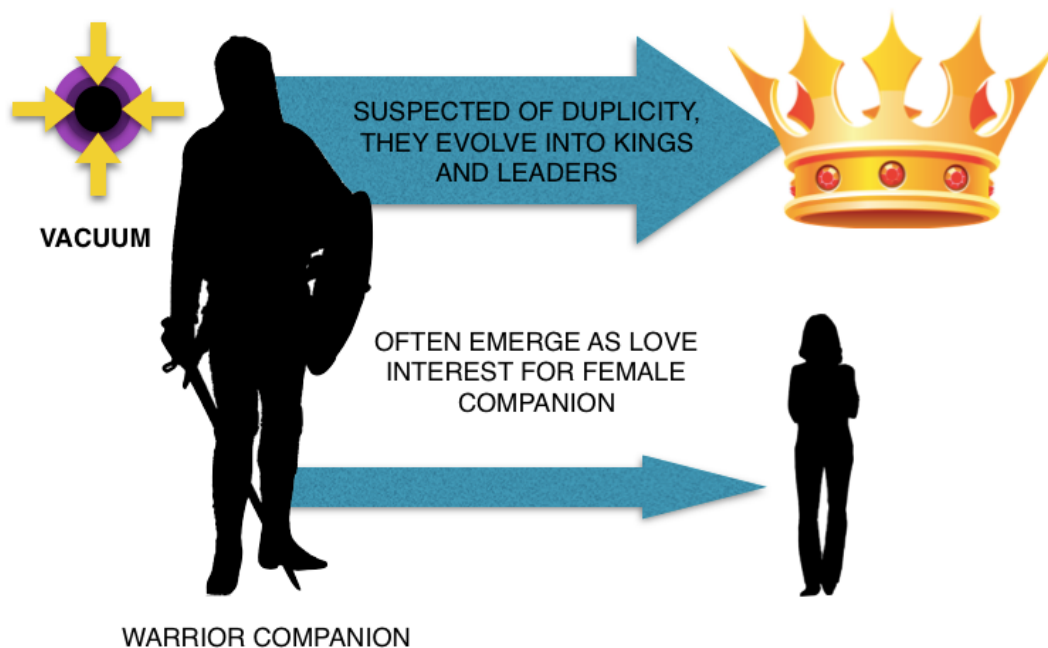
It is Aragorn who wins the military side of the War of the Ring, Hans Solo who rescues Luke, Fielding who stands up against British injustice in the trial of Adela, Sirius Black who commands power in *Harry Potter*.

Darcy loses his pride and becomes a mover of events; Boo Radley comes out of hiding to save the children; Jules Winnfield rejects his criminal background and decides to 'walk the earth'.

So these characters we have become accustomed to call warrior figures are figures in transition and move out of their vacuums in the course of a wide variety of fiction.

All these figures are moved by vacuums: the protagonist by his or her inner or outer wounds, scars or losses; the comic companions contrast this with an injection of vacuum-filler; the female figures personify vacuums; the warrior figures emerge from their vacuums.

The whole world of 'character-driven fiction' is here: reader attention pulled along by vacuums within archetypal figures.



The Strange Case of The Old Man with the Stick

What about 'plot-driven fiction'? Well, there's still one major figure who we touched upon earlier: the old man with a stick.

He opens the door to the central plot vacuum.

What else do these figures have in common?

The old-man-with-a-stick figure ranges from Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings*, Dumbledore in *Harry Potter*, Obi Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars*, the Doctor in *Doctor Who*, and so on, right the way through to their Tragic, Ironic or Comedic reflections, like Jaggers in *Great Expectations*, Jacob Marley in *A Christmas Carol*, Clarence in *It's a Wonderful Life*, or Doc Smith in *Back to the Future*.

All of them play the role of *establishing the major plot vacuum for the tale of which they are a part*.

- Gandalf reveals the history of the One Ring which sets the story in motion
- Dumbledore outlines the tasks that Harry must accomplish
- Obi Wan sets out the nature of the quest for Luke and his companions
- the Doctor always sees the main issue and a way through to the conclusion of each episode's plot
- Jaggers in *Great Expectations* lays out the law, literally, which moves Pip forward
- Jacob Marley in *A Christmas Carol*, outlines the challenge faced by Scrooge
- Clarence in *It's a Wonderful Life* creates the 'vacuum' of George's vanishment which is the central core of the plot
- Doc Smith in *Back to the Future* similarly drives the story into action plot-wise.

They are the main expositors; we turn to them for an idea of what the plot is going to be about.

Then all of them, across the vast range of stories under consideration here, *disappear*. They usually die, vanishing from the story for at least a while. Then they all return, even from beyond death.

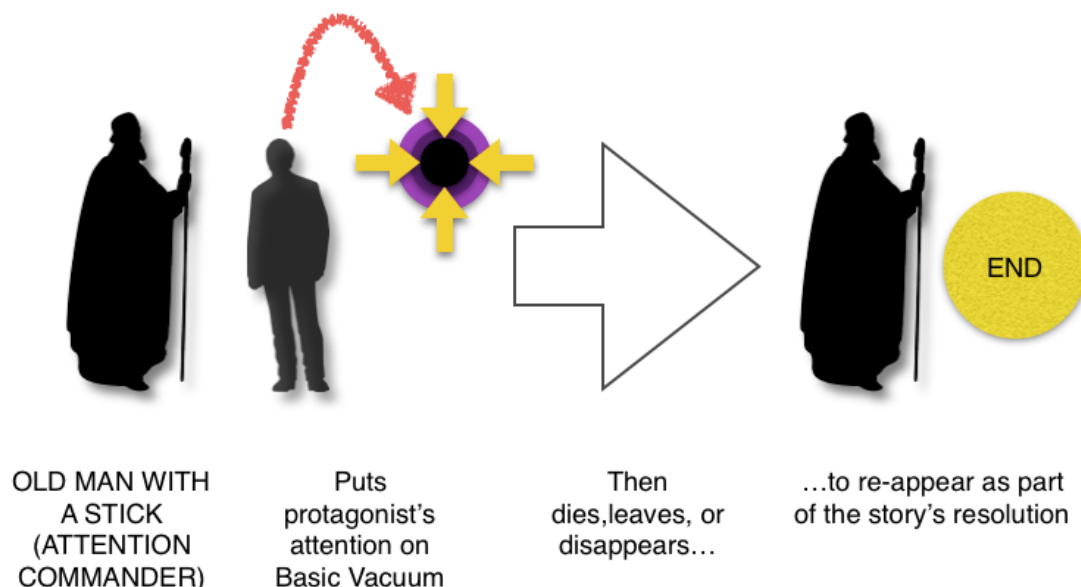
Why is that?

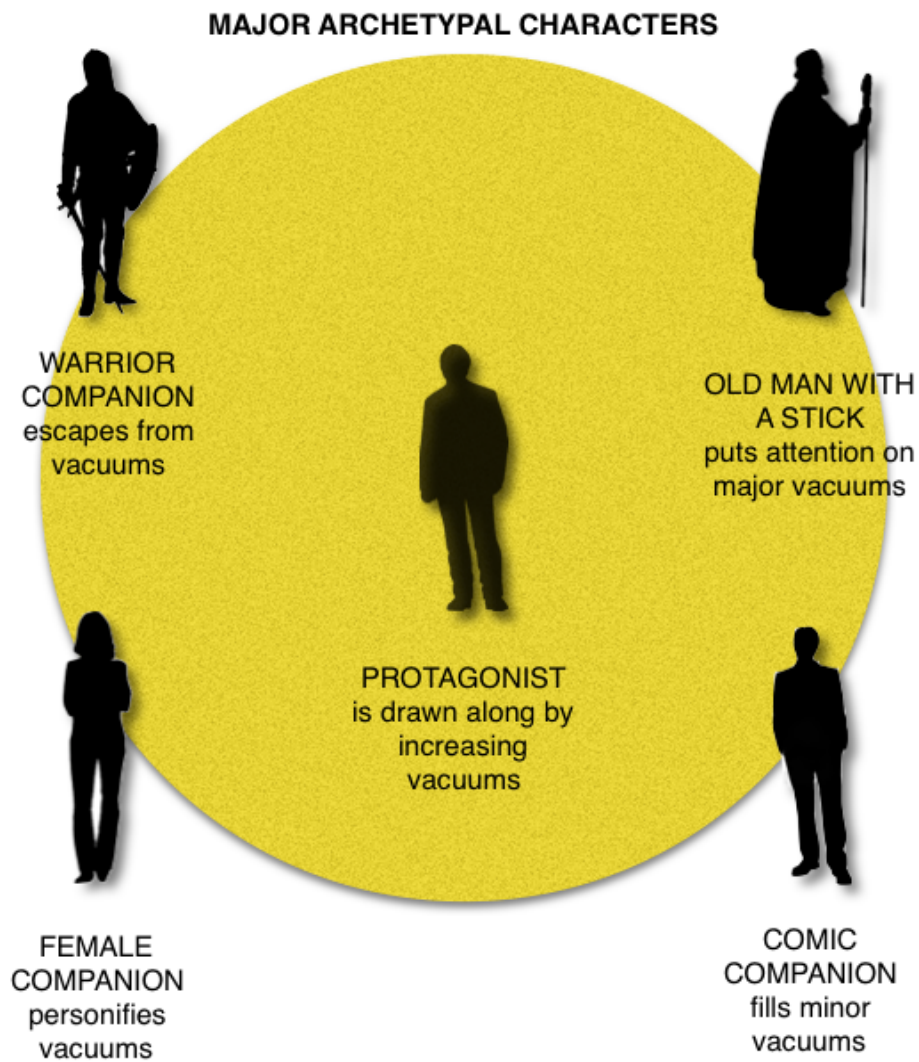
They disappear largely because their function in the story is completed. Even in the child's tale *The Hobbit*, Gandalf disappears for a large portion of the adventure because the plot vacuum is so well established at that point that there is no need for him. He only returns when there is a requirement for further 'vacuum clarification' during the Battle of the Five Armies. Even Badger in *The Wind in the Willows* plays no real part in the tale until he has to set the plot goal for the last part of the book, the recapture of Toad Hall.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the old man Egeus, having laid the ground rules for the unfolding of the story, exits the stage until right at the end; once Nick Fury has laid out the role of the superheroes in *The Avengers*, he takes a back seat.

Jaggers in *Great Expectations* presents the groundwork of the plot and (because *Great Expectations* is an Irony) conceals its implications; Clarence in *It's a Wonderful Life*, or Doc Smith in *Back to the Future* both mechanically make the entire plot happen by generating the big plot vacuum themselves. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus sets out the parameters of what the story is all about but takes a minimal role for the first half.

That type of fiction familiar to us as 'plot-driven' turns out to be a set-up - a set-up organised and masterminded by the character figure known as the old man with a stick.





Character Vacuums

Doesn't that all strike you as a little bit uncanny?

All these character figures turn out to be almost as identical as mathematical functions.

And they are all in the thing called a story to serve particular purposes.

You'll see why all this works technically in later weeks.

So:

- major characters possess vacuums of one kind or another
- these are essential in any story that you want to connect to a reader
- the old man figure is the one who bridges over into the *plot vacuums*, which come in various kinds, as we shall see next week
- comic companions tend to fill minor vacuums in the story and thereby produce relief, seen as laughter

* female companions tend to personify vacuums and often end up partnered with the warrior king character

- warrior king characters tend to evolve through the course of a story, leaving behind or escaping from a character vacuum and becoming a king, leader or authority figure of some kind.

These all operate together to give us the story seen from the viewpoint of the things we call characters, which are actually constructed of vacuums.

How to Create a Protagonist

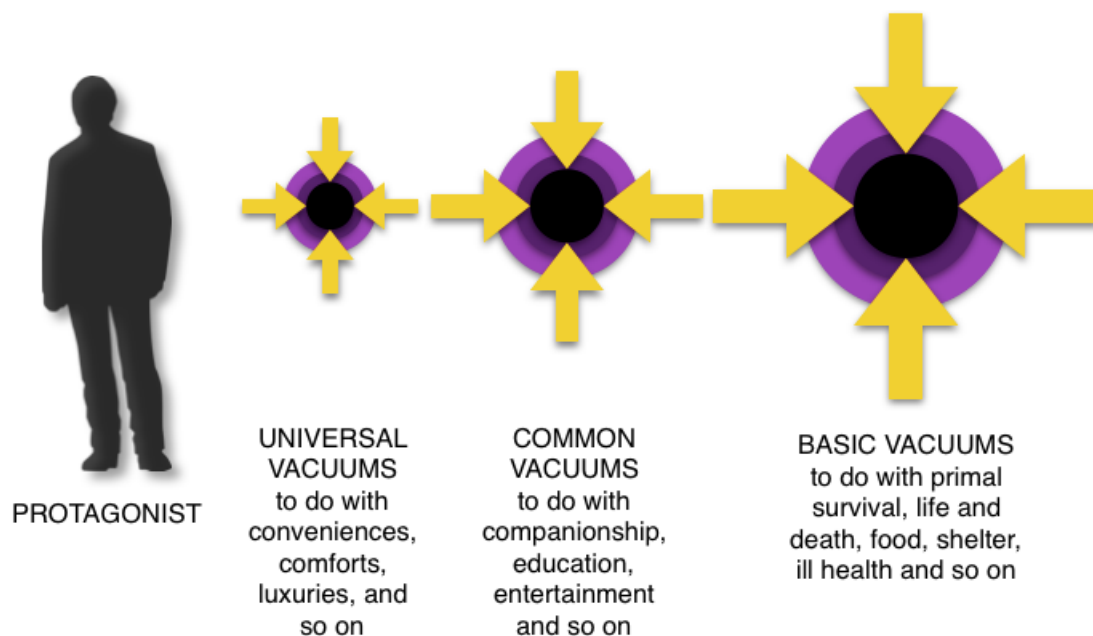
We haven't yet taken a close look at the central character in the diagram above, the protagonist.

What we said earlier about characters and vacuums was really to do with this central figure. But what exactly is a 'protagonist'? What makes him or her different from the other archetypal characters described above?

The dictionary defines a protagonist as 'the main figure or one of the most prominent figures in a situation' or 'an advocate or champion of a particular cause or idea'. Both of these definitions will do as starting points. The word comes from the Greek *prōtagōnistēs*, from *prōtos* 'first in importance' + *agōnistēs* 'actor'. The meaning 'a supporter of a cause' probably arose by analogy with *antagonist*, the *pro-* in *protagonist* being interpreted as meaning 'in favour of', whereas in fact, it derives in this case from the Greek root meaning 'first'.

From that we can say that a protagonist is the most important character in a story. Later, you will see how he or she is also often the 'supporter of a cause'.

The most important thing right now is that we keep in mind this diagram:



It's a common thing for writing guides and so forth to say that the protagonist is the character with whom the reader 'identifies'. We can now see that this isn't a mystical connection: the reader is almost compelled to 'identify with' this character *because he or she is the one with the most vacuums*.

To repeat:

A protagonist is defined as that constructed figure who attracts and holds the most reader attention.

In a huge range of stories of various kinds, the central figure is a construction made of vacuums, whose losses, needs and gaps grow proportionately throughout the tale, until, towards the end, the character often sacrifices his or her own life, or comes close before being miraculously rescued.

In Comedies and Epics, the character 'returns from death' and the vacuum is filled

In Tragedies and Ironies, the vacuum often remains empty and overwhelming.

(You'll learn much more about the Four Genres next week.)

To create a basic protagonist for a basic story, just do this:

1. Invent a name and outline a personality.

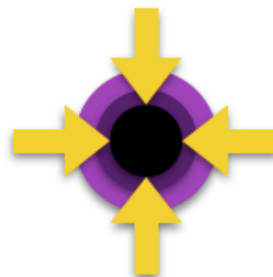
Don't go into details, just write down some basic information, the kind of thing you would enter into a form about yourself: name, gender, age and so forth.

Really don't waste any time on this step! It won't help you bring the character to life!

2. Now give him or her a universal vacuum - a minor problem, an inconvenience, a frustration, a discomfort, the loss of a luxury.

Make this something to do with himself or herself - a character vacuum, a small but noticeable deficiency or lack.

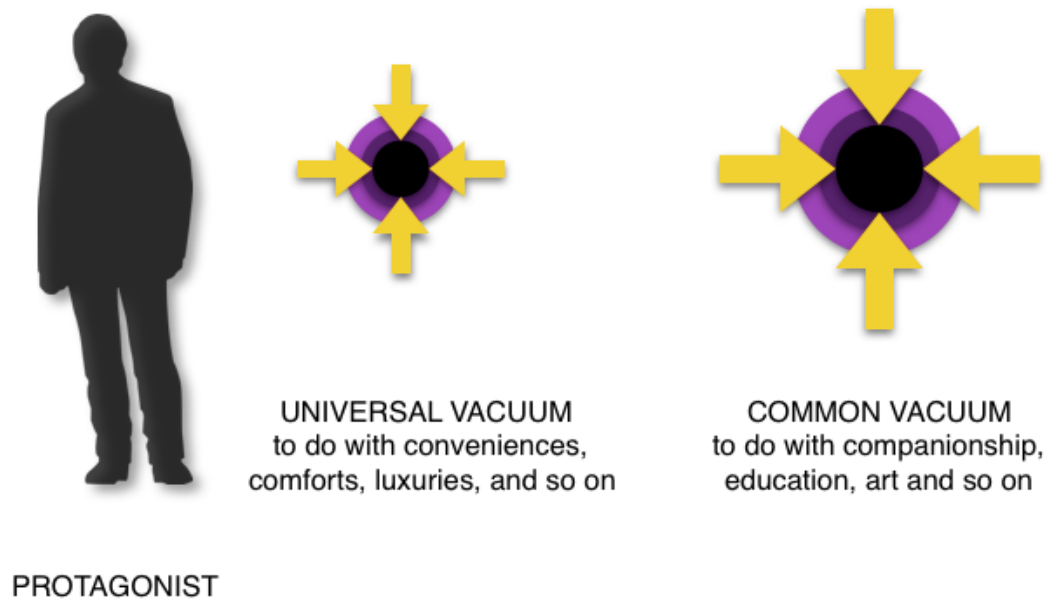
This step starts to bring the protagonist to life.



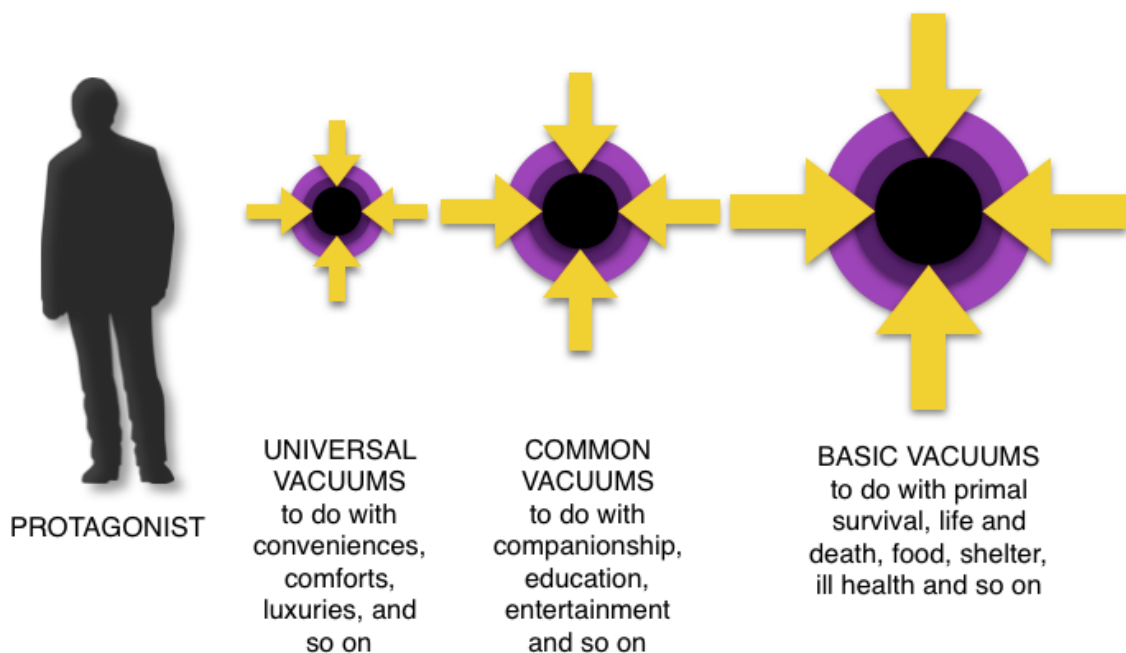
UNIVERSAL VACUUM
to do with conveniences, comforts,
luxuries, and so on

3. Next give him or her a deeper issue, something to do with the loss of a friend or family member, a barrier preventing his or her education, a block stopping the expression of himself or herself, something along those lines.

This prompts the character into action: suddenly, he or she has a goal, a need, something to reach for.



4. Next, insert the 'heart' or core of the character in the form of a basic vacuum. Install something into the character that threatens the character's existence in some way; take away his or her 'internal comfort zone'. Now you have a living construct, someone who will start to breathe.



When inserting the basic vacuum in step 4, try to make this connect with the earlier universal and common vacuums.

For example, Luke Skywalker's initial frustration with his Uncle Owen, who demands that Luke stay at home and do his chores, develops into the more serious loss of both his uncle and aunt when they are killed. This then leads to the core issue: the fact that his father is responsible for their deaths and is the epitome of everything Luke opposes.

Steve Rogers in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, first suffers the mild inconvenience and strangeness of being 'a man out of his time'. This then leads to the loss of friends and companions and finally to his confrontation with his enemy, the one man who shared that lost life.

Frodo Baggins at first experiences an annoyance to do with his neighbours, then goes on to suffer loss after loss before finally being unable to complete the quest to get rid of the Ring on the edge of the Cracks of Doom.

In each case - and in many more cases, in stories of all kinds from all over the world and throughout history - there is an escalation of vacuums, from universal to basic, which in each case serve to bring the protagonist to life - in effect, to create the protagonist as the construct in a story with the most 'vacuum power'.

The Crucial Role of the Antagonist

There is another mechanism used by master authors to increase vacuum power until they get maximum emotional commitment from readers.

To increase the vacuum power around a protagonist in any story, successful authors use a device called an 'antagonist'.

What is an antagonist?

If our definition of 'protagonist' is reasonably accurate, we should expect the definition of the antagonist to be more or less its opposite. And so it turns out to be.

An antagonist is a constructed character whose actions produce and magnify vacuums on an increasing gradient around a protagonist.

Antagonists seem universally incapable of recognising a vacuum for what it is - a genuine need, basic, common or universal - and this is their downfall.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, we first glimpse Sauron as the Dark Lord whose effect is to create mental conflict in various Ring-bearers from afar. This power then extends into sending the projected vacuums of the Nine Riders - empty haunted figures whose souls have long been consumed, living vacuums, in effect - against the Fellowship of the Ring. As the forces of good muster against him, Sauron refuses to contemplate that there could be any gap or chink in his armour. He sets about conquering Middle Earth, right up until the Ring is destroyed in the Cracks of Doom and the whole edifice he has constructed collapses. His inability to recognise vacuums leads to his destruction.

In *Star Wars: A New Hope*, the Grand Moff Tarkin and his assistant Darth Vader - who has been turned into a walking vacuum himself, drained of life and made into a cyborg - cannot admit that there might be any kind of weakness in the Death Star, the Dark Side of the Force, or the Imperial Fleet, until the moment when Luke exploits the flaw in the Death Star's plans. In later *Star Wars* films, the Emperor likewise denies any possibility of defeat until Luke persists in seeing the good - or the deep need for repentance - in his father, and Vader throws the Emperor over a rail and into oblivion. None of these antagonists saw the vacuum that was right in front of them.

In the *Harry Potter* series, Voldemort - who at first is no more than a discomfort for Harry but later takes frightening corporeal form using the emptiness in others - and his dark wizards are simply incapable of seeing the strand of virtue which has taken shape right under their noses through the workings of Dumbledore, Snape and Harry, leading to their defeat.

In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Hydra leader Pierce - and his ally the Winter Soldier whose mind has been turned into a vacuum - fails to allow for the structural weakness in the heli-carriers which make it possible for a small team to infiltrate the vessels and undermine Hydra's whole strategy.

This pattern continues in any of the genres.

In Tragedies, Macbeth, who progressively becomes his own antagonist, fails to see his own blindness until the last scene; King Lear doesn't glimpse the truth about what has been happening until his last appearance on stage.

In an Irony like *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham tries to create a walking vacuum in Estella, and use it to break men's hearts. She doesn't see what she is doing until it is too late. Dickens shows her no mercy - her failure to recognise vacuums results in her fiery death.

In Comedies or Romances, antagonists comically remain blind to their personal vacuums (though, as we will see, the audience is privy to them). Note too that antagonists usually have no sense of humour - that's because humour rests on the use of vacuums, minor and major, as we have glimpsed.

Trying to ignore or suppress vacuums as antagonists do has the opposite effect eventually: the vacuums grow so great and urgent that they become desperate, core vacuums which power the final part of any tale.

Whether it is the One Ring (in *The Lord of the Rings*), the Death Star (in *Star Wars: A New Hope*), the Deathly Hallows (in the *Harry Potter* series), the Zola algorithm (in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*), the witches' prophecies (in *Macbeth*), Estella (in *Great Expectations*) or the power of the law in Athens (in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), all the devices of an antagonist eventually collapse because they have failed to spot the flaw which was always going to undermine them, and which the protagonist was always going to exploit.

As we know from the world of dentistry, a slight twinge of discomfort in a tooth, if suppressed, can grow worse until eventually serious pain-killers are needed and then massive dental work. Trying to suppress a real and underlying need only worsens things. In fiction terms, this means that those characters who deny or can't see the power of vacuums - we might call them the 'vacuum suppressors' - are giving a clue to their greatest weakness: they deny vacuums and thus expose themselves to defeat as soon as the tiniest one is located.

Vacuums grow in power the more they are denied.

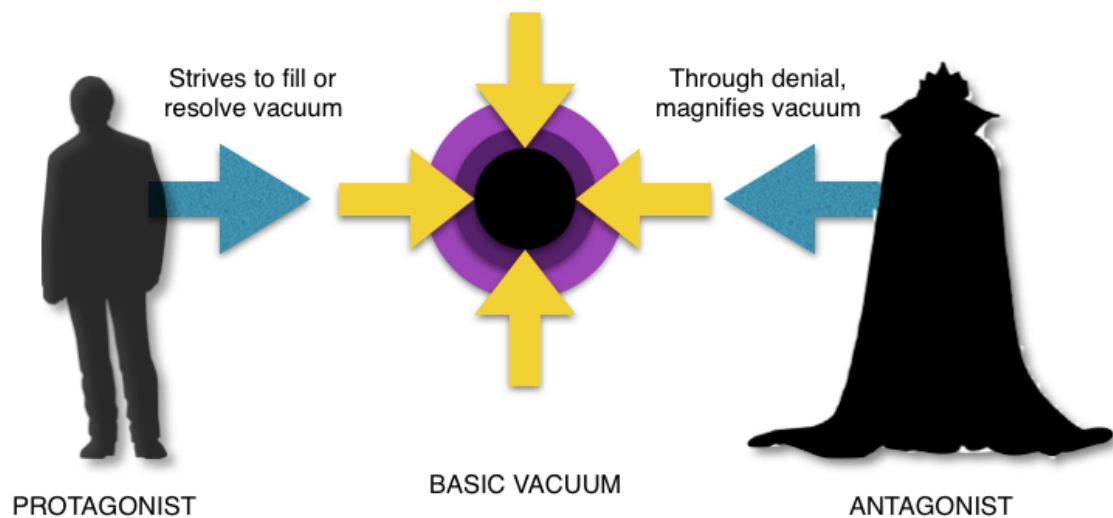
Any denial of need or attempt to conceal it with substitutes, any rejection of vacuums through manically building a world around them, will eventually crumble and collapse. All it will take will be the slightest crack, the smallest sign of real emptiness, and the whole edifice will crash to ruin.

The denied vacuum is usually right at the heart of an antagonist's 'empire', and will manifest itself as the thing that they use to try to overpower the people around them. The One Ring, the Death Star, the Deathly Hallows, the Zola algorithm, the witches' prophecies, the Athenian law - all could be defined as *denied vacuums*.

They all have some weakness in their heart that is critically flawed. But their creators, the antagonists, or those who believe in these things, can't see it or refuse to acknowledge it.

The protagonist represents, from the antagonist's point of view, a growing need which is eventually going to expose and destroy the artifice which the antagonist has created.

- Luke's progression from teenage restlessness to embryonic Jedi destroys the Death Star
- Frodo's development from homesick hobbit to saviour of Middle Earth undermines Sauron's dark empire
- Captain America's growth from displaced war veteran to new American symbol is what unravels Hydra.



The above diagram also reveals another stunning underlying operation in fiction, namely that *the antagonist and the protagonist are almost always intimately connected in some way*.

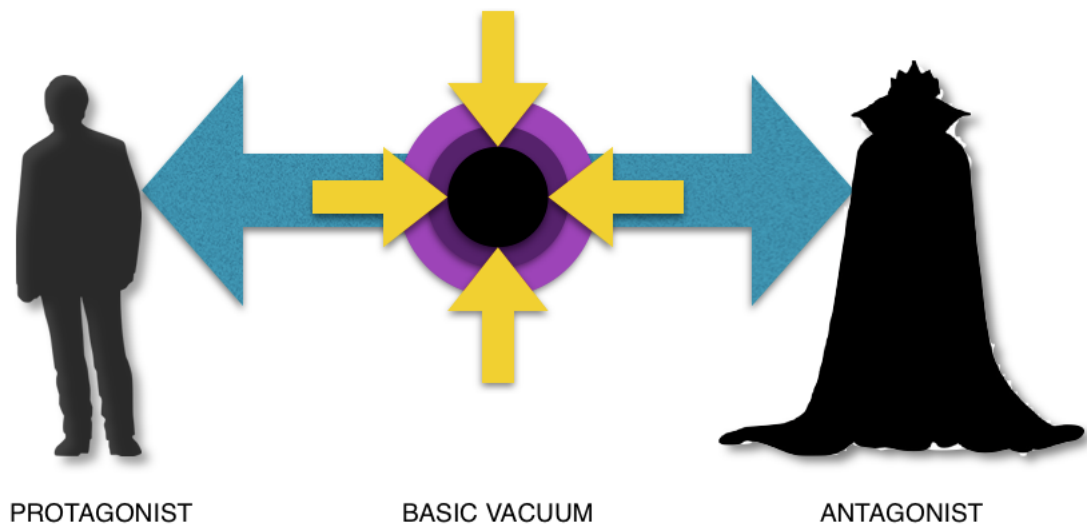
Just using the examples that we have used this week, we can immediately see that this is the case:

- In *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron as the Dark Lord is linked psychically through the One Ring to Frodo its bearer
- In *Star Wars*, Darth Vader turns out to be Luke Skywalker's father
- In the *Harry Potter* series, Voldemort and Harry are joined through Harry's scar
- In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Nazi organisation Hydra and Steve Rogers are linked by their common World War 2 heritage

This is no accident; it's not even a 'story device'.

This link between antagonist and protagonist arises from their roles in the story.

The protagonist and antagonist have different, almost mathematical functions in fiction: one is to acknowledge and in most cases overcome a basic character vacuum; the other is to deny, and therefore increase, a basic character vacuum.



The connection can be symbolic rather than familial or 'magical', but it seems to be always there. Even in other genres, this connection is stark:

- *Pride and Prejudice*'s Darcy is antagonist Lady Catherine du Bergh's relative
- Bob Ewell in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a quasi-father compared with Atticus's real father figure
- the witches in *Macbeth* seem capable of reading the protagonist's mind
- Claudius is Hamlet's uncle

Why is this?

If the antagonist's job is to try to deny all vacuums by force, and instead substitute twisted, imperfect 'solutions', then the most intimate vacuum they must try deny will be the central character vacuum of the story - i.e., the innermost need of the protagonist.

If we look, that's exactly what we find: Vader, Sauron, Voldemort, Lady Catherine du Bergh, Miss Havisham, Bob Ewell, *Macbeth*'s witches, and all the rest all make the effort throughout their stories to fill the mind of the protagonist with lies and false solutions, ranging from the Dark Side of the Force to racist prejudice and sinister prophecy.

The Shadow Protagonist

There are some additional things that are worth noting too.

There is another kind of antagonist. This is the character construct who bears a close resemblance to the protagonist himself or herself. This character is usually working for the main antagonist, or shares the goals of that figure, so he or she is both an enemy to the protagonist and yet very much like the protagonist in many ways.

This is the Shadow Protagonist.

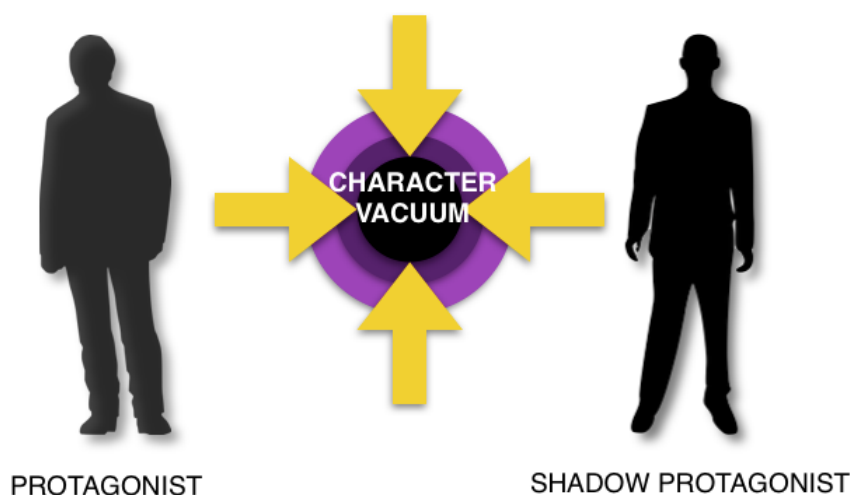
- In *The Lord of the Rings*, this is Gollum, the ancient hobbit twisted by the One Ring
- In the larger *Star Wars* series, Darth Vader is the Shadow Protagonist while the Emperor is the main antagonist
- In the *Harry Potter* series, Malfoy is the Shadow Protagonist to Harry
- In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Steve Rogers' Shadow Protagonist is clearly the Winter Soldier himself, his former partner transformed into a brainwashed assassin.

Other examples abound: Orlick in *Great Expectations*, Rochester's first wife in *Jane Eyre*, M'lady in *The Three Musketeers*, and so on. These figures act as a kind of 'deputy antagonist' in many cases.

In the case of most of these constructs, it's possible to see in the story how the protagonist might have walked down a different path and become the shadow protagonist:

- Frodo (or Bilbo, in *The Hobbit*) could have been Gollum, and could become more like him through overuse of the Ring of Power
- Luke Skywalker could become like Darth Vader and is explicitly tempted to do so
- Harry Potter almost ends up in the House of Slytherin and is throughout the stories seduced to become like Malfoy
- Steve Rogers is haunted by the Winter Soldier - ironically, it is the Winter Soldier who becomes Captain America briefly in the comics.

The primary purpose of the shadow protagonist, like that of the antagonist, is *to highlight the vacuums of the protagonist*. Such is the burden of the inner character vacuum of the protagonist that he or she could be twisted into becoming just like their shadow.



The Protagonist as Champion of an Idea

And now we can explore the second part of the definition of a protagonist: 'an advocate or champion of a particular cause or idea'.

This goes right back to the intention of the author: if an author wants to create a Comedy or an Epic - in other words, a story with a positive ending - the antagonist of that story will be creating sorrow and negativity; if an author wants to relate a victory, an antagonist will be trying to bring about defeat.

If an author wants to create a Tragedy or an Irony - a story with a negative ending - then the 'antagonist' of that tale, the one opposed to the protagonist, will be ironically trying to bring positivity.

If the author is focused on defeat, this character will be aiming for victory.

Antagonists come with answers; they are the opposite to the protagonist, who is full of questions and growing vacuums.

In Comedies and Epics, these solutions are enforced, unwanted, false; in Tragedies and Ironies they are weak, misguided or doomed.

The antagonist's purpose is hinted at in the early part of a tale, then grows in proportion to the vacuum power.

As we will see, there are surprisingly similar patterns in all of this.

Antagonists in stories are all almost identical: they are all compulsively trying to fill all kinds of vacuums by force, and imperfectly, with their own messages, or some kind of projection of themselves. Look at any major antagonist in any successful story: they tend to be the ones trying to take over the world and fill it full of madness or mindless wraiths or slaves.

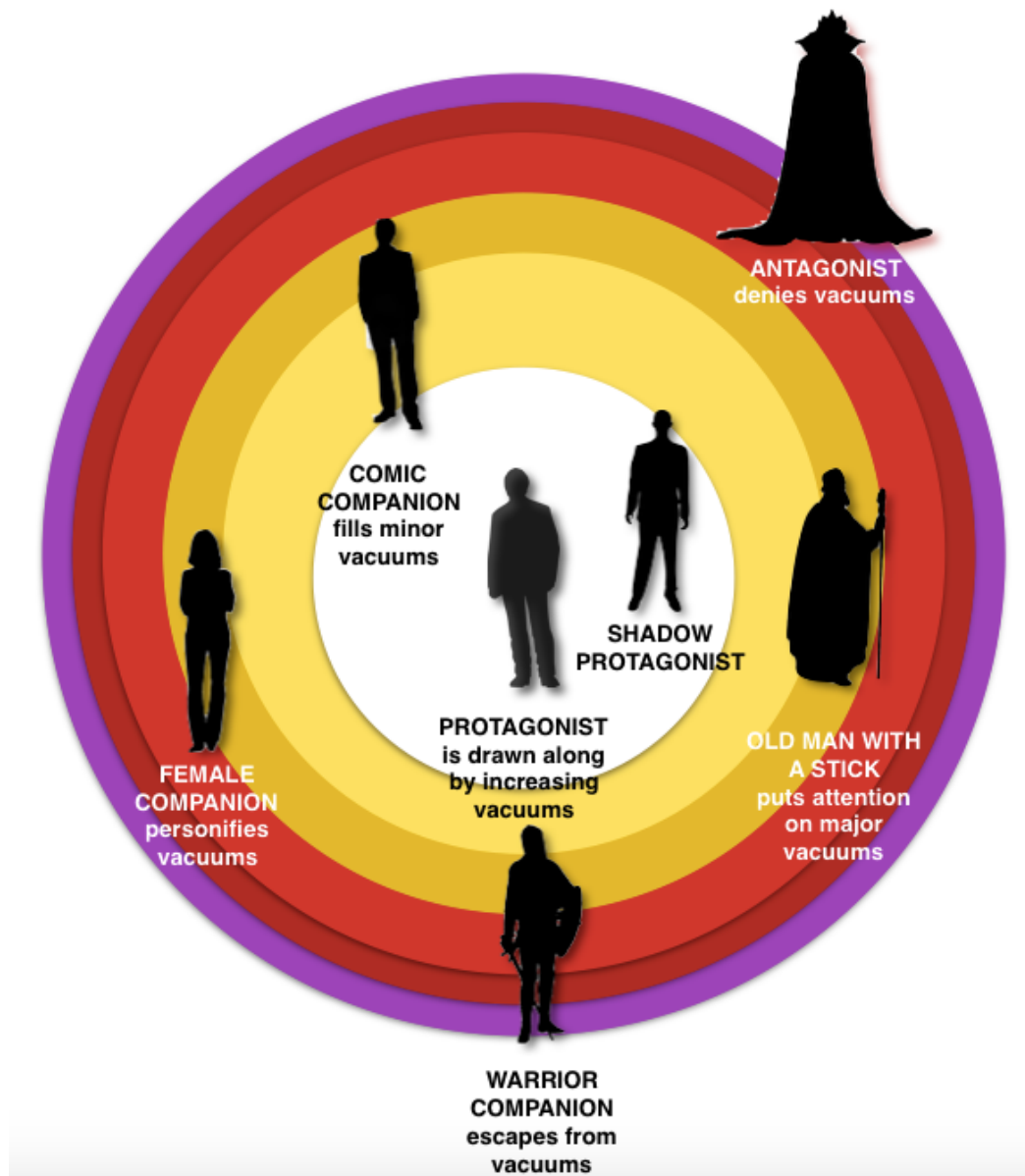
- Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*
- Voldemort in *Harry Potter*
- Chancellor Palpatine in the *Star Wars* series
- the witches in *Macbeth*
- the White Witch in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*
- Morgana le Fey in the Arthur legends

and so on.

All either have conquered the world or threaten to take it over, or at least to dominate the local area of the story; all come with an antipathetic message; all seem to possess some kind of overwhelming power.

Now we can expand our character diagram to include antagonists and shadow protagonists.

We get something that looks like this:



The whole thing is about vacuums.

By vacuums, we of course mean needs, desires, cravings, missing things, gaps, losses and so on.

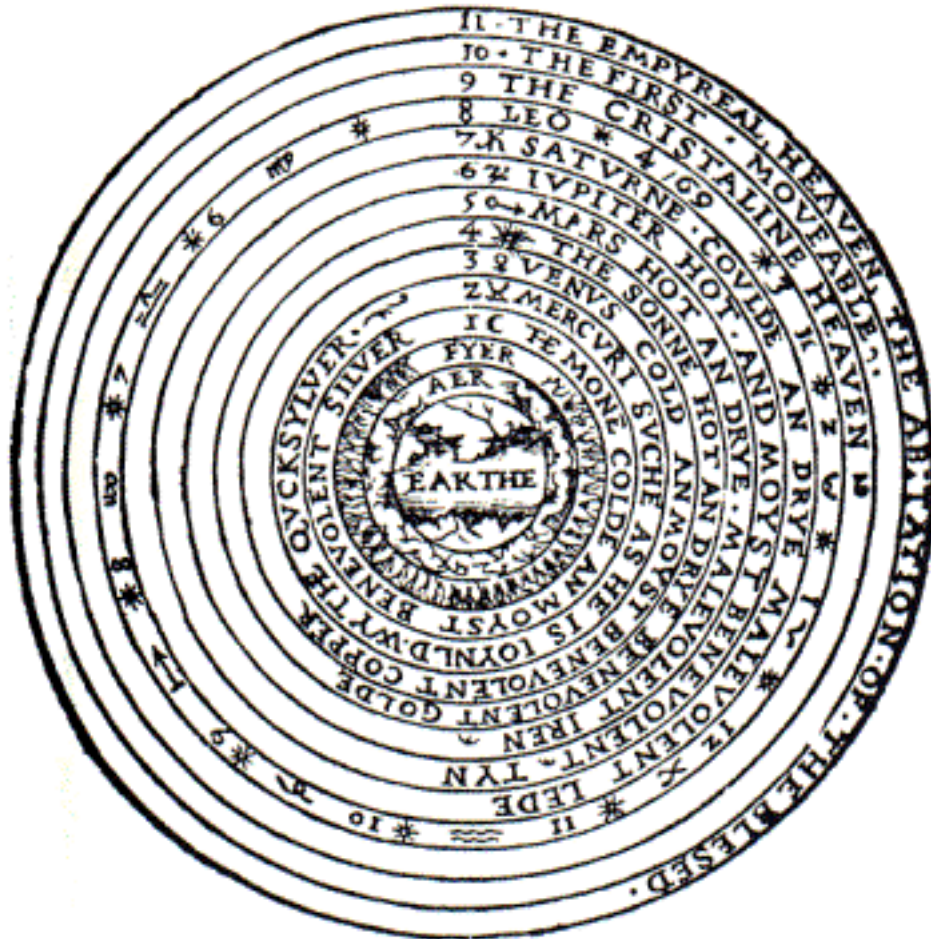
- The antagonist denies that needs, desires, cravings, missing things, gaps, and losses exist and in so doing creates them
- The old man with a stick points out the major needs, desires, cravings, missing things, gaps, and losses
- The warrior companion escapes from needs, desires, cravings, missing things, gaps, and losses to become king or leader
- The female companion personifies needs, desires, cravings, missing things, gaps, and losses

- The comic companion helps to relieve them.

Using characters and vacuums alone, we can see that a work of fiction can be teeming with life and energy.

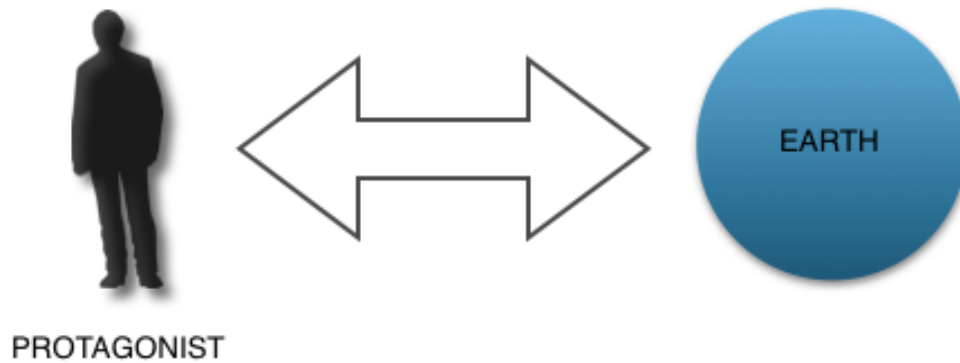
An Aside

By the way, the more astute among you will have noticed a remarkable similarity between the diagram above and the old mediaeval concept of the solar system:

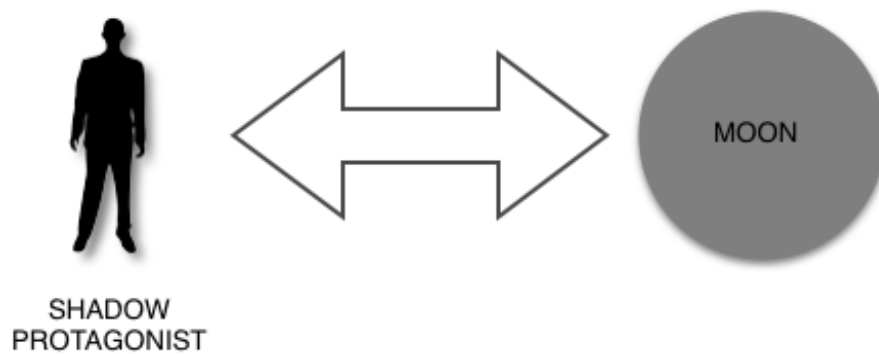


If we were to draw a direct comparison, we would get something like this:

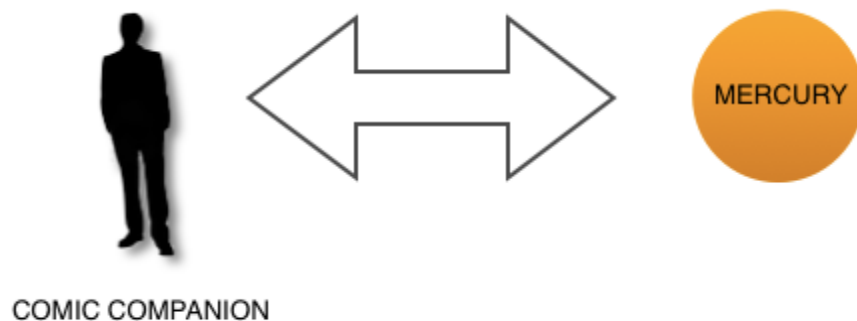
The protagonist is the earth:



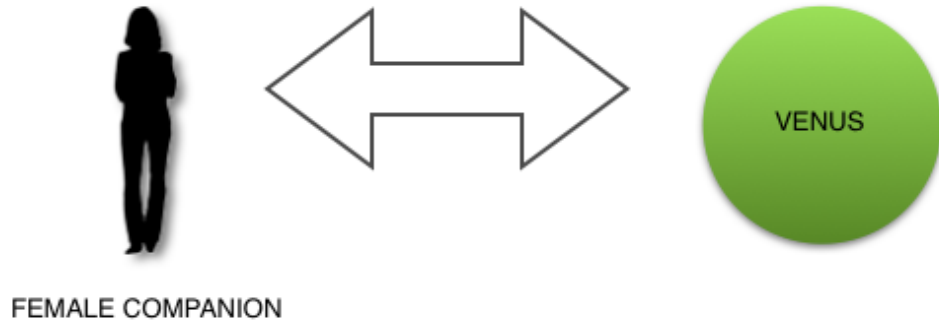
The shadow protagonist is the Moon, wandering in orbit around the Earth:



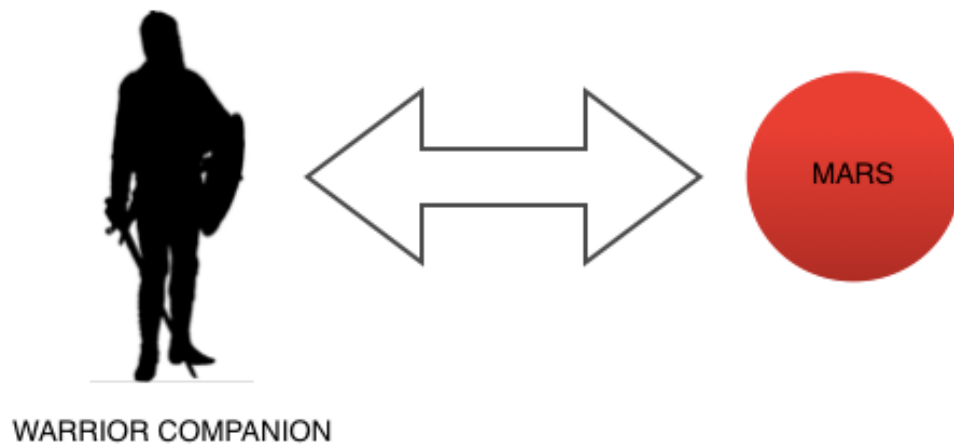
The comic companion is Mercury, Roman god of humour and communication:



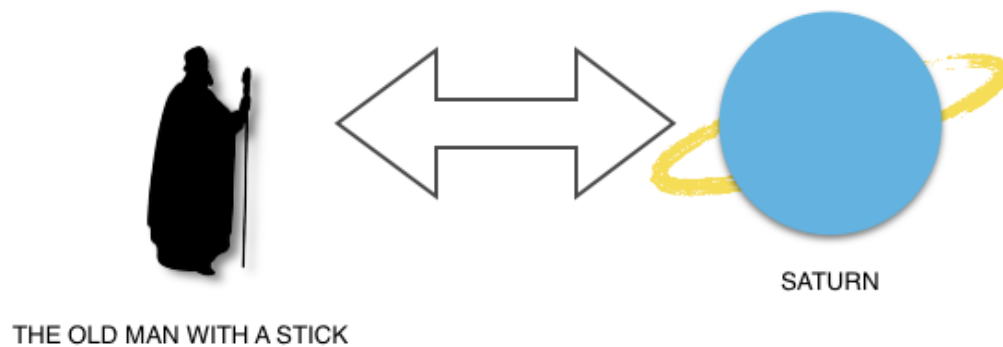
The female companion is Venus, Roman goddess of desire:



The warrior companion is both Mars, the Roman god of war, and later, once he becomes a king, Jupiter, king of the gods:



The old man with the stick is Saturn (commonly depicted as an old man with a stick):



Which came first: the mediaeval idea of the solar system? Or the archetypal characters?

That discussion might have to wait for another day. The important thing for our purposes is that these character archetypes are real and powerful.

Your First Feedback Session

OK, so here we are towards the end of Week 3 and I want you to write to me and for me in your First Feedback Session.

If you're serious about writing stories that work and getting published, you will have tackled the following assignments already to one degree or another, even if only in your head.

Now I need you to do the following:

A. How have you gotten on with Hyper-critical Situation #1: You're Not Writing?

Write an email to me describing how you are doing with this.

Are you making progress?

Is everything still in your head, ready to explode? Or have you come up with ways of getting some writing done? Go into as much detail as you like.

You can email me at:

grant@clarendonhousebooks.com

Make sure to include your name! I'll give you some feedback as soon as I possibly can!

B. Have you developed any characters based on what you have learned this week?

If so, please email me a list of the major ones, along with a one-paragraph summary of your story. Give a short breakdown of how your characters fit into the story. Particularly work on your protagonist: remember that he or she is defined as *that constructed figure who attracts and holds the most reader attention*. And that that is done through *vacuums* - missing things, losses, gaps, emptinesses and so on. Follow the steps described earlier this week.

You can email me at:

grant@clarendonhousebooks.com

Make sure to include your name! And again, I'll give you some feedback as soon as I possibly can!

Some Tips

Can the characters in your own fiction be redesigned so that they are composed of needs, emptinesses, missing things, rather than features and qualities?

Already, just in thinking about these modifications, you will be bringing your story to life.

Turn the things called 'characters' into *vacuum constructs*.

Paradoxically, by almost mechanically treating them that way, they will come to life for the reader.

Connect them all up in some way and you will have set up a means of getting through to the reader.

Leave out the vacuums, design your characters to be 'as close as possible to real life', and your story will remain unread by anyone except you - and even you will know that there's something wrong with it.

You need to prompt your reader, guide or move him or her, stir and arouse the vacuum within the reader, make that inner vacuum more real and give it a little jolt or push.

The same kinds of things apply to the thing called 'plot'.

That's what we'll cover next week!

End of Week 3!

Fantastic!

We've covered a lot of ground! You've discovered what the thing called a 'character' *actually* is, and the secrets of how to rapidly build a convincing one that attracts readers.

What's more, you've learned something about what the archetypal characters are in any masterpiece of fiction and how they work together.

You found out about how to create a protagonist who isn't just a cipher or shallow copy of someone else's character, but a living and dynamic entity in his or her own right.

Furthermore, the crucial role of the antagonist in a story has been revealed to you.

You've been asked to apply what you've learned to grow your own protagonist - and get feedback from me and any advice if needed.

Now prepare for the rocket ride that is Week 4!

Week 4: The Thing Called a Plot

What a Plot Actually Is

The Nuclear Reactor of Fiction

The Four Basic Genres

Choosing and Building a Plot

Now that you have some idea of what a character is, it's time to look at that other fundamental element of fiction, the plot.

This week, you'll learn about

- the four mechanisms which together create an engine that drives readers forward.
- the things called 'plots', what they are and how they are actually made (rather than how you might suppose they are made)
- the 'nuclear reactor' that drives all successful stories through to their conclusion
- how the four basic genres - Epic, Tragedy, Irony and Comedy - are composed and how they work to create different effects

and much, much more.

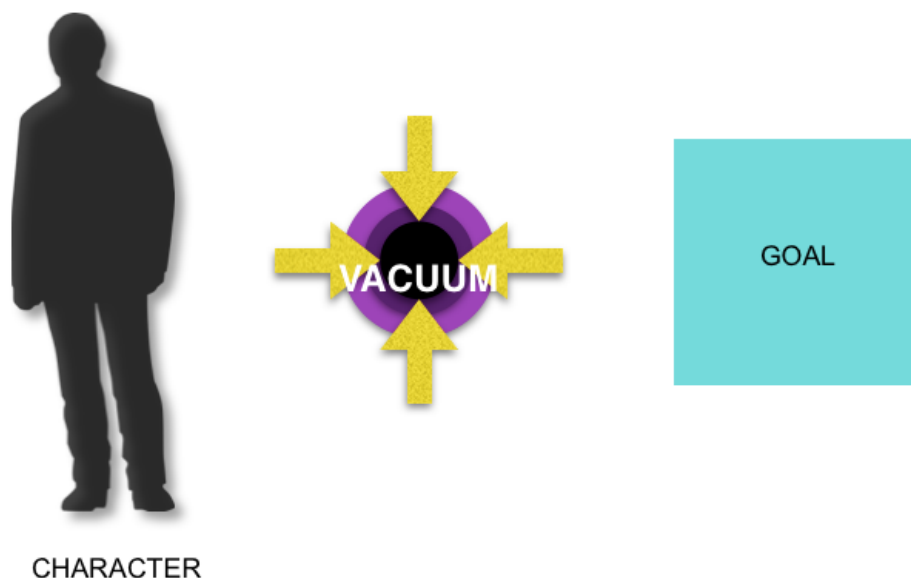
WARNING: If you are purchasing this module separately from the rest of the course, welcome, but beware! You won't get the complete benefit of the 'How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published' e-course unless you do the whole thing! By all means extract what wisdom you can from this week's 'episode' - but take the plunge and get the whole course as soon as you can!

You can get it [here](#).

What a Plot Actually Is

We saw last week that the things that we have become accustomed to calling 'characters' are actually almost vacuums disguised as people. You don't need to 'develop a character' to make him or her convincing or attractive - you need to develop what that character is *missing* or *yearning for*.

What brings the things called 'characters' to life is the vacuum between who, what and where they are now, and who, what and where they want to be:



In character-driven fiction, what drives the fiction isn't actually 'character' at all, it's *vacuums*.

Plots are the same. Are they driven by emotion? Action? Drama? Conflict?

You'll read a lot in other guides or tomes full of advice to do with fiction about using emotion to engage your potential reader. Aristotle called this use of emotion 'pathos'. It's powerful and common.

But what creates these emotions?

Vacuums, in various forms.

Sadness is the result of a loss.

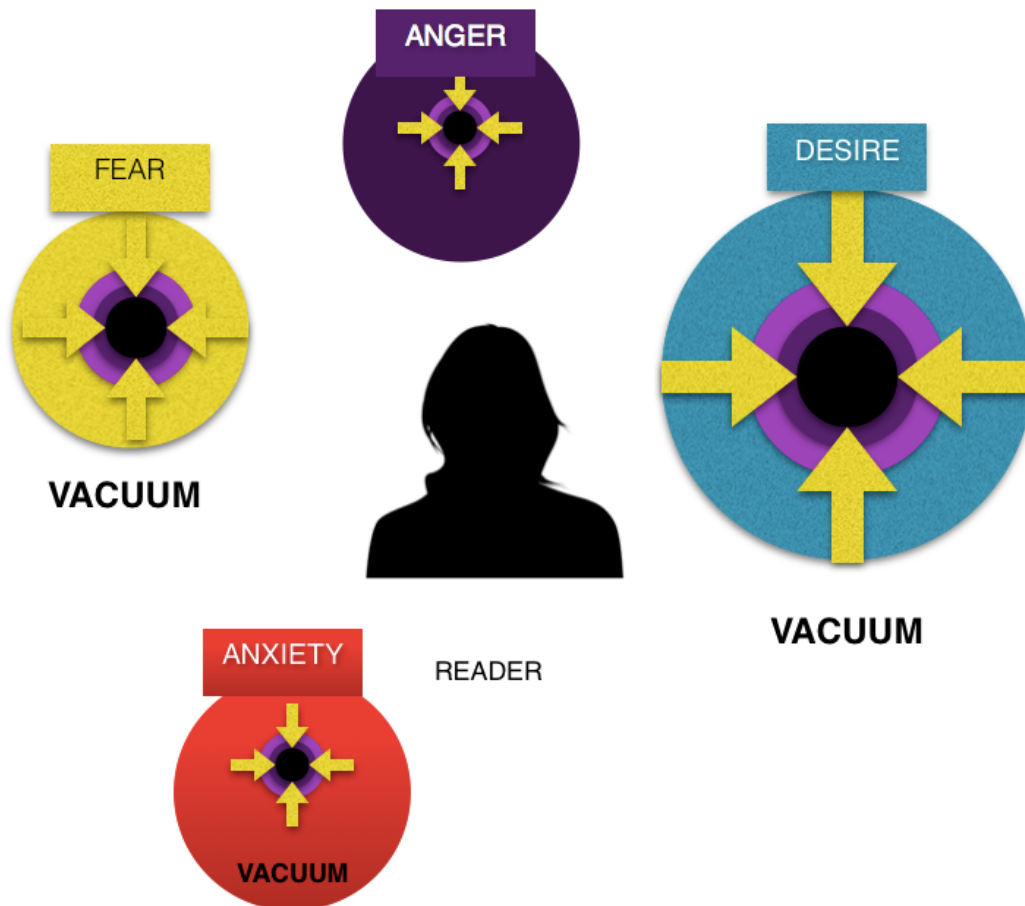
Fear is the consequence of impending loss.

Anger is a protest against loss.

Boredom arises when something is missing.

Joy, happiness, elation arises when a vacuum or need is filled, perhaps to overflowing.

Your reader is gripped by emotions, but emotions are generated by vacuums or underlying needs and desires, which are empty, craving and powerful, or which are being filled or satisfied joyously.



So how do you do get an emotional commitment from your readers?

The first thing is not to do what you're probably (if you're like hundreds of thousands of other writers) tempted to do: get overemotional with your language and style.

Here's a tip:

The best way of creating an emotional effect is to avoid emotionalism.

As a writer, maintain a cool-headed, objective approach, even when you passionately want to convey a feeling. Avoid seeming angry, or overly passionate.

Why does this work? We have to go back to an earlier point for a technical answer: readers are attracted by vacuums of some kind, missing things, losses, needs, gaps, mysteries.

Emotional language and style have two main effects: readers are hypnotically 'drawn in' by the use of emotional words and lose awareness of what is actually occurring, effectively becoming numb; or they are repelled and feel they have to see through a 'fog' of unnecessary emotionalism. In either case, the vacuum power is weakened.

A dispassionate author who simply lays out the scene as a tableau of vacuums actually heightens the emotional effect.

Ernest Hemingway was a master at this - his novels are apparently so dry, so free of outward emotional entanglement or linguistic emotional techniques, yet he is hailed as a major influence on writing in the twentieth century because his writing ends up conveying such powerful feelings.

In this excerpt from *The Old Man and the Sea*, the case is just plainly stated:

The old man was thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of his neck. The brown blotches of the benevolent skin cancer the sun brings from its reflection on the tropic sea were on his cheeks. The blotches ran well down the sides of his face and his hands had the deep-creased scars from handling heavy fish on the cords. But none of these scars were fresh. They were as old as erosions in a fishless desert. Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same colour as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.

Approximately 14% of the words in this passage are adjectives, and even they are straightforwardly presented: only two are figurative, the rest are simple physical descriptions. There is no particular drive to stir up the emotions of the reader. Rather, the technique is to understatedly set up the contrast between all the features of the old man that suggest he is old, and the one exception, his eyes. The result is that we sense the tension between the opposites of the character's age and his inner spirit. A vacuum, a gap between two elements of his character, is thus created.

The primary communicators of human emotion are carefully crafted vacuums.

Fiction books or stories are *attention-capturing devices*. The main mechanism in them that is used for capturing attention is *vacuums*.

Vacuums are reliable; vacuums are dependable. Plus they are quite mechanical in nature. Their existence explains why 'popular' literature sells so well even when it's not particularly 'well written'. The almost physical force which a cleverly crafted vacuum can deploy is what compels emotional commitment by readers.

A strong vacuum or set of vacuums attracts emotional commitment.

What you are aiming for with characters and plots is to generate vacuums so powerful that they drag the reader through any obstacle on the way to the full effect you want to create.

How do you do that?

By making vacuums larger.

We touched last week on the many levels of vacuum from universal to basic. Successful fiction shows the reader through the medium of the story what would happen if a vacuum grew worse or wider or larger or more intense or whatever is applicable. What if the loss of an innocuous luxury tapped into a deeper loss of companionship and then that led to a threat to life itself? The reader, imagining this, moves towards greater need and gets closer to acquiring your meaningful message.

This is all covered in greater detail in last week's lesson, ***Characters - What They Are and How to Create Them***.

Plots are also made in this way.

Is the purpose of a plot 'to tell a story'? 'To inform the reader what happens with a set of characters'? 'To entertain the reader with a series of exciting events'?

It can do all of these, but its primary function is more mechanical than these:

The purpose of a plot is to obtain the reader's emotional commitment to complete the story and accept the effect you are aiming to create.

If a plot is not doing that, then the reader will drift off or have to force themselves to read right to the end.

That's why authors don't include a breakdown of every single action or every single day in the life of a character; that's why we have gaps and leaps from one scene or event to another; that's why the story that is actually communicated to the reader is an edited version of the time in which the story's events take place.

We don't get a detailed breakdown of Frodo's journey to Mount Doom, just the edited highlights; we don't see every last attribute of every room into which Austen's characters enter, just enough to get a sense of place; we don't get a diary of Scout's life day by day in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, just the events that have meaning and power.

Why?

Because successful authors know, consciously or not, that *it is the most vacuum-charged moments which will guarantee reader attention and lead to emotional commitment.*

There is a moment in successful fiction when a reader becomes completely committed to the work. Perhaps they are tracking with a character figure who is in emotional pain and needs a remedy, as in *Great Expectations*; perhaps they are attracted by the vacuums of a scene in which there is an urgent need for an item to defuse an imminent explosion, as in the film thriller *Juggernaut*; perhaps they are glued to a chase scene as in the films *Speed* or *The French Connection* or the children's book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. In the case of the vacuum-driven reader, they need something and they are going to get it, regardless, even if it means reading all night.

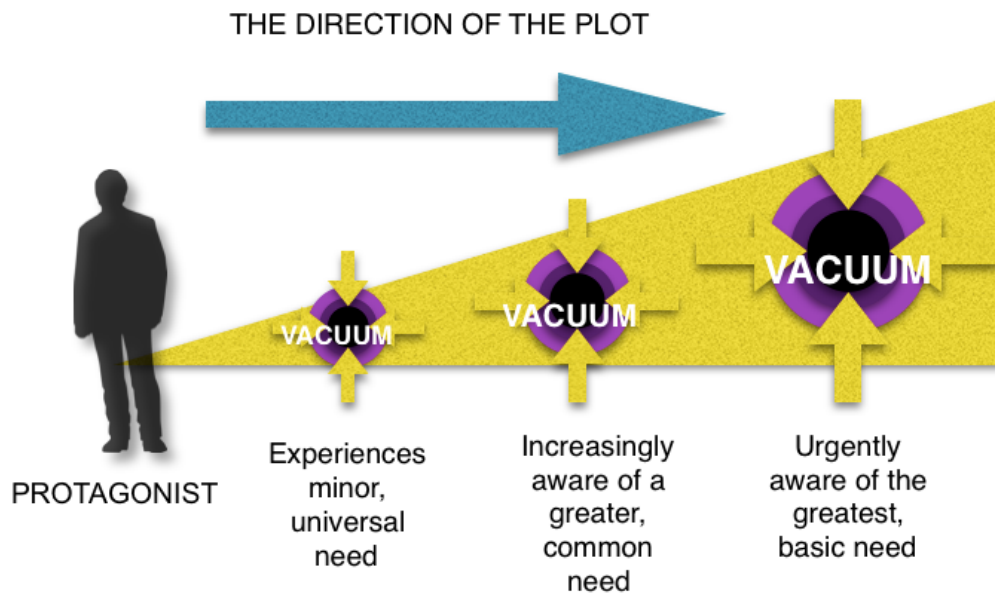
How did they get to that point?

Readers, like the character figure to whom you have 'stuck' them with character vacuums, are prompted to action by *plot vacuums* in the story.

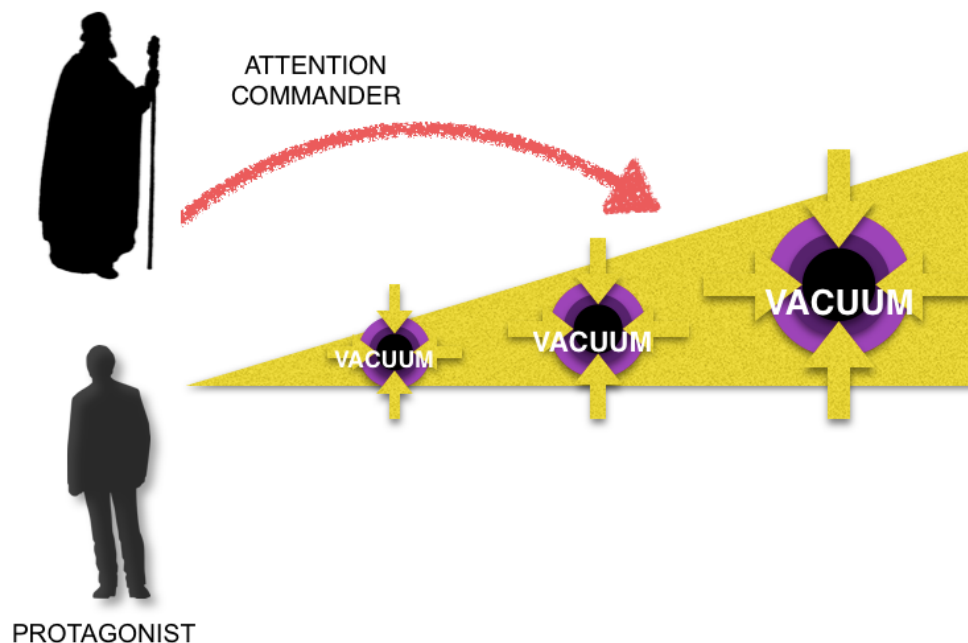
As they are driven further forward by plot vacuums, they become urgently aware of the greater need that is developing and are in full motion towards it. They just want to get to the climax of the story, the vacuum-filling moment.

Fiction writing is the process of creating or boosting vacuums until motion is achieved towards the fulfilling (or intentionally unfulfilling) ending.

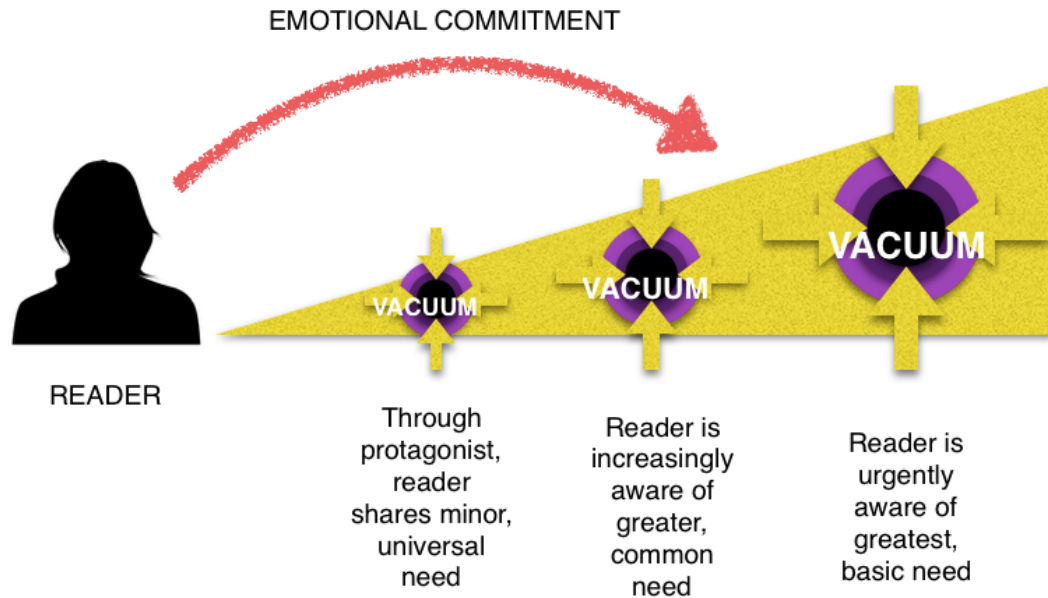
Successful fiction writers simply work with vacuums until the reader overcomes his or her own inertia and makes that commitment, as per the following diagrams.



The 'old man with a stick' archetype directs the protagonist's attention to the most basic vacuum:



The reader, attracted by character vacuums to the figure known as the protagonist, tracks with the plot and makes an emotional commitment:



If your message fills the vacuum accurately (or intentionally leaves it empty), fulfilment is obtained, trust is achieved and the reader will return to your writing in the future to have vacuums filled again.

Thus great fiction is born.

But how do we get to the point where the vacuum power is so strong that all reader inertia is overcome?

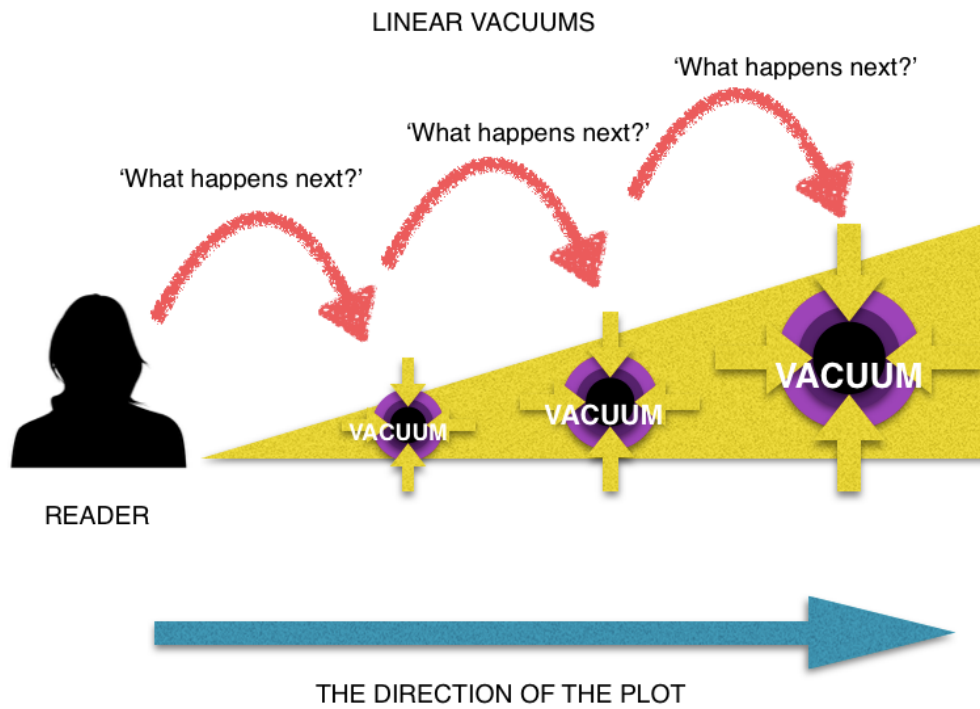
At this point, you should try and dispense with any previous knowledge or training in this area as what you're about to learn here is too simple - and too powerful - for any of that. You may find many reasons why this is 'too simple' and 'needs to be more complex'.

It doesn't.

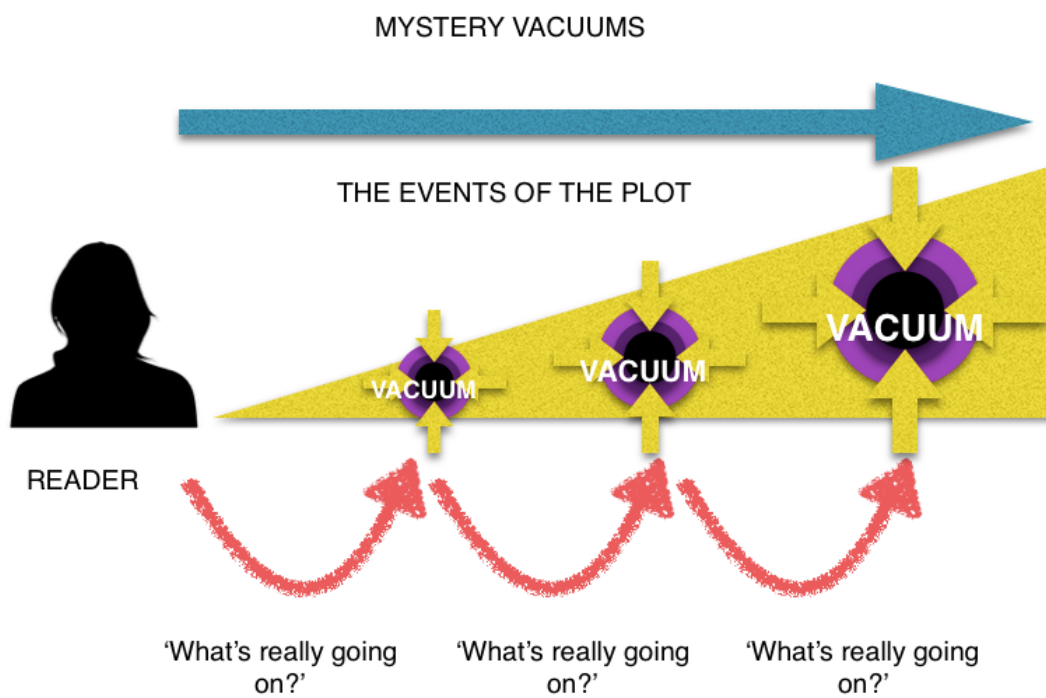
The Four Kinds of Plot Vacuum

There are four kinds of plot vacuum:

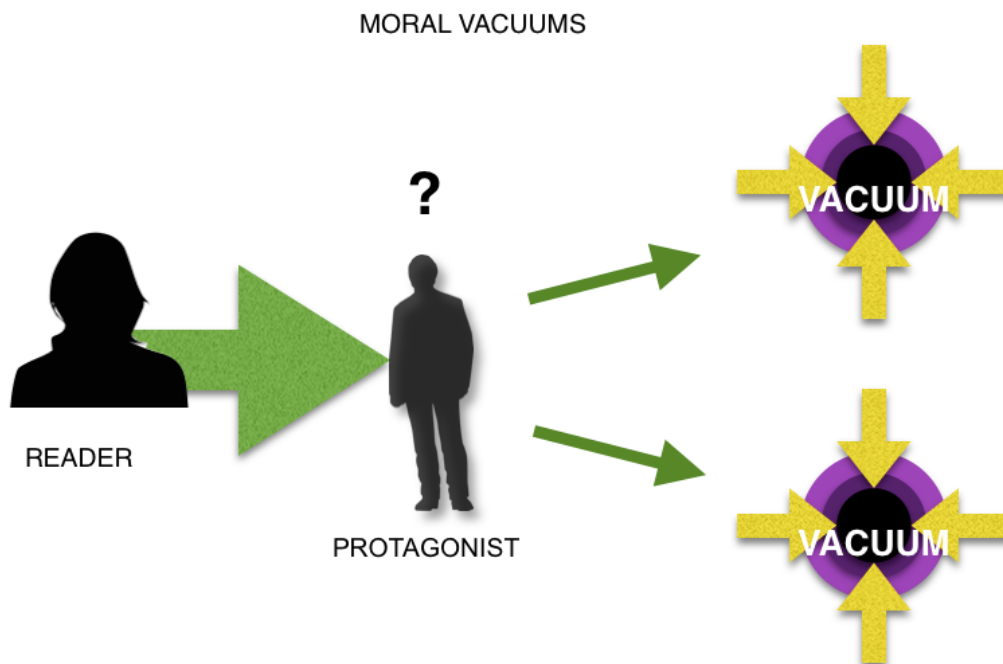
Linear vacuums - best summed up by the question 'What happens next?'



Mystery vacuums - encapsulated by the question 'What's really going on?'

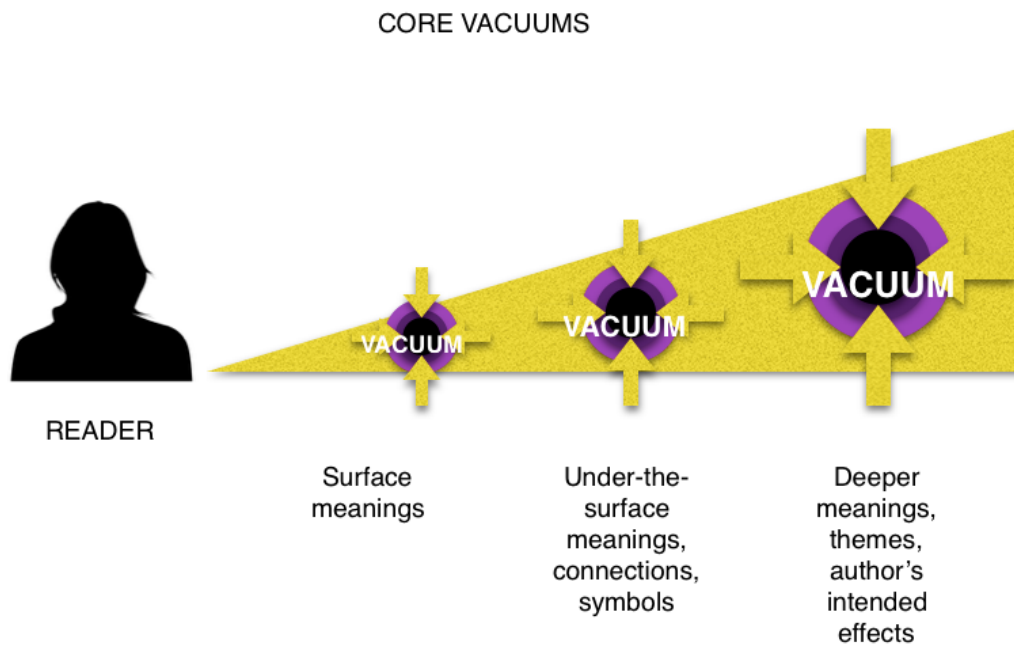


Moral vacuums - as in the question 'What is the right thing in this situation?'



and

Core vacuums - summed up as what the story is really all about.



Core vacuums are entangled with answers to the biggest questions, 'What are the big problems we're trying to solve?', 'What is the message or solution we're trying to communicate?' and 'What is the goal which we're trying to attract others to?'

Core vacuums in stories equate to *basic vacuums*: risks to basics like life, health, personal well-being and so on. They are the engines, the 'nuclear reactors' of fiction.

Mystery vacuums ask questions like 'What's really going on?' 'What is happening under the surface?' and 'What unknown needs to be known?' We don't know, and we want to know - and that *want* is a vacuum.

Mystery vacuums stick us to the story at every possible point. They are the 'glue' of fiction.

Linear vacuums ask simple questions like 'What happens next?' or 'What unknown comes next?'

Simpler than a mystery vacuum, they are part of the woof and warp of even the most primitive stories.

Linear vacuums drive us forward. They create the *momentum* of fiction.

Moral vacuums ask the questions 'What's right and wrong here?' 'What about consequences?' and 'What should be done?' We are in a quandary - and that *uncertainty* is a vacuum.

Moral vacuums engage our innermost selves. They help to create the *meaning* of fiction.

'Captain America: The Winter Soldier'

To understand what these things are and how they work together to produce a story, let's take the example of the film *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. Close scrutiny shows that it makes expert use of all the above kinds of plot vacuum, knowingly or not. Obviously, spoilers follow for those who haven't yet seen the film, but it is a good example of how plot vacuums work and should be comprehensible even if you haven't seen it or aren't familiar with the characters.

The truth is that almost any story would serve as a good illustration of plot vacuums, but this is a workable contemporary example.

The well-known Marvel Comics character like Captain America has a fan-following numbering in millions. Furthermore, any Marvel fan has already been hooked into watching this film by the phenomenal success of the Marvel cinematic universe, in particular the film *The Avengers*, one of the top-grossing films of all time. So we already have the fan who will camp outside the theatre on opening night to see the film first; and we already have an interested public, not quite as desperate but nevertheless gripped by the ongoing saga that unfolds throughout the Marvel films.

But what about those potential audience members who know nothing about Captain America at all? How are they attracted?

Before the film starts, we already have some character vacuums. The basic back story of Steve Rogers, the eponymous hero of the story, is that he has not only lost his parents by this film, but his whole time period, 1940s America. He's survived being frozen and has awakened to a whole new world as shown in the comics and in the initial film in the series, *Captain America, the First Avenger*. This means that he fits our definition of a protagonist, from last week's lesson:

A protagonist is defined as that constructed figure who attracts and holds the most reader attention.

For audiences less familiar with this character vacuum, we see it triggered by observing in the opening scenes Rogers not understanding basic modern concepts like the internet when making friends with Sam Wilson.

The story is set up in this way to be driven by Rogers' character vacuums. Based on this, we should expect that towards the end of the film, Rogers will 'rediscover himself' - in other words, he will have that vacuum filled, at least partially. And that is what we do find.

But how are the plot vacuums constructed?

The initial and most basic plot vacuum is the one which drives even the most primitive fiction, drawn from the simple question:

'What happens next?'

This is a *linear vacuum*. It is the emptiness created as soon as anyone starts writing a story based on sequence - which is just about any story: what is the next occurrence in a chain of occurrences?

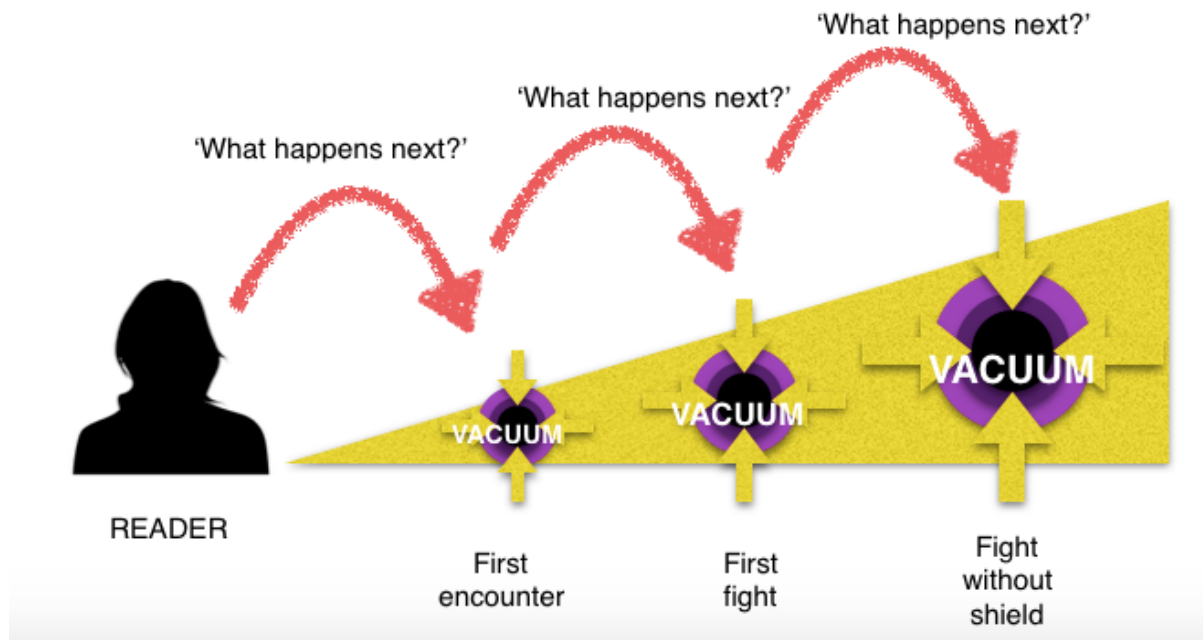
The gap or missing answer to that question draws the reader on.

Where the expertise comes in is in constructing a linear vacuum *which the reader cares about filling*. Thus, we see the character vacuum established first, as described above, in the opening scene.

Then, in the action sequence set on board a ship at the beginning of the film, it is the fast-paced placing of one linear vacuum after another which draws the viewer along: who will win the next hand-to-hand combat? How will the apparently overwhelming odds be overcome? How will Rogers defeat Batroc without his shield? and so on. It wouldn't work as well if we didn't already care about the Rogers character as the prime vacuum-surrounded figure, the protagonist.



LINEAR VACUUMS IN THE FIGHT SCENE



These linear vacuums are typical of all action films or stories based on simplistic action. We are accustomed by certain conventions that come as part of the genre that the hero will beat up the bad guys, though the scene's power comes from the vacuum of not knowing exactly how that will happen when the bad guys seem to have the upper hand.

Linear vacuums draw power not only from the unspoken question 'What will happen next?' but also from its associated question 'How will it happen?'. A linear vacuum is boosted whenever the odds are stacked against the protagonist - which occurs in almost every story, as you may have noticed in your own reading or viewing.

The reason that these odds are increased is usually given as 'it escalates the drama or tension'. What is actually happening is that having the protagonist face greater and greater barriers acts to *magnify the vacuum in the reader's or viewer's mind* generated by the question 'What will happen next?' and *this* is what draws the reader or viewer on.

Fights, chases, hunts, quests: these are all typical forms of linear vacuums.

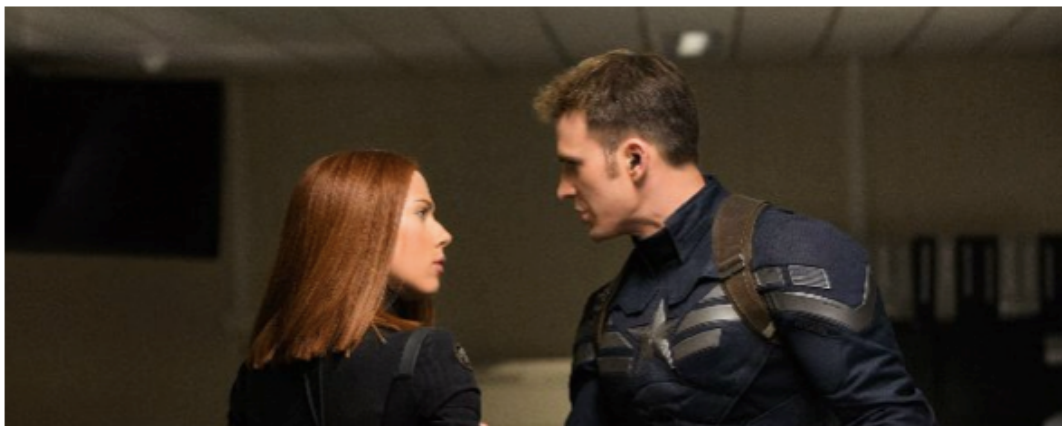
Linear vacuums give the story *momentum*.

But linear vacuums alone are often not enough. What spices things up or takes things to the next level is the next category of plot vacuum, the *mystery vacuum* based on the question:

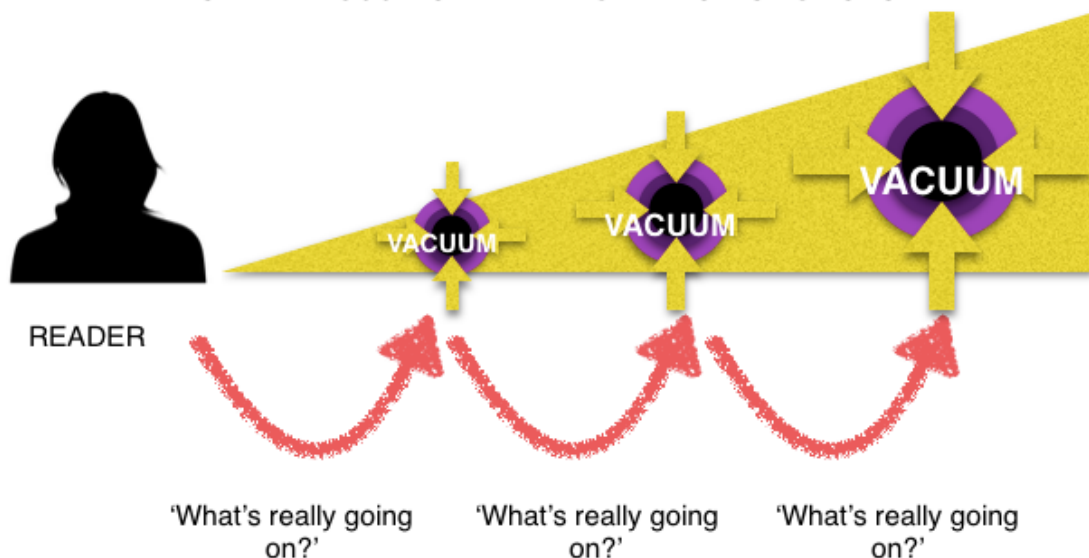
'What is really going on?'

It is the additional, unexpected vacuum of not knowing exactly what Natasha Romanoff, the Black Widow, is doing in these early scenes of the film that sets up the mystery.

Romanoff, by hacking into the enemies' computer and downloading data, seems to be doing something contrary to what Rogers is doing, and of which Rogers is unaware. This is a mystery vacuum: in this case, unknown intentions in a character leading to a mystery which sucks in our attention even more. Rogers discovers Romanoff has another agenda: to extract data from the ship's computers for Nick Fury, Rogers' boss and the director of S.H.I.E.L.D., the agency which employs him. The resolution of the 'What happens next?' - good guy beating bad guy in physical combat - is underpinned quickly by this unexpected mystery.



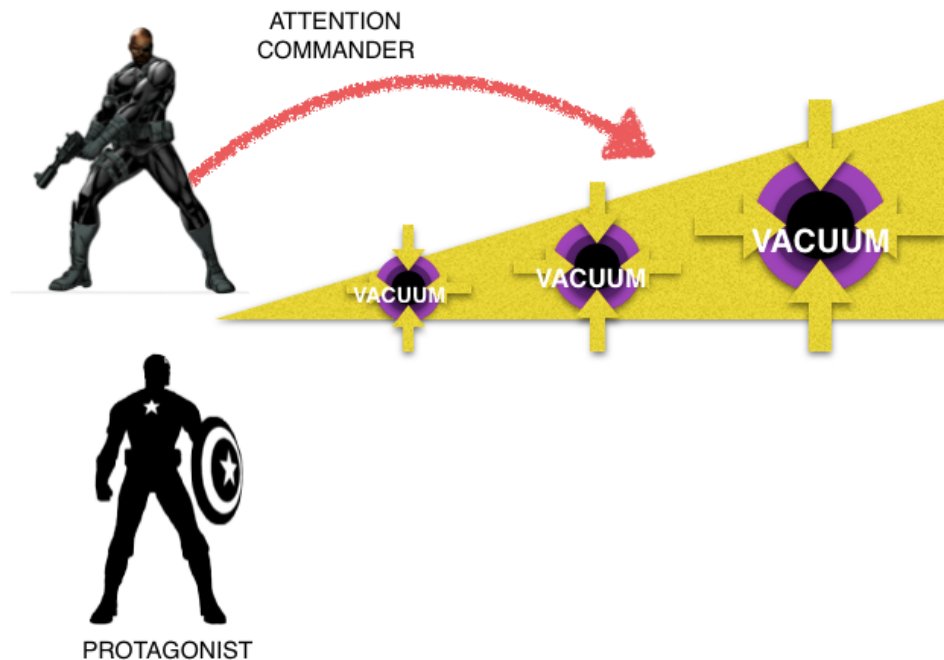
MYSTERY VACUUM OF THE BLACK WIDOW'S ACTIONS



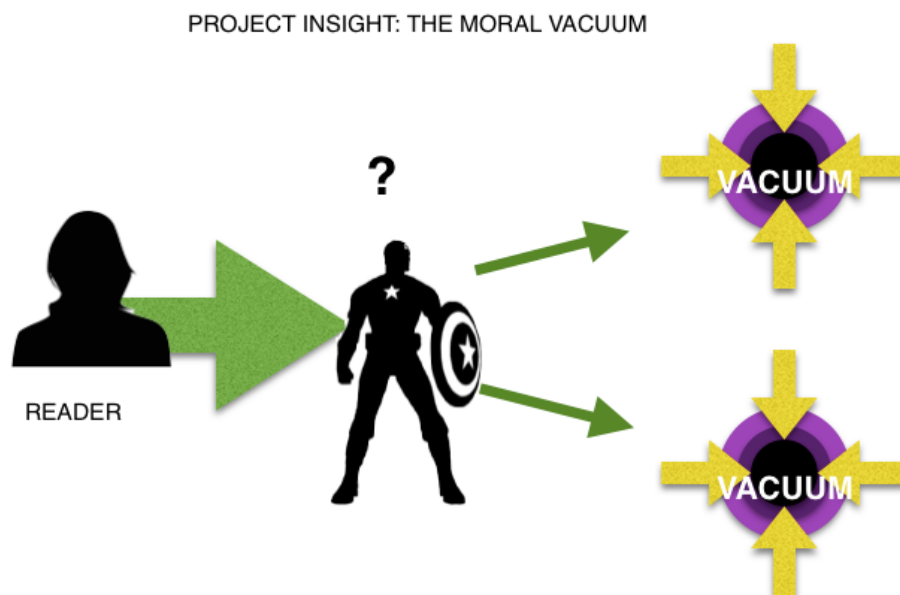
That underlying mystery vacuum is what carries us forward into the next scene when Rogers returns to the Triskelion, S.H.I.E.L.D.'s headquarters. He confronts Fury who is not forthcoming, which prolongs and deepens the mystery vacuum. Rogers is then briefed about Project Insight: three Helicarriers, giant airborne destroyers, linked to spy satellites, designed to preemptively eliminate threats. While these are impressive visually and as a threat, they don't fill the mystery vacuum that has been established but only serve to amplify it.

What are all these heli-carriers for? Their presence taps into *common* and *basic* vacuums - personal freedom, life and death - and so raises the stakes and the vacuum power in the story.

It's no accident that it's Nick Fury who gives Rogers this briefing: Fury is after all the 'old man with a stick' in this story. It's his function to outline the deeper vacuums of the tale, as described earlier.



It's also here that we glimpse our first *moral vacuum*: Rogers questions whether Project Insight is the right thing to do. As an audience, our own morality is engaged and the story gains meaning.



The reason why we begin to care is the character vacuums and the sense of unresolved mystery around Fury's actions.

Older guides to fiction might have called this 'conflict' and claimed that it had to be present in any story - what it actually is is the operation of *mystery vacuums*, sucking in attention from the audience and channelling it more or less wherever the screenplay writer wishes, if he or she understands vacuum power.

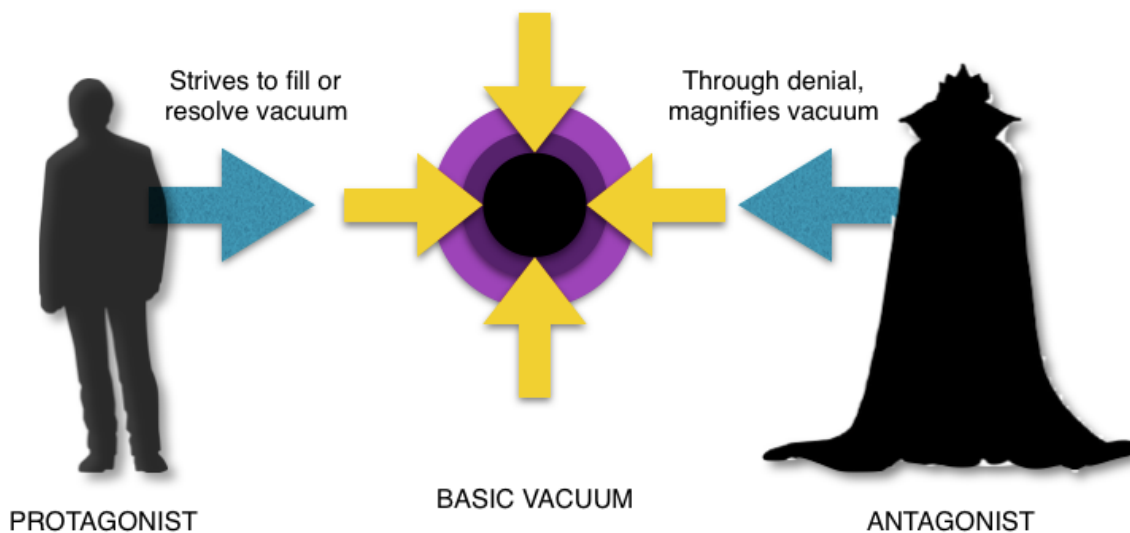
Fury himself then develops his own character vacuum, set up in his dialogue in the elevator with Rogers, suggesting a lack of trust in others from a past in which he has lost much. Note that he already has a trademark character vacuum symbol, the wound or scar - his missing eye. That he then reveals that he doesn't know what is on the encrypted drive recovered by Romanoff connects him to the mystery vacuum too.

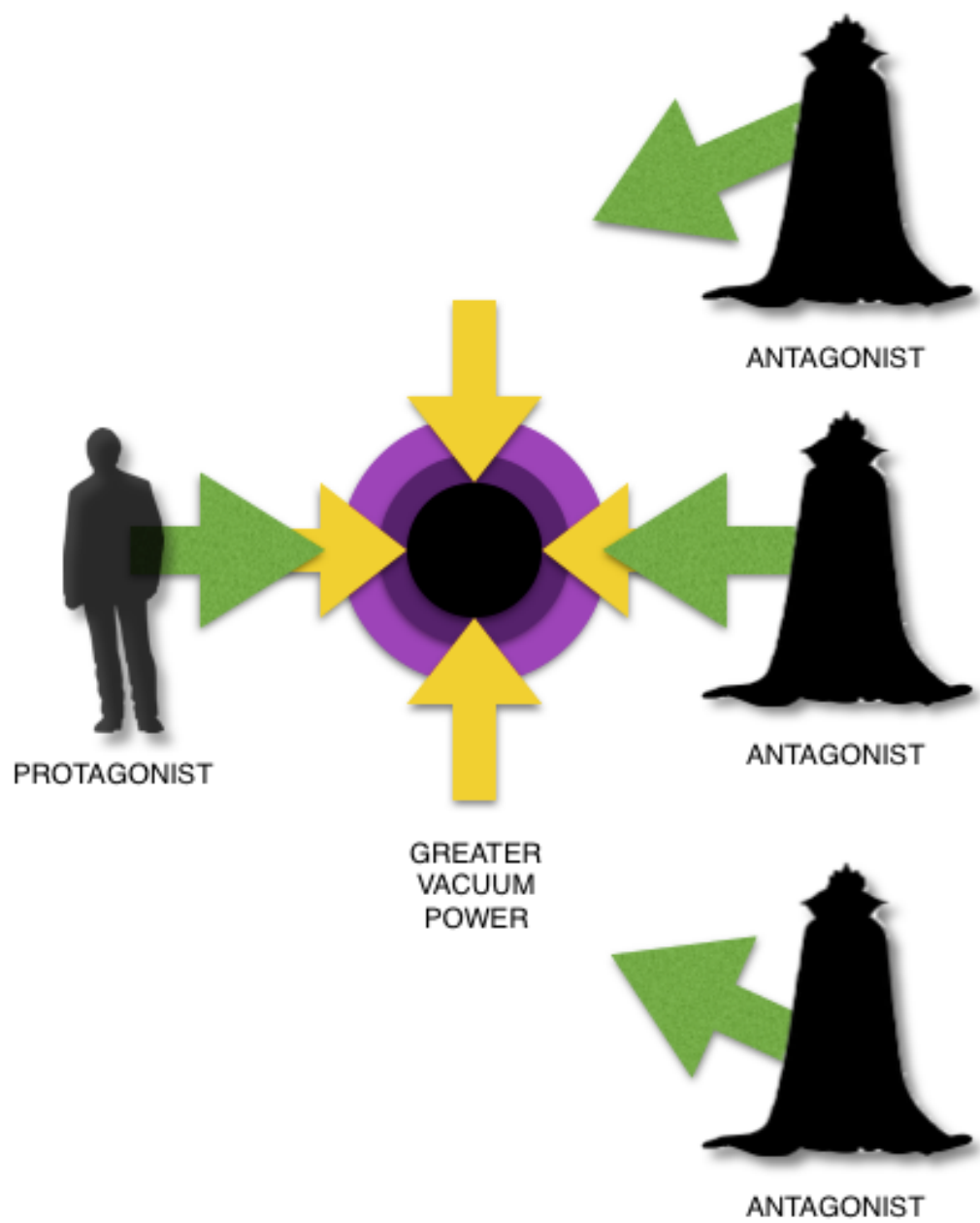
Our attention is therefore literally glued to Fury as we move into the next scene. His inability to decrypt the data recovered by Romanoff magnifies the mystery vacuum even more. Fury becomes suspicious about Project Insight and asks senior S.H.I.E.L.D. official Alexander Pierce (Robert Redford) to delay the project while he tries to find out more. The film's audience are also tracking with the desire to find out more and are thus becoming allied to the construct we know as the 'character' Fury.

This is what makes the next scene so powerful. On his way to rendezvous with agent Maria Hill, Fury is ambushed by whole squad of assailants led by the mysterious assassin (another mystery vacuum) called the Winter Soldier. Our sympathies now lie with the Fury figure in his quest to solve the mystery. But something else comes into play here too, as outlined above.

The odds stacked against the character magnify the size of the vacuum.

This leads to one of the key formulas of vacuum power: the more antagonists there are, the more powerful they seem, and the more apparent force used against the protagonist, the greater the vacuum power.





The Nuclear Reactor of Fiction

Continuing with our analysis of the film enables us to examine what I've referred to as the 'nuclear reactor of fiction', the core vacuum.

The core vacuum equates to the *basic vacuum* covered last week, the sense of loss, or impending loss, of life's most essential needs: shelter, food, means of survival, health, life itself. It is the Big Issue, the most important factor, the fundamental thing that the story is about. In most fiction, it is the final significant matter which has to be resolved before the story ends; in great literature, it's also the most central ideas and messages of the author.

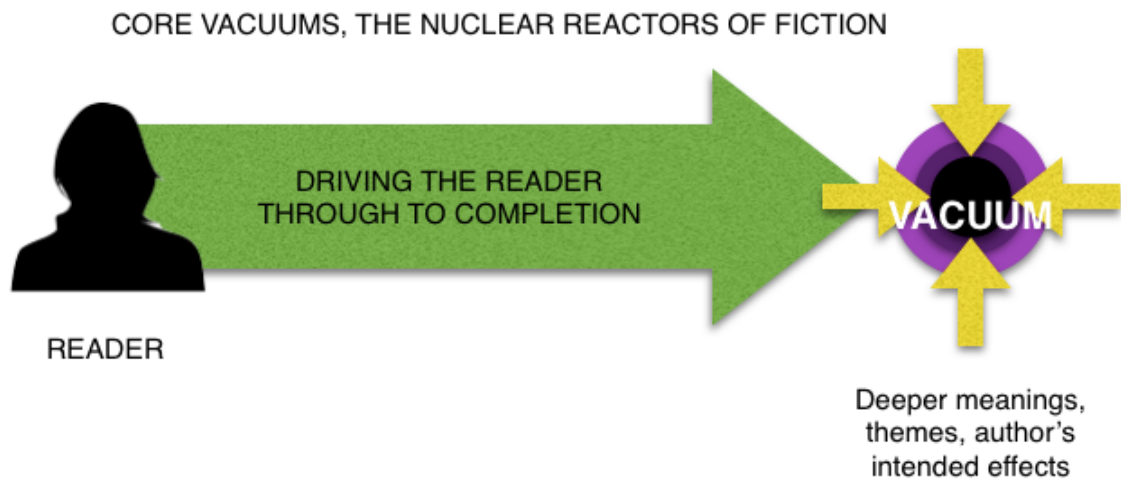
In *The Lord of the Rings*, the core vacuum is therefore not only the attempted destruction of the One Ring on the slopes of Mount Doom but also the whole inner significance of the story as a tale about life, death and the meaning of mortality.

In *Star Wars: A New Hope*, the core vacuum is not just the attack on the Emperor's main weapon, the Death Star, in the hope of undermining the Empire itself, but also the concept of the story as a 'rite of passage' for Luke Skywalker and a study in good and evil.

In the Harry Potter stories, the core vacuum isn't only about defeating Voldemort but about sacrifice and friendship and mentoring.

The unknowns which make up the core vacuum are the things which pull the reader's attention along right to the end of the tale.

Character vacuums attract the reader in the first place, while linear, mystery and moral vacuums hold the reader to the story as it goes along - but the major 'pull' of the story are the core vacuums.



The maxim is this:

Successful stories construct everything around the core vacuums of the tale - characters, linear plot, mysteries, moral vacuums, and so forth, all built around the 'nuclear reactor' of the central core concepts.

What does this mean in practice?

Well, the film can give us a good example:

After escaping the Winter Soldier, a wounded Fury escapes to Rogers' apartment, and completes his 'old man with a stick' role by outlining the tale's core vacuum, the Big Story, warning Rogers that S.H.I.E.L.D., the government's super-security service, is totally compromised. That's what the story is 'about': the attempt to defeat a Nazi conspiracy at the heart of government.

On a thematic level, of course, it's about government corruption versus integrity, which is why the film has a flavour of the political thrillers of the past.

The story's central issue - the Nazi conspiracy - and the thematic idea - government integrity - are the core vacuums of the film. And of course they are perfectly symbolised and captured by the character vacuums of its protagonist, Steve Rogers, Captain America. The crafted perfection of this alignment is why the film was a winner at both the box office and in critical circles.

After handing Rogers a flash drive containing data from the ship, Fury is gunned down by the Winter Soldier, who then escapes. Fury then dies in surgery (in this way fulfilling his role as the 'old man with a stick' archetype here too, as covered last week - and so we suspect that he might be back later in the story.)

Fury's 'stick' in this case is literally the USB stick with all the revelatory data on it about what Hydra, the Nazi organisation, has been up to.

This further intensifies the vacuum power for the audience: not only has Fury apparently been slain with all the potential knowledge he could have cast upon the situation, but Rogers and Romanoff now have further character vacuums, both losing a respected mentor figure.

Rogers' initial *universal* vacuum - the inconvenience of not really grasping the society around him, as shown at the beginning of the film - has been magnified into a *common* vacuum: the real loss of a close friend and ally.

As you can see, the screenplay writers have so far really done nothing else than create various kinds of vacuums and work to make them align and grow larger. These are then amplified further as the story proceeds.

This isn't an aimless progression - it's heading somewhere specific, as we are about to see.

When Rogers withholds Fury's information, S.H.I.E.L.D. executive Pierce brands him a fugitive. Both Rogers and female companion archetype Romanoff are then ruthlessly pursued and hunted by the antagonists, in a classic linear vacuum hunt.

Old methods of story analysis might have called this 'increasing the tension' or 'delineating the conflict between the protagonists and the antagonists' but what is at work behind it is *vacuums*.

It's not so much a battle between protagonist and antagonist as it is a playing out of vacuum power which drives the story forward: the audience is glued to the screen by the question how will these vacuums, plot and character alike, get filled?

The linear vacuums created by 'What happens next?' combine with the mystery vacuums generated by 'What is really going on?' which add to the character vacuums to build a vacuum-powered machine.

This all leads up to the impressive antagonist's apparent triumph in the next section of the film: villain Arnim Zola reveals to Rogers and Romanoff that ever since S.H.I.E.L.D. was founded after World War II, Nazi offshoot Hydra has secretly operated within its ranks, sowing global chaos with the long-term aim that humanity would willingly surrender its freedom in exchange for security.

Now the game plan is laid out and that initial mystery vacuum of the encrypted data resolved. Now we are in *basic vacuum* territory: loss or threat to security and life itself.

The vacuum power initialised in the opening action sequence has been focused, magnified and intensified into a *core vacuum*, with one sole aim, whether the screenplay writers knew about vacuum power or not: *to get the audience's emotional commitment to the rest of the story.*

Now as an audience we are subject to a classic core vacuum: the stakes are raised, and Hydra is about to reveal itself to the world and place millions of lives and the vital freedoms of society at risk.

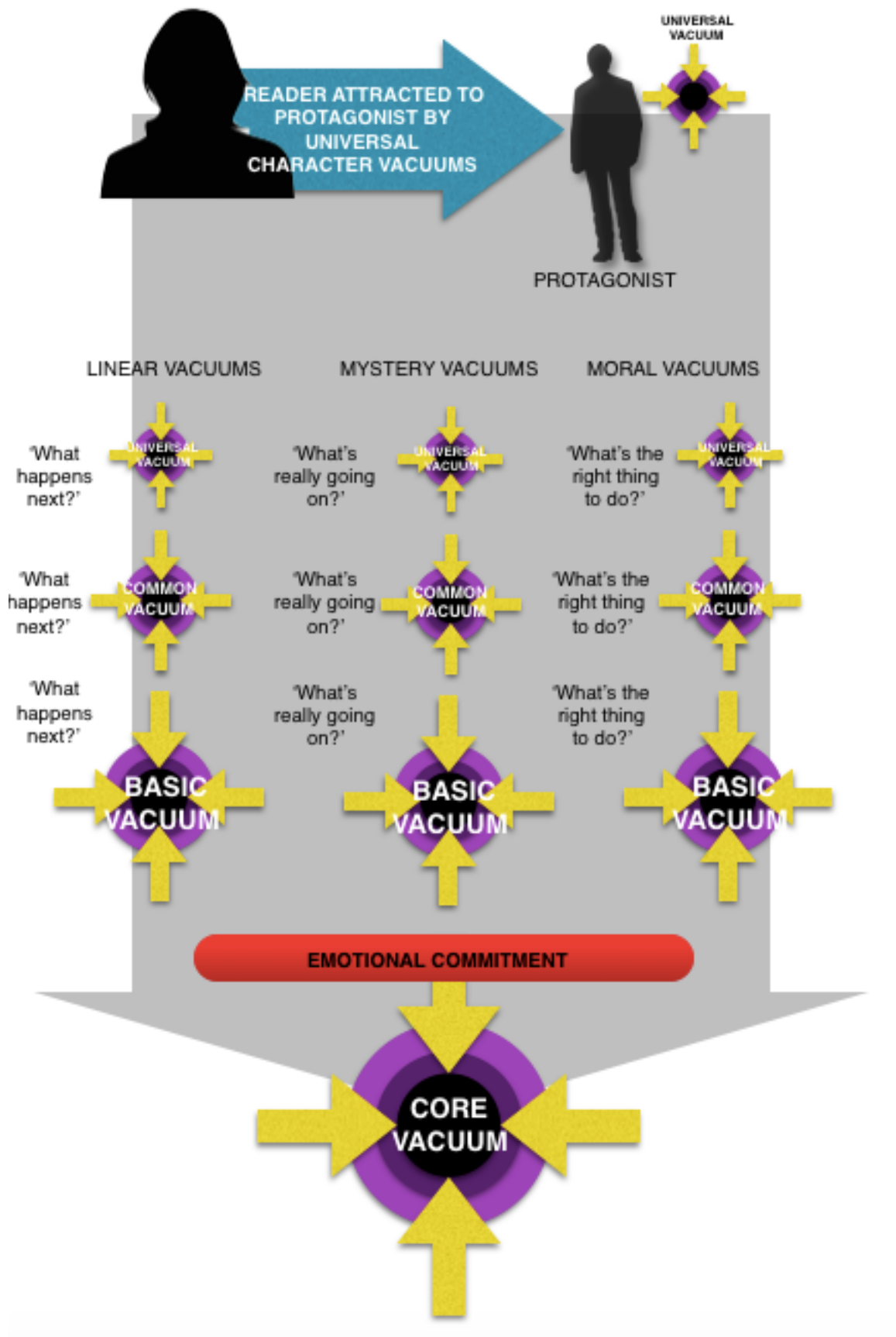
Basic and common vacuums - the desire for life and for freedom and safety - have all been tapped into. Rogers explicitly fills the moral vacuum with a decision to fight for freedom, no matter what.

Now it is the role of the core vacuum, to take things to the highest possible 'notch', to involve the maximum possible pulling power.

It's a point which is usually aligned with the naming or outing or otherwise revealing the story's real antagonist. Rogers and Romanoff realise what the audience have probably seen at least since Pearce named Rogers as a fugitive: that their enemy has been Pearce as a Hydra leader all along. There's no point in keeping that mysterious any longer - to some degree, mystery vacuums have been superseded by the core vacuum which will carry the viewer through to the end of the tale. But also the antagonist is revealed here so that he or she can fulfil their function: maximising vacuum power.

So what we are accustomed to describing as the 'plot' has so far been a string of different types of vacuums leading up to a point of emotional commitment and to the core vacuum.

The path through all of this looks something like this:



Can we imagine a situation in which character, linear, mystery and moral vacuums *not* been used to attract and glue viewers to the story in various ways?

Could the story of *Captain America: the Winter Soldier* have worked without them?

Would the audience have accepted the 'Hydra threatens the world' scenario without the prior build-up?

The honest answer is yes, they probably would - but the film would have far less emotional power and the audience would have invested very little in the outcome.

Character vacuums, linear vacuums, mystery vacuums and moral vacuums have all helped produce an *emotional commitment* to the story where the viewers care far more about the final result than they otherwise would have.

That's the difference between a shallow 'good versus evil' tale which tries to jump straight into the core vacuum, and a story which acquires the participation of the audience or reader using character, linear, mystery and moral vacuums. Lesser or simpler stories are built around a core vacuum and nothing else - they depend on voluntary reader/viewer participation, if you like. More complex and more successful stories use every vacuum at their disposal to almost compel reader or viewer commitment.

In an epic like *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, the rest of the tale is now a matter of the protagonist working towards filling the story's core vacuum, whatever the odds and however unlikely the events which follow. Somehow, Steve Rogers has to defeat the enemy and prevent basic vacuums created by threats to life and freedom from growing out of control - he has to find the real vacuum filler, which is always the author's central message: Joy, or Sorrow; Victory, or Defeat.

This Marvel movie was a success at the box office and critically. It was no accident. It's a story which weaves the various types of plot vacuums - linear, moral, mystery and core - with the standard character vacuums as exemplified by Rogers, Romanoff, Fury and Wilson. Wilson plays out his role as 'comic companion' (described in detail last week) with vital assistance or vacuum-filling; Fury returns from the dead to delineate the final core vacuum as a classic 'old man with a stick' attention commander (as explained last week); Romanoff as the female companion with a mysterious past (a personified vacuum, also covered last week) finds some satisfaction at the end of the film and an even deeper respect for Rogers; and Rogers, who had an inner emptiness and uncertainty for the first part of the story, comes to deeper self-knowledge and certainty in the second part.

The interaction between plot and character vacuums makes for a more satisfying vacuum-filling finale and denouement.

Less successful fiction relies on too few of these vacuums, if it is even aware of them at all, and generally fails to connect them up in any meaningful way.

But no doubt you have thought of stories with substantial variations to this pattern. 'It's all too simple and mechanical,' a little voice may be saying in your head.

The truth is that *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is an example of a classic story pattern, the template that the large majority of fiction follows - but there are four basic patterns in total. You've heard them mentioned several times since: Epic, Tragedy, Irony and Comedy.

Let's examine those next.

The Four Basic Genres

You now know what's perhaps been wrong with the characters you've devised who just don't seem to work, and what's right about the characters who seem alive.

You now know what motivates characters, to varying degrees, across the whole range of fiction, and what drives plots forward.

You now know what brings about an emotional commitment on the part of a reader.

Obviously, in the pursuit of your goals as a fiction writer, other basics have to be in place. You have to be writing in the same language as your prospective readership. An entire novel in French will communicate exactly nothing to a non-French-speaking person.

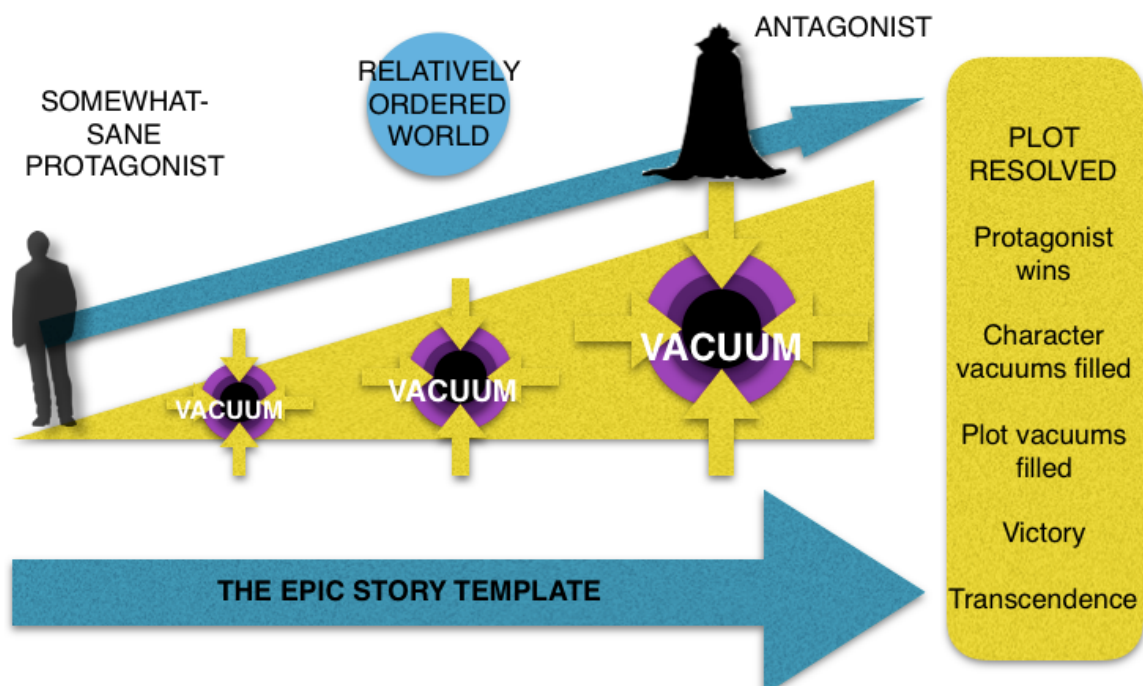
Above words and their order, though, lies a layer of what we might call 'established reader expectations' which fiction writers tap into as soon as they put pen to paper (or finger to keyboard). This overlying pattern or web is alive, shifting, interweaving itself all the time. It is the secret language of fiction.

And what animates it is *vacuums*.

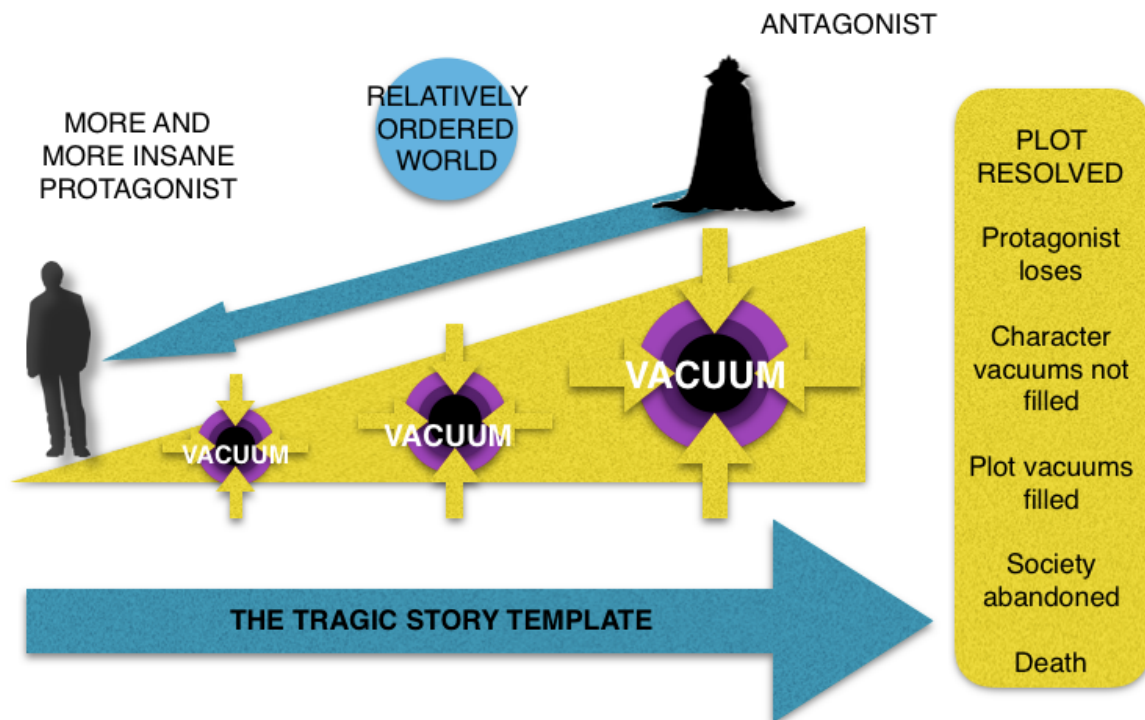
These established reader expectations fall into four broad categories. They've been called 'genres' before, but that word can be misleading - for now, think of them as templates containing certain patterns of vacuums.

Here they are:

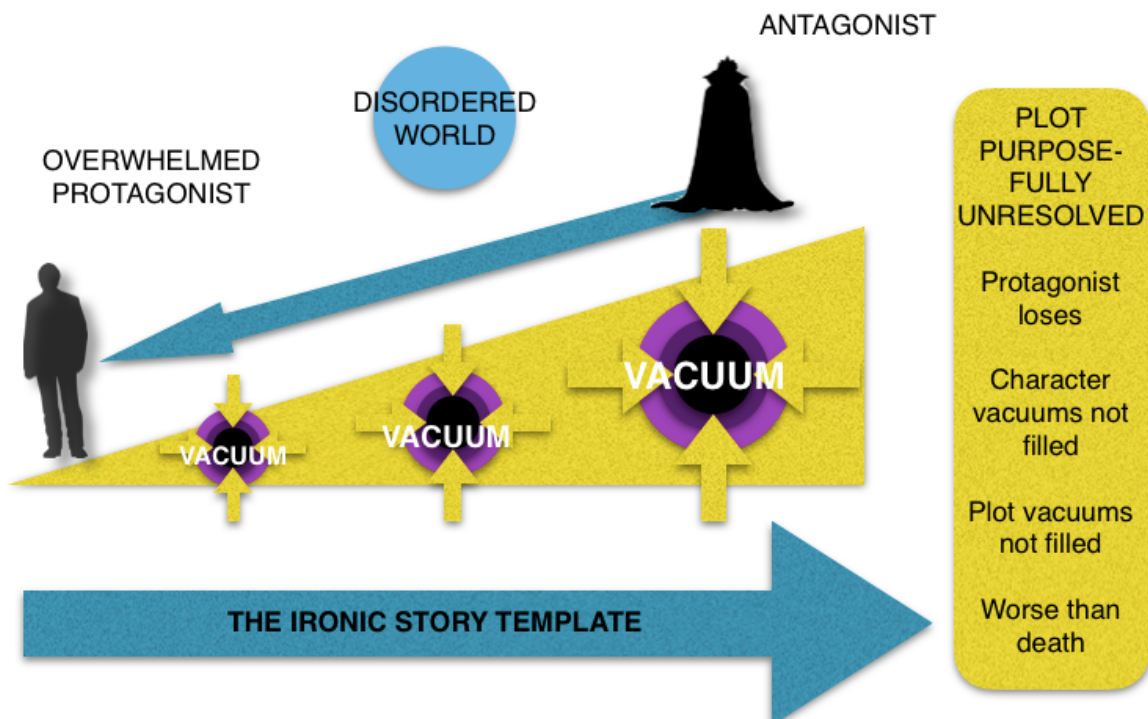
- The set of expectations involving a somewhat-sane protagonist, not overwhelmed by his or her character vacuums, who moves through a relatively ordered world to confront and ultimately triumph over an antagonist. This is the set of stories called 'Epic' and this is the most commonly used template and the one upon which the others rest.



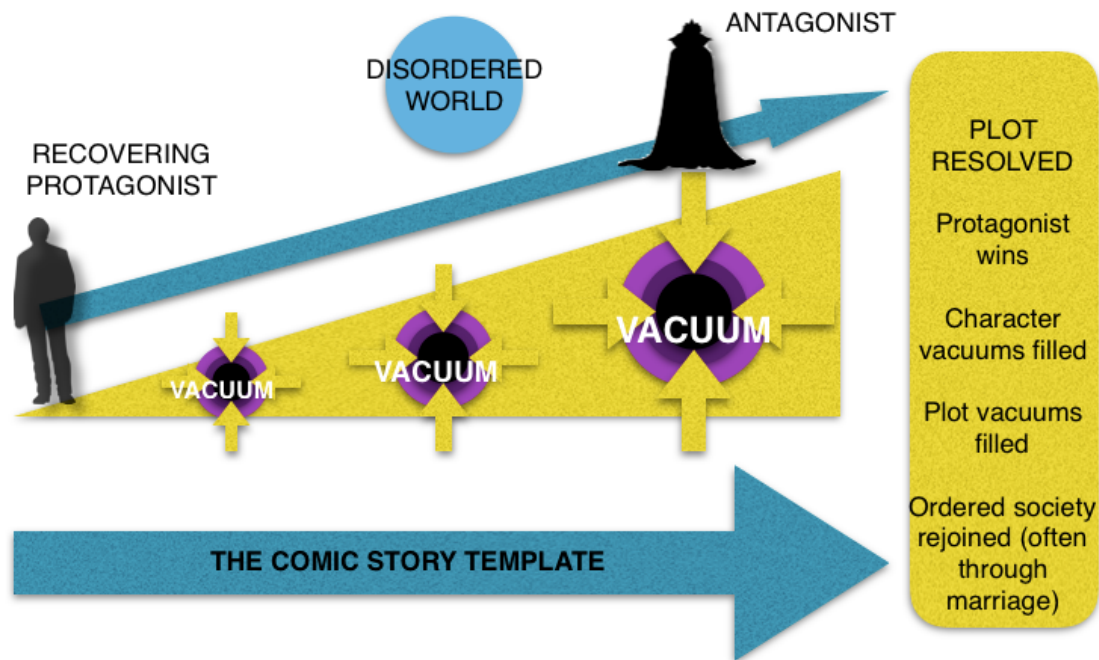
- The set of expectations involving a more and more insane protagonist, gradually ruined by his or her character vacuums, who moves through a relatively ordered world but who, due to a growing internal imbalance, fails to triumph and abandons society. This is the set of stories called 'Tragic'.



- The set of expectations involving a more-or-less insane or overwhelmed protagonist who moves through a disordered world full of vacuums, ending up defeated and isolated. This is the set of stories called 'Ironic'.

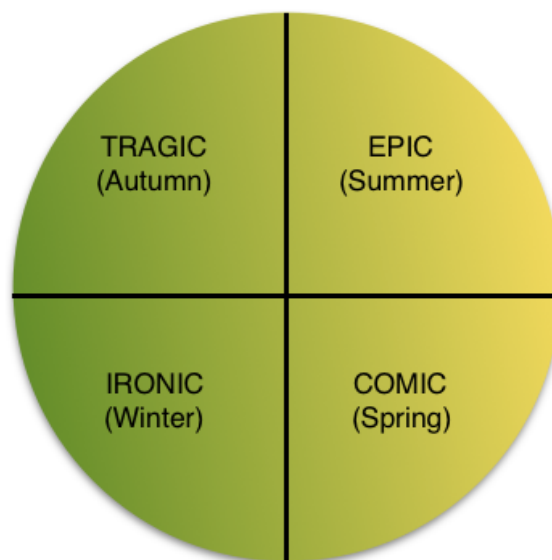


- The set of expectations involving a somewhat-sane or recovering protagonist who moves through a disordered world to ultimately join or re-join an ordered society (often through marriage). This is the set of stories called 'Comic'.



These broad categories can be seen together on a 'Wheel of Fiction':

THE WHEEL OF FICTION



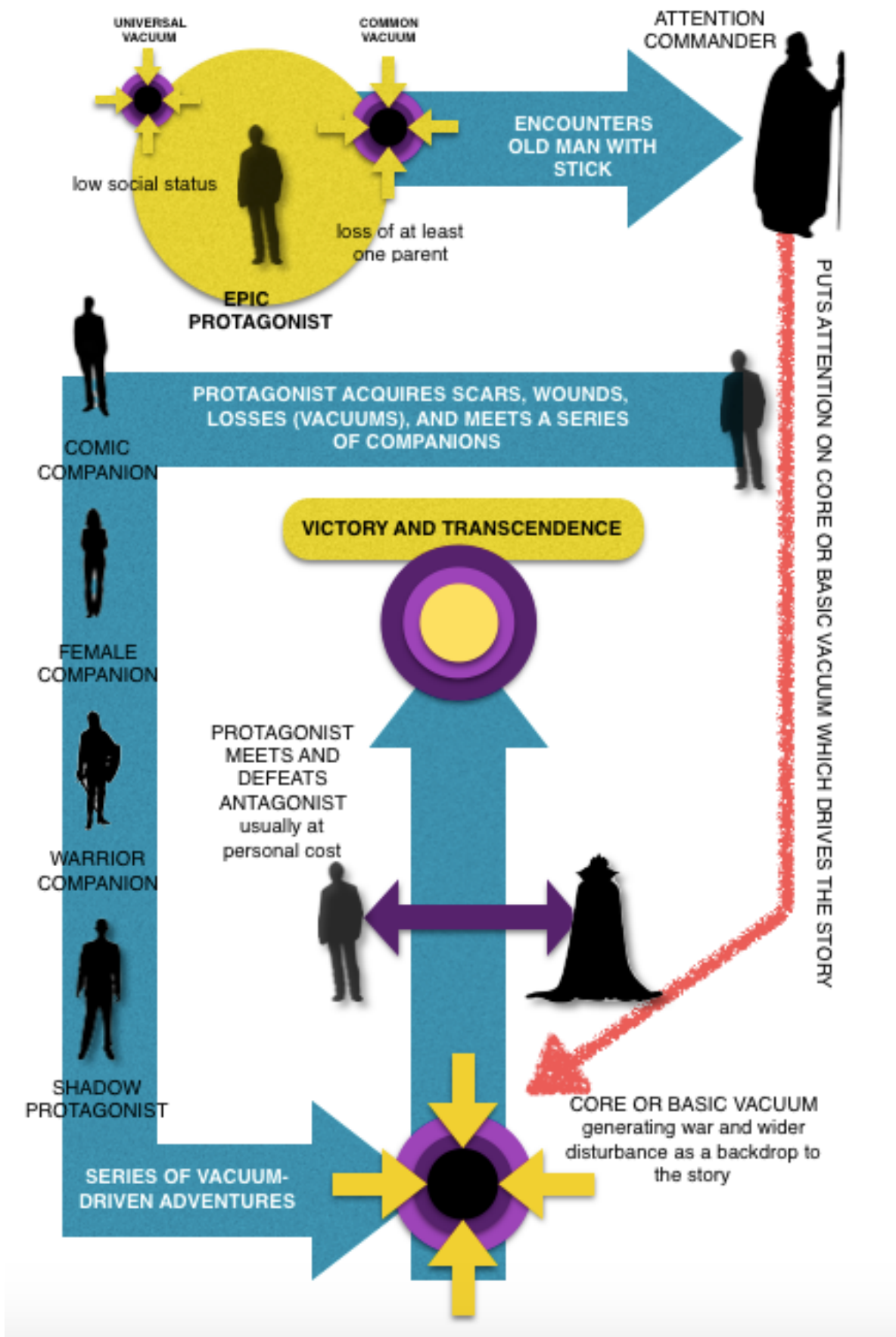
Epic Stories

In the top right hand quarter is everything we've learned so far about our most common type of story model, that associated with 90% of the stories we generally encounter. This is the 'Summer' quarter. As we look further into the four categories, we will see exactly what plot vacuums it uses and how.

These stories feature a classic hero and following a classic pattern, much of which we covered last week when discussing characters:

- the protagonist is usually a young boy or servant (loss of status creating a universal vacuum)
- he is missing at least one parent (creating a common vacuum)
- he is being brought up by a close family member or social superior
- he encounters an old man with a stick (the 'attention commander' as described above)
- the old man orientates him to the antagonist, opening up the basic vacuum of the story
- a journey or quest commences, usually physical, pulled forward by this basic vacuum
- the protagonist is scarred, wounded or otherwise damaged before or during this journey - all individual character vacuums
- the protagonist acquires a comic companion who becomes pivotal in the journey
- the protagonist also often meets a female companion
- there is also a warrior king - an older companion with particular characteristics
- the protagonist often has a shadow - a character similar in many ways to the protagonist but often a kind of opposite
- a war between 'good' and 'evil' is taking place as a backdrop to the story - this is the basic vacuum, the threat to life or health, which is the dominating narrative force
- eventually, the protagonist meets and defeats the antagonist, usually at personal cost (another character vacuum), and usually by finding a close familial or psychological connection between them (as discussed last week)
- the protagonist transcends the world in which he has lived, leaving companions behind.

This is what the Epic storyline normally looks like:



There are obvious examples which follow this template exactly: *The Lord of the Rings*, the *Star Wars* films, the Harry Potter books, the King Arthur stories, and so forth. But other stories that might not spring to mind immediately but which hug this template closely include:

Dune, by Frank Herbert

Watership Down, by Richard Adams

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, by C. S. Lewis

The Wind in the Willows, by Kenneth Grahame

The Hobbit, by J. R. R. Tolkien

Toy Story, 1995

The Wizard of Oz, 1939

Captain America: The Winter Soldier, 2014

There are many, many others. I'm sure you can think of a few. They cover a range of forms and media, but all possess the above points in common.

Though this template seems to be a story with which we are very familiar, appearing constantly in various forms, repeatedly reinvented around us through Hollywood, in the bestseller lists, on television and elsewhere, though other writers have traced some or most of the patterns, no one seems to ask *why* it works or how come it is repeated almost without deviation, time and time again.

Only by understanding vacuums can we understand the principles behind the template.

Tragic Stories

In tragic stories, these are the repeating elements:

- the protagonist is usually a mature warrior figure, with a psychological vacuum
- he is missing at least one parent (a common vacuum)
- he is often, but not exclusively, a social superior
- he experiences loss or defeat early on (another vacuum)
- he encounters an old man with a stick, often a foolish figure, who orientates him to the antagonist and the basic vacuum, which is usually a psychological one - but this is often ignored or misinterpreted
- a journey or quest commences, usually based on an internal, psychological vacuum
- the protagonist is scarred, wounded or otherwise damaged before or during this journey, usually psychologically
- the protagonist loses a comic companion

- the protagonist also often loses a female companion
- there is also a warrior king, often lost - an older companion with particular characteristics
- the protagonist often has a shadow - a character similar in many ways to the protagonist but often a kind of opposite
- a psychological war between 'good' and 'evil' is taking place as a backdrop to the story, but the definitions of what is 'good' and what is 'evil' are blurring
- eventually, the protagonist meets but is defeated by an antagonist, usually resulting in the protagonist's death and usually by finding a close familial or psychological connection between them.

The most typical examples of this type of story, normally called Tragedy, are the Shakespearian plays *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *Othello*.

Other examples of stories with tragic overtones include:

Wuthering Heights, by Emily Brontë

The *Harry Potter* series (if seen as the story of Severus Snape) by J. K. Rowling

The complete *Star Wars* film series (if seen as the story of Darth Vader).

Tragedy is a relatively rare genre in today's culture, for reasons which will become clear later.

This quarter is called the 'Autumn' quarter.

Ironic Stories

Things in fiction can be worse than death, and the bottom left quarter begins with death and gets worse. This quarter, the Ironic segment, takes the same model we started with and flips it even further, into 'Winter'.

You will note some subtle changes from the original 'Summer' template, usually mirror images:

- the protagonist is often (but not exclusively) a young girl or servant
- she is missing at least one parent
- she is being brought up by a close family member or social superior
- she encounters an old man with a stick
- the old man orientates her to the antagonist, opening up the basic vacuum of the story, but as this is an Irony his advice is often twisted or duplicitous
- a journey or quest commences, usually psychological, pulled forward by the basic vacuum
- the protagonist is scarred, wounded or otherwise damaged before or during this journey - an individual vacuum which is usually, in Irony, quite central and overwhelming
- the protagonist acquires a comic companion who becomes pivotal in the journey
- the protagonist also often meets a male companion
- there is also a warrior king - an older companion with particular characteristics, who is, in the Irony quarter, often seriously flawed himself
- the protagonist often has a shadow - a character similar in many ways to the protagonist but often an opposite
- a war between 'good' and 'evil' is taking place as a backdrop to the story but the definitions are so confused as to be opaque to the reader

- eventually, the protagonist degenerates and fails, usually finding a close familial or psychological connection between herself and the antagonist
- the protagonist leaves the world in which she has lived, often in shame, leaving companions behind.

Allowing for differences in the gender of the protagonist, examples here include:

Great Expectations

The film *Brazil*

The film *Fight Club*

1984 by George Orwell

An Inspector Calls by J. B. Priestley

and many others including:

Tess Of The D'Urbervilles, by Thomas Hardy

A Passage to India, by E.M. Forster

Captain Corelli's Mandolin, by Louis de Bernieres

Animal Farm, by George Orwell

Pulp Fiction, 1994

Blade Runner, 1982

For reasons which should become apparent later, our present culture produces more of the Irony genre than has been seen in previous generations.

It is the quarter of the horror story, the dark detective thriller, the unsolved mystery, the twisted and unending nightmare. It is the quarter where things which would be neatly resolved in the Epic or even Tragic quarters are left unresolved, often explicitly. Whereas the Epic apex is one of enlightenment and release, here at the nadir of the circle waits only despair and eternal captivity.

Horror as an established genre belongs in this quarter.

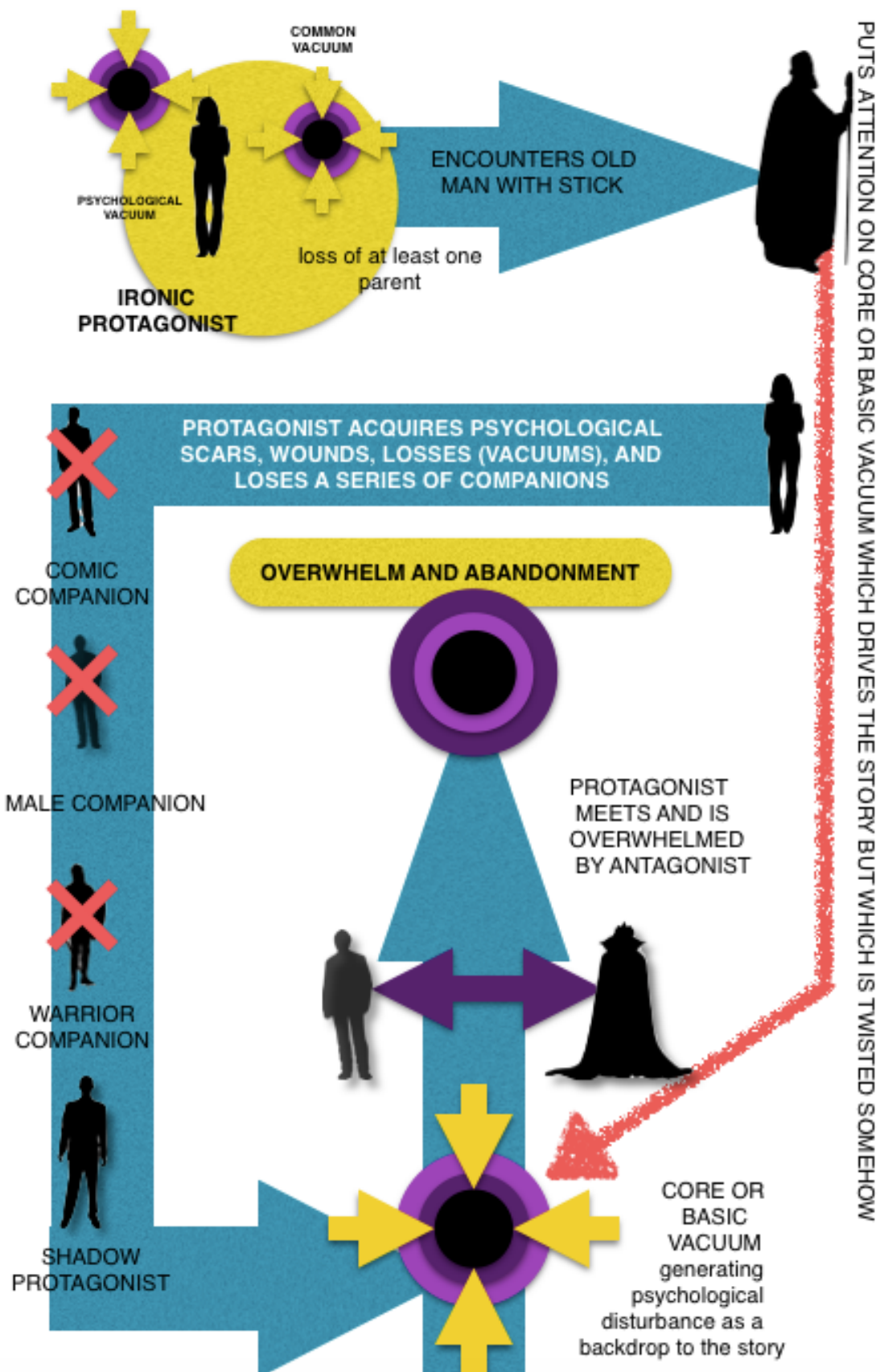
One of the key features of Ironies is that things get a little 'mixed up': time is often out of sequence (as in *Pulp Fiction*), characters have split personalities (as in *Fight Club*) and reality can take on the colour of nightmares (as in *Brazil*).

What this boils down to is this:

In Ironies, vacuums are intentionally left empty.

Frankly, things get so bad at the bottom of the circle that the only response likely to create any kind of upswing is laughter. Like a really bad day when everything that could possibly go wrong actually

does go wrong, leaving us exasperated in the extreme, we can get to the point where reality just seems absurd. Art movements based on the absurd predominated in the early part of the twentieth century as people tried to come to terms with living in an Ironic age.



Comic Stories

Oddly enough, though, laughter at the absurdity pushes us over the line into the final quarter of the circle: Comedy, or 'Spring'. This quarter includes what are commonly described as 'Romance' novels.

Again, the template 'flips', but now everything is on an upward swing once more.

- the protagonist is often a young girl or servant
- she is missing at least one parent
- she is being brought up by a close family member or social superior
- she encounters an old man with a stick, often a foolish figure
- the old man orientates her to a comic nemesis, opening up the basic vacuum of the story, but his advice or input is often comedically exaggerated in some way
- a journey or quest commences, usually physical again, pulled forward by the basic vacuum
- the protagonist is scarred, wounded or otherwise damaged before or during this journey - an individual vacuum which is usually, in Comedy, light and laughable in some way, a quirk or foible rather than a serious wound
- the protagonist acquires a comic companion who becomes pivotal in the journey
- the protagonist also often meets a male companion
- there is also a warrior king - an older companion with particular characteristics, who, in the Comedy quarter, sometimes becomes a love interest
- the protagonist often has a shadow - a character similar in many ways to the protagonist but often an opposite
- a war between 'good' and 'evil' is taking place as a backdrop to the story but the battle is played out as a farce
- eventually, the protagonist comes to some kind of resolution, often marrying the antagonist
- the protagonist rejoins the society in which she lives.

Often the hero or heroine remains celibate or virginal. Disguise, cross-gendering and mixed roles play a large part in traditional comedies and farces.

Thousands of examples exist: Shakespeare's comedies, Restoration farces, comedies of manners, television sit-coms, the list is probably endless. This quarter includes what are normally referred to as 'romances'.

And so we literally come full circle, back into the restored and ordered world of the Epic.

Specific examples of Comedy include:

Winnie the Pooh, by A.A. Milne

Jane Eyre, by Charlotte Brontë

Persuasion, by Jane Austen

Emma, by Jane Austen

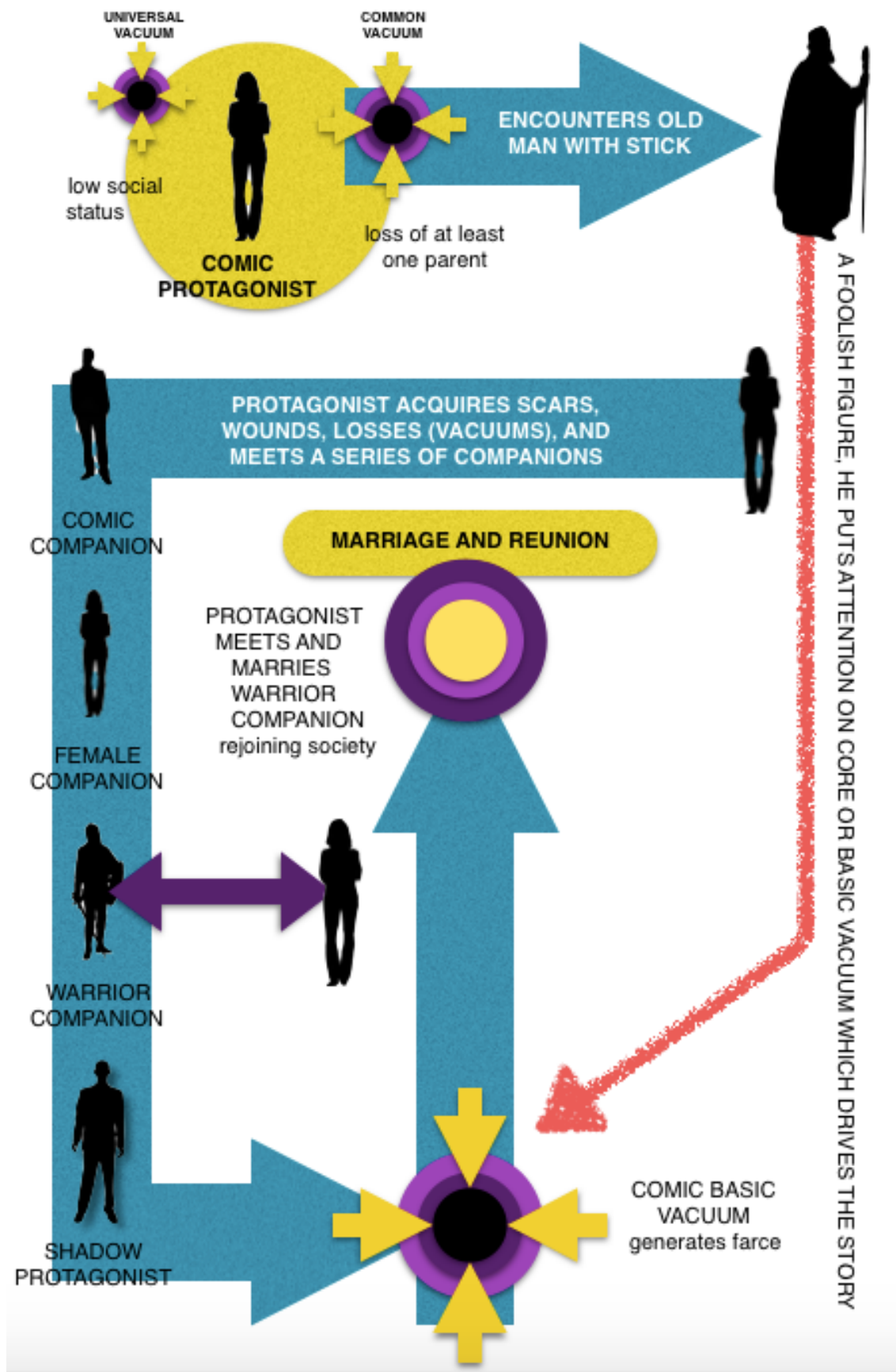
Anne Of Green Gables, by L. M. Montgomery

A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens

It's a Wonderful Life, 1946

Groundhog Day, 1993

Back to the Future, 1985



These four templates - Epic, Tragic, Ironic and Comic - form the foundation of all story-telling.

Of course, there are subtle gradations or overlaps sometimes. Some stories, while holding the shape of a Summer quarter, start to shade towards Autumn. These could be called 'Autumn Epics' and *The Lord of the Rings* might be better described as one of them.

Similarly, a story might be at its heart following an Epic pattern, but be light-hearted and even frivolous in tone. So we get a 'Spring Epic' like *The Princess Bride*, for example.

There are plenty of examples these days of heroic adventure tales which are overcast with a sense of horror or gloom - most modern thrillers fall into this grouping. The hero still triumphs but the mood is downcast - for example, the films *Alien* and *Aliens*, along with *The Bourne Identity* and its sequels, or novels such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* in which racism is still triumphing but the protagonist learns real wisdom. These are 'Winter Epics'.

Can one have a 'Spring Tragedy', a blend of comedy and seriousness that captures both seasons? Some of Shakespeare's works possibly fall into this grouping, such as *Twelfth Night* or *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Modern culture is Ironic in nature - thus we can have many shades of Winter in our fiction, even when it is ultimately light-hearted. Dark Comedy such as the film *Dr. Strangelove*, or the TV series *Red Dwarf* or Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22* are what could be called 'Spring Ironies' or 'Winter Comedies'. George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Fire and Ice* series, made into the television series *Game of Thrones*, is clearly a Winter Epic.

With these four fundamental categories and their shadings, the entire world of fiction is covered. Detailed case studies showing how these templates are used in famous works of fiction come in later weeks. But with these templates in mind, you should have seen past the first 'veil' of fiction and realised that every single story you have ever read is using identical patterns to lead you through to some kind of parallel conclusion.

Epics always end in victory for the 'right' side; Tragedies always end with the death of the protagonist, portrayed as a sad loss of potential; Ironies always end in a kind of introverted nightmare; Comedies always end with reunion or marriage or both.

If you want to create a happy, upbeat effect, the categories of Comedy and Epic give you your first broad guidelines; if you want to create a more introverted, downbeat effect, then Tragedy or Irony are your tools.

More specifically, if your story is about a conflict between 'good' and 'evil' in which 'good' triumphs, then Epic gives you your basic layout. If you, on the other hand, want to tell a tale of loss, folly and misdirected intentions, which results in the wasteful death of the protagonist, then Tragedy is your template.

'Surely not?' you may respond. 'If I just use the template, surely I'm telling the same story as everyone else? What happened to originality or creativity?'

It's a big question. But the blunt fact is that *any successful piece of fiction uses one of these templates to one degree or another*. And the strange truth is that the more successful the work, the more closely the template has been followed.

Rather than finding thousands of departures from this statement, you will soon see how authors use vacuums in remarkably similar ways in almost every story you will be able to think of.

Choosing and Building a Plot

Let's go back a couple of weeks for a moment and re-ask a question that we asked back then.

What is it that you want your readers to experience?

Designing an Epic Plot

If you want them to experience something like a sense of victory or transcendence, then use the Epic template to design your plot.

Use the following as a checklist to help you make some notes:

My protagonist needs to be a young boy or servant.

He should be missing at least one parent.

He should be being brought up by a close family member or social superior.

He needs to encounter an old man with a stick.

The old man needs to orientate him to the antagonist of the story and the core vacuum that the antagonist supports or represents.

A physical journey or quest should then commence, pulled forward by this core vacuum.

My protagonist should be scarred, wounded or otherwise damaged before or during this journey.

My protagonist acquires a comic companion who becomes pivotal in the journey.

My protagonist also meets a female companion.

There should also be a warrior king - an older companion with particular characteristics.

My protagonist should have a shadow - a character similar in many ways to the protagonist but a kind of opposite.

A war between 'good' and 'evil' needs to take place as a backdrop to my story.

Eventually, my protagonist needs to meet and defeat my antagonist, at personal cost, finding a close familial or psychological connection between them.

Designing a Tragic Plot

If you want them to experience something like a sense of failure and death, then use the Tragic template to design your plot.

Use the following as a checklist to help you make some notes:

My protagonist needs to be a mature warrior figure, with a psychological vacuum

He should be missing at least one parent.

He should be a social superior.

He should experience loss or defeat early on.

He needs to encounter an old man with a stick, a foolish figure, who orientates him to my antagonist and my core vacuum, a psychological one - but this needs to be ignored or misinterpreted.

A psychological journey or quest needs to commence.

My protagonist needs to be psychologically scarred, wounded or otherwise damaged before or during this journey.

My protagonist needs to lose a comic companion.

My protagonist also needs to lose a female companion.

There needs to be a warrior king, often lost - an older companion with particular characteristics.

My protagonist needs a shadow - a character similar in many ways to the protagonist but a kind of opposite.

A psychological war between 'good' and 'evil' needs to place as a backdrop to my story, but the definitions of what is 'good' and what is 'evil' need to blur.

Eventually, my protagonist meets but is defeated by my antagonist, resulting in my protagonist's death, finding a close familial or psychological connection between them.

Designing an Ironic Plot

If you want them to experience something like a sense of overwhelm and abandonment, then use the Ironic template to design your plot.

You will note some subtle changes from the original 'Summer' template, usually mirror images:

My protagonist needs to be a young girl or servant.

She should be missing at least one parent.

She should be being brought up by a close family member or social superior.

She needs to encounter an old man with a stick.

This old man needs to orientate her to my antagonist, opening up the core vacuum of my story, but as this is an Irony his advice should often twisted or duplicitous.

A psychological journey or quest needs to commence, pulled forward by the core vacuum.

My protagonist needs to be psychologically scarred, wounded or otherwise damaged before or during this journey, to the point of being overwhelmed.

My protagonist needs to acquire a comic companion who becomes pivotal in the journey but is lost.

My protagonist also needs to lose a male companion.

There needs to also be a warrior king - an older companion with particular characteristics, who should be seriously flawed himself.

My protagonist needs to have a shadow - a character similar in many ways to my protagonist but an opposite.

A psychological war between 'good' and 'evil' needs to take place as a backdrop to my story but the definitions need to be so confused as to be opaque to the reader.

Eventually, my protagonist needs to degenerate and fail, finding a close familial or psychological connection between herself and my antagonist.

My protagonist needs to leave the world in which she has lived, in shame, leaving companions behind.

Designing a Comic Plot

If you want them to experience something like a sense of marriage or reunion, then use the Comic template to design your plot.

Use the following as a checklist to help you make some notes:

My protagonist should be a young girl or servant.

She should be missing at least one parent.

She should be being brought up by a close family member or social superior.

She needs to encounter an old man with a stick, a foolish figure.

This old man needs to orientate her to my comic nemesis, opening up the core vacuum of my story, but his advice or input needs to be comedically exaggerated in some way.

A physical journey or quest needs to commence, pulled forward by my core vacuum.

My protagonist needs to be scarred, wounded or otherwise damaged before or during this journey - a light and laughable injury, a quirk or foible rather than a serious wound.

My protagonist needs to acquire a comic companion who becomes pivotal in the journey.

My protagonist also needs to meet a male companion.

There needs to also be a warrior king - an older companion with particular characteristics, who needs to become a love interest.

My protagonist needs to have a shadow - a character similar in many ways to my protagonist but an opposite.

A war between 'good' and 'evil' needs to take place as a backdrop to my story but the battle needs to be played out as a farce.

Eventually, my protagonist comes to some kind of resolution, marrying my antagonist or warrior companion.

My protagonist needs to rejoin the society in which she lives.

In each case, work back and forth, over each point of the checklist you have chosen, keeping in mind the basics that you have learned so far, including:

- Character vacuums and how they attract readers
- The different sorts of vacuums - universal, common and basic - and how they grip the reader
- The various kinds of plot vacuums which work together to drive readers through the story

Keep plenty of notes!

You will need them for the lessons coming up.

Before long, you will be writing a story that really works!

Assignment for Week 4

1. Choose a genre from the data above.
2. Complete the checklist for it, making any additional notes that you wish.

End of Week 4!

This is great!

Having gotten some idea of what a character is, you've examined plots, the other fundamental element of fiction.

This week:

- You learned the four mechanisms which together create an engine that drives readers forward: linear, mystery, more and core vacuums!
- You found out how to actually make a plot that works!
- You zoomed in on the 'nuclear reactor' that drives all successful stories through to their conclusion!
- And you explored how the four basic genres - Epic, Tragedy, Irony and Comedy - are composed and how they work to create different effects!

Get ready for Week 5!

Week 5: Case Studies

Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*

Dickens' *Great Expectations*

American TV series *Friends*

Copying the Master Authors

Why is Shakespeare so successful?

What does C. S. Lewis do that attracts readers?

What are Dickens' most successful actions as a fiction writer?

Why was the American sit-com *Friends* such a hit?

During this week, you'll find out

- how master authors through the centuries have applied all of the earlier weeks' lessons to create the masterworks which have survived the test of time
- how the power of vacuums is used in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*
- why the structure of C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* makes it so popular
- what Dickens does in *Great Expectations* that you can emulate in your own work
- how comedy makes use of vacuum power

and much more!

You'll get to appreciate the majesty of a working piece of fiction - and then you'll be coached to apply their triumphant features to your own work!

WARNING: If you are purchasing this module separately from the rest of the course, welcome, but beware! You won't get the complete benefit of the 'How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published' e-course unless you do the whole thing! By all means extract what wisdom you can from this week's 'episode' - but take the plunge and get the whole course as soon as you can!

You can get it [here](#).

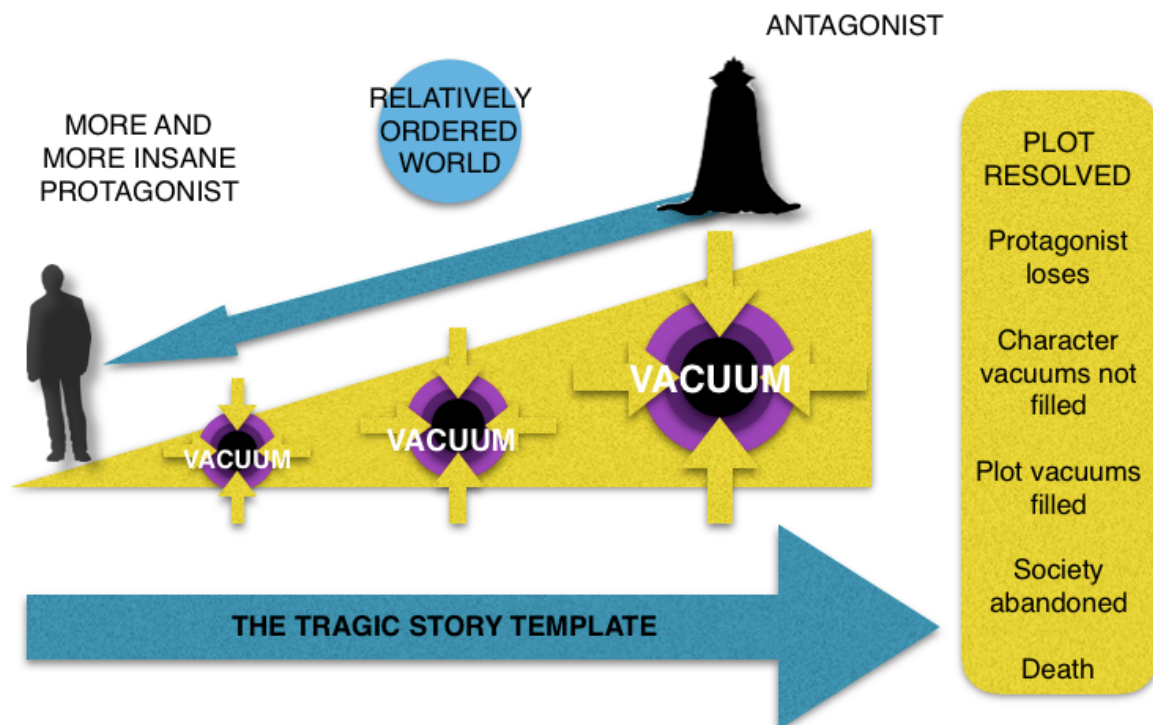
Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Last week you learned how to construct a basic plot that will actually both attract readers and drive them through to the completion of a story.

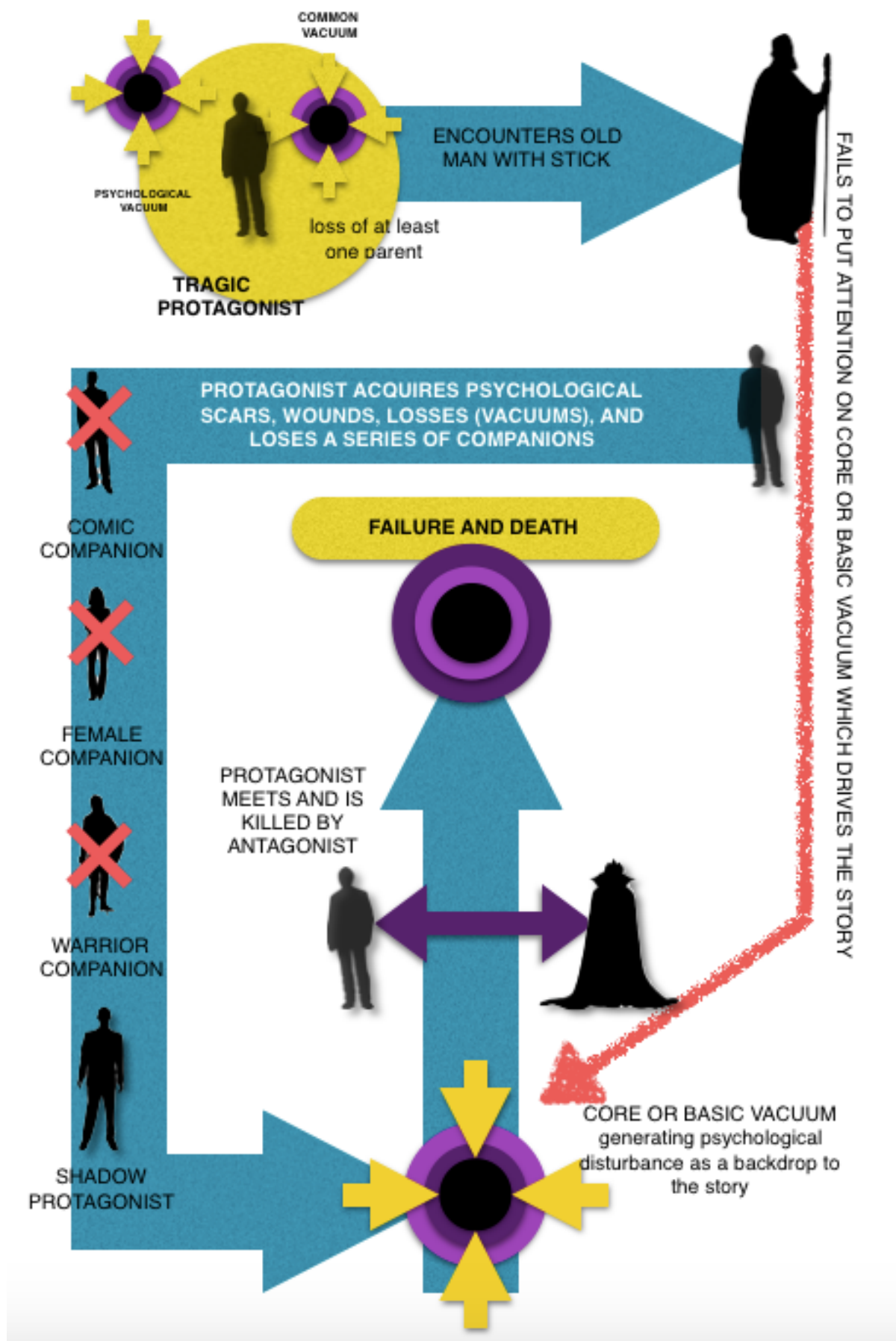
It's almost a mechanical process, and yet fiction itself doesn't seem quite so mechanical when you are watching a play or reading a novel.

How do all these processes and diagrams translate into working pieces of fiction? And what can you learn from these authors for your own work?

Let's start with the most famous and legendary author at all, Shakespeare. *Macbeth* is one of his most well-known plays and is categorised as a Tragedy. It appears to follow the template of a Tragedy, as described in last week's lesson.



This can be broken down even further into a detailed 'map' of how a Tragedy unfolds:



To remind you, in tragic stories, these are the repeating elements:

- the protagonist is usually a mature warrior figure, with a psychological vacuum
- he is missing at least one parent (a common vacuum)
- he is often, but not exclusively, a social superior
- he experiences loss or defeat early on (another vacuum)
- he encounters an old man with a stick, often a foolish figure, who orientates him to the antagonist and the basic vacuum, which is usually a psychological one - but this is often ignored or misinterpreted
- a journey or quest commences, usually based on an internal, psychological vacuum
- the protagonist is scarred, wounded or otherwise damaged before or during this journey, usually psychologically
- the protagonist loses a comic companion
- the protagonist also often loses a female companion
- there is also a warrior king, often lost - an older companion with particular characteristics
- the protagonist often has a shadow - a character similar in many ways to the protagonist but often a kind of opposite
- a psychological war between 'good' and 'evil' is taking place as a backdrop to the story, but the definitions of what is 'good' and what is 'evil' are blurring
- eventually, the protagonist meets but is defeated by an antagonist, usually resulting in the protagonist's death and usually by finding a close familial or psychological connection between them.

How does this work out in the play?

Act 1 of the play opens with thunder and lightning, and the Three Witches deciding that their next meeting shall be with Macbeth.

The witches immediately suggest implicitly and explicitly that the natural order is going to be subverted and our expectations along with it:

Act One

Scene 1

A desert place

(Thunder and lightning. Enter three witches.)

First Witch: When shall we three meet again

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

Second Witch: When the hurly-burly's done,

When the battles lost and won.

Third Witch: That will be ere set of sun.

First Witch: Where the place?

Second Witch: Upon the heath.

Third Witch: There to meet with Macbeth.

First Witch: I come, Graymalkin.

All: Paddock calls: -anon!

*Fair is foul, and foul is fair.
Hover through the fog and filthy air.
(Exeunt)*

In the following scene, a wounded sergeant reports to King Duncan of Scotland that his generals, Macbeth, the Thane of Glamis, and Banquo, have just defeated the allied forces of Norway and Ireland, led by the traitorous Macdonald and the Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth, the King's kinsman, is praised for his bravery and fighting prowess in graphic detail and certainly fulfils the requirement that the protagonist is a 'mature, warrior figure':

*but all's too weak:
For brave Macbeth - well he deserves that name -
Disdaining fortune, with his brandish'd steel
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like valour's minion carved out his passage
Till he faced the slave;
Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to the chaps,
And fix'd his head upon our battlements.*

Macbeth and Banquo then meet Three Witches who greet them with prophecies. Though Banquo challenges them first, they address Macbeth, hailing him as 'Thane of Glamis' and 'Thane of Cawdor', and telling him that he shall 'be King hereafter'. We learn here of two things: that he has lost at least one parent, and that he has some kind of inner anxiety which stuns him into silence. This is expanded shortly afterwards in a soliloquy by Macbeth after he has learned that he will become Thane of Cawdor, and therefore that the witches' prophecies are coming true for him - a soliloquy which outlines his inner psychological vacuum:

*This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill; cannot be good: if ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor:
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings:
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
But what is not.*

Soon afterwards, King Duncan welcomes and praises Macbeth and Banquo, and declares that he will spend the night at Macbeth's castle at Inverness; but also names his son Malcolm as his heir, a significant defeat for Macbeth's ambition to become king. In overlooking Macbeth as the military leader who has just saved his kingdom, dramatically and in terms of vacuum power, Macbeth's inner character vacuum is highlighted:

*Macbeth: (aside) The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires:
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.*

On its own, though, this vacuum is still not strong enough to produce a powerful emotional commitment in the audience. So Shakespeare introduces us to the female companion, the vacuum-laden Lady Macbeth, who is shown literally emptying her soul on stage:

*Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!'*

It is her vacuum power, added to Macbeth's own, which tips things over into action, prompting Macbeth to kill the king. Her savage argument with him, during which she paints him as a walking vacuum, not a man at all, ends with Macbeth ending his procrastination:

*Lady Macbeth: What beast was't then
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And, to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you. I have given suck and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I sworn as you
Have done to this.*

Macbeth: If we should fail?

Fed emptiness by his wife, Macbeth now has tremendous vacuum power as a character, but to continue to hold the audience's attention and to get the full commitment needed, even this must grow. Macbeth determines to empty himself of humanity even further and visits the witches again. Growing more and more hollow, Macbeth slaughters Macduff's innocent family.

Lady Macbeth becomes such a strong example of walking emptiness - a case of the female companion becoming a personified vacuum if ever there was one - that she sleepwalks in her insanity; after her suicide, Macbeth points out in a soliloquy that he has lost everything and has entered the autumn of his life:

*I have lived long enough: my way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf,
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.*

Ultimately, total reader commitment is achieved when every one of the witches' prophecies is found to be a false message, progressing step by step through ever-larger vacuums until we know he really has nothing left:

*And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
That palter with us in a double sense;*

*That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope.*

Is there an old man with a stick, often a foolish figure, who orientates Macbeth to the antagonist and the core vacuum of the plot, usually a psychological one in a Tragedy? The only old man is one who appears in the last scene of Act 2. He doesn't directly speak to or warn Macbeth, but he does outline the deep disharmony that he observes in events:

*Old Man: Threescore and ten I can remember well:
Within the volume of which time I have seen
Hours dreadful and things strange, but this sore night
Hath trifled former knowings.*

Does a journey or quest commence based on an internal, psychological vacuum? Yes, Macbeth becomes king but grows more and more insane and mentally troubled as time goes on. He resorts to more murders, and reveals that he is psychologically scarred when he hallucinates and thinks he sees the dead Banquo, his former comic companion, at a feast:

*Macbeth: Blood hath been shed ere now, i' the olden time,
Ere human statute purged the gentle weal;
Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd
Too terrible for the ear: the time has been,
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end; but now they rise again,
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools: this is more strange
Than such a murder is.*

Later, of course, Macbeth loses a female companion, his wife, when she commits suicide. The warrior king, often lost in Tragedies, might have been Duncan.

Macbeth's shadow protagonist - a character similar in many ways to him but often a kind of opposite - is Macduff, who eventually meets and kills him.

What have we learned from this?

This Tragedy has fallen almost completely in line with our template, without any particular effort to 'squeeze' it into place.

Macbeth is a perfect example of how a Tragedy applies vacuum power.

Traditionally, tragic heroes are said to be motivated by *hamartia*, the in-built 'flaw' which leads an otherwise noble protagonist figure to destruction. This is another way of saying 'inner character vacuum'. And we find that character vacuums are the main engine which drives Tragedies, *Macbeth* being no exception. Macbeth as a protagonist is normally said to 'suffer' from over-ambition, but in vacuum terms over-ambition would be better stated as a lack of acknowledgement from the society around him.

Shakespeare's understanding of vacuum power gives us a master-class in how to use it to construct a Tragedy in this play.

Macbeth's inner character vacuum gnaws at him within, opening up a gap in his constructed personality - or rather, revealing that his constructed personality *is* an inner vacuum. Like all protagonists, Macbeth is the construct with the most vacuums in the story.

We find all our constructed, archetypal figures present in some form, but wearing Tragic clothes: Lady Macbeth the female vacuum figure (who doesn't even have a name of her own); Banquo the 'comic' companion; Malcolm the warrior king with the suggestion of duplicity; and Macduff, acting as a shadow protagonist. The antagonists are the witches, filling the protagonist with false hope.

In Tragedy, society's vacuums are filled with restored order and usually a new king, but the individual protagonist's vacuums are not: that's why it's a Tragedy.

C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*

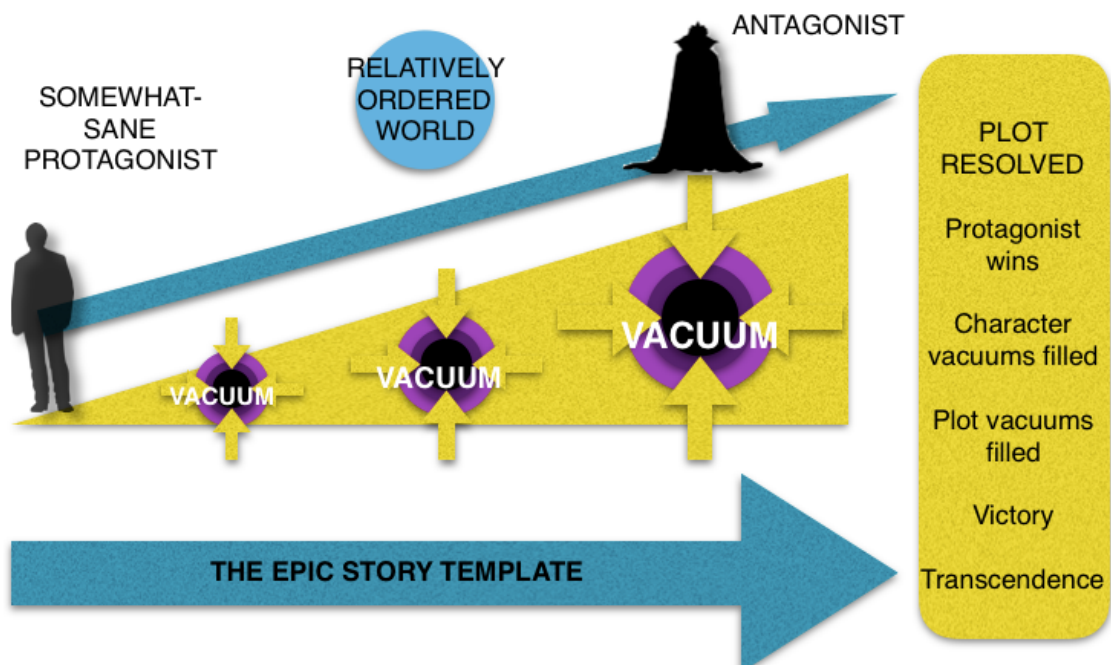
We've seen a genre template work almost exactly as outlined in last week's lesson in the case of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Macbeth also uses linear, mystery, moral and core vacuums to grip and direct its audiences: from the mystery created by the witches at the beginning, through to the linear vacuum around whether or not Macbeth will actually go ahead with Duncan's murder, the enormous moral vacuum of that, and the core psychological vacuum which drives the whole thing forward. Once you know about vacuums - and you do now - the play 'deconstructs' to a remarkable degree.

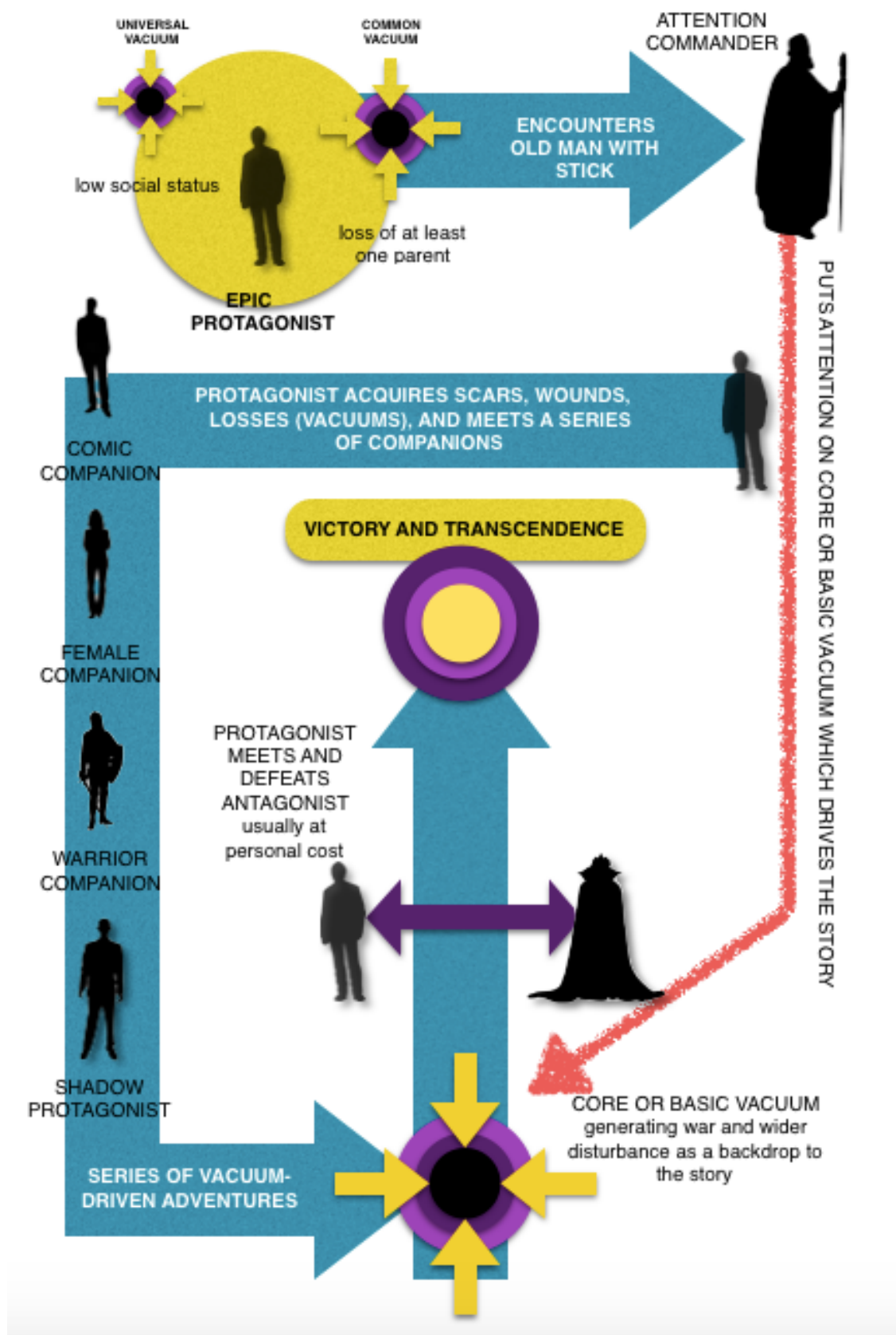
But let's look at another, simpler example to see how character, linear, mystery, moral and core vacuums work together to produce a successful story.

Let's examine a straightforward Epic tale.

The basic Epic story template looks like this:



In more detail, it looks like this:



In C. S. Lewis's world-famous children's book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, we begin with four children whose initial character vacuum is the same: they have lost their homes and (at least temporarily) their parents due to the Second World War, taking place 'off-stage' when the story begins. The opening sentence establishes the extent of the initial vacuum:

Once there were four children whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy. This story is about something that happened to them when they were sent away from London during the war because of the air-raids.

After Lucy discovers a magical portal, our attention is hooked by a strong mystery vacuum: what is really going on with a wardrobe that leads to another world? Fantasy vacuums play on the mystery of magic: what if the world as the reader normally knows it is not all that there is?

'This must be a simply enormous wardrobe!' thought Lucy, going still further in and pushing the soft folds of the coats aside to make room for her. Then she noticed that there was something crunching under her feet. 'I wonder is that more mothballs?' she thought, stooping down to feel it with her hand. But instead of feeling the hard, smooth wood of the floor of the wardrobe, she felt something soft and powdery and extremely cold.

That kind of mystery vacuum carries a great deal of power if managed correctly. It underlies much of the success of the fantasy and science fiction genres and plays a large role in children's literature precisely because, for children, the 'normal' world isn't yet as totally settled as it is for most adults. The mystery vacuum is broad and taps into such questions as 'What is the true nature of reality?'

In Lewis's story, before long, character vacuums kick in: Lucy, her visit to Narnia challenged, loses the trust of her older brothers and sister. Once all the children are in Narnia, Lucy then loses her new friend Mr. Tumnus and, in an escalating series of vacuums, the children soon afterwards lose their brother Edmund.

Before long, it's clear that Edmund is more deeply lacking the empathic qualities of the others. He takes on some of the characteristics of an antagonist: a character construct who is busy filling vacuums incorrectly or falsely. In reality, he is the Shadow Protagonist:

The silence and the loneliness were dreadful. In fact I really think he might have given up the whole plan and gone back and owned up and made friends with the others, if he hadn't happened to say to himself, 'When I'm King of Narnia the first thing I shall do will be to make some decent roads.' And of course that set him off thinking about being a King and all the other things he would do and this cheered him up a good deal. He had just settled in his mind what sort of palace he would have and how many cars and all about his private cinema and where the principal railways would run and what laws he would make against beavers and dams and was putting the finishing touches to some schemes for keeping Peter in his place, when the weather changed.

The real antagonist of the story is the White Witch, of course. She is the one seeking to enforce her own vacuum-filling 'solutions' onto the world. The bulk of the story is a chase sequence as she pursues the children across Narnia. This is a classic linear vacuum mechanism: 'What will happen next?' is the ongoing question in a chase or hunt which moves the reader through the tale, event by event.

'But that isn't what she'll do first,' said Mrs Beaver, 'not if I know her. The moment that Edmund tells her that we're all here she'll set out to catch us this very night, and if he's been gone about half an hour, she'll be here in about another twenty minutes.'

'You're right, Mrs Beaver,' said her husband, 'we must all get away from here. There's not a moment to lose.'

Linear vacuums are the bare bones of any story, since story-telling began: one event after another, prompted by the question 'What will happen next?' Unfortunately, for many writers linear vacuums

are all the vacuums that are employed. Alone, they are not enough. Apart from being driven *through* a story, we need to have our attention *glued* to the story. While we are moving through the chase sequence, our attention is attracted by the character vacuums of poor Edmund, upon whom it gradually dawns that he has chosen the wrong side, and by the mystery vacuum of Aslan the Lion.

When the children meet Aslan, the supreme ally, (in effect the old man with a stick representing as he does the Emperor-Over-Sea) it seems at first that all the vacuums will be imminently filled, equilibrium restored and the tale concluded - and this may very well have been the case in the hands of a lesser story-teller. Lewis has other ideas. He intends to create an even bigger loss, need, desire, through Aslan's sacrifice, thus manufacturing the big character and plot vacuum needed to draw the reader into maximum emotional commitment.

With Aslan gone, we apparently lose everything just when we thought that the battle and the story might be over. This moment is also tangled up with a big moral vacuum: 'What is the right thing to do?' Aslan makes the supreme sacrifice because it is the right thing to do, and the moral vacuum grips us even further.

Susan and Lucy are witnesses to the sacrifice and experience a huge loss:

And it was all more lonely and hopeless and horrid than I know how to describe. 'I wonder could we untie him as well?' said Susan presently. But the enemies, out of pure spitefulness, had drawn the cords so tight that the girls could make nothing of the knots. I hope no one who reads this book has been quite as miserable as Susan and Lucy were that night; but if you have been - if you've been up all night and cried till you have no more tears left in you - you will know that there comes in the end a sort of quietness. You feel as if nothing was ever going to happen again. At any rate that was how it felt to these two.

Hours and hours seemed to go by in this dead calm, and they hardly noticed that they were getting colder and colder.

It takes a giant vacuum to get a giant emotional commitment.

But Lewis isn't writing a Tragedy or an Irony - he wants to produce Joy; he is creating a eucatastrophe. Aslan's resurrection fills this core vacuum and removes the final mystery vacuum:

'But what does it all mean?' asked Susan when they were somewhat calmer.

'It means,' said Aslan, 'that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know: Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards. And now -'

'Oh yes. Now?' said Lucy, jumping up and clapping her hands.

'Oh, children,' said the Lion, 'I feel my strength coming back to me. Oh, children, catch me if you can!'

Once the reader is emotionally committed on this scale, the battle that takes place afterwards has meaning; without the commitment, it's just words on a page, a hollow scenario like a scene from a video game.

It's all the more powerful when the children take up the empty thrones in Cair Paravel because their character vacuums are also filled: Edmund matures into a rounded human being and all the children grow into adult kings and queens:

These two Kings and two Queens governed Narnia well, and long and happy was their reign. At first much of their time was spent in seeking out the remnants of the White Witch's army and destroying them, and indeed for a long time there would be news of evil things lurking in the wilder parts of the forest - a haunting here and a killing there, a glimpse of a werewolf one month and a rumour of a hag the next. But in the end all that foul brood was stamped out. And they made good laws and kept the peace and saved good trees from being unnecessarily cut down, and liberated young dwarfs and young satyrs from being sent to school, and generally stopped busybodies and interferers and encouraged ordinary people who wanted to live and let live.

As you can see, in an ideal work of fiction, character vacuums (missing parents, wounds, scars and so on) attract readers, but should then unite with simple linear vacuums ('What will happen next?') to produce momentum. Mystery vacuums ('What's really going on?') glue our attention, along with moral vacuums ('What's the right thing to do?') Core vacuums (tapping into basic vacuums and carrying the reader through to the finale) then produce what the reader wants: fulfilment.

The more vacuums, the better, is the usual rule. In Comedies and Epics, we expect vacuums to be filled; in Tragedies and Ironies, vacuums tend to remain unfilled and others are only partially filled or filled in unexpected ways.

Get the reader more worried, more anxious, increase the need. 'Is it unethical to worry a reader by apparently increasing his or her needs?' you ask. The purpose is to achieve emotional commitment - without emotional commitment, the tale is hollow.

Your job as a fiction writer is to create and then fill vacuums (or leave them empty, if you want to produce a tragic or ironic mood).

'If I'm spending all this time encouraging talk about the vacuums of the reader, don't I ever get to speak about what I want to write about?' is another common question at this point.

That depends on what you want. If you want readers, if you want to be published and your books to sell, concentrate on vacuums. If fiction doesn't generate vacuums that resonate with the needs of readers, it is never going to succeed. It will always fight an uphill battle to get published along traditional lines.

Strangely, the truth is that, if this is done right, imaginative ideas will flow more easily and be filled with new meaning. That's because meaning shines out in contrast with all the gaps, emptinesses, needs, desires and losses that are created.

The meaningfulness of fiction deepens as more vacuums are added.

Readers aren't attracted to meaning in any context. They are only attracted to meaning by the vacuums around it. Attempts to convey meaning without vacuums will cause reader attention to drift. This gives us one of the chief axioms of vacuum power:

Loss of interest in readers always, always, always indicates a weakening of vacuums in the work being read.

The job of a vacuum-generating writer is to boost the vacuum until the reader emotionally commits, not rave on about ideas or something else while the reader slows to a standstill or slides backwards.

Those things that appear to us to be 'dramatic' or 'action-packed' or full of energy in stories are precisely those things that contain vacuums.

And vacuums are *contagious*.

In successful fiction, universal vacuums lead to common vacuums which in turn lead to basic vacuums. When a reader arrives at a piece of fiction, they experience, through the mechanism of character vacuums, a universally recognisable loss or need; then those losses or needs grow into emptinesses, desires, mysteries and unknowns through linear vacuums, mystery vacuums, character vacuums, moral vacuums and eventually core vacuums.

If this sequence is followed, readers emotionally commit with almost no effort whatsoever. Keep talking about ideas, 'character background', exposition, description, or any other attempt to show off 'style', and so on, and a work of fiction risks losing readers.

Epics, then, conclude with social and individual vacuums being filled satisfactorily. Often, though, as we have pointed out, the protagonist's vacuums grow so large within the tale that they are difficult to fill within the constructed stage of the story and so the protagonist must move to some kind of higher plane: Frodo goes to Valinor; Harry becomes an adult wizard; Luke Skywalker becomes a Jedi; Arthur goes to Avalon to become the 'Once and Future King' and so on.

How the Chronicles of Narnia Evolved

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe was clearly the first book Lewis wrote in the Narnia series because of its primitive structure. It's basically divided into four parts: entrance to Narnia, chase, Aslan's sacrifice and the battle. (Each part is 'bridged' on either side, with the children's arrival at the house, the dinner with the Beavers, meeting Aslan, freeing the statues and, at the end, returning to England, but that's another story.)

Examining the evolution of the series, you can gain confidence as a writer because you will see that Lewis moved forward step by step, just as you would, in putting together a series of interlinking stories and establishing the world in which they took place.

Lewis himself describes how the story of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* appeared to him through a series of separate images, some of them in dreams, which came suddenly and remarkably together as soon as he 'imagined' Aslan, but the story itself is very simple.

Just as this is the children's first entrance into Narnia, so it is Lewis's, and we find him tentatively exploring the landscape he has created in much the same way as Lucy and then the rest of the children. Soon, though, the power of the basic 'chase' plot pulls the characters, the readers and Lewis himself to the story's resolution in a linear fashion. We are also pulled further into the meaning of the story by the non-linear significance of what happens with Aslan before, during and after his sacrifice. You could also argue that, when the children stay in this other world and grow up to be Kings and Queens, Lewis was also 'lingering' in Narnia and not really wanting to come 'home' to the world outside the story.

Lewis had given himself some advice in the book when it came to trying to return to Narnia, through Professor Kirke:

'But don't go trying to use the same route twice. Indeed, don't try to get there at all. It'll happen when you're not looking for it. And don't talk too much about it even among yourselves. And don't mention it to anyone else unless you find that they've had adventures of the same sort themselves. What's that? How will you know? Oh, you'll know all right. Odd things, they say-even their looks-will let the secret out. Keep your eyes open.'

But the next book he wrote in the series, *Prince Caspian*, seems to show a degree of impatience with this idea. Lewis has the children 'sucked' back into Narnia from a railway platform - the sensation we get as readers is very mechanical and even awkward compared to the enchanting wardrobe of the first story. Lewis explains elsewhere that he wanted to tell the story of a magical intervention from the 'other side' - what if you were the magical power being summoned? How

would that feel from your point of view? This is all very well, but it's possible to argue that, on a different level, Lewis himself was 'sucked' into Narnia by the unexpected power (and popularity) of the first story - it exerted a 'pull' on his imagination in the same way that Susan's horn, blown by Caspian in Narnia, exerts a pull on the children. But it seems that he hadn't 'kept his eyes open' and waited for the magic to come to him. The book feels a little forced.

Lewis finds himself as an author in the land of Narnia again, at a bit of a loss as to why he is there, like the children, and, through the children, he attempts to find an explanation. Just as the dwarf appears and tells them the story of Caspian's escape from his uncle Miraz, so Lewis develops the internal narrative which backs up why he is there himself: something has happened to Narnia, it has degenerated into a darker place and must be 'redeemed' or rescued. The process of trying to find Aslan, so painful in the book, is also Lewis's search for the original 'key' - Aslan - that helped Lewis pull it together in the first place.

Prince Caspian finishes, many think, unsatisfactorily - Aslan eventually appears, creates a doorway in the air and returns the Telmarines whence they came, which some readers might question: Why didn't he do that earlier and save everyone some grief? Lewis is still struggling here with the mechanics of inventing Narnia and his uncertainty about connecting his profoundly held beliefs and his story shows in this way. For Narnia to be a stronger creation, he needs to get to the bottom of the creative and spiritual impulses which started it and made it such a success.

He needs to re-establish some core vacuums, in other words.

In the next book he wrote in the series, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, he explores his own creation with characters in exactly the way he needed to as its author. The children are 'drawn in' through a painting in a way reminiscent of the first entrance through the wardrobe (and more satisfactory), and the quest to reach the end of the world parallels Lewis's own quest to explore the core vacuums of his creation. He does this successfully, interweaving the 'realistic' elements of the invented world with the more magical and religious elements, particularly in his treatment of Eustace: transforming the boy into a dragon and then having him redeemed and restored is a perfect analogy for the character growth which we know must occur and a great use of character vacuums.

It would be nice and fairly nearly true, to say that 'from that time forth, Eustace was a different boy.' To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of those I shall not notice. The cure had begun.

Lewis here masters the balance between the real and the fantastic and discovers or re-discovers the vacuums upon which the success of the series depends.

As the Dawn Treader approaches the edge of the world, things get more and more mythic and when we finally glimpse Aslan's country we can sense that Lewis himself also has fully worked out the relationship between his beliefs and his invented reality. He has connected up the core vacuums again.

But between them and the foot of the sky there was something so white on the green grass that even with their eagles' eyes they could hardly look at it. They came on and saw that it was a Lamb.

'Come and have breakfast,' said the Lamb in its sweet milky voice.

Then they noticed for the first time that there was a fire lit on the grass and fish roasting on it. They sat down and ate the fish, hungry now for the first time for many days. And it was the most delicious food they had ever tasted.

'Please, Lamb,' said Lucy, 'is this the way to Aslan's country?'

'Not for you,' said the Lamb. 'For you the door into Aslan's country is from your own world.'

'What!' said Edmund. 'Is there a way into Aslan's country from our world too?'

'There is a way into my country from all the worlds,' said the Lamb; but as he spoke his snowy white flushed into tawny gold and his size changed and he was Aslan himself, towering above them and scattering light from his mane.

These vacuums are further explored in *The Silver Chair*, with Lewis literally establishing the roots of his world through the underground journey of the characters, a process which is successfully marked by the return to an original Narnian winter when the children emerge into the snow from the underground realm, echoing the first entrance into Narnia by Lucy, years before.

It is in *The Silver Chair*, too, that our impressions of Aslan as the god of this created universe are developed - we see that he has placed 'signs' throughout the Narnian plane to act as beacons and warnings for the narrative's heroes, something which was not clear in earlier books in the series. The providential order required by Epic convention has appeared more fully. Lewis is gaining certainty in his own creation, the whole thing is now running on 'core vacuum power', and he can confidently have Puddleglum state the best philosophical argument of the series:

'One word, Ma'am,' he said, coming back from the fire; limping, because of the pain. 'One word. All you've been saying is quite right, I shouldn't wonder. I'm a chap who always liked to know the worst and then put the best face I can on it. So I won't deny any of what you said. But there's one thing more to be said, even so. Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all those things—trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours is the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that's a funny thing, when you come to think of it. We're just babies making up a game, if you're right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow. That's why I'm going to stand by the play-world. I'm on Aslan's side even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia. So, thanking you kindly for our supper, if these two gentlemen and the young lady are ready, we're leaving your court at once and setting out in the dark to spend our lives looking for Overland. Not that our lives will be very long, I should think; but that's a small loss if the world's as dull a place as you say.'

The Horse and His Boy, the next book to be written, is a purely moral tale: Aslan, no longer a single lion, a personification of distinct religious experience, who only occasionally appears in Narnia, has now developed even more completely into a cosmic Providence who is everywhere, overseeing and guiding every detail and adopting many guises.

'I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the horses the new strength of fear for the last mill so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you.'

Then, just to make matters even more certain, Lewis goes back and successfully works out Narnia's origins in creative terms in *The Magician's Nephew*, which he does with aplomb - mysteries such as the lamppost in the middle of nowhere, and the White Witch are deftly explained without at all appearing mechanical or clumsy, like some of the events of Prince Caspian. Lewis is at the height of his confidence in creating Narnia, knowing exactly what its core vacuums are:

In the darkness something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing. It was very far away and Digory found it hard to decide from what direction it was coming. Sometimes it seemed to come from all directions at once. Sometimes he almost thought it was coming out of the earth beneath them. Its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself. There were no words. There was hardly even a

tune. But it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it.

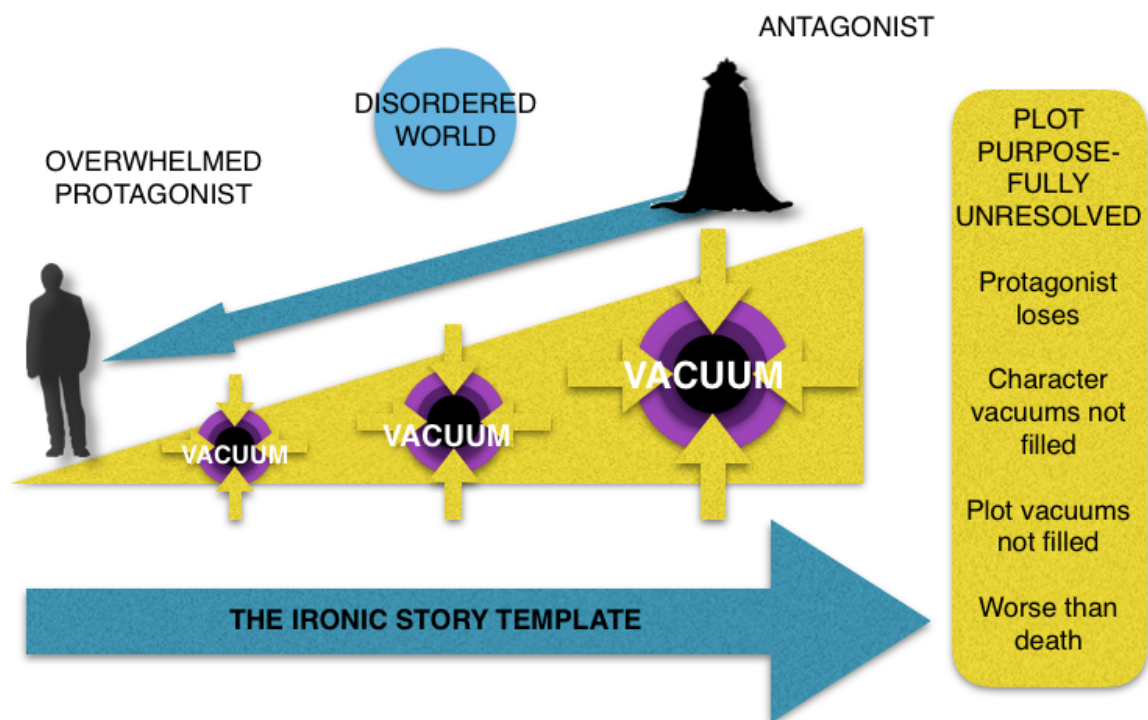
In *The Last Battle*, Lewis then attempts to wrap things up. All fantasy writers have to terminate their creations in some way, either by walking away from them as in *The Lord of the Rings* - as paralleled by the Ringbearers 'leaving Middle earth forever' - or actually destroying them, as Lewis does to Narnia in this final book. Vacuums are filled; fiction has served its purpose. Few other books have attempted to transcend themselves like *The Last Battle*:

All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

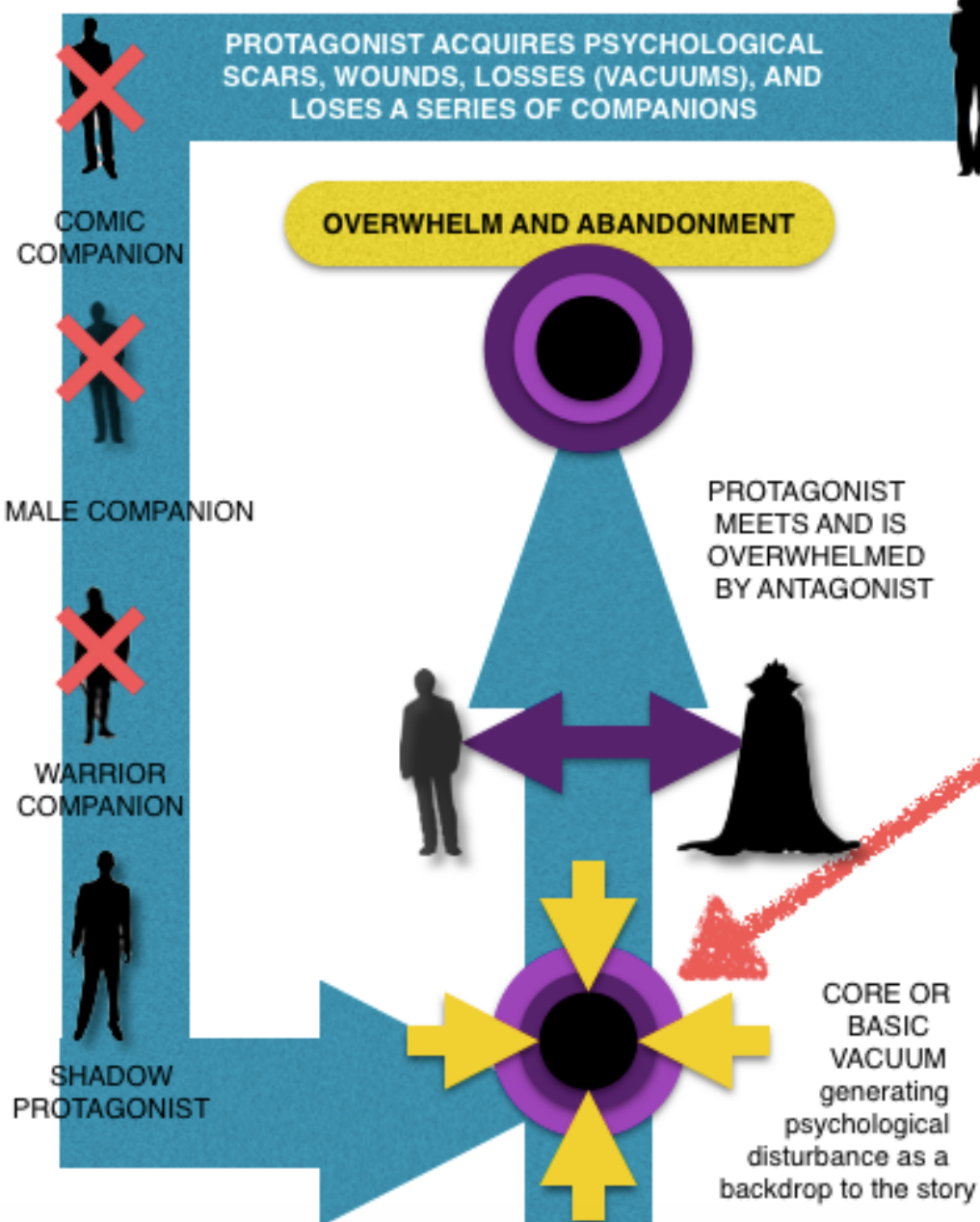
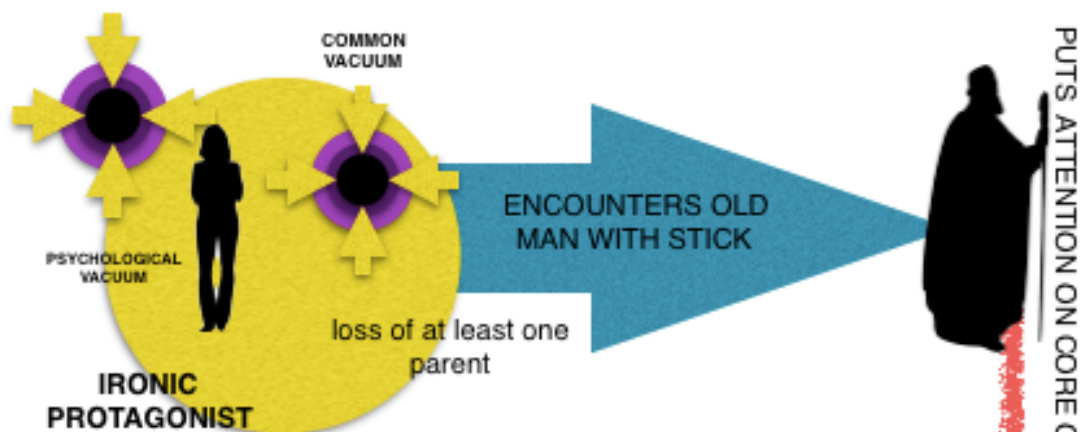
The fact that Lewis, acclaimed around the world as a great writer and one of the most popular authors of all time, can be seen to have visibly developed the core vacuums of the Narnia series in this way should be encouraging to budding writers. It's an example of a great author learning, consciously or otherwise, the secrets of constructing, developing and then transcending a fictional world.

Dickens' *Great Expectations*

Great Expectations is an Irony, the basic template of which looks like this:



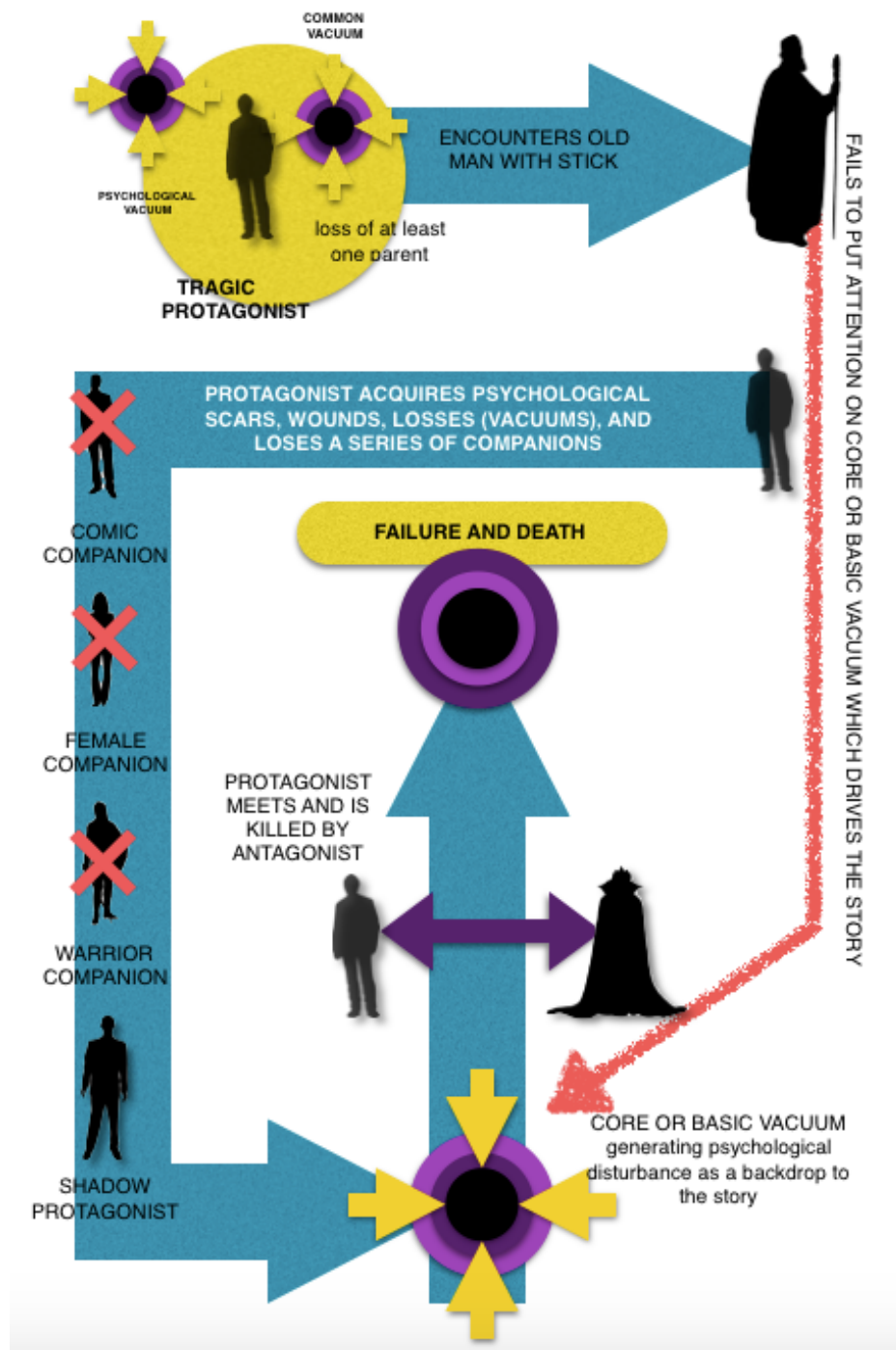
In more detail, this looks like this:



In Charles Dickens' Ironic masterpiece *Great Expectations*, it's not difficult to spot our vacuum-laden protagonist. The opening of the novel labours the point that Pip has lost his parents and is living in desolate circumstances:

My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for certain that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried; and that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dikes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip.

Dickens
this classic
vacuum to
glue our
to Pip,
visiting the
his mother,



amplifies
character
further
attention
who, while
graves of
father and

siblings, encounters an escaped convict, Magwitch, in the village churchyard. The convict scares Pip into stealing food (and a file to grind away his shackles) from the home he shares with his abusive older sister and her kind husband Joe Gargery, a blacksmith. In this first section of the novel, Dickens works each paragraph to magnify the loss or threat of loss surrounding Pip using one linear vacuum after another, winding up with Pip in absolute terror of his life:

Since that time, which is far enough away now, I have often thought that few people know what secrecy there is in the young under terror. No matter how unreasonable the terror, so that it be terror. I was in mortal terror of the young man who wanted my heart and liver; I was in mortal terror of my interlocutor with the iron leg; I was in mortal terror of myself, from whom an awful promise had been extracted; I had no hope of deliverance through my all-powerful sister, who repulsed me at every turn; I am afraid to think of what I might have done on requirement, in the secrecy of my terror.

The next day, soldiers recapture the convict while he is engaged in a fight with another escaped convict; the two are returned to the prison ships and disappear from the reader's radar for the moment, but not before leaving the lingering impression of a mystery connection between them.

Then Dickens sets to work on further mystery and character vacuums to hold our attention. Miss Havisham, a wealthy spinster who wears an old wedding dress and lives in the time-frozen, dilapidated Satis House, asks Pip's Uncle Pumblechook to find a boy to visit. Pip visits Miss Havisham and her adopted daughter Estella, falling in love with Estella on first sight, though both are quite young. Estella is a standard female companion figure, but, given that this is an Irony, she is a walking vacuum, hollowed out by her mentor and empty of any positive emotion:

Estella was always about, and always let me in and out, but never told me I might kiss her again. Sometimes, she would coldly tolerate me; sometimes, she would condescend to me; sometimes, she would be quite familiar with me; sometimes, she would tell me energetically that she hated me. Miss Havisham would often ask me in a whisper, or when we were alone, 'Does she grow prettier and prettier, Pip?' And when I said yes (for indeed she did), would seem to enjoy it greedily. Also, when we played at cards Miss Havisham would look on, with a miserly relish of Estella's moods, whatever they were. And sometimes, when her moods were so many and so contradictory of one another that I was puzzled what to say or do, Miss Havisham would embrace her with lavish fondness, murmuring something in her ear that sounded like 'Break their hearts my pride and hope, break their hearts and have no mercy!'

Instead of being a vacuum-filler for Pip, Estella acts to increase his character vacuum and his desire for her motivates his decisions throughout the story. Meanwhile, while both Pip and Joe are away from the house, Mrs. Joe is brutally attacked, by an unknown figure (creating another mystery vacuum) leaving her unable to speak or do her work. (This later turns out to be the work of the shadow protagonist, Orlick, whom Pip might have grown to resemble and whose motives are those of a 'shadow Pip'.) Biddy - who we recognise would have been a more suitable partner for Pip - is ironically overlooked when she arrives to care for Mrs. Joe.

Four years into Pip's apprenticeship, Mr. Jaggers, a lawyer, fulfilling the Ironic version of the old man with a stick character, approaches him in the village with the news that he has 'expectations' from an anonymous benefactor, with immediate funds to train him in the gentlemanly arts. He will not know the benefactor's name until that person speaks up. Pip is to leave for London in the proper clothes:

'Now you are to understand, secondly, Mr. Pip, that the name of the person who is your liberal benefactor remains a profound secret, until the person chooses to reveal it. I am empowered to mention that it is the intention of the person to reveal it at first hand by word of mouth to yourself. When or where that intention may be carried out, I cannot say; no one can say. It may be years hence. Now, you are distinctly to understand that you are most positively prohibited from making any inquiry on this head, or any allusion or reference, however distant, to any individual whomsoever as the individual, in all the communications you may have with me. If you have a suspicion in your own breast, keep that suspicion in your own breast.'

Dickens thus creates the central mystery vacuum which will power the rest of the novel. Pip assumes that Miss Havisham is his benefactor, a typical Irony error.

In London, Pip sets up house with Herbert Pocket, the comic companion for this story.

As the novel proceeds, a week after he turns 23 years old, Pip learns in true Irony style that his benefactor is not Miss Havisham at all but the convict from so long ago, Abel Magwitch. Pip's entire purpose and motivation turns out to have been driven by a false conception, typical in an Irony.

As long as he is out of England, Magwitch can live, but, a wretched figure driven by his own vacuums and longing to see again the one person who showed him mercy, he returns to see Pip. Meeting Pip again was his motivation, his own character vacuum, for all his success in New South Wales.

This is the resolution of the central mystery vacuum and the point of emotional commitment for the reader. This is followed by the core vacuum, the working out of the battle between Magwitch and Compeyson.

As *Great Expectations* is an Irony, everything goes wrong. Though Pip and Herbert devise a plan to get Magwitch out of England by boat, Pip tells Miss Havisham that he is as unhappy as she can ever have meant him to be, and Estella tells Pip she will marry Bentley Drummle. In a series of mounting vacuums, the plot works itself out; Joe's former journeyman Orlick seizes Pip, confessing past crimes as he means to kill him; Herbert Pocket and Startop save Pip and prepare for the escape. On the river, they are met by a police boat carrying Compeyson for identification of Magwitch. Compeyson was the other convict years earlier, and as well, the con artist who wooed and deserted Miss Havisham. Magwitch seizes Compeyson, and they fight in the river. Magwitch survives to be taken by police, seriously injured and dies soon after, sparing an execution.

The rest of the Irony is a sequence of intentionally ill-fitting vacuum-fillers and missed opportunities: after Herbert goes to Cairo, Pip falls ill in his rooms; he is confronted with arrest for debt; he returns to propose to Biddy, to find that she and Joe have just married. Dickens isn't trying to produce a eucatastrophe, but its opposite.

As Magwitch's fortune in money and land is seized by the court, Pip no longer has income. Eleven years later, after working hard in the world, Pip visits the ruins of Satis House and meets Estella, widow to the abusive Bentley Drummle. The scene is set for the resolution of the major character vacuum that has motivated Pip throughout the story. In a variation on Dickens' original bleaker ending, Estella asks Pip to forgive her, assuring him that misfortune has opened her heart and that she now empathises with Pip:

'We are friends,' said I, rising and bending over her, as she rose from the bench.

'And will continue friends apart,' said Estella.

I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her.

Finally, there is some promise of vacuums being filled, though the sentence is still Pip's subjective hope rather than fictive truth: we don't know what happens next, and, in typically Irony fashion, we are left hanging in an incomplete linear vacuum.

In constructing an Irony, perhaps even moreso than when creating an Epic, then, the emphasis is on vacuums: emptinesses, losses, gaps, mysteries, unknowns. But whereas Epics resolve when most or all of these created vacuums are filled, in Ironies they are left for the most part yawningly open and empty.

That's a Shakespearian Tragedy, a children's Epic, and a Dickensian Irony, all following the same patterns and using character vacuums, linear vacuums, mystery vacuums and climactic vacuums with varying effects.

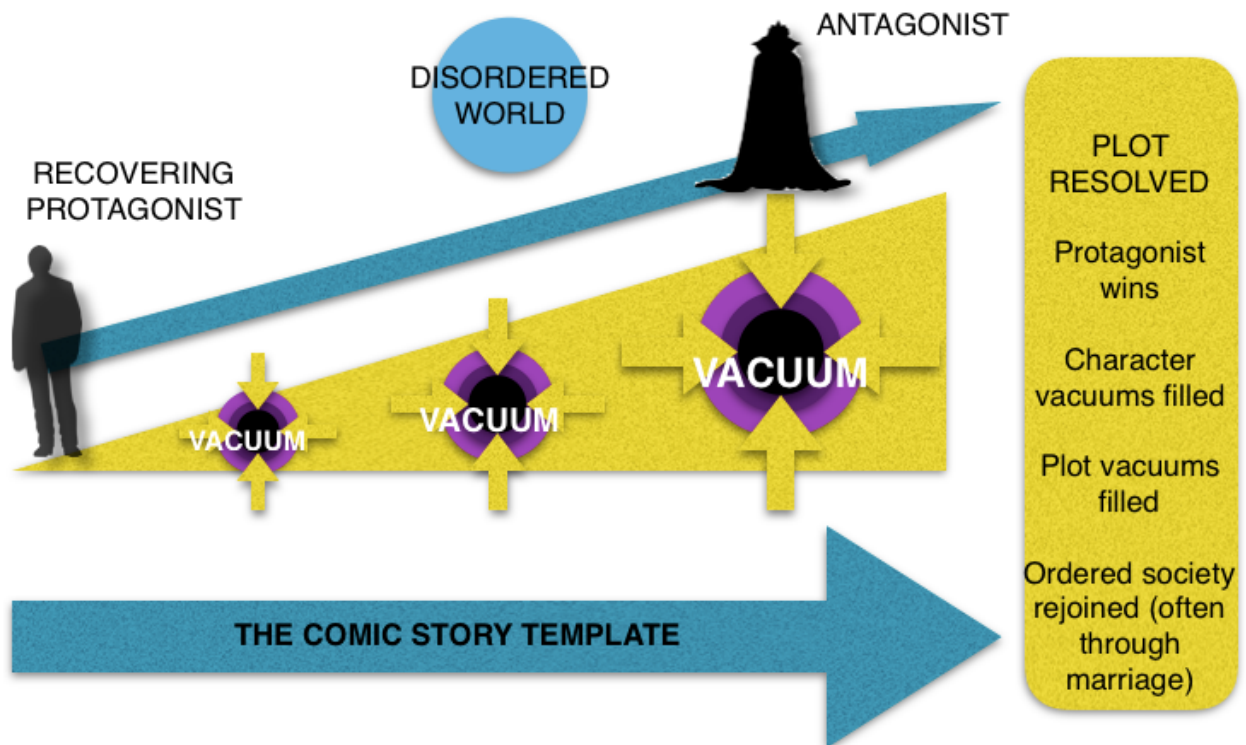
For Comedy, let's take a look at something a little different.

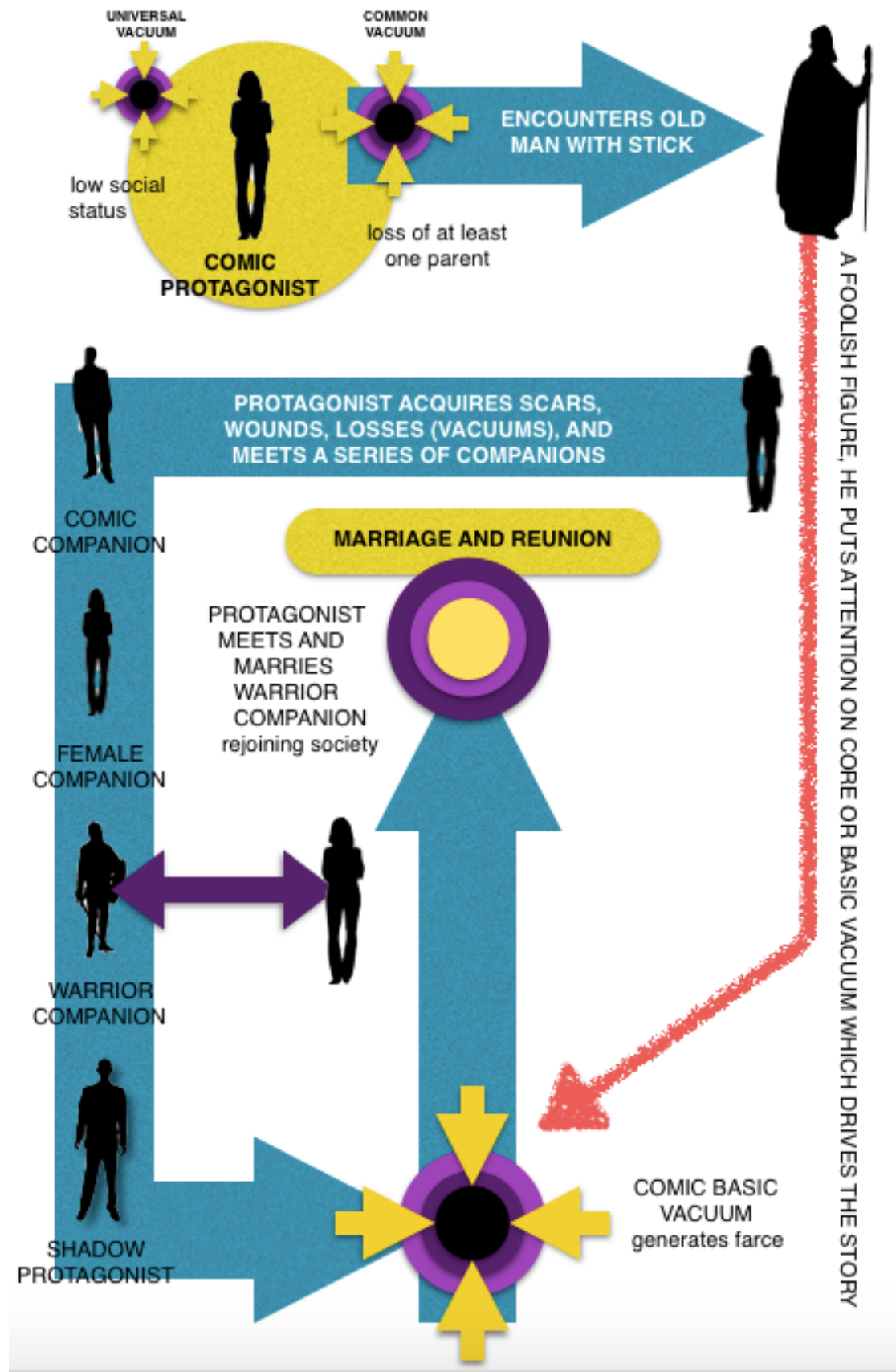
American TV series *Friends*

The last remaining quarter of the Wheel of Fiction, Comedy, is an opportunity to investigate an entirely different form of text to show that the principles of vacuum power are quite universal.

Does an American television sit-com also operate on vacuum power?

Here are the templates for Comedy, just to remind you:





Friends was an American television sitcom, created by David Crane and Marta Kauffman, which originally aired on NBC from September 22, 1994, to May 6, 2004. It revolved around a circle of friends living in Manhattan. All ten seasons of the show ranked within the top ten of the final television season ratings, reaching the top spot with its eighth season. The series finale on May 6, 2004, was watched by around 52.5 million American viewers, making it the fifth most watched series finale in television history, and the most watched television episode of the 2000s decade.

Friends received positive reviews throughout its run, becoming one of the most popular sitcoms of all time. It was nominated for 62 Primetime Emmy Awards, winning the Outstanding Comedy Series award in 2002 for its eighth season and many other awards, including, in 2014, the Best TV Series of All Time.

If we are correct about the things we have been examining - character, linear, mystery, moral and core vacuums and so forth - we should find plenty of evidence of them in such a successful form of fiction. Let's look at a summary of the series' premise and see if we can tell what to expect.

The overall story of the sit-com is that the main couple, Ross and Rachel, finally get together after ten years of comic mis-matching and laughter-laden misunderstandings. So we get to Marriage or Reunion eventually.

In the opening episode, character Rachel Green abandons her proposed husband on her wedding day and seeks out childhood friend Monica Geller, a New York City chef. They become roommates. Rachel joins Monica's social circle of single people in their mid-20s: struggling actor Joey Tribbiani, business professional Chandler Bing, musician and masseuse Phoebe Buffay, and newly-divorced paleontologist Ross Geller, Monica's older brother. Rachel becomes a waitress at Central Perk, a Manhattan coffeehouse where the group frequently gathers. The six also often get together at Monica and Rachel's nearby West Village apartment, or Joey and Chandler's across the hall.

Episodes typically depict a range of romantic adventures and career issues with a comedic twist, including Joey auditioning for roles as an actor or Rachel seeking jobs in the fashion industry. The six characters each have many dates and serious relationships, but it is Ross and Rachel's intermittent relationship which is the most often-recurring storyline. During the ten seasons of the show Ross and Rachel repeatedly date and break up; Ross briefly marries someone else; he and Rachel have a child; Chandler and Monica eventually marry each other, and Phoebe marries outside the core group. Frequently recurring characters include Ross and Monica's parents in Long Island, Ross's ex-wife and their son, Central Perk barista Gunther, Chandler's ex-girlfriend Janice, and Phoebe's twin sister Ursula.

According to vacuum theory, each of these six main characters, to work successfully as characters, should be constructed of vacuums - needs, desires, missing items, vulnerabilities, losses or inadequacies. These 'gaps' act to draw in viewer attention and sympathy.

In the case of *Friends*, these things abound.

Character Vacuums in *Friends*

Jennifer Aniston portrays Rachel Green, a fashion enthusiast. Rachel first moves in with Monica in season one after nearly marrying Barry Farber, whom she realizes she does not love. So the opening episode plants one big vacuum in its first main character: Rachel's loss of her future, her proposed husband and stability generally (she has no job). Though Rachel dates other men during the series, such as an Italian neighbour, Paolo, her client Joshua Bergin, her assistant Tag or even Joey Tribbiani, it is made clear to the audience that she is unstable in the romantic department - i.e. her inner character vacuum isn't adequately resolved.

Rachel and Ross even have a daughter together named Emma in the episode entitled 'The One Where Rachel Has a Baby, Part Two', but even this apparent vacuum filler is not enough to settle her down. In the final episode of the entire series Ross and Rachel finally confess their love for each other: Rachel gives up a job in Paris (also a potential but inadequate vacuum filler for her) and the show closes with its central character vacuum - the 'missing' love between Ross and Rachel - resolved and fulfilled.

Courtney Cox portrays Monica Geller, a chef, known for her perfectionism, bossy and control-obsessed attitude, and competitive nature. These traits are established as her character vacuums - her inability to relax and later her anxieties about her childhood (Monica is often jokingly teased by the others for having been overweight as a child, especially by her brother Ross). Monica and Chandler Bing later start a relationship after spending a night with each other in London, leading to their marriage in season seven and adoption of twins at the end of the series. In this way - finding a stable partner and being able to become a mother - Monica's initial character vacuum is addressed, to be immediately replaced by anxieties about her inability to have children of her own. The adoption of the twins - after a series of comic mishaps - means that, by the end of the series, she achieves fulfilment.

Phoebe Buffay, portrayed by Lisa Kudrow, is an eccentric masseuse and self-taught musician who lived in uptown New York with her mother until her mother committed suicide. This is a vacuum of magnitude which is played for comic effect by having Phoebe be scatter-brained but street-smart. She writes and sings her own quirky songs, accompanying herself on the guitar, and is childlike and innocent in disposition, using her past misfortunes such as her mother's suicide as sympathy ploys. Her fulfilling marriage in the show's final season comes after several other failed relationships which come close to, but fail to resolve, her character needs.

Matthew Perry portrays Chandler Bing, an executive in statistical analysis and data reconfiguration for a large multinational corporation who later quits his job (creating a vacuum of instability temporarily) and becomes a junior copywriter at an advertising agency. On the surface, Chandler's life surrounded by friends and with enough money and a good lifestyle, suggests less vacuums in his character but as the series goes on it becomes apparent that he has a peculiar family history: he is the son of an erotic novelist mother and a gay, cross-dressing Las Vegas star father. This challenging background has led to his central character vacuum, his uncertainty about himself, which he demonstrates through his sarcastic sense of humour and bad luck in relationships. Chandler's marriage to Monica in season seven, and their adoption of twins by the end of the series, acts to fulfil his needs.

David Schwimmer portrays Ross Geller, Monica Geller's older brother, a paleontologist working at New York's Museum of Natural History, and later at New York University. Ross is outwardly a sweet-natured man of good humour, but has an ongoing character vacuum: he is often clumsy and socially awkward. This social inadequacy leads to three failed marriages during the series: Rachel, Emily, and Carol, a lesbian who is also the mother of his son, Ben. His failed love life is contributed to by the underlying vacuum of paranoia and jealousy in relationships which certain episodes reveal in a comedic stagework, and his divorces become a point of humour within the series.

Struggling actor and food lover Joey Tribbiani, played by Matt LeBlanc, becomes famous as the series unfolds for his role on soap opera *Days of Our Lives* as Dr. Drake Ramoray, but Joey as a character is a simple-minded womanizer with many short-term girlfriends. His innocence, coupled with a caring, and well-intentioned attitude, reveal less of a character vacuum than any of the others and he experiences less character change or fulfilment than any of the others by the end of the series. (Interestingly, his character is then given his own comedy show, *Joey*, indicating that there is something about him as a character that is unresolved.)

Audience Viewpoint

Comedy characters, then, have character vacuums just as characters do in Epics, Tragedies or Ironies, though these are viewed in a more light-hearted way because they are comically exaggerated. Shifted slightly, each of the *Friends* characters' vacuums look grimmer: all have relationship issues and all suffer from psychological problems of one kind or another; all have potentially traumatic backgrounds to some degree, with Phoebe's family tragedy probably being the worst.

How then does Comedy deal with character vacuums which in another genre would be the substance of grief, mental disturbance or much drama?

Partly by having an ensemble approach.

Comedies often deflect the intense vacuum power associated with protagonists in Epics, Tragedies and in particular Ironies by having more than one protagonist.

Though it is clear that the central thread tying together the series as a whole is the relationship between Ross and Rachel - making them the closest things to the show's true protagonists as we get - the truth is that every episode of *Friends* features a balance of focus between the six major characters which acts to alleviate the seriousness or gravity of each one's personal vacuums.

In effect, they all act as Comic Companions for each other, bringing the 'vacuum relief' we talked about earlier.

In Comedies, character and plot vacuums are also changed somewhat by the placement of the audience. It is not by accident that television situation comedies are often 'filmed before a live audience' or use 'canned laughter' to prompt audience reaction at home. This mechanism acts to extrovert the audience from the action - we are constantly aware of the presence of others like us, 'watching' the events before us. That means we don't take them too seriously.

A simple experiment can highlight this: take any episode of *Friends* and remove the 'live audience' or 'canned laughter' element. The events immediately take a more serious turn in our eyes. For example, Ross's outrage at his work colleague's accidental consumption of Ross's favourite sandwich in one episode is intended to be perceived as funny and our laughter is prompted by the live audience soundtrack. However, take that prompt away and, while the scene is still amusing, we grow more concerned for Ross's mental state.

Conversely, as part of the experiment, take any dark horror film from the Ironic quarter of our division of genres and play a canned laughter soundtrack alongside the scenes of impending death or terror on screen - and we instantly cannot take the events we are watching seriously at all, or the scene becomes bizarre and unsettling in a very different way. Stanley Kubrick made use of this discordance in films such as *A Clockwork Orange* or *Doctor Strangelove*: at moments of the most severe psychological impact, such as a rape scene or the beginning of a nuclear war, inappropriately comic or light-hearted music is played. The effect is eerie - our immersion into the seriousness of what is happening on screen is interrupted and made strangely disturbing.

Comic Archetypes

Do any of these comic characters fit our other character archetypes? Is anyone fulfilling the role of the 'old man with a stick'?

If Comedies are often based on an ensemble and don't really have as defined a 'protagonist', then what happens to the fixed roles we have found in other genres?

Let's assume Ross is as much of a protagonist as we are going to find in *Friends* - then Rachel is his 'female companion' and Joey and Phoebe fall into place to some degree as their comic companions, in a world where every major character is constructed to be comic to some degree.

Monica, who bosses her brother around and asserts manic control regularly could be allocated the 'warrior king' role. She has emerged from a 'dark background' like other warrior figures in that she has conquered her challenges with weight as a young person. That leaves Chandler as the 'old man with a stick', which hardly fits unless we accept that it is his sarcasm and tendency to view situations from the outside which comes closest to the activities we would associate with that particular figure. It's all very tentative and shifting because of the ensemble nature of the series, but the archetypes are present to some extent.

What about an antagonist? In *Friends*, as an ensemble, most of the constructed characters have their own antagonists throughout the show's many episodes and triumph over them in various ways. That usually forms the basis of each episode's plot, in effect.

In Comedies generally, as in other genres, the 'antagonist' is someone who is forwarding their own agenda, blindly and mechanically seeking dominance of one kind or another. Thus Egeus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* wants to use Athens' law to control his daughter's future; Lady

Catherine de Burgh in *Pride and Prejudice* asserts social conventions in order to try to have her way; Potter, the 'scurvy old spider' banker in *It's a Wonderful Life* calls the sheriff to arrest George Bailey so that he can dominate the town of Bedford Falls.

Antagonists in Comedy, then, are much the same as antagonists anywhere.

Plot Vacuums in Comedy

Linear vacuums underlie the whole principle of the 'joke' in which a story is told with an unexpected and comic 'punchline' or outcome. A joke needs a specific and well-defined narrative structure to have the effect of making people laugh. Jokes normally take the form of short stories, often with dialogue. The punchline reveals to the listener that there has all along been a second, conflicting meaning - or, in vacuum terms, the punchline suddenly reveals a vacuum which the listener has not been aware of until that moment, and fills it in an unexpected way.

These can be very succinct and are often one-liners - for example, the now-famous comic statement 'Velcro - what a rip off'. In this simple example, the contextual meaning of the words 'rip off', usually indicating that a customer has been defrauded of value, conflict with the other, simpler meaning of the words, indicating what velcro actually does physically. The listener did not expect there to be a convergence of these two meanings, and thus responds with laughter, the normal human response when a vacuum that was not suspected is filled in an unpredictable way.

Of course, any joke dismantled in this way isn't funny any more. The essence of humour is the *surprise* one gets from the unexpected exposure of, and filling of, a vacuum.

Take the other one-liner 'I'd give my right hand to be ambidextrous': the idiomatic 'I'd give my right hand', normally taken as a cliché expressing a serious commitment, is suddenly shown to have a second, equally applicable and more obvious meaning in the joke's second half. The listener reacts with a smile - a subdued form of laughter - recognising the hidden vacuum and how it was filled.

Word meanings play a key role in humour of this kind. Definitions are assumed and then quickly revealed to be unsuspected vacuums - gaps, into which other definitions then flow. Puns of course demonstrate this in action by their nature - playing one definition of a word off against another to create that tiny 'fulfilment moment' of recognition.

Humorous forms which are *not* jokes include involuntary humour, situational humour, practical jokes, stand-up comedy, anecdotes, and slapstick or purely visual humour. All of these depend on vacuums - unknowns, gaps, missing things. The situational comedy used by many stand-ups, for example, rests upon the comic's cleverness in spotting a vacuum in people's lives. A comedian relates what happens in a household where children are growing up as opposed to the same events in a household with no children: those with children recognise the situation, which they formerly considered a private matter, unknown to others (vacuum), suddenly exposed and played out on stage (fulfilment); those with no children, having no data on what life is like with them (vacuum), imagine what it must be like from the comedian's antics (fulfilment).

Of course, stand-up comedians and slapstick work with precise comic timing and rhythm in their performance, relying as much on actions as on the verbal punchline to evoke laughter, but this begs a question: what is comic timing?

Comic timing is the creation of a vacuum - a need, an emptiness, an expectation- and its exact but unexpected fulfilment.

Practical jokes and purely visual humour similarly hide a vacuum in front of us and then play it out with an unexpected outcome.

The big difference between Comedy and Tragedy or Irony is that we as an audience or reader are 'in on the joke'. We can see the vacuums that are normally hidden from the participants and players on the stage. Bottom's conceit in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* isn't apparent to him or to his fellow Athenian workers but it is very clear to us; Mr. Collin's sycophancy in *Pride and Prejudice* is plain to us as readers, but invisible to him even to the end. Jane Austen makes the most of this

in her novels to suggest character subtleties - small, partly concealed or innocent vacuums, needs, lacks, gaps, which she permits the reader to glimpse but hides from the constructed person themselves. Only the wisest characters in Austen novels - Darcy, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Knightley, Captain Wentworth - are given the gift of being able to see clearly the foibles of others, and to be tactful and discreet with that knowledge.

Characters in Comedy are only permitted to be aware of their own character vacuums for comic effect. In *Friends*, Ross's social awkwardness frustrates him and spoils many potential relationships for him, but makes us laugh: we get to see it 'from the outside', in effect, not having to suffer it. In Tragedies or Ironies, on the other hand, characters suffer from their failings and we are led to suffer with them, not being permitted the perspective that comes with Comedy. If *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was re-written into a Tragedy, Bottom would see how he has destroyed his own life with his own character; if *Pride and Prejudice* became an Irony, Mr. Collins would be trapped in an empty, introverted world of his own making.

So plot vacuums in Comedy are heavily associated with character vacuums that motivate action or inaction. A joke or piece of situational humour or a practical joke has a linear vacuum quality to it - 'What will happen next?' being the primary question prompted by most humorous situations. Comedies don't usually have many mystery vacuums - or if they do, the audience knows the answers and the characters are the ones in mystery. All the farces with their cases of mistaken identity, misunderstood events, or mis-timed arrivals and departures are constructed of mystery vacuums which the audience plainly sees unfolding before them but which are hidden from the players. Watch any Charlie Chaplin silent comedy and you will immediately see set-ups - situations which are laden with vacuums for the characters that we as an audience delight in knowing all about beforehand.

Returning to *Friends*, we can see that Ross's relationship with Rachel is going to crash and burn so many times because we can clearly see her instability and his insecurities; we know that Monica and Chandler are going to argue and disagree about something because we know all about her mania and his self-doubt; we can grasp immediately that Phoebe and Joey are going to have difficulty in certain situations because of their audience-visible comic flaws.

Comedy is Tragedy turned inside out: instead of 'tragic flaws' being suffered internally and exposed to an audience through soliloquys, 'comic flaws' are obvious to everyone but the characters themselves.

One attracts our pity; the other, our laughter.

Core Vacuums in Comedy

Core vacuums are what the story is really all about - what is the central plot thread which is at work all the time, leading things to a full resolution? What is the Big Question to which the author's message is the answer?

A core vacuum, hinted at by the 'old man with a stick' construct in Epics, Tragedies and Ironies, takes full effect when linear vacuums and mystery vacuums have done their work in obtaining emotional commitment from the reader. Character, linear and mystery vacuums make us care and engage our attention so that we are actually emotionally concerned enough to find out how things work out. It's similar for Comedies. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* our sympathies are acquired by character, linear and to some degree mystery vacuums (the fairies' magic being a kind of mystery) so that we want to see how the characters end up and even how the workers' play at the end turns out; in *Pride and Prejudice* we are emotionally committed to Lizzy and Darcy by character, linear, mystery and moral vacuums ('Who is right, Wickham or Darcy?') to want things to resolve in the last chapter. But the Big Question, the core vacuum in most Comedies is simply will the central characters get together in marriage - or some similar socially acceptable union?

If we hadn't had our sympathies aroused and engaged in this way, Ross and Rachel's final coming together would mean little to us; the weddings at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would be hollow and of little concern; Lizzy's marriage to Darcy would simply be an emotionless event. Because we are emotionally embroiled, these moments of fulfilment for imaginary, constructed

characters on the screen, on stage or on the page carry weight and have an effect. They are fulfilling.

And that's what you want to do as a writer: create fulfilment.

Comedy, then, is transparent; its vacuums are visible. We are drawn in mainly by exaggerated character vacuums which we see from the outside, and led forward by plot vacuums which are obvious and even predictable to us but are fulfilled in surprising ways. And so we laugh and celebrate, rather than cry or fear or rage.

Copying the Master Authors

What can you apply from these masterpieces to boost your own fiction?

Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Firstly, to make the most of *Macbeth* as a tool for your own work, you have to be clear that you would be writing a Tragedy. That means a tale which ends in failure and death, designed to communicate a downbeat message to readers.

Once you have determined that, here are some other specific lessons you could draw from Shakespeare's play:

- ***Open your work by subverting our expectations in some way, like the witches do. Create a setting or framework in which the conventional portrayals of good and evil are disturbed in some fashion.***
- ***Work to build up the bravery and prowess of your protagonist so that he (or she) can be clearly seen as a 'mature, warrior figure':***
- ***Make it clear that your protagonist has lost at least one parent, and has some kind of inner anxiety.***
- ***Give your protagonist a significant defeat or obstacle early on, as Shakespeare gives Macbeth the unexpected promotion of Malcolm to Prince of Cumberland.***
- ***Work to produce a powerful emotional commitment in the audience, perhaps using a vacuum-laden female companion. This can help to tip things into action, prompting your protagonist forward to do something that he or she would probably not otherwise do.***
- ***Continue to pile on the vacuum power until your protagonist is almost overwhelmed by loss, and have him or her reflect upon it for the reader.***
- ***Have an old man with a stick orientate your protagonist, even indirectly, to the psychological, internal vacuum and have that vacuum gnaw at him or her within, opening up a gap in his constructed personality.***
- ***Don't be afraid to utterly destroy your protagonist - this is a Tragedy.***
- ***Restore society's needs at the end with order, but not your individual protagonist's.***

Try it.

Learn from Shakespeare himself.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

To make the most of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as a tool for your own work, establish first that you want to write an Epic. That means a tale which ends in victory and transcendence, designed to communicate joy and liberation to readers.

Here are some other specific lessons you could draw from Lewis's children's story:

- ***Begin with initial character vacuums***
- ***Hook the reader with a strong mystery vacuum: what is really going on?***
- ***Have character vacuums kick in: have your protagonist lose trust or even a loved one.***
- ***Establish an antagonist who is seeking to enforce his or her own vacuum-filling 'solutions' onto the world.***
- ***Perhaps base the plot on a chase sequence.***
- ***Build up the mystery vacuums.***
- ***Make it seem at first that all the vacuums will be imminently filled, equilibrium restored and the tale concluded, but instead create an even bigger loss, need, desire to draw the reader into maximum emotional commitment. Get the reader more worried, more anxious, increase the need.***
- ***Include a big moral vacuum.***
- ***Fill your core vacuum joyfully and remove the final mystery vacuum.***
- ***Make sure that all character vacuums are also filled.***

Dickens' *Great Expectations*

Do you want to write an Irony? That's the first thing you want to establish if you're going to use *Great Expectations* as a model. That means a tale which ends in overwhelm and abandonment, designed to communicate misery and introversion to readers.

Here are some other specific lessons you could draw from Dicken's story:

- ***Start with a heavily vacuum-laden protagonist.***
- ***Amplify this character vacuum***
- ***Develop a mystery connection between some of the characters.***
- ***Add mystery and character vacuums to hold our attention.***
- ***Increase your protagonist's character vacuums, make them the motivation for his or her decisions throughout the story.***

- **Create an Ironic version of the old man with a stick character.**
- **Develop a powerful central mystery vacuum which will power the rest of your novel, and have your Ironic protagonist jump to the wrong conclusion about it, a typical Ironic error.**
- **Introduce a comic companion for your story.**
- **Towards the end of the story, reveal the Ironic truth about the mystery you've created.**
- **Have everything go wrong, a sequence of ill-fitting vacuum-fillers and missed opportunities**
- **Leave the reader hanging in an incomplete linear vacuum.**

American TV series *Friends*

If you're aiming to write a Comedy, you'll need to plan a story that ends with marriage or reunion, striving to convey joy and laughter to readers.

Here are some other specific lessons you could draw from *Friends*:

- **Start with a set of vacuum-laden protagonists.**
- **Amplify each character vacuum by setting up situations which highlight them**
- **Develop a Comic Companion connection between the characters.**
- **Add joke-like linear vacuums to hold our attention.**
- **Increase each protagonist's character vacuums, make them the motivation for his or her decisions throughout each part of the story.**
- **Create a Comic version of the old man with a stick character.**
- **Develop a powerful central linear vacuum which will energise each part of your tale, and have your Comic protagonists jump to wrong conclusions about it, a typical Comic error.**
- **Introduce an antagonist for each of the protagonists.**
- **Towards the end of the story, reveal the 'punchline' truth for each situation you've created.**
- **Have everything go wrong, a sequence of ill-fitting vacuum-fillers and missed opportunities which we see as an audience but which are hidden from the characters.**

- ***Leave the reader with a core vacuum happily filled.***

So that's a Shakespearian Tragedy, a children's Epic by C. S. Lewis, a Dickensian Irony, and a smash-hit American TV series, all following the same patterns and using character vacuums, linear vacuums, mystery vacuums and climactic vacuums with varying effects.

And from them all we've gleaned clues for writing successful fiction ourselves.

Assignment for Week 5

Choose one of the above checklists and make notes for a story using the secrets of the great authors!

End of Week 5!

Well done!

Now you have some inkling of why Shakespeare is so successful, what C. S. Lewis does that attracts readers, what Dickens' most successful actions are as a fiction writer and how Comedy works on television or in any format!

And you can make use of these things in your own work!

- You've discovered how master authors through the centuries have applied all of the earlier week's lessons to create the masterworks which have survived the test of time.
- You've seen how the power of vacuums is used in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*
- You can understand why the structure of C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* makes it so popular
- You know what Dickens does in *Great Expectations* that you can emulate in your own work
- You can see vacuum power at work in situation comedies

and much more!

You've come to appreciate the majesty of a working piece of fiction - and can apply their triumphant features to your own work!

Now let's move on to Week 6...

Week 6: Second Feedback Session!

We have covered a huge amount of ground and possibly transformed your ideas of how fiction works and what constitutes a successful story.

Now you have to put it all into practice!

You may have already tried, or you may have yet to begin.

This week, there's a Grand 50-point Checklist to help you prepare something for submission to me.

Things are getting serious!

WARNING: If you are purchasing this module separately from the rest of the course, welcome, but beware! You won't get the complete benefit of the 'How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published' e-course unless you do the whole thing! By all means extract what wisdom you can from this week's 'episode' - but take the plunge and get the whole course as soon as you can!

You can get it [here](#).

Grand 50-point Checklist for Writing Stories That Work

Here's your master checklist, based on what you have learned so far, for use in getting ready to submit something to me!

Just go through each point and apply it or not to your own fiction as you see fit.

1. Whatever you do, don't make your characters too comfortable. The more you take away, progressively, from a character, the more the reader is drawn into the vortex of emptiness that remains.
2. Remove family, health, salary, comfort, job satisfaction and much more from the happy character in order to create an 'absence' which will then create motivation.
3. If you want more productive work from either a happy character or an unhappy character, *find and create vacuums*. The gap between the existing state of affairs and achieving the target is the vacuum that pulls the character along.
4. Use judgement and establish agreement with the character and you will find forward motion occurring. This is the force draws your protagonist out of his or her initial environment and into the new worlds that the rest of the story has in store.
5. The closer you can get the character vacuums to coincide with the plot vacuums, the better your story will be.
6. If the vacuum is made real enough, and is strong enough, the character will swing round and align his or her actions with the plot and you will have a believable, powerful story.
7. If a character possesses no vacuums, it's probably time to inject vacuums into him or her or let that character go before any more damage is done to your story. The vacuum-less character simply doesn't align and can't be aligned with whatever it is that you want to write about. He or she is 'dead'.
8. Vacuum building doesn't end with engaging the reader: you can actually go on and on using the vacuum generation approach described in this course to get *commitment* after *commitment* after *commitment* - which is the key to escalating reader engagement - as long as you focus on *getting a finely-tuned vacuum filler, otherwise known as a moment of fulfilment, into the heart of your reader*.
9. If a work's whole attention is on obtaining the reader's engagement as a final product, then the work will end up eventually losing readers in the longer term. You have to become an experienced practitioner at creating vacuums and then filling them - and then creating *even more vacuums*.
10. The bigger the vacuum, the stronger the pull. Vacuums create attraction. They have a *pull*.
11. The job of the successful piece of fiction (made much easier by the observant writer) is to create vacuums that overlap with the vacuums of the reader and then magnify them.
12. Filling the vacuum produces a moment of fulfilment for the reader. A large vacuum being filled produces a bigger, more emotionally fulfilling effect.
13. Some vacuums are inherent, automatic or basic. We have to eat, we all need shelter, we all have health requirements, we are all alive. Characters respond on a primal level when threatened with starvation, loss of homes, ill health or death.
14. Some vacuums are not necessarily basic, but are so common that they are part of living: the need for companionship, the urge to be entertained and the desire to be educated are examples. These form the fabric of human society.
15. Then we get into the realms of the universal: things that characters don't need but might want, conveniences, comforts, luxuries, small things that just about everyone has lacked at some point of

time or all the time. Universal vacuums open the door to stories in a profoundly significant and almost all-embracing way.

16. All readers at some point have suffered an inconvenience or discomfort. This means that they more readily grasp that level of vacuum when it is presented in a *character*.

17. Basic vacuums, to do with life and death, shelter, health and security, are the foundation: on top of those, common vacuums like companionship, entertainment or education are overlaid. Sometimes there is no need for further vacuums; sometimes universal vacuums are interwoven into the construct to create a complex 'character'.

18. Find the appropriate authority figure for your potential protagonist and he or she can be made aware of a vacuum that he or she didn't even know was there - which brings in the substance of the *plot*. The underlying basic need has to be put in front of them and made real.

19. Protagonists experience an awareness of such a thing as a basic vacuum - because someone they innately respect, even if only a little, has said that they favour something, need something, have to draw our attention to something. A need, however slight, is awakened and a real plot vacuum is born. Encourage it to grow and the character begins to move and the reader begins to develop momentum through the work.

20. By robbing their protagonists of support, successful fiction writers immediately attract reader attention. This has very little to do with verisimilitude - when you think about it, in real life not that many people are actually orphans or are brutalised in the way that protagonists are. It has everything to do with *vacuums*.

21. The first law of character development is: create vacuums.

22. A 'protagonist' is actually *the point in a story which most attracts the reader's attention with vacuums*. Dress that character with minimal verisimilitude - fail to describe him or her, give them only a skimpy history, sketch in only a pale outline of a person - *but make sure that you take plenty away from him or her from the start, and continue to do so throughout the story*.

23. The object of pumping characters full of more and more vacuums is *to strengthen the flow of reader attention until it becomes strong enough to prompt emotional commitment*. Given enough of that commitment, a reader will be further prompted into the physical action of turning page after page to find out how this central character vacuum, which has grabbed and held so much reader attention, will eventually be filled. It's not only the protagonist that this applies to. It applies to everything in a story. In terms of the things we have been used to calling 'characters', *every single one is created using vacuum power*.

24. Create a Comic Companion to provide comic relief, *to fill a minor vacuum*. A side vacuum, not essential to the overall plot, is temporarily filled, bringing with it that well-known symptom of vacuum-filling: laughter.

25. Create a Female Companion who is a *composite of vacuums*.

26. Create a warrior figure who starts off as duplicitous - they are presented to the reader as potentially villainous, not quite to be trusted, shadowy. This ambiguity is their characteristic quality. That uncertainty about them is of course a vacuum, a gap, an unknown. They often emerge as the love interests for the female figures and are figures in transition, moving out of their vacuums in the course of the story.

27. Create a main expositor, an 'old man with a stick', for an idea of what the plot is going to be about. Have him die, vanishing from the story for at least a while. Then have him return, even from beyond death.

28. To create a basic protagonist for a basic story, just do this:

i) Invent a name and outline a personality.

Don't go into details, just write down some basic information, the kind of thing you would enter into a form about yourself: name, gender, age and so forth.

Really don't waste any time on this step! It won't help you bring the character to life!

ii) Now give him or her a universal vacuum - a minor problem, an inconvenience, a frustration, a discomfort, the loss of a luxury.

Make this something to do with himself or herself - a character vacuum, a small but noticeable deficiency or lack.

This step starts to bring the protagonist to life.

iii) Next give him or her a deeper issue, something to do with the loss of a friend or family member, a barrier preventing his or her education, a block stopping the expression of himself or herself, something along those lines.

This prompts the character into action: suddenly, he or she has a goal, a need, something to reach for.

iv) Next, insert the 'heart' or core of the character in the form of a basic vacuum. Install something into the character that threatens the character's existence in some way; take away his or her 'internal comfort zone'. Now you have a living construct, someone who will start to breathe.

When inserting the basic vacuum in step iv), try to make this connect with the earlier universal and common vacuums.

29. Create an antagonist who is incapable of recognising a vacuum for what it is - a genuine need, basic, common or universal - and make this their downfall. Have any denial of need or attempt to conceal it with substitutes, any rejection of vacuums through manically building a world around them, eventually crumble and collapse. All it will take will be the slightest crack, the smallest sign of real emptiness, and the whole edifice will crash to ruin.

30. The denied vacuum is usually right at the heart of an antagonist's 'empire', and will manifest itself as the thing that they use to try to overpower the people around them. Have some weakness in their heart that is critically flawed. The antagonists can't see it or refuse to acknowledge it.

31. The protagonist represents, from the antagonist's point of view, a growing need which is eventually going to expose and destroy the artifice which the antagonist has created.

32. Have the antagonist and the protagonist intimately connected in some way. The connection can be symbolic rather than familial or 'magical', but it needs to be there.

33. The protagonist and antagonist have different, almost mathematical functions in fiction: one is to acknowledge and in most cases overcome a basic character vacuum; the other is to deny, and therefore increase, a basic character vacuum.

34. Create a character construct who bears a close resemblance to the protagonist himself or herself. This character is usually working for the main antagonist, or shares the goals of that figure, so he or she is both an enemy to the protagonist and yet very much like the protagonist in many ways. This is the shadow protagonist.

35. The primary purpose of the shadow protagonist, like that of the antagonist, is *to highlight the vacuums of the protagonist*. Such is the burden of the inner character vacuum of the protagonist that we feel as readers that he or she could be twisted into becoming just like their shadow.

36. The antagonist's purpose is hinted at in the early part of a tale, then grows in proportion to the vacuum power.

37. Have your antagonist dominate or threaten to conquer the story world, with an antipathetic message and some kind of overwhelming power.

38. Check the following:

- The antagonist denies that needs, desires, cravings, missing things, gaps, and losses exist and in so doing creates them.
- The old man with a stick points out the major needs, desires, cravings, missing things, gaps, and losses.
- The warrior companion emerges from needs, desires, cravings, missing things, gaps, and losses to become king or leader.
- The female companion personifies needs, desires, cravings, missing things, gaps, and losses.
- The comic companion helps to relieve them.

39. The best way of creating an emotional effect is to avoid emotionalism. As a writer, maintain a cool-headed, objective approach, even when you passionately want to convey a feeling. Avoid seeming angry, or overly passionate.

40. The most vacuum-charged moments will guarantee reader attention and lead to emotional commitment.

41. Readers, like the character figure to whom you have 'stuck' them with character vacuums, are prompted to action by *plot vacuums* in the story. As they are driven further forward by plot vacuums, they become urgently aware of the greater need that is developing and are in full motion towards it. They just want to get to the climax of the story, the vacuum-filling moment.

42. Devise and include where appropriate the four kinds of plot vacuum:

- Linear vacuums - best summed up by the question 'What happens next?'
- Mystery vacuums - encapsulated by the question 'What's really going on?'
- Moral vacuums - as in the question 'What is the right thing in this situation?'
- Core vacuums - summed up as what the story is really all about.

43. The core vacuum equates to the *basic vacuum*, the sense of loss, or impending loss, of life's most essential needs: shelter, food, means of survival, health, life itself. It is the Big Issue, the most important factor, the fundamental thing that the story is about. In most fiction, it is the final significant matter which has to be resolved before the story ends; in great literature, it's also the most central ideas and messages of the author, phrased as questions.

44. Character vacuums attract the reader in the first place, while linear, mystery and moral vacuums hold the reader to the story as it goes along - but the major 'pull' of the story are the core vacuums.

45. Orientate your story to at least one of the following four sets of expectations:

- The set of expectations involving a somewhat-sane protagonist, not overwhelmed by his or her character vacuums, who moves through a relatively ordered world to confront and ultimately triumph over an antagonist. This is the set of stories called 'Epic' and this is the most commonly used template and the one upon which the others rest.
- The set of expectations involving a more and more insane protagonist, gradually ruined by his or her character vacuums, who moves through a relatively ordered world but who, due to a growing internal imbalance, fails to triumph and abandons society. This is the set of stories called 'Tragic'.

- The set of expectations involving a more-or-less insane or overwhelmed protagonist who moves through a disordered world full of vacuums, ending up defeated and isolated. This is the set of stories called 'Ironic'.
- The set of expectations involving a somewhat-sane or recovering protagonist who moves through a disordered world to ultimately join or re-join an ordered society (often through marriage). This is the set of stories called 'Comic'.

46. If writing an Epic, check through the following:

- the protagonist is usually a young boy or servant (loss of status creating a universal vacuum)
- he is missing at least one parent (creating a common vacuum)
- he is being brought up by a close family member or social superior
- he encounters an old man with a stick (the 'attention commander' as described above)
- the old man orientates him to the antagonist, opening up the basic vacuum of the story
- a journey or quest commences, usually physical, pulled forward by this basic vacuum
- the protagonist is scarred, wounded or otherwise damaged before or during this journey - all individual character vacuums
- the protagonist acquires a comic companion who becomes pivotal in the journey
- the protagonist also often meets a female companion
- there is also a warrior king - an older companion with particular characteristics
- the protagonist often has a shadow - a character similar in many ways to the protagonist but often a kind of opposite
- a war between 'good' and 'evil' is taking place as a backdrop to the story - this is the basic vacuum, the threat to life or health, which is the dominating narrative force
- eventually, the protagonist meets and defeats the antagonist, usually at personal cost (another character vacuum), and usually by finding a close familial or psychological connection between them (as discussed earlier in the course)
- the protagonist transcends the world in which he has lived, leaving companions behind.

47. If writing a Tragedy, check through the following:

- the protagonist is usually a mature warrior figure, with a psychological vacuum
- he is missing at least one parent (a common vacuum)
- he is often, but not exclusively, a social superior
- he experiences loss or defeat early on (another vacuum)

- he encounters an old man with a stick, often a foolish figure, who orientates him to the antagonist and the basic vacuum, which is usually a psychological one - but this is often ignored or misinterpreted
- a journey or quest commences, usually based on an internal, psychological vacuum
- the protagonist is scarred, wounded or otherwise damaged before or during this journey, usually psychologically
- the protagonist loses a comic companion
- the protagonist also often loses a female companion
- there is also a warrior king, often lost - an older companion with particular characteristics
- the protagonist often has a shadow - a character similar in many ways to the protagonist but often a kind of opposite
- a psychological war between 'good' and 'evil' is taking place as a backdrop to the story, but the definitions of what is 'good' and what is 'evil' are blurring
- eventually, the protagonist meets but is defeated by an antagonist, usually resulting in the protagonist's death and usually by finding a close familial or psychological connection between them.

48. If writing an Irony, check through the following:

- the protagonist is often (but not exclusively) a young girl or servant
- she is missing at least one parent
- she is being brought up by a close family member or social superior
- she encounters an old man with a stick
- the old man orientates her to the antagonist, opening up the basic vacuum of the story, but as this is an Irony his advice is often twisted or duplicitous
- a journey or quest commences, usually psychological, pulled forward by the basic vacuum
- the protagonist is scarred, wounded or otherwise damaged before or during this journey - an individual vacuum which is usually, in Irony, quite central and overwhelming
- the protagonist acquires a comic companion who becomes pivotal in the journey
- the protagonist also often meets a male companion
- there is also a warrior king - an older companion with particular characteristics, who is, in the Irony quarter, often seriously flawed himself
- the protagonist often has a shadow - a character similar in many ways to the protagonist but often an opposite
- a war between 'good' and 'evil' is taking place as a backdrop to the story but the definitions are so confused as to be opaque to the reader

- eventually, the protagonist degenerates and fails, usually finding a close familial or psychological connection between herself and the antagonist
- the protagonist leaves the world in which she has lived, often in shame, leaving companions behind.

49. If writing a Comedy, check through the following:

- the protagonist is often a young girl or servant
- she is missing at least one parent
- she is being brought up by a close family member or social superior
- she encounters an old man with a stick, often a foolish figure
- the old man orientates her to a comic nemesis, opening up the basic vacuum of the story, but his advice or input is often comedically exaggerated in some way
- a journey or quest commences, usually physical again, pulled forward by the basic vacuum
- the protagonist is scarred, wounded or otherwise damaged before or during this journey - an individual vacuum which is usually, in Comedy, light and laughable in some way, a quirk or foible rather than a serious wound
- the protagonist acquires a comic companion who becomes pivotal in the journey
- the protagonist also often meets a male companion
- there is also a warrior king - an older companion with particular characteristics, who, in the Comedy quarter, sometimes becomes a love interest
- the protagonist often has a shadow - a character similar in many ways to the protagonist but often an opposite
- a war between 'good' and 'evil' is taking place as a backdrop to the story but the battle is played out as a farce
- eventually, the protagonist comes to some kind of resolution, often marrying the antagonist
- the protagonist rejoins the society in which she lives.

Often the hero or heroine remains celibate or virginal. Disguise, cross-gendering and mixed roles play a large part in traditional comedies and farces.

50. The blunt fact is that *any successful piece of fiction uses one of these templates to one degree or another*. And the strange truth is that the more successful the work, the more closely the template has been followed.

Submission Time!

If you have written something, please summarise the whole thing for me in a few paragraphs and then send me up to 5,000 words for an individual assessment and feedback.

I will review it and provide you with some hands-on help and advice based on what I see.

You'll get specific suggestions and input, normally charged for separately but included in the cost of this course.

If you haven't yet written anything substantial, just send me some notes so that I can see what you are planning.

You can email me at:

grant@clarendonhousebooks.com

Make sure to include your name! And again, I'll give you some feedback as soon as I possibly can!

But stay tuned for the Bonus section below!

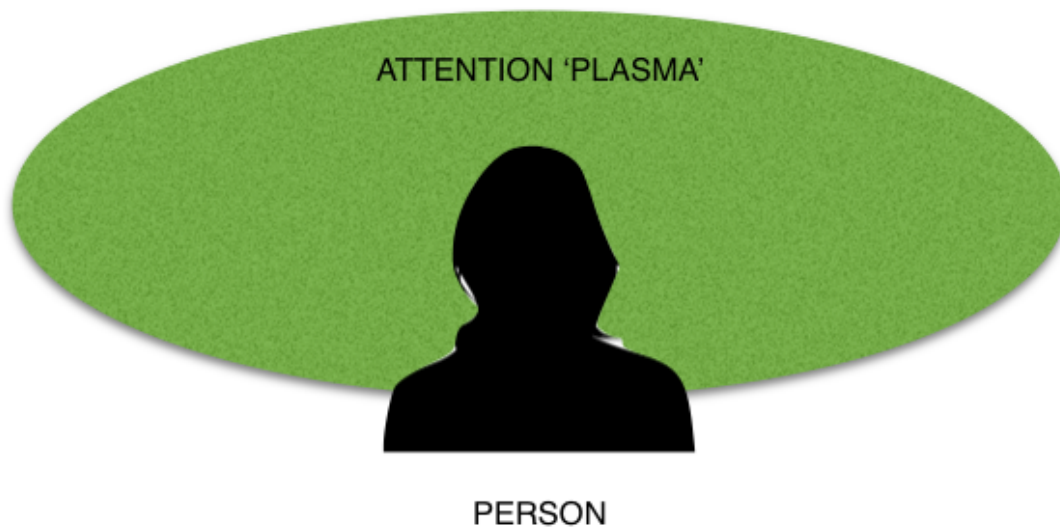
Bonus: The Secrets of Attention

Here is another useful analogy to help you harness the latent vacuum power in your fiction.

If you have grasped the basics of vacuums - the gaps, losses, needs, desires, emptinesses and things that are missing, which motivate characters and plots, and in doing so pull readers into committing to texts - a sensible next question would be 'What exactly is it that is being sucked into the vacuum?'

And the answer is 'Attention'.

Imagine that the thing we call 'attention' was a plasma, surrounding a person and more or less under that person's control. Picture a person walking around surrounded by a vague cloud of 'attention plasma'.



Right now, in this analogy, your own 'attention plasma' forms a cloud around you, with some of it flowing towards the page as you're reading this sentence.

What's making it flow?

The vacuum between you and the page - your desire to learn what is written here.

Think of attention as a hypothetical substance which people generate and to some degree control, but which is also susceptible to vacuums that they create or which are present in the environment. It's only an analogy, but as you will see, it's a powerful and useful one.

This 'attention plasma' is susceptible to all kinds of vacuums that we already know about: external, internal, positive, negative.

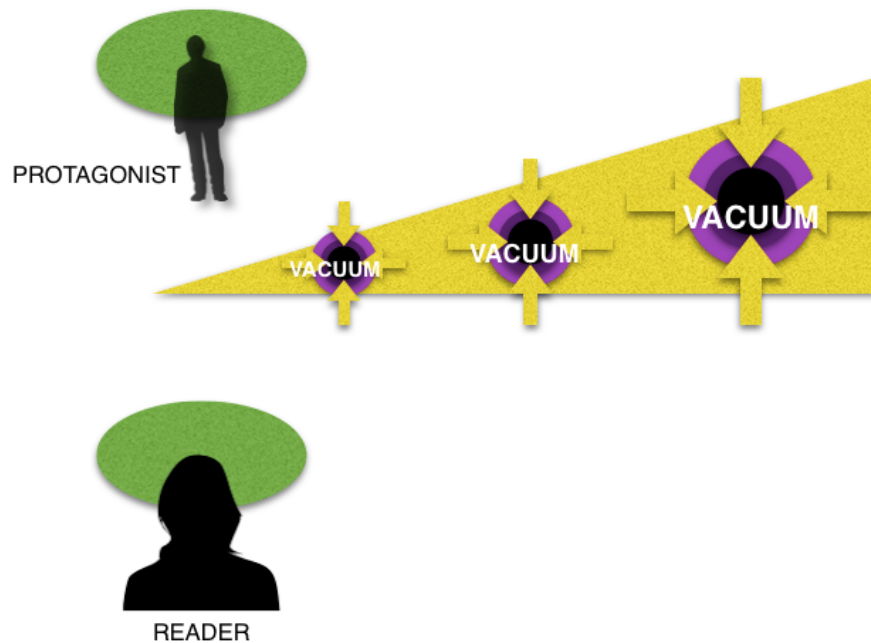
Attention can be described as plasma-like when vague. It floats around, aimless and without focus, subject to the lightest whims. Like plasma, though, when the temperature drops or other forces are brought to bear, it becomes more like liquid: it begins to coalesce, to become slightly more definite, and it starts to flow.

As we know, flowing liquid can be directed and channeled. It pools, it gathers, it swirls around things.

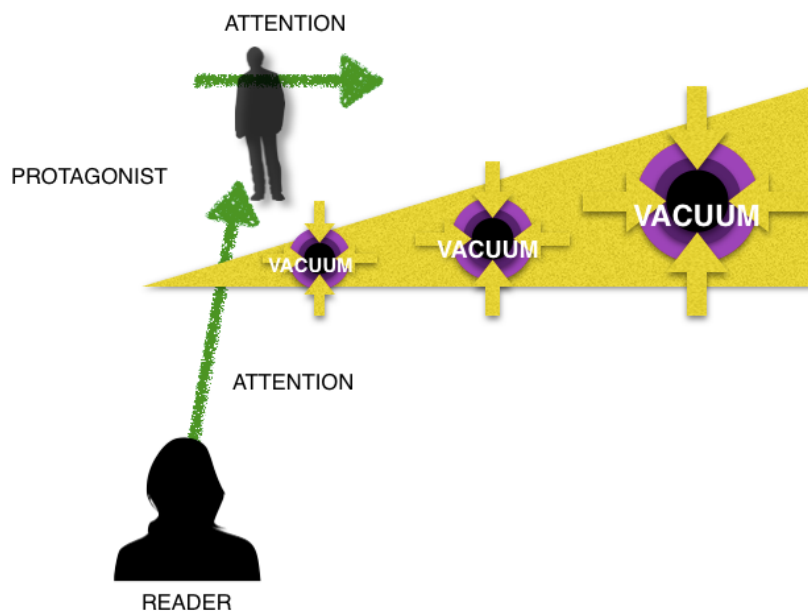
When attention fixates, it becomes solid.

These states match the sequence of a successful piece of fiction.

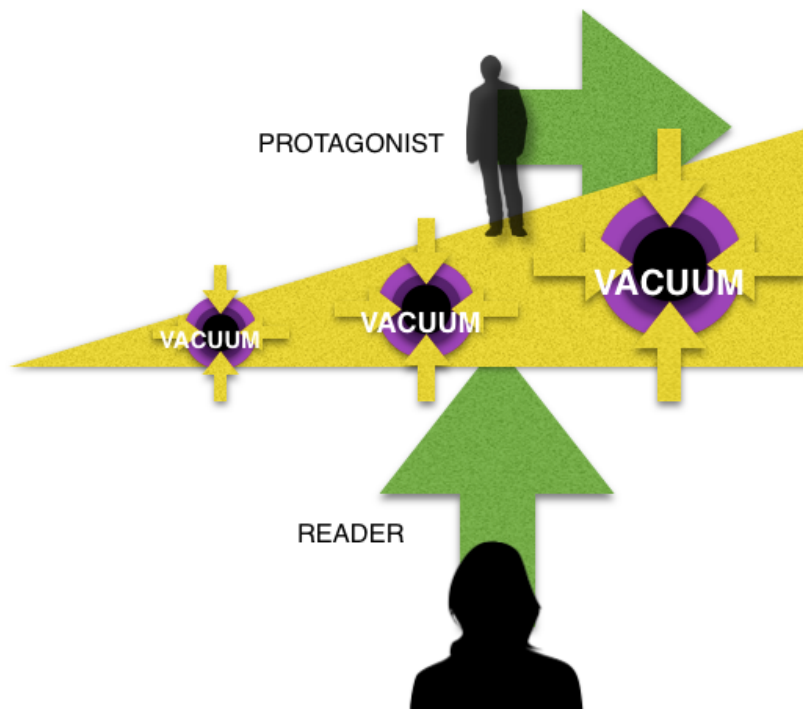
Initially, protagonists have little or no idea of their real needs. Their attention is a thin, swirling plasma, not focused on anything in particular. This mirrors the attention of the reader at the beginning of any tale.



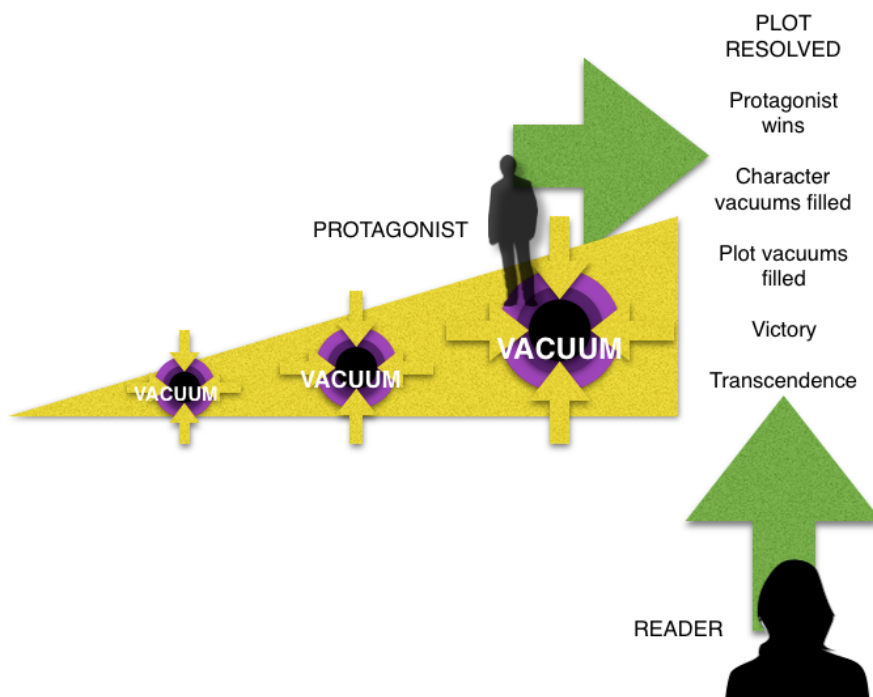
As character vacuums become apparent and plot vacuums manifest themselves, attention 'liquifies', becoming slightly more defined but still loose and ethereal.



As vacuums magnify and needs become desperate, attention cascades towards the object of desire, ready to be frozen to it or around it in the moment of fulfilment.



Using this analogy, all any piece of fiction has to do is convert plasma-like attention to liquid and then solidify it around its message, its moment of fulfilment, to be successful.



Readers who are managed in this way embrace messages wholeheartedly; they 'solidify' around them; they experience the magic of fulfilment and the fiction produces the effect it was designed to produce.

Dispersed attention is plasma-like in nature, superficial and wandering. Becoming aware of something missing, a need or vacuum, it chills to liquid and then freezes.

Right now, each person on the planet has some attention on vacuums that have been generated by his or her environment. This is almost what it is to be human. And that's partly why it is intensely useful to you as a fiction writer. If everyone is affected by this attention phenomenon, then it must respond to universal laws and can be acted upon in certain ways. Attention can be left to float around, or it can be directed and channelled.

How can attention be directed and channelled exactly?

With the things we call 'characters'.

Characters draw in attention from readers in various ways, and along various model lines, as we have seen: you can have central vacuum constructs or protagonists, and you can have companion vacuum constructs - a female companion, warrior companion, comic companion and so forth. Then you can have a constructed figure who bridges the reader over into the plot vacuums: the 'old man with a stick'.

Plot vacuums then draw the reader's attention along lines ('What will happen next?'), into mysteries ('What is going on?'), and into moral questions ('What's right?') all the time aiming to increase the reader's commitment so that by the time the core vacuum is approached, sufficient momentum has been built up and the reader will then complete the story and gain fulfilment.

All stories employ these tools in one way or another; successful stories do so more successfully.

Good fiction is a series of steps which takes the potential reader's vague, wandering, unfixed attention and cools it into a more liquid form which is then channelled and directed towards an even more defined need until it eventually coalesces around a message of fulfilment, in an Epic or a Comedy, or, if it's a Tragedy or an Irony, the message of non-fulfilment.

Attention, just like water, in a liquid form can be directed more easily. A well-constructed piece of fiction is engineered to have channels in place to make sure that this liquid attention is captured and directed properly. That's largely what this course is about - developing and implementing those channels.

A reader progresses from having vague awareness of need to a more defined and focused need, to an eventual satisfaction of that need.

Fiction takes gas, if you like, and transforms it into stone.

The iceberg that sank the Titanic was once a cloud.

The most successful works of fiction in the world are machines for converting the plasma-like attention of potential readers into solid fulfilment.

Vacuum Patterns

When enough character, linear, moral and mystery vacuums have served their purpose and you have grasped the reader's attention with them, it's time to switch over to the core vacuum, the Bigger Picture.

However, the core vacuum is usually outlined, as we have seen, early in the story. The figure of the old man with the stick has the role of sketching it out and thus giving us the basic shape of the work. Gandalf talks about the background to the One Ring in the second chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*; Obi Wan Kenobi lays out the backstory of the *Star Wars* saga in *A New Hope*; and so on.

At first, this is just a glimpse. It doesn't become the primary vacuum in most stories until later, when more character and plot vacuums have made sure that the reader is emotionally committed. Then the switch to 'core vacuum power' can be made.

In *The Lord of the Rings* this happens when Frodo makes the decision to journey alone into Mordor; in *Star Wars: A New Hope* it's when Luke decides to switch off his targeting computer in the final run at the Death Star; in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* this is when Captain America broadcasts to the SHIELD crew that he is fighting for freedom. It's a 'goosebump' moment - and the goosebumps indicate the solidification beginning to occur around an approaching moment of fulfilment.

Pip (in *Great Expectations*) could have decided to give up on Magwitch and reject his situation entirely. Instead, he sticks with him, leading to the dramatic climax of the story.

Macbeth leaves it right until the final scene before he decides to persist - 'Lay on, Macduff, and damned be him that first cries 'Hold, enough!' - despite knowing that he will fail. The core vacuum can be short, but drives the reader straight towards fulfilment once it arrives.

At the same time, the original need or emptiness within the protagonist, his or her character vacuum, is reasserted or validated. In a well-worked out Epic or Comedy, the filling of the core vacuum will also fill or partially fill the character vacuum of the protagonist. In a Tragedy or Irony, the core vacuum is revealed as dooming the protagonist's character to forever be incomplete and unfulfilled.

Epics tend to have expected vacuums based on the traditional character constructs described above and plot structures of stories that we have seen examples of. These vacuums are then filled in various ways: the protagonist 'finds himself'; the female companion 'becomes complete' (often through marriage); the warrior companion becomes a king or leader of some kind; the comic companion takes centre stage, even if briefly; and the old man with a stick returns from death to wrap up the core vacuum that he introduced us to in the first place and has reminded us of all along.

So in *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo discovers a new inner peace and journeys to Valinor, Arwen marries Aragorn and Eowyn marries Faramir, Aragorn becomes king, Sam becomes Mayor of Michel Delving and takes over after Frodo leaves, and Gandalf the Grey returns as Gandalf the White and sees everything through to victory. In a classic fantasy novel of this kind it's relatively easy to see these separate strands, but they are also almost as clear in a modern realistic novel like *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Scout becomes complete (through her revelations at the end); Boo (as the 'warrior figure') literally comes out of the shadows and is redeemed; Dill plays his key role in the plot; and Atticus, the old man with the stick (or rifle) sees out the theme of social justice, suggesting hope at the end.

In Tragedies - in Shakespearian dramas, for example - the inner character vacuums are often glimpsed by us through the protagonist's soliloquys, as we have seen. But the whole tragedy is that the expected vacuum is left largely unfilled: Macbeth's expectations that he should be king of Scotland go awry; Lear's expectations that he can divide his kingdom up and still have a good life are undone; Othello's desire for a good marriage are undermined by Iago's subterfuge. And, beyond Shakespeare, Anakin Skywalker's craving for justice and order are betrayed by his master, the Emperor in the *Star Wars* films.

In Ironies, the vacuums are unexpected and then made worse - sudden death, unwanted changes of identity, mysteries which are solved in shocking ways. In *Great Expectations*, for example, Pip had no idea at first that he might want to be a gentleman, but this desire is sparked in him and then betrayed; in *An Inspector Calls*, the pleasant family gathering is unexpectedly destroyed layer by amplified layer by the visit from the Inspector and even the hope that order can be restored is swept aside by the impact of the play's ending.

By the time we get to Comedy, the pattern is predictable from the above: if Epics have expected vacuums which are filled in various ways, Tragedies have expected vacuums which are left unfilled, and Ironies have unexpected vacuums made worse, then Comedies as the last of the

broad genre types should have unexpected vacuums filled in unexpected ways. And this is what we find: a joke is simply the creation of an unexpected vacuum and its filling in a surprising way. Punchlines are always surprising, or should be.

Whether you want to write an Epic saga, a dark historical Tragedy, a modern psychological Irony or a lighthearted romantic Comedy, keep in mind the patterns suggested here. They will act to keep your work 'on the rails' so that readers are not left puzzled, disappointed or confused.

This table might help keep it clear for you.

GENRE	VACUUMS	OUTCOMES
Epic	Expected	Filled in traditional ways
Tragedy	Expected	Unfulfilled
Irony	Unexpected	Worsened
Comedy	Unexpected	Filled in unexpected ways

Assignment for Week 6

There is no assignment for Week 6! Give yourself a break! You're halfway through the e-course and on the way to becoming a published author!

End of Week 6!

You should be proud! You've reached the end of Week 6!

You're halfway towards actually publishing a piece of fiction that will attract readers!

You've reviewed everything on the course so far and had your Second Feedback Session which has given you an opportunity to put it all into practice.

Plus you've learned what is it that you are attracting from readers when you develop a successful character and plot.

Ready for Week 7? Here we go!

Week 7: The Five Stage Fiction Model

Core Ideas

Your Existing Work

Attracting Your Readers

The Crucial Chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*

How Charles Dickens Uses Language and Structure in 'The Signalman'

Putting It Together

Now things are getting serious. This week, you'll start to put it all together and really grasp how ideas, characters, plots and writing style complement and support each other in ways that you have probably never imagined.

Exercises this week include word-and-sentence level work, studying what the master authors have done in the past to grip you as a reader and then replicating that in your own writing.

- Discover how a master author like J. R. R. Tolkien holds your attention through a whole crucial chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*
- Find out how Charles Dickens uses the language and structure of his short story 'The Signalman' to make sure it has maximum emotional impact

and much more!

WARNING: If you are purchasing this module separately from the rest of the course, welcome, but beware! You won't get the complete benefit of the 'How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published' e-course unless you do the whole thing! By all means extract what wisdom you can from this week's 'episode' - but take the plunge and get the whole course as soon as you can!

You can get it [here](#).

Core Ideas

You have the broad idea now: you can appreciate the principles behind vacuum-power and you have had some guidance as to how it all might work to get more readers for your own fiction than you have ever imagined, retain them and make them happier than they ever dreamed of.

You've seen a few examples of how this has worked for others. But how can you actually make it work for you and your work?

This section walks you through setting up a vacuum-powered piece of fiction, beginning with you and the actions that you can implement straight away to get your work functioning properly, then moving on to extend your thinking into realms you've probably never considered. By the time you have finished, you should have a work model designed to generate huge reader satisfaction.

The process of building a successful work of fiction can be reduced to a series of five stages.

Stage 1

Stage 1 is You, as a writer.

Successful fiction isn't created by simply pushing ideas at the reader - that is usually counter-productive. Most stories at least attempt to fill some kind of vacuum for readers, or they would not persist as stories. A few go further and become great works of literature.

But the source of all stories, at least as they appear to us, is a writer. What does that writer believe? What personal vacuums motivate him or her? Are they positive, negative, internal, external, or a mixture of all? Which vacuums will he or she select to drive the story?

90% of fiction will fail to even get written, let alone published, if the writer doesn't have an appropriate motivation to do so, as we saw with Hyper-Critical Situation # 1, back in Week One.

What do *you* believe?

Why must *your* story be written?

Is this going to be an uplifting story in which vacuums are filled? Or a disturbing or introverting story in which vacuums are left open or empty?

Which engine are you going to choose to drive your fiction?

A common practice in literary criticism is to try to trace back the elements of a story to its author's psychology. While it's true that every human being has vacuums of his or her own, this type of analysis misses out on the step of selection: which vacuums will the author *choose* to use, personal or otherwise, in the construction of a story?

It also misses the basic fact that most vacuums have interconnections far beyond the comprehension of any single author or reader.

That's why stories can have so much meaning; that's why there are whole libraries devoted to the significances to be found in Shakespeare; that's why the map of significance has no edges and can never have any.

Readers bring their own vacuums and interconnections to any work of fiction, adding in further dimensions and layers of sense and connotations.

You as a writer are just as dwarfed by all this as any reader. You should work hard to increase the significance of your fiction, but at the end of your work the web of inter-relationships will be outside your grasp just as it is outside any one person's grasp.

Stage 1 is the internal world of the author.

Selecting out from his or her experience and imagination the core vacuums for a work of fiction gives us Stage 2.

Putting together character, linear and mystery vacuums to effectively 'sell' those core vacuums to readers is Stage 3.

Stage 4 consists of the bridging of the story to its particular target audience.

Stage 5 is the word and sentence level use of vacuums to grip and hold attention on every page.

Establishing Core Vacuums

In your work, you must have some kind of idea of what you are offering to the public, even if you are still in the planning stage. You should at least have a notion of whether you have written or want to write a Comedy or an Epic, or a Tragedy or an Irony.

Perhaps you want your epic fantasy to rival Tolkien's or George R. R. Martin's and have some idea of the sense of wonder you want to leave readers with.

Maybe you are imagining a romantic novel which you would like to emotionally grip readers while also stretching the boundaries of the genre.

Possibly you have in mind a grand tragedy with the fall of a great figure prompting introspection in a range of readers.

Or you might have a collection of short horror stories in mind, designed to produce shock and a sense of nightmare.

In each case, large or small, the engine that drives the story will be its *core vacuum*. But your first task as a writer is to determine which core vacuum you are going to use.

If you are burning to write a particular story or set of stories, and already have a clear idea of what you are going to write, then you will still benefit from clarifying what these core vacuums will be.

That's Stage 2.

When you first established your work, or first made plans to do so, you probably had an idea of what your main 'message' would be. Stage 2, though, requires that you go 'back to the drawing board' to some degree - but in an exciting and very positive way. Stage 2 is the beginning of escalating your work into a higher realm of meaning and satisfaction.

If you have an existing piece of fiction, or an idea for one, you need to list what you think its core vacuums are.

What is it *about*?

The Lord of the Rings' core vacuum is the struggle between the forces of life and death. It's an Epic because the forces of Life win, though not without some loss.

Macbeth's core vacuum is the struggle between the protagonist's conscience and temptation. It's a Tragedy because he loses.

Great Expectations is driven by the core vacuum of Pip's desire for satisfaction and love. It's an Irony because it's not at all clear at the end of the novel that this vacuum is filled.

Pride and Prejudice has at its heart the need for romantic fulfilment, which comes with the social benefits of marriage in this case, as this is a Romance, fitting into the genre of Comedy. The union of Elizabeth and Darcy fills the core vacuum.

All the other techniques of the stories above are designed to attract and hold enough readers or audience so that they 'buy' the core ideas.

Take your existing fiction or idea and examine it closely. What are its core vacuums? Then ask, how could those core vacuums be expanded into something bigger, deeper, better, wider, more powerful or more valuable?

Your key question is:

'How can I take my existing core vacuums and *dramatically add meaning* to them?'

Look at the vacuums that your work already seeks to fill.

Are there *bigger* vacuums associated with those?

Are there *connected* vacuums?

Are there areas of need which, with some work and adjustments, you could tap into?

For example, C. S. Lewis's story *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* could have been a simple chase story, good versus evil, with some fighting and so on. But, by adding in layers of meaning, by creating a religious allegory, or simply by tapping into basic vacuums to do with life, death and morality, Lewis created a long-lasting children's classic.

The entire *Star Wars* saga could have been a 'Western in space', a shoot-out between two-dimensional good guys and shallow, typical bad guys, like many of its imitators. What gave it depth and resonance was the basic vacuums that were tapped into through mentions of the cosmic 'Force', the character vacuums associated with Luke's father, and so on. *Star Wars* continues to grow today not because it was a yarn about heroes and villains, but because it tapped into something deeper.

Without working on Stage 2, your work as a writer may be wasted by being too superficial. Linear, mystery and moral vacuums, working with character vacuums, can still create good stories on their own - but core vacuums magnify their power and give it meaning. It's a question of connecting vacuums together. This can be more clearly seen if we take another look at the categories of vacuums outlined earlier.

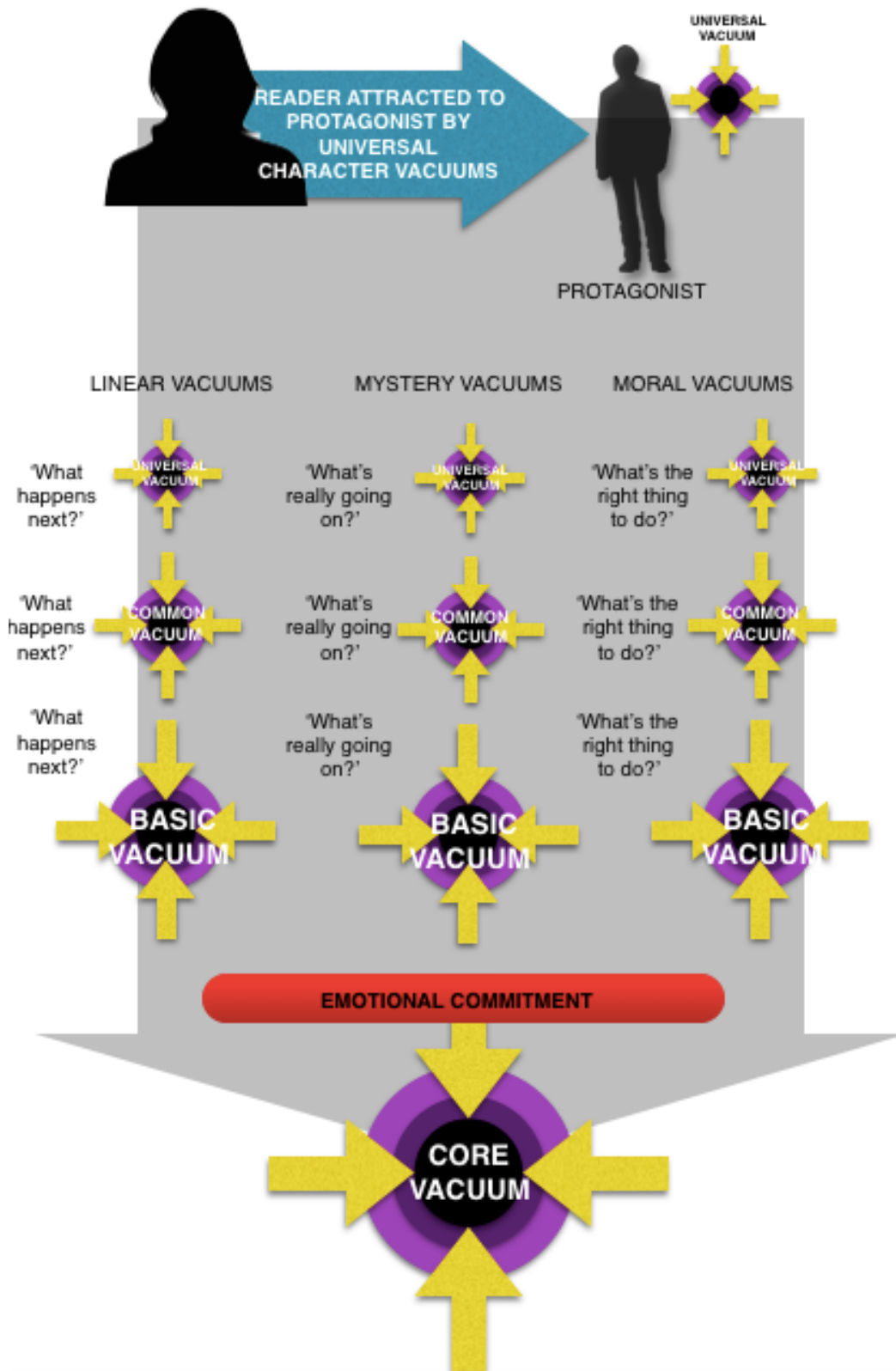
The Protagonist's Journey

Firstly, let's look at the Protagonist's Journey from the reader's point of view, as per the following diagram. The reader normally lives in a world where he or she only experiences mild discomforts or inconveniences as vacuums - things missing in life. Of course, worse things happen to readers as human beings from time to time, but the 'average reader' at any given moment will have universal vacuums of some sort in play in life.

A protagonist, as we have seen, has certain common gaps or absences or mysteries in existence, usually including missing parents, but as far as the plot is concerned should start off sharing a reality with the reader, discomfited and unhappy in some way without really being distinctly threatened.

There is an overlap, then, in the worlds of the reader and the protagonist - something we'll develop in Stage 4 - beginning with the lighter universal vacuums common to both in degree; this then moves along as the plot vacuums get larger and larger, ending with the core vacuum. This gives you the direction of the story from beginning to conclusion. If you successfully fill the core vacuum at the end, you have created an Epic or Comedy; if you leave it intentionally empty, you have created a Tragedy or an Irony.

All fiction gains power and meaning from its core vacuums.



Imagine the core vacuum as the nuclear reactor, the electric generator, the beating heart of your story. From it pulse the megawatts of energy that give your story energy and meaning. Craft a good core vacuum and the rest of the story more or less writes itself. Its vacuum power will grab and grip reader attention and pull the reader along through the lesser vacuums that in the end build up to it.

How do core vacuums interact with the other vacuums in a story? As stated earlier, all other vacuums exist to grab and hold reader attention with the intention of 'selling' the core vacuum to the reader, i.e. getting the reader to emotionally commit to it. The more you can get the linear, mystery, moral and character vacuums to relate to the core vacuum, the better your story will be.

What traditional advice about writing calls the 'climax' of any piece of fiction has to do with one such interrelationship.

The collision between the protagonist's character vacuums and the core vacuum is the climax of a tale.

Frodo's desperation to serve the cause of Good clashes at the heart of Sauron's realm with the Dark Lord's destructive centre that threatens all of Middle Earth; Frodo is overwhelmed by the power of the Ring and succumbs to the temptation of power, almost transforming the whole tale into an Irony - it is only the 'fateful' intervention of Gollum that saves the world, turning it into a *eucatastrophe*. Frodo rediscovers himself, emerging from under the shadow of the Ring, but has such large vacuums (wounds, dark memories) that he can only really be fully healed by journeying to Valinor.

Luke Skywalker's search for the goodness in his father on board the second Death Star impacts with the Emperor's evil plan to dominate the galaxy; Luke is almost killed by the Emperor when he cannot be turned to the Dark Side, again bringing the story to the verge of an Irony - only his father's last minute eucatastrophic intervention and sacrifice changes things. Luke is saved and goes on to become a full Jedi.

Captain America's search for the last vestiges of his lost era run into the Winter Soldier's defiance and support of the plan to destroy the freedom of the world; Rogers is almost killed by his former friend Bucky, but in the end Bucky saves him by dragging his body ashore. Rogers recovers to become leader of the Avengers.

Macbeth's attempt to fulfil his own character vacuum of kingly ambition meets the witches' knowledge of events that work against him; Macbeth is robbed one by one of his hopes, and fails. As this is a Tragedy, he is not saved but perishes.

In *Great Expectations* Pip's desire to reach a status where Estella will take him seriously encounters the full force of the law; Pip succumbs to illness and loses everything. As this is an Irony, it is highly doubtful whether he regains anything at the end.

Character vacuum meets core vacuum: in Epics and Comedies, the protagonist is almost lost, but survives through some kind of miraculous intervention. In Tragedies and Ironies, nothing intervenes and the protagonist is overwhelmed.

Linear, mystery and moral vacuums have served their purpose at this point. They exist to get your reader to the point where the protagonist makes a choice right at the heart of the story: will he act to fill the core vacuum or not?

In Forster's *A Passage to India*, Adela Quested's inner needs overlap with the needs of the entire community. She flounders and fails, but a deeper meaning is revealed, again depending on how the last part of the Ironic novel is read.

But the fact remains that, no matter what successful story is examined, no matter the genre, the climax is the coming together of the character's innermost desires with the story world's uppermost needs.

This is the progression we have seen in the examples that we have examined, ranging from Shakespeare to contemporary films. This is the progression that your leading character needs to make in order to secure the most reader empathy and hold the attention in the story.

How deep and meaningful do you want to make your fulfilling chapters at the end of the tale?

Do you want your characters to simply survive or win a battle, thus fulfilling the classic 'What happens next?' linear vacuum of the plot?

Do you want the mysteries resolved and everything clarified, thus fulfilling the 'What is going on?' mystery vacuums of the story?

This will satisfy readers and produce a reasonably successful work of fiction.

But if you want to create a long-lasting masterpiece, or at least a more powerful work which stands the test of time and is read again and again, you need to include as much meaning as possible in your *core vacuums*: not only does the protagonist need to survive, he or she needs to discover the meaning of that life; not only does a world have to be saved, it has to be saved for a purpose or in such a way that resonates with significance.

To be a truly successful author, you need to fulfil core vacuums until they overflow with fulfilment and resonate with meaning.

Through your protagonist you're leading a reader into a terrible zone of vacuums where life or sanity or both can be threatened. If you don't fulfil that expectation well, all your work can be wasted or not quite ring true.

But if you do fulfil it with meaning, your work will become a classic.

The idea of Stage 2 is to have a powerful, lingering effect on a reader. This comes from having core vacuums which resonate so deeply that they tap into universal themes: love, peace, life and death, what it means to be alive and so forth.

C. S. Lewis's children's fiction is one example. He creates a fantasy world, but that fantasy world intersects with the world in which we live. We discover, quite unexpectedly, that the back of an old wardrobe is a door into another world. This intersects with something every child feels - the sense of surprise and the encounter with the unexpected. Lewis then connects it with a whole different level of experience and gives readers more than they expected.

Your Existing Work

Right now, you may have a work of fiction which you currently offer or want to offer to the public, with no changes, tweaks, modifications or adaptations of any kind. Perhaps you aren't writing enough, and perhaps you have already realised that various changes need to be made to your work and the way you operate. But let's begin by taking what you already have, no matter what shape it is in.

How can you apply vacuum power to this existing picture?

Has vacuum power already been at work in your work? If what we have been talking about is in any way true, then yes, the thing that has been keeping your work afloat in terms of meaning, character motivation and reader relations has been vacuum power, whether you recognised it as such or not. Characters and plots have been driven by something, however unsatisfactory, and readers have been attracted and driven by something, even if it hasn't been as strong as you would wish.

How do you work out what those already existing vacuums are?

Isolating Character Vacuums

Firstly, take the work you have written and break it down as follows:

Look for the *most obvious* character vacuum.

This is the thing that your current protagonist most lacks or feels is missing. This is what gives your protagonist the most attractive power in the whole work. Even if that power is still weaker than you would like, this is the item which you should immediately develop in any way you can. If it is already attracting reader attention, it is capable of attracting more. So your first action should be to *boost the already-existing character vacuum in your protagonist*.

Perhaps your hero is missing a limb or (more likely) lacks a stable family background. Magnify this. Make his or her weakness greater, either by hinting at basic vacuums - threats to life itself - or at common vacuums - loss of companionship or opportunities.

It's quite possible, though, that the most attractive thing in your existing work isn't your protagonist at all. It should be, but then you have only just had 'protagonist' defined in these terms in this book as *the point in a story which attracts most of the reader's attention with vacuums*. Perhaps there's a lesser character that you've constructed with more vacuums and you were wondering why that figure seemed attractive in his or her own right.

Now you know.

You have a choice: either shift the vacuum intensity over to your original protagonist by giving him or her more vacuums, or transfer the 'protagonist-ship' over to the other character. Writers who do this sometimes give their stories a whole new lease of life: they've been trying to tell the story from the viewpoint of the wrong character! Move a more attractive character into the central position and the story explodes into life.

Work this over until you have created as many character vacuums as seem appropriate. Too many, and the character starts to become a comedy construct: exaggerated losses can act to prompt laughter, like the knight in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* who keeps acting defiantly despite the loss of all his limbs. You need to be the judge of which character vacuums will work in the context of your story - but don't be afraid to magnify those needs, losses, cravings, desires.

Then take the next most likely character vacuum and promote that, and so on. This won't get your fiction into the stellar levels that you're dreaming about, but it will instantly boost the energy of your fiction while you work on the much more powerful measures that are coming up.

Now look over the story for the other character archetypes that we have described: the comic companion who brings temporary relief? The female companion who personifies a vacuum? The warrior companion who appears duplicitous at first? And who is performing the role of the old man with the stick?

If they are not present, insert them. A couple of examples of this may help you to see what happens when you do.

Back in the 1960s, in the Marvel comic *Daredevil*, young Matt Murdock gained super-enhanced perceptions including a 'radar sense' which enabled him to see all around him, though blinded after an accident with a truck carrying radio-active chemicals. For two decades, Daredevil did well as a Marvel character with his own comic book series. Then, in the 1980s, comic book artist and writer Frank Miller took charge of the character and re-structured his 'origin story', giving him a stern mentor figure who trained the fledgeling hero in the use of his powers. This old man carried a staff and was named Stick. He pointed out deeper lackings in Murdock's personality and a larger external core vacuum for the hero. *Daredevil* as a series went into best-seller mode as readers, consciously or not, picked up on all of these archetypal additives.

Still in the superhero world, Richard Donner's classic film *Superman* expanded the role of its protagonist's father, a little-seen character from the comics called Jor-El, into a standard 'old man with a stick' character who points out the main issues for the protagonist. Jor-El's 'stick' was the green crystal seen in the film which his son uses to create the crystalline Fortress of Solitude and communicate with his father. The film went on to huge success and is still considered a model for superhero movies to this day.

In the world of television, consider the long-running BBC science fiction series *Doctor Who*. This began in 1963 with character archetypes in place - standard hero protagonist Ian Chesterton accompanied by female companion Barbara Wright discover that the mysterious Susan Freeman is actually the grand-daughter of a time travelling alien called 'the Doctor', who initially was very much the 'old man with a stick' mentor figure. Later, writers even gave him a 'stick', a 'sonic screwdriver' with a range of functions so vast that it became his magic wand. As the series went on, the Doctor through his various incarnations came to cover some of the other character archetype functions himself, including comic companion and warrior king, but he usually reverted to the old man mentor type. It goes without saying that the series continues to thrive in various media even after five decades. Note also that for the first few years the television audience had no idea who the character was or where he came from - a real mystery vacuum. Even today, the Doctor's true name remains unknown.

So look for these archetypes and develop them, giving each his or her appropriate character vacuums to ensure that as a constructed person they are attractive to readers.

Isolating Plot Vacuums

Then take your plot, whatever shape it is in. By far the majority of plots, in order to be plots at all, as we have seen, have to contain at least one linear vacuum, the question 'What happens next?' being a universal requirement of story-telling. But the ramblings of a writer's imagination don't always fulfil this requirement.

Take what you have and create suspense in some way by inserting vacuums: what exactly *will* happen next? Is there a race, chase or hunt sequence where it is not immediately obvious who will win? Work over your existing tale and pump into it as many linear vacuums as you can. You will find your plot coming to life with each unknown outcome you insert.

If you can relate the linear vacuum to character vacuums, all the better. The children's race to find Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is a powerful linear vacuum which drives the whole plot, but it is made more effective because it is also linked to their character vacuum desires to see their brother again; Luke Skywalker's final run on the Death Star in *Star Wars: A New Hope* is a gripping linear vacuum which closely relates to his maturation as a young Jedi, filling his own character vacuum.

Mystery vacuums are part of this. What is really going on in your story? Is there some kind of sub-text, or is what readers see all that they get? Are your constructed characters just going through the motions created by linear vacuums, or are they also internally driven by a desire to find the answer to a puzzle? Create mysteries and pump them into your story.

J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is virtually powered by mystery vacuums alone: page after page is turned, as the small group of Hogwarts students desperately seeks the solution to a series of intriguing unknowns, most of them linked to Harry's character vacuum, his loss of his parents. All detective stories are built around at least one mystery, usually several. Again, link these mysteries to the characters and your story gains depth and gravity. What is motivating your protagonist? Is he or she simply on a journey somewhere? Or is there also a desperate quest to find an answer to a mystery?

The combination of added linear vacuums and fascinating mystery vacuums, mixed with a series of gripping character vacuums, gives you the recipe for totally transforming your work.

Looking for Fulfilment

You should answer the following questions based on your top five favourite pieces of fiction of all time, books or films or plays.

Ask yourself:

- What was the need which drove you to read that book or see that play or film?
- What did you expect when you did?
- How would you rate the performance of the work in bringing you some kind of fulfilment?

The more specific you can be, the more useful your answers will be.

For example, you might say that you first were attracted to *The Lord of the Rings* by the mention of quests and elves and a created fictional world on a grand scale. Your expectations might have been that you would be drawn into a world which would be both similar to our own but sufficiently different to be intriguing. How would you rate *The Lord of the Rings* in terms of fulfilment? Did it live up to its original promise? Did it surpass your expectations?

Answer the same questions for your other four favourite works of fiction.

Now, having accumulated some answers, can you replicate those kinds of things in your work? Any data which you can use to help to fulfil that purpose in your fiction is worth gold to you.

What are the needs which might drive readers to your epic fantasy or your romantic novel or your grand tragedy or your collection of short horror stories?

What are readers expecting when they pick up or see a work of fiction by you?

What kinds of people are they?

Are there patterns there?

And how do you think they would rate your ability to fulfil their initial expectations?

Are you confident that you can *exceed* those expectations?

Stage Three, then, boosts the power of your work immediately. But we still have Stages Four and Five to come. These stages, as you will see, will form a powerful channel out into the world which will widen into a super-highway for new readers if used correctly.

Attracting Your Readers

Your task in Stage 4 is to take the character and plot vacuums that you have already developed and *make them more real to your target audience*.

Look for the area from which most of your readers have come or from where you would like them to come.

This could be a particular gender - in which case you should concentrate your attention on that gender - or it could be an age group - e.g. the teen market. Look for common denominators among these readers. Do they all have a similar cultural background? What else are they likely to have read or seen? All of these things, and any other clues you can glean from your existing knowledge, give you an indication of the vacuums that might be put to work in your fiction.

The *Harry Potter* series struck at the children's market with a combination of powerful vacuums: the need for a simple vocabulary adventure story featuring children of a particular age group combined with a desire for schooling to be magical, literally. It was interesting to observe that a large part of the market for Harry Potter when he first appeared was those children who struggled to get interested in reading as a whole. They wanted to be interested, they just didn't know how to start and were striking barriers when they attempted it. J. K. Rowling's material - a school environment filled with magic - both began from a base with which those children had some familiarity while embellishing it with imaginative ideas. Her unchallenging writing style and basic vocabulary presented fewer barriers. And with each successive book, the Potter phenomenon grew with loyal readers desperate for the next release.

The *Twilight* series similarly tapped into the teenage market with its sense of isolation and hormonal flows to create a best-selling love story about vampires. The feelings exhibited by the main characters were hardly supernatural - the readers could relate.

Could you replicate this in some way in your own fiction? Not by writing stories about learning magic at school or vampire love (there are already many who have tried to do that) but by taking something very familiar to your age group or gender of readers and injecting it with new life and energy?

This takes minimal effort and may require no real modification of your writing.

What you are doing in Stage 4 is working on *universal vacuums*, making them fit the likely universal vacuums of your particular public.

Move the initial gaps, holes, needs, desires and so on upwards or outwards from basic and common vacuums to do with life, death health, loss of friends or missed opportunities into the slightly lighter realm of universal vacuums - curtailed time, threats to comforts, frustrations about changes.

Why does this work?

The further up and out vacuums go, the more universal they become.

For example, in *Star Wars: A New Hope* we meet Luke Skywalker not in an outer space battle with his nemesis, but on a farm, beleaguered by chores given to him by his grumpy uncle in the same way that many teenagers feel constrained by adults around them. We meet Frodo Baggins in *The Lord of the Rings* not in some outlying part of Wilderland fighting a dragon but in the recognisable domestic setting of the Shire, bothered by relatives. We encounter Scout, protagonist of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, not in the dramatic courtroom of later scenes but in her own garden, confronted by the challenges of a first day at school. Successful authors take pains, whether they are conscious of it or not, to build a firm bridge between us and the constructed characters that they are introducing to us: their vacuums must be our vacuums, at least in the beginning.

Taking what you've isolated about your target market, you can take this a stage further. What kind of additional or universal vacuums have your readers experienced? Unhappiness at school?

Frustration in a relationship? Unwanted change of location? The teenage market is so huge and alive for fiction mainly because it possesses so much scope for vacuums of this kind: the parameters of a teenager's life are established by adults, by definition, which leads to relatively mild frustrations and constraints of all kinds.

Similarly, if you are writing or planning to write a romantic comedy aimed at young or middle-aged women, the question to ask to build your bridging vacuums is what kind of light but universal vacuums do these women experience? Disappointment in long-term relationships? Mild health issues? Concerns about appearance? *Bridget Jones Diary* became an international bestseller by tapping into those kinds of things.

Start with the universally recognisable vacuums and you will haul in a large catch of readers.

The World of Stage 5

Of course, attracting readers must happen on every page - ideally, with every line.

That's what Stage 5 is all about.

Over the centuries, the various techniques used by authors to attract, hold and direct reader attention have come to be given names. They are collectively called 'literary techniques'. But what we have learned about vacuums and their role in fiction means that certain literary techniques need re-assessment so that you can use them more effectively.

Here is a list of some of the chief techniques used by writers and how they could be redefined with what we now know. There are many more literary techniques which draw upon vacuum power, but this selection at least explains how some of them operate:

Alliteration—The repetition at close intervals of initial identical consonant sounds. Or, vowel sounds in successive words or syllables that repeat. This sounds ordinary enough - but why is repeating a sound at close intervals so effective? *Because of the vacuum, or gap, between those sounds.* Alliteration is a way of creating a rhythm: sound - gap - sound - gap - which resonates with readers and listeners. This is using the principle of vacuums at micro-level.

Allusion—An indirect reference to something (usually a literary text) with which the reader is expected to be familiar. Allusions are usually literary, historical, Biblical, or mythological. Allusions also draw on the vacuum power of whatever is being alluded to. For example, the apple which Digory seeks from a garden in C. S. Lewis's children's tale, *The Magician's Nephew* is more than just an apple: the allusion to the apple in the Garden of Eden is obvious, as Lewis meant it to be, and so all the power of that Biblical image and the loss associated with its consumption by Adam and Eve is 'attached' to the apple recovered by Digory.

Ambiguity—An event or situation that may be interpreted in more than one way. Also, the manner of expression of such an event or situation may be ambiguous. Artful language may be ambiguous. Unintentional ambiguity is usually vagueness. But intentional ambiguity is like allusion above: it makes the most out of the fact that the audience or reader isn't perhaps sure of what is finally 'meant'. For example, in the ending of J. B. Priestley's play *An Inspector Calls*, the Birling family receive a phone call telling them that a police inspector is on his way to ask them some questions. But they have already been subjected to a set of questions by someone claiming to be a police inspector, questions which effectively dismantled their family relationships almost entirely. Who is this new police officer? What are we meant to make of the inspector who has already visited them? Priestley doesn't answer these questions, leaving a gaping vacuum of ambiguity at the end of his work. Ambiguity is a prime way of creating *mystery vacuums*.

Anaphora—Repetition of a word, phrase, or clause at the beginning of two or more sentences in a row. This device is a deliberate form of repetition and helps make the writer's point more coherent. This resembles alliteration above: the use of repetition sets up a resonant rhythm.

Antithesis—A balancing of two opposite or contrasting words, phrases, or clauses. Antithesis is used to create vacuums: if a character does one thing, and then its opposite, the reader has had a

vacuum created. 'Act like the innocent flower' says Lady Macbeth, 'but be the serpent under it.' Opposites create tensions because they create emptinesses (vacuums) which drag in attention.

Archetype—A term borrowed by psychologist Carl Jung who described archetypes as 'primordial images' formed by repeated experiences in the lives of our ancestors, inherited in the 'collective unconscious' of the human race and expressed in myths, religion, dreams, fantasies, and literature. These characters, plot patterns, symbols recur in literature and evoke profound emotional responses in the reader because they resonate with an image already existing for us. As we have seen, there are certain definite character archetypes used in most successful fiction.

Aside—A dramatic convention by which an actor directly addresses the audience but it is not supposed to be heard by the other actors on the stage. This enables authors to show readers or audiences what is happening inside the character's mind and so point out psychological vacuums which might otherwise have to be inferred by actions.

Catharsis—The process by which an unhealthy emotional state produced by an imbalance of feelings is corrected and emotional health is restored. Traditionally, catharsis is supposed to take place as part of the process of a Tragedy. What we can see with our knowledge of vacuums is that catharsis is actually the working out of *inner psychological vacuums*, which are either filled (in Epics or Comedies) or left unfilled (in Tragedies or Ironies).

Characterisation—The method an author uses to develop characters in a work. Direct characterisation straightforwardly states the character's traits; indirect characterisation implies traits through what the character says, does, how the character dresses, interacts with other characters, etc. But as we know, real characterisation has much to do with what a character *doesn't have* rather than what he or she demonstrates as a trait.

Chronological Ordering—Arrangement of ideas in the order in which things occur; may move from past to present or in reverse, from present to past. We find that in Epics and Comedies time usually moves in an ordinary forward way, whereas in Tragedies and Ironies, time tends to be mixed up. Quentin Tarantino's film *Pulp Fiction*, for example, changes the sequence of events so that what we see on screen is not a standard chronological order; similarly, John Fowles' novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* has the author step into the story and change time in order to change the ending. (Both are Ironies.)

Comic relief—Humorous speeches and incidents in the course of the serious action of a Tragedy; frequently comic relief widens and enriches the tragic significance of the work. What we have also seen is that 'comic relief' could be called 'vacuum relief': the unremitting progress of the protagonist towards deeper and deeper vacuums is occasionally relieved (and therefore enhanced) by the presence of a comic companion who creates minor moments of fulfilment, which communicate as laughter.

Conceit—Unusual or surprising comparison between two very different things; a special kind of metaphor or complicated analogy. Similar to allusion, a conceit places two or more images next to each other so as to draw on the vacuum power of each.

Connotation—Rather than the dictionary definition, the associations of a word, the implied meaning rather than literal meaning or denotation. This is also similar to allusion and conceit in that these associations are used by the author to add to the vacuum power of the work. For example, in Forster's *A Passage to India*, the infamous Marabar Caves which form the central point of action in the novel are both physical caves with unusual sound properties but also have connotations of psychological states and what happens there in the novel has connotations of something sexual.

Consonance—Repetition of a consonant sound within two or more words in close proximity. See 'Alliteration'.

Contrast - when an author places something next to something distinctly different, drawing attention to the contrast between them. What is actually drawing the attention, almost physically, of course, is the vacuum created by the absence of the other thing. Light and dark, for example, are contrasts, but the gap in light created by the absence of darkness and the gap in darkness created

by the absence light are the things which mechanically attract attention.

Dramatic Irony—When the reader is aware of an inconsistency between a fictional character's perception of a situation and the truth of that situation. Dramatic irony is a straightforward use of vacuum power: the reader or audience is in a position to observe something which the character is not. This highlights the vacuums or losses or gaps or missing pieces of knowledge in the character, and thus draws in more attention.

Elliptical—Sentence structure which leaves out something in the second half. Usually, there is a subject-verb-object combination in the first half of the sentence, and the second half of the sentence will repeat the structure but omit the verb and use a comma to indicate the ellipsed material. Elliptical sentences are used so often in writing and speech that most omissions go unnoticed. For example, a common overlooked use of an elliptical sentence is those which take a compound subject: A. 'Bill and Joe just jumped'. B. 'Bill (just jumped) and Joe just jumped'. Anything where anything is said to have been missed or is missing should alert you by now that vacuum power is being used, even if very subtly.

Emotional Appeal—When a writer appeals to an audience's emotions (often through 'pathos') to excite and involve them in the argument. As we now know, emotion is created using vacuums.

Ennui—A persistent feeling of tiredness or weariness which often afflicts existential people, frequently manifesting as boredom. Ennui results from the long-term presence of an unfilled vacuum.

Epiphany—Traditionally defined as a major character's moment of realisation or awareness, an epiphany is actually a moment when a vacuum, minor or major, gets filled.

Figurative Language—A word or words that are inaccurate literally, but describe by calling to mind sensations or responses that the thing described evokes. Figurative language may be in the form of metaphors or similes, both non-literal comparison. Shakespeare's 'All the world's a stage' is an example of non-literal figurative language.

Flat Character—A character constructed around a single idea or quality; a flat character is immediately recognisable and may be a simplified version of one of the character archetypes outlined earlier. However, a rounded character is created by giving the figure more vacuums. Essentially then, a flat character is one with no vacuums.

Foil—A character whose traits are the opposite of another and who thus points up the strengths and weaknesses of the other character. Like the shadow protagonist mentioned earlier, a foil is used to highlight the deficiencies or vacuums of a character.

Genre—French, a literary form or type; classification. e.g. Tragedy, Comedy, novel, essay, poetry. As we have seen, the four basic genres, Epic, Tragedy, Irony and Comedy, are created by patterns of vacuums and whether those vacuums are filled or not.

Hubris—Overwhelming pride or insolence that results in the misfortune of the protagonist of a Tragedy. It is the particular form of tragic flaw that results from excessive pride, ambition, or overconfidence. The excessive pride of Macbeth is a standard example of *hubris* in English drama. Also spelled *hybris*, this is a manifestation of the inner psychological vacuum found particularly in tragic protagonists. Considered to be a 'tragic flaw' in conventional terms, hubris is actually a response to a deeper underlying psychological wound or absence.

Imagery—The use of images, especially in a pattern of related images, often figurative, to create a strong unified sensory impression. Imagery, like allusion or conceit, uses the vacuum power of other things or ideas to enhance the object or thought in question.

Irony—When a reader is aware of a reality that differs from a character's perception of reality (dramatic irony). The literal meaning of a writer's words may be verbal irony. Generally considered to be a discrepancy between expectation and reality, Irony as a genre draws its power from the accustomed expectations set up in readers and audiences by Epic patterns.

Metaphor—A comparison of two things, often unrelated or a 'figurative equation' which results where both aspects illuminate one another. Metaphors may occur in a single sentence, as a controlling image of an entire work or can be implied. A so-called 'dead metaphor' is one that has been overused that its original impact has been lost; an extended metaphor is one that is developed at length and involves several points of comparison. When two metaphors are jumbled together, often illogically, it is referred to as a 'mixed metaphor'.

Mood—An atmosphere created by a writer's word choice and the details selected. Syntax is also a determiner of mood because sentence strength, length, and complexity affect pacing. But the engine behind mood is vacuum power: what missing thing or gap or unknown is being created?

Oxymoron—Juxtaposing two contradictory terms, like 'wise fool' or 'deafening silence.' Oxymorons draw on the power of contrast, as described above.

Paradox—A seemingly contradictory statement or situation which is actually true. This rhetorical device is often used for emphasis or simply to attract attention. Paradoxes, like oxymorons, draw on the power created by contrasting things.

Parody—An exaggerated imitation of a usually more serious work for humorous purposes. Exaggerations create vacuums which are then filled ludicrously, creating laughter. For example, Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series takes the standard patterns of Epic fantasy and exaggerates them, then fills those vacuums in comic ways.

Pathos—Qualities of a fictional or nonfictional work that evoke sorrow or pity. Over-emotionalism can be the result of an excess of pathos. Real pathos - i.e. pathos that works to draw in and hold reader attention - is powered by underlying vacuums. For example, in Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, there is a great deal of emotionalism. What makes it work (and makes the book one of the biggest selling novels of all time) is that the emotions are based on real and cataclysmic events (losses, wounds, pains) that took place during the French Revolution.

Periodic Sentence—A sentence the meaning of which does not become clear until right at the end —e.g. in the opening line of John Milton's epic poem 'Paradise Lost': 'Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit/Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste/Brought death into the world, and all our woe,/With loss of Eden, till one greater man/Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,/Sing heavenly muse...' Clearly making the reader wait creates an unknown, and therefore vacuum power.

Peripety—A reversal in the hero's fortunes, which of course means the creation of a vacuum.

Point of View—The perspective from which a story is told. First-person, third-person, or third-person omniscient points of view are commonly used. This is a complex subject which requires a separate study in terms of vacuum power, but for now we can be assured that a successful author makes a selection of which point of view from which to tell a story based on the amount of vacuum power created. For example, the substance of the tale of *Wuthering Heights* is somewhat incredible, being the extreme dramatisations of two families living on the Yorkshire moors, but we see the story told through the maidservant of the household and then we have it conveyed to us through an 'outsider', Mr. Lockwood. The effect is to remove us by at least two layers from the action itself, which actually serves to increase the vacuum power.

Round Character—A character drawn with sufficient complexity (or vacuums) to be able to attract and surprise the reader without losing credibility. See 'flat character' above.

Satire—A work that reveals a critical attitude toward some element of human behaviour by portraying it in an extreme way, usually targeting groups or large concepts rather than individuals; its purpose is customarily to inspire change. See 'parody' above.

Setting—Locale and period in which the action takes place. This is very important and deserves its own study too, but its power to assist in generating vacuums is fairly obvious: for example, the setting of *A Passage to India* in dilapidated Chandrapore enhances the vacuums of the story, as does setting *Wuthering Heights* in the bleak moorscape of Yorkshire.

Simile—A figurative comparison of two things, often dissimilar, using the connecting words: 'like,' 'as,' or 'than.' See 'metaphor'.

Soliloquy—When a character in a play speaks his thoughts aloud —usually by him or herself. See 'aside'.

Symbol—A thing, event, or person that represents or stands for some idea or event. Symbols also simultaneously retain their own literal meanings. A figure of speech in which a concrete object is used to stand for an abstract idea —e.g. the cross for Christianity. This relates to what has been said about 'connotation' above. Symbols work because of vacuum power and connotation.

Theme—A central idea of a work of fiction or nonfiction, revealed and developed in the course of a story or explored through argument. In a successful work of fiction, a theme should be represented by a clear core vacuum, and readers should be drawn into understanding the author's theme and message by the power of that vacuum.

Tragic Flaw—Tragic error in judgment; a mistaken act which changes the fortune of the tragic hero from happiness to misery; also known as *hamartia*. See 'hubris' above. 'Hamartia' is another word for 'inner psychological vacuum'.

Vacuum power, then, is about more than devising characters who attract reader attention and then developing plots which move the reader along. It uses the methods above, and others, to hold the reader to every page, every paragraph, every sentence where possible.

To get more of an idea of how this works in practice, let's take a look at two major examples of how master authors have used some of the above to engage and grip readers.

The Crucial Chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*

Here is an example of Stage 5 techniques at work in Chapter Two of *The Lord of the Rings*, called 'The Shadow of the Past'. In this part of the story, old man archetype the wizard Gandalf returns to visit young, orphaned protagonist Frodo. From the moment they greet each other there is a carefully controlled pattern of vacuums which rhythmically eases the reader along through the entire chapter. Tolkien's main technique in this section of his story is using contrast:

They looked hard at one another. 'Ah well eh?' said Gandalf. 'You look the same as ever, Frodo!'

'So do you,' Frodo replied; but secretly he thought that Gandalf looked older and more careworn.

Immediately, a counter-balance of vacuums is invoked: Gandalf looks 'the same as ever' in the form of Frodo's polite greeting, but 'secretly' looks 'older and more careworn'. Why? This is a subtle mystery vacuum as well as outlining a possible character vacuum for Gandalf - what is weighing the wizard down so much?

The gentle contrasts continue in nearly every sentence, almost subliminally, until the reader is lulled:

A bright fire was on the hearth, but the sun was warm, and the wind was in the South. [A linear vacuum contrasting the warmth outside with the need for a fire indoors.]

[Gandalf's] hair was perhaps whiter than it had been then, and his beard and eyebrows were perhaps longer, and his face more lined with care and wisdom [character vacuum]; but his eyes were as bright as ever, and he smoked and blew smoke rings with the same vigour and delight [a contrast serving to highlight the prior vacuum].

Even in the light of morning [Frodo] felt the dark shadow of the tidings that Gandalf had brought [the contrast of the light of morning again serving to highlight the vacuum of the 'dark shadow'].

Gandalf then begins to relate to Frodo the details of the Ring's history and its terrible nature. After Gandalf explains that the Ring will wear down any wearer until he is spiritually eroded, and 'sooner or later the dark power will devour him', Frodo's response is: 'How terrifying!' After a long silence, this is contrasted with one of the most unexpected and innocent sounds in the world: 'The sound of Sam Gamgee cutting the lawn came in from the garden.'

Each subtle positive moment - the conversational banter, the sun outside, the sound of cutting the lawn - serves a purpose: to highlight the vacuums with which they contrast.

At no point does Tolkien let our attention waver from the tense mood of the darkened room inside Frodo's home where this conversation is taking place - but he actually increases the tension and makes it more effective by rhythmically contrasting it with other, lighter and more innocent details around it. This contrast is made implicit in the symbol of the Ring itself - "Bilbo thought the ring was very beautiful, and very useful at need" explains the wizard- and in the sharp distinction between the largely comic world of the hobbits and the darker forces at work elsewhere in Tolkien's world:

'Ever since Bilbo left I have been deeply concerned about you, and about all these charming, absurd, helpless hobbits. It would be a grievous blow to the world, if the Dark Power overcame the Shire; if all your kind, jolly, stupid Bolgers, Hornblowers, Boffins, Bracegirdles, and the rest, not to mention the ridiculous Bagginses, became enslaved.'

Even as Gandalf tells Frodo all this, and then submits the Ring to an alarming test by throwing it into the fire, the author points gently to contrasting factors: 'The room became dark and silent, though the clack of Sam's shears, now nearer to the windows, could still be heard faintly from the garden.'

Contrasts continue as Gandalf outlines the character of Gollum for Frodo, and attempts to explain his lust for the Ring. Note the explicit use of contrast here to create a psychological vacuum:

'He hated the dark, and he hated light more: he hated everything, and the Ring most of all.'

'What do you mean?' said Frodo. 'Surely the Ring was his precious and the only thing he cared for? But if he hated it, why didn't he get rid of it, or go away and leave it?'

'You ought to begin to understand, Frodo, after all you have heard,' said Gandalf. 'He hated it and loved it, as he hated and loved himself. He could not get rid of it. He had no will left in the matter.'

Having heard the full history of the Ring from the wizard, Frodo, afraid of his burden, offers it to him, and Gandalf's fearful refusal is swiftly juxtaposed with something quite different:

'Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good. Do not tempt me! I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused. The wish to wield it would be too great, for my strength. I shall have such need of it. Great perils lie before me.' He went to the window and drew aside the curtains and the shutters. Sunlight streamed back again into the room. Sam passed along the path outside whistling.

As Frodo reaches a decision about what to do, explicit use is made of the difference between the inside of the room in which the discussion has taken place and the much brighter outside: "No!" answered Frodo, coming back to himself out of darkness, and finding to his surprise that it was not dark, and that out of the window he could see the sunlit garden.'

The Ring, of course, is a perfect symbolic vacuum: an empty circle, which threatens to suck into it the whole world. It operates on character, affecting each person who comes near it; it is central to the plot, creating the entire linear vacuum of the story; it resonates with mystery, in that we are never certain of its power or how active it is. In one simple object, Tolkien captured all the vacuum power that he needed to drive his story forward and keep our attention glued to it.

The chapter concludes with Sam Gamgee, Frodo's servant (a classic comic companion who later saves the day, playing a pivotal role in the quest and the story as a whole) being drawn into the room by Gandalf, who commands him to go with Frodo - but even this final sentence is told in contrasts: "Me go and see Elves and all! Hooray!" he shouted, and then burst into tears.'

Vacuums, used in this way on a word and sentence level, have ensured, amongst other things, that the wild and hard-to-believe back-story of the Ring and the whole host of larger-than-life characters and events which it introduces draw our attention in such a way that we don't reject them out of hand - a master author like Tolkien knows how to use them to bring about a smooth gradient so that, almost before we know it, we have been 'captured'.

How Charles Dickens Uses Language and Structure in 'The Signalman'

We can examine this word-and-sentence level use of vacuums even more closely by looking at a short story by Charles Dickens in some detail.

It's not for nothing that Dickens is perhaps the most famous of all English novelists. His novels are notable not only for their humour and treatment of social problems of his time, including the troubles faced by the poor in the newly expanding cities of Victorian England, and the corruption and inefficiency of the legal system, but also for their richness of style and their apparently effortless ability to engage the reader. *Great Expectations* (1860–61) in particular is a triumph of the Irony genre, and that novel is a study in the expert use of vacuum power, whether Dickens himself would have used the term or not.

Dickens lived well before the age of movies or television, yet his stories are very visual and dramatic, partly because he wrote them in instalments for magazines (which operate, like any kind of serialised story, on the 'cliffhanger' of a linear vacuum - 'What happens next?') His characters and their settings, especially London, are well described, linger in our imaginations and come to life on the page - and there are specific reasons why.

'The Signalman', a short story which Dickens wrote for a journal he was producing, called '*All the Year Round*', first appeared in 1866, when Britain was undergoing huge changes and was in the middle of what we now call the Industrial Revolution. Railways had recently been invented and had spread across the countryside like spiders' webs; there was a glamour and a mystery about the sheer power of steam locomotives as they thundered down the railway lines which were now criss-crossing the once-peaceful countryside. Perhaps driverless cars are an equivalent for us today - new modes of transport promising unknown developments in society, and prompting new thoughts, images and moral questions.

'The Signalman' is also a ghost story, and the Victorians loved ghost stories (ghosts being 'living vacuums') - but this was also a time when new sciences like psychoanalysis were beginning to probe the unconscious dreams and nightmares of people. Many were questioning whether traditional forms of belief like Christianity were objectively true or how far the precepts of traditional religion really extended into the vastness of the rapidly unfolding universe or the darkness of our own minds. Just what was the truth about the universe and human souls? Dickens capitalises on all this from the very first line of the story:

'Halloa! Below there!'

When he heard a voice thus calling to him, he was standing at the door of his box, with a flag in his hand, furled round its short pole. One would have thought, considering the nature of the ground, that he could not have doubted from what quarter the voice came; but instead of looking up to where I stood on the top of the steep cutting nearly over his head, he turned himself about, and looked down the Line. There was something remarkable in his manner of doing so, though I could not have said for my life what. But I know it was remarkable enough to attract my notice, even though his figure was foreshortened and shadowed, down in the deep trench, and mine was high above him, so steeped in the glow of an angry sunset, that I had shaded my eyes with my hand before I saw him at all.

'Halloa! Below!'

With this story opening, we start in a void: there is none of the traditional 'scene-setting' common to the beginnings of stories. We have to interpret a kind of code to get even a vague idea of where we are: the 'door of his box', the 'flag in his hand, furled round its short pole', and then a few words later 'the steep cutting'. The author doesn't pause to carefully explain the setting, but just plunges us into the vacuum of the unknown and expects us to put the scene together on our own. This isn't unintentional - it's part of the disorientation which Dickens creates to prompt a slight 'fictive vertigo' in the reader. This is a telltale Irony technique. He magnifies it soon afterwards with this passage:

He looked up at me without replying, and I looked down at him without pressing him too soon with a repetition of my idle question. Just then there came a vague vibration in the earth and air, quickly changing into a violent pulsation, and an oncoming rush that caused me to start back, as though it had force to draw me down.

What is happening here? Some kind of unknown, 'vague' but 'violent pulsation' enters the scene in an 'oncoming rush' which prompts the narrator to 'start back' afraid that he will be drawn down. The result? Fictive vertigo increased through a combination of linear ('What will happen next?') and mystery ('What is going on?') vacuums. It's not until the next sentence that the source of this strangeness is explained, in a single sentence which restores some stability and order to things:

When such vapour as rose to my height from this rapid train had passed me, and was skimming away over the landscape, I looked down again, and saw him refurling the flag he had shown while the train went by.

But Dickens is a master of rhythm. Before we can gain any comfort or even get our bearings, he describes the narrator's descent into the railway cutting in terms designed to unsettle us with further vacuums:

The cutting was extremely deep, and unusually precipitate. It was made through a clammy stone, that became oozier and wetter as I went down. For these reasons, I found the way long enough to give me time to recall a singular air of reluctance or compulsion with which he had pointed out the path.

The use of words is precise: 'extremely deep', 'unusually precipitate', 'clammy', 'oozier and 'wetter' as the narrator goes 'down'. The way is long enough to give him time to recall the 'singular air of reluctance or compulsion' with which the signalman had pointed out the path. It's also long enough for Dickens to be able to insert that sentence, amplifying our sense of unease by adding vacuum after vacuum through words alone.

Dickens takes pains to describe the exact manner in which the signalman is waiting for the narrator:

'He had his left hand at his chin, and that left elbow rested on his right hand, crossed over his breast. His attitude was one of such expectation and watchfulness that I stopped a moment, wondering at it.'

What is this man thinking? Why point out these details to us except to undermine any certainties we might be trying to establish? Thus the mystery vacuums are increased.

Then we are hit over the space of only a few lines by a disproportionate number of gloomy adjectives, nouns and verbs: 'dark', 'sallow', 'heavy', 'solitary', 'dismal', 'dripping-wet', 'jagged', 'crooked', 'dungeon', 'terminating', 'gloomy', 'gloomier', 'black', 'massive', 'barbarous', 'depressing', 'forbidding', 'earthy', 'deadly', 'cold', 'rushed', 'struck' and 'chill'. Dickens the master author uses words like bullets. The cumulative effect is to make the narrator feel 'as if I had left the natural world.' And so, to a lesser but nevertheless marked degree, do we. Natural expectations and comfortable settings have been shot down.

This is again using words as vacuum-generators. They stack up, adding to our sense of something missing, a gap, a darkness, embodied in the tunnel itself.

The narrator's attempt to strike up a 'normal' conversation fails at first:

'To such purpose I spoke to him; but I am far from sure of the terms I used; for, besides that I am not happy in opening any conversation, there was something in the man that daunted me.'

And by now the narrator has been so bombarded by discomfiting sensations and responses that a 'monstrous thought' comes into his mind that 'as I perused the fixed eyes and the saturnine face,

that this was a spirit, not a man. I have speculated since, whether there may have been infection in his mind.'

The unsettling vacuums created by the precise use of language has the effect of stirring deeper, basic vacuums - we are on the edge of sanity itself. A series of rapid-fire questions and answers dispel these forebodings, but nervously:

In my turn, I stepped back. But in making the action, I detected in his eyes some latent fear of me. This put the monstrous thought to flight.

'You look at me,' I said, forcing a smile, 'as if you had a dread of me.'

'I was doubtful,' he returned, 'whether I had seen you before.'

'Where?'

He pointed to the red light he had looked at.

'There?' I said.

Intently watchful of me, he replied (but without sound), 'Yes.'

'My good fellow, what should I do there? However, be that as it may, I never was there, you may swear.'

'I think I may,' he rejoined. 'Yes; I am sure I may.'

What follows is a nerve-steadying couple of paragraphs of ordinariness: the signalman describes his life in the signal-box in a manner that we might expect. His life, in fact, has for the most part 'shaped itself into that form, and he had grown used to it.' In the room there are the ordinary things one might expect to find in a signal-box: a fire, a desk for an official book, a telegraphic instrument with its dial, face, and needles, and a little bell. The narrator observes the signalman 'to be remarkably exact and vigilant, breaking off his discourse at a syllable, and remaining silent until what he had to do was done' and concludes that 'I should have set this man down as one of the safest of men to be employed in that capacity' except for one thing.

Dickens, settling us down with these comforting associations, which serve to partly fill the vacuums he has laboured to create, now explodes them. The 'one thing' that deeply concerns the narrator about the signalman is that

while he was speaking to me he twice broke off with a fallen colour, turned his face towards the little bell when it did NOT ring, opened the door of the hut (which was kept shut to exclude the unhealthy damp), and looked out towards the red light near the mouth of the tunnel. On both of those occasions, he came back to the fire with the inexplicable air upon him which I had remarked, without being able to define, when we were so far asunder.

The signalman's following confession that he is 'troubled' would lead, in the hands of a lesser author, to an immediate unfolding of the mysteries which have been brewed for us so far. But Dickens is a master author, and so intrudes a further delay by having the narrator return to his inn for one night, promising to return the next day. There is no need for this overnight delay - the signalman could just have easily told the narrator the whole story then and there. But Dickens knows that adding time into the story - extending the linear vacuum of 'What happens next?' and magnifying the mystery vacuum of 'What is going on?' - at this point serves to increase the suspense.

Suspense is the degree to which vacuums are stretched before any fulfilment occurs.

On his way out, we are given one further chilling prompt when the signalman asks a parting question:

'What made you cry, 'Halloa! Below there!' to-night?'

'Heaven knows,' said I. 'I cried something to that effect—'

'Not to that effect, sir. Those were the very words. I know them well.'

'Admit those were the very words. I said them, no doubt, because I saw you below.'

'For no other reason?'

'What other reason could I possibly have?'

'You had no feeling that they were conveyed to you in any supernatural way?'

'No.'

This interchange of short questions and answers serves to undermine the certainties about the signalman that we may have developed up to this point. It's a technique Dickens uses throughout the story, as when the narrator returns and the signalman begins telling him of his 'trouble':

'That mistake?'

'No. That someone else.'

'Who is it?'

'I don't know.'

'Like me?'

'I don't know. I never saw the face. The left arm is across the face, and the right arm is waved,--violently waved. This way.'

I followed his action with my eyes, and it was the action of an arm gesticulating, with the utmost passion and vehemence, 'For God's sake, clear the way!'

The short, punchy sentences, the tense question-and-answer exchanges, punctuate the mystery vacuum. We listen, with the narrator, to the tale of spectral appearances. We resist, with the narrator, any supernatural conclusions: 'Resisting the slow touch of a frozen finger tracing out my spine, I showed him how that this figure must be a deception of his sense of sight'. But these 'rational' interruptions are a device that Dickens is using to amplify the tension. We are glued by the powerful mystery vacuum to the signalman's tale now, our remaining resistance mirrored explicitly by the narrator:

But he would beg to remark that he had not finished.

I asked his pardon, and he slowly added these words, touching my arm, --

'Within six hours after the Appearance, the memorable accident on this Line happened, and within ten hours the dead and wounded were brought along through the tunnel over the spot where the figure had stood.'

A disagreeable shudder crept over me, but I did my best against it.

Again, the narrator interrupts; again, the signalman says he has not finished: "This," he said, again laying his hand upon my arm, and glancing over his shoulder with hollow eyes, 'was just a year ago.'

The contact between narrator and signalman is now physical. And again we have a series of nervous questions:

'Did it cry out?'

'No. It was silent.'

'Did it wave its arm?'

'No. It leaned against the shaft of the light, with both hands before the face. Like this.'

Once more I followed his action with my eyes. It was an action of mourning. I have seen such an attitude in stone figures on tombs.

The reference to tombs is, of course, not accidental: it is an image which taps into basic vacuums of life and death. When the signalman tells of further apparitions and of the "beautiful young lady" who "had died instantaneously in one of the compartments, and was brought in here, and laid down on this floor between us" the reaction has become a physical action:

Involuntarily I pushed my chair back, as I looked from the boards at which he pointed to himself.

'True, sir. True. Precisely as it happened, so I tell it you.'

Now that the narrator's reasoning powers have failed him, Dickens turns up the volume literally by having the setting step in to create further vacuum intensity: 'I could think of nothing to say, to any purpose, and my mouth was very dry. The wind and the wires took up the story with a long lamenting wail.'

Note that the sound isn't a 'long, humming crescendo' or a 'long, buzzing background noise': Dickens is too much of a master author not to make use of further imagery associated with basic vacuums of life and loss: it's a 'lamenting wail' that the narrator hears.

The narrator is now determined to act. He persuades the signalman to look with him for the ghost at the tunnel mouth, the physical embodiment of the vacuums of the story:

I opened the door, and stood on the step, while he stood in the doorway. There was the Danger-light. There was the dismal mouth of the tunnel. There were the high, wet stone walls of the cutting. There were the stars above them.

Short, crisp, statements that serve to punctuate the scene - each one a short breath long. When the narrator leaves again, unsure of what to do, his discomfiture has a point to focus on: 'That I more than once looked back at the red light as I ascended the pathway, that I did not like the red light, and that I should have slept but poorly if my bed had been under it, I see no reason to conceal.' But Dickens has now added a deeper, moral dimension, further drawing in the deeper level of basic vacuum power. The narrator - and to that degree we as readers - are concerned about responsibilities and outcomes:

But what ran most in my thoughts was the consideration how ought I to act, having become the recipient of this disclosure? I had proved the man to be intelligent, vigilant, painstaking, and exact; but how long might he remain so, in his state of mind? Though in a subordinate position, still he held a most important trust, and would I (for instance) like to stake my own life on the chances of his continuing to execute it with precision?

Having laboured to create an effective mystery, Dickens now points us in the direction of an uncertainty: while we wonder about the nature, origin and meaning of the spectre, we are now anxious about the consequences. These are distinctly different vectors: the mystery vacuum 'glues' us to the story; the moral vacuum suggested by the question of responsibility drives us forward towards a resolution of some kind. Together they intensify the tension.

Tension is measured by the size of the vacuums created before fulfilment occurs.

When we see what the narrator sees on his return to the site the next day, we experience a chill:

Before pursuing my stroll, I stepped to the brink, and mechanically looked down, from the point from which I had first seen him. I cannot describe the thrill that seized upon me, when, close at the mouth of the tunnel, I saw the appearance of a man, with his left sleeve across his eyes, passionately waving his right arm.

What follows is a resolution of events, fulfilling the linear vacuum of 'What happens next?' - the train has run over the signalman, killing him; the 'ghost' was a kind of premonition - but not a resolution of the mystery vacuum of 'What is going on?'. The narrator explicitly has no answers to those - true Ironies never do - and concludes by pointing out that the words he attached (but never voiced) to the gestures of the spectre - 'Below there! Look out! Look out! For God's sake, clear the way!' - turn out to be the words actually used by the train driver in his attempt to warn the signalman. This final, chilling reminder connects us through the narrator to the events of the tale and removes any kind of rational conjecture we might have had: how could the workings of the narrator's own mind have been so uncannily reflected in the events we have witnessed?

Our mystery vacuum is filled by an icy cold vision which effectively explains nothing. It is Dickens' final masterstroke in a triumph of short story telling, pushing the finger of the spectre not only before our faces as readers but into our very souls.

Whereas successful authors of Comedies or Epics employ the vacuums of disharmony, disappointment, lack of fulfilment, to set the reader up for the 'joy' of a restored harmony and filled vacuum, authors of Tragedies and Ironies like 'The Signalman' use the same methods, but, while they naturally wrap up the linear vacuums of the plot, bringing their tales to some kind of conclusion, they leave the reader with unanswered questions and only partly fill, or hint at, the fulfilment of mystery vacuums.

Emotional ups and downs in stories are really the outward signs of vacuum manipulation on many levels.

A whole further book could be written just about Stage 5, the use of vacuums at word and sentence level. Stage 5's stylistic techniques convey the full power of the bridging vacuums of Stage 4, which create a channel to the structural plot and character vacuums of your basic work in Stage 3.

Putting all this together, you are no longer merely 'writing ideas down on the page', you are engineering a piece of fiction using precise tools.

A story is an attention-capturing device which uses words and vacuums - and you now know how to build one.

Mechanics

Note a key mechanical fact: most readers read at the pace of about one page every two minutes. Some are faster, of course, and some slower, but experience suggests that two minutes per page is about average. So, three minutes probably takes your reader somewhere onto page two. Those first two pages are where something vital needs to happen if you are going to continue to keep the reader's attention.

You need to have effective vacuums at work in the first two pages, ideally in your opening sentence.

Then you need to use the same principles throughout your work. All great authors do this, from Hemingway to Tolkien, from Shakespeare to the Beowulf poet: precise word choice, precise plot structuring, rhythmic back and forth, strength and weakness, horror and comedy, emphasis and non-emphasis, long sentences, short sentences, from the level of words all the way up to the work as a whole.

If you create the ongoing presence of vacuums in your work, starting at a word level, progressing up through a sentence level and then within paragraphs, you will keep a firm grip on your reader's 'hand' throughout the work. Contrast creates vacuums - stark contrast increases pace, subtle contrast decreases pace, ridiculous contrast creates humour, expected contrast create seriousness.

Create vacuums on every level.

Putting It Together

Almost everything that people have said about literature through the ages fits into Stage 5.

That's because Stage 5 is the actual 'interface' between the written work and the reader. This is where the result of all the structuring and conceptualising and formatting that has been accomplished in the other stages lies in the form of an open page before another person, who then reads it.

As we have seen, vacuums are an incredibly useful tool or analogy to help you develop your ideas as a writer, build character constructs that actually grip and attract reader attention, as well as assisting you in creating plots which really drive the reader through the text. And now we can see that vacuums also operate at page and sentence level.

Vacuums used subtly and consistently can create, consciously or otherwise, precise structures and recurring patterns at sentence level.

You will have seen that by now in any successful work of fiction you have core vacuums, hidden by mystery vacuums, punctuated by moral vacuums, surrounded by linear vacuums and encompassed by character vacuums.

Character vacuums draw the reader in.

Linear vacuums drive the reader on.

Moral vacuums engage the reader's sense of ethics.

Mystery vacuums grip the reader's attention.

And core vacuums deliver the fulfilling moment (or purposely unfulfilling moment in Tragedies and Ironies) at the end.

For example, in *To Kill a Mockingbird* we are drawn in by the way Scout and the other children are portrayed, their character vacuums mainly being composed of an endearing and common child's innocence and ignorance of the world. Then we are gripped by the mystery vacuums surrounding Boo Radley before being driven by the increasingly tense linear vacuum of the unfolding courtroom testimony. Finally, the powerful message of the novel is delivered through the core vacuum when the villain of the story, Bob Ewell, attacks and attempts to kill the children. He fails and Scout's revelation at the end of the novel fulfils us.

In the classic film *It's a Wonderful Life*, the physical and emotional losses of protagonist George Bailey make him attractive to us before we are moved forward by the linear vacuum of his life story and enthralled by the mystery of the angel Clarence's appearance and his alteration of reality. Then we are compelled by the core vacuum as George's threatened arrest and suicide are averted, resulting in our moment of Christmas fulfilment.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennett's mildly ironic view of life captivates us enough so that the linear vacuum of her family's developing connections with the nobility are able to carry us forward while we are intrigued by the mysteries presented by Wickham. Eventually we are engaged enough to be gripped by the core vacuum as family ruin is threatened and then avoided in the final chapters, with the fulfilling marriage of Elizabeth to Mr. Darcy crowning the ending.

Here's a guide to what to do to bring vacuum power into your fiction:

Stage 1: Work out your own goals and dreams as a writer. What do you want to communicate?

Stage 2: Turn those goals into core vacuums for your story - work out themes and a central 'missing thing' which wilful readers through the tale to its conclusion.

Stage 3: Go through any existing fiction you have and write in character, linear, mystery and moral vacuums to boost the energy and life in your work.

Stage 4: Relate all of the above to your preferred readership - what universal vacuums are they experiencing?

Stage 5: Work over your writing at a word and sentence level to emulate the techniques of the master authors, using a variety of literary techniques to grip and hold and direct your readers' attention.

Work over these stages, back and forth, until your fiction begins to come to life and you can see it blossoming.

End of Week 7!

Congratulations!

You've reached the end of ***Week 7: The Five Stage Fiction Model!***

You're grasping how ideas, characters, plots and writing style complement and support each other in ways that you have probably never imagined.

From the bigger picture of character and plot vacuums, you've glimpsed the world of word-and-sentence level vacuum power, and have studied what the master authors have done in the past to grip you as a reader so that you can replicate it in your own writing.

Week 8: Fulfilling Expectations

The Ending of Your Story

What Your Reader Is Looking For

Providing and Withholding

Great Story Endings

Revising, Aligning and Focusing

You've reached the all-important stage of ending your story!

This week you'll learn more about how to make sure that you wrap things up in a satisfactory way based on what you promised in the beginning.

What exactly is your reader looking for?

Do you want to provide it? Or are you willing to withhold it a little longer and create more of an effect?

We'll take a look at how the great authors in history - and modern screenwriters - ensure maximum impact at the end of their stories.

Then work backwards through your entire story to revise it, align everything and focus on laser-precise results.

WARNING: If you are purchasing this module separately from the rest of the course, welcome, but beware! You won't get the complete benefit of the 'How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published' e-course unless you do the whole thing! By all means extract what wisdom you can from this week's 'episode' - but take the plunge and get the whole course as soon as you can!

You can get it [here](#).

The Ending of Your Story

The end of your story is the point where everything, theoretically, comes together and your original intentions and ideas as an author come full circle to meet in the minds of readers.

You could have just written down an idea, printed it, and distributed it to people at large. But chances are no one would have read it, or, even if they had, they wouldn't have cared.

Instead, you used the medium of fiction to

a) disguise your message

b) draw in readers using vacuum power

and

c) make them care about what you had to say.

'Having faith will help you to overcome apparently overwhelming odds and defeat an apparently invincible opposition' is the simple, reduced message of many works of the Epic genre, for example. George Lucas's *Star Wars* films encapsulate it.

They also

a) disguise the message by dressing it up with a galactic setting and science fiction figures and images

b) draw in readers using the character vacuums of Luke Skywalker, the linear vacuums of a fast-paced plot, the moral vacuums that the protagonist must face, and the core vacuum of his final confrontation with his father

and

c) make audiences care about what George Lucas had to say by establishing a series of vacuums leading up to the core vacuum which involves the destiny not only of worlds but of characters who have something missing and are desperate to find it.

The same thing happens with Tolkien's Epic trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien could have simply scribbled a philosophic idea on a piece of paper, along the lines of 'Pride is blind and faith will see things through'. Instead, he

a) disguised his message by devising a whole world full of characters, races, archetypes and images

b) drew in readers using the character vacuums of Frodo Baggins, the linear vacuums of a quest plot, the moral vacuums that Frodo and other characters have to confront, the core vacuum of a mountain-top failure at the climax of the tale

and

c) made readers care about what he had to say by establishing a series of vacuums leading up to the core vacuum which involved the destiny not only of the whole of Middle-earth but of Frodo and Sam and other characters with recognisable losses and wounds, physical and mental.

Shakespeare takes the same approach in *Macbeth*: rather than pen a poem or some other piece of writing warning against the dangers of unrestrained ambition, he

a) cloaks his intention by devising two powerful characters in particular, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, who embody powerful psychological desires

b) attracts audiences using their character vacuums as well as the linear and mystery vacuums of a dark and haunted plot, and the moral vacuums that Macbeth ponders, as well as the core vacuum of a confrontation with the truth

and

c) makes audiences care about what happens by coalescing everything into a core vacuum which involves the destiny of a nation but also the failure of an individual.

In an Irony, the message of the author is communicated by *not* filling the core vacuum at the end. J. B. Priestley, for example does this in his play *An Inspector Calls* by

a) embodying his thoughts in the characters of the Birling family, each possessing a psychological vacuum which a mysterious inspector brings into the open

b) drawing in audience sympathies with a powerful mystery vacuum that unfolds as the linear vacuum of the plot proceeds to explore each character vacuum one at a time and which is then *not* fully explained or resolved

and

c) compelling the audience to care about what happens by touching on a core vacuum which is left starkly empty at the end but which embraces the whole of society while also involving the very human lives of a family.

Comedies and romances follow the same pattern. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is summed up in its title, but the author fleshes out her thought by

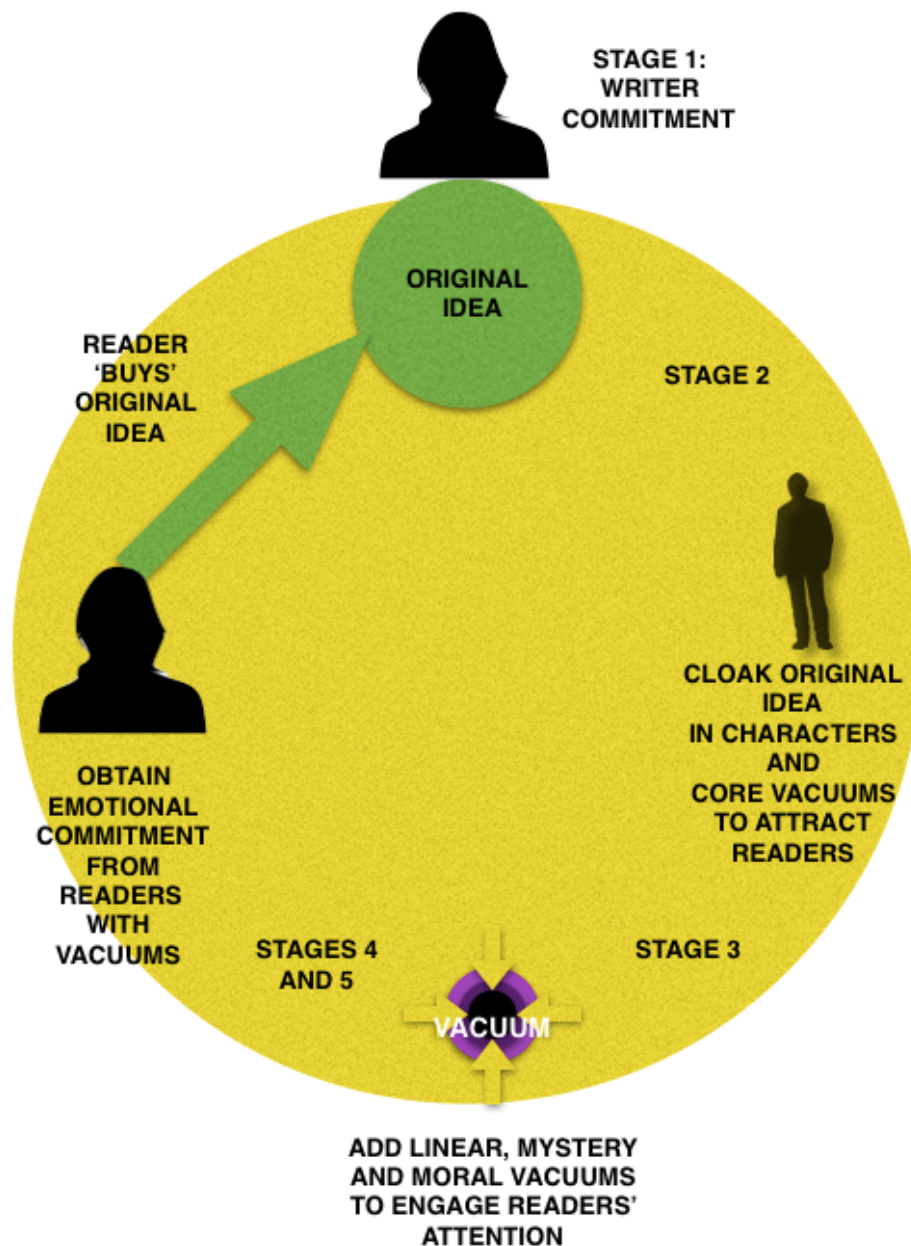
a) hiding her intentions temporarily behind the screen of a set of carefully-crafted characters

b) attracting readers using delicately-drawn character vacuums and then powerful linear, mystery vacuums and moral vacuums leading to a core vacuum which involves the reputation and future of a whole family

and

c) engaging the audience's compassion by making that core vacuum transform the individuals concerned.

All genres, all kinds of story, all using the same basic idea: take a profound thought or intention, disguise it with the things called 'characters', and play out a game of engaging reader and audience attention until, by the time the story approaches its end, the message is 'bought' in its entirety.



Can you do this with your own fiction?

Make some notes along the following lines:

a) take a thought or idea that you would like to communicate to others and encapsulate it in a character vacuum and a core vacuum. Think of Luke Skywalker, Frodo Baggins, Macbeth, the Birling family, Elizabeth Bennett or any other protagonist with whom you are familiar as a reader. Make your own protagonist a mirror of your thought. Think of the clash with the Emperor in *Star Wars*, the confrontation on Mount Doom in *The Lord of the Rings*, the final battle of *Macbeth*, the mysterious ending of *An Inspector Calls*, the romantic conclusion of *Pride and Prejudice*. Make your story a pathway to your intended effect.

b) devise linear, mystery and moral vacuums which align with and enhance your character and core vacuums above and string them together into a story.

c) compel readers to care by having your characters experience real vacuum power, real loss, real pain, and then either fill their vacuums (if you're writing an Epic or a Comedy or romance) or leave them empty on purpose (if you're writing a Tragedy or an Irony).

That might all sound too simple. But you now have the tools and the insight to do it.

Make some loose sketches of how this might all be done with your fiction.

You're learning from the master authors when you do.

What Your Reader Is Looking For

Why do great stories get read again and again?

Surely once you've read a story once, you know what happens and don't need to read it again?

Now that you know about vacuums, these questions are easier to answer.

Great stories are read again and again because they have the power to evoke great vacuums - concerns about deep human questions, about the loss of love or companionship, about the risks involved with living and dying - and then they either fill those vacuums or leave them unfulfilled in a meaningful way.

Reading a story should not just be a case of 'finding out what happened'. That only addresses the linear vacuum's question of 'What happens next?' the most primitive of the forces that drive stories forward. It's not even a question of 'finding out what's really going on', as this is only to do with the mystery vacuum's puzzles which most stories resolve as they finish. Even the ethical question of 'What's the right thing to do?' is usually clear by the time a story comes to a close. These are the components of the engine which move a reader forward; they are the bones of a plot which works.

But for a story to be read and re-read it must contain *core vacuums* which are recognisable and re-creatable, questions of good versus evil, of light and dark, of life and death. The author decides whether these questions will be answered: if they are, then the story becomes an Epic or a Comedy or romance; if they are not, the story is transformed into a Tragedy or an Irony.

Yes, a reader is looking to find out 'what happens next' as they read, but only in the simplest stories is that all that they are looking for; yes, they want to know 'what's really going on' and 'what is the right thing to do' but ultimately, in successful fiction, readers look for the bigger questions to be both asked again and answered (or not).

This is an almost universal *hunger* amongst readers: they want to experience vacuums and then have the vacuums filled, or left empty in a powerful way. When Gollum loses his footing atop Mount Doom and the Quest of the Ring is brought to a close, when Luke Skywalker hits the target with his torpedo at the end of *Star Wars: A New Hope*, when George Bailey returns to his former existence in *It's a Wonderful Life*, the 'goosebump' sensations are the physiological equivalent of a core vacuum being filled. When we are left with a cold emptiness as we are at the end of *An Inspector Calls* or the film *Fight Club*, the chill we feel is the chill of a vacuum being carefully left empty.

Readers around the world want those sensations. One could almost say that fiction readers are *addicted* to those sensations. Books are read and re-read, new books are bought and pored over, volumes and volumes of fiction are published either in a print form or electronically every day all over the planet to satisfy this craving. By becoming a fiction writer, you are setting yourself up as a purveyor of sensation: not physical sensation necessarily, but intellectual, emotional and sometimes spiritual sensation, certainly.

You may have found so far that your own efforts to write fiction, without knowing any of this data, have wandered all over the place in an attempt to provide yourself with some kind of feedback, some kind of 'goosebump'. If you haven't been able to produce this for yourself, your chances of producing it for others is probably limited. But now you know and you have the tools to produce plenty of the kinds of things that readers are looking for.

It's up to you to decide now what kind of effect you really want to create with the tools you have to hand.

Providing and Withholding

As we have covered, filling a vacuum provides the reader with a particular sensation.

Withholding that filling also provides a reader with a sensation.

Filling vacuums generally produces stories which uplift or end on a positive note.

Withholding the vacuum-filler generally ends up with a story which introverts, chills or suggests negativity.

Both are valid and both can provide insight into the human condition, or whatever effect you are trying to communicate.

There are a few of 'rules of thumb' here which may be useful to you:

- i) Any story in which it seems unclear whether or not a vacuum has been filled is either a) an Irony or b) a poorly written story.
- ii) Any story which ends in marriage is probably a romance or Comedy.
- iii) The genre we call 'Horror' fits into the Irony category. It usually begins with death and gets worse, ending up in a nightmare scenario.
- iv) Ironies often end with the reader having to make a decision about whether or not there should be an uplifting conclusion or not. Thus, at the end of Alan Moore's famous graphic novel *Watchmen*, for example, the global conspiracy is either about to be exposed or is to remain hidden, depending on how the reader interprets the last panel. Similarly, in Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil*, set in a frightening dystopian future, the protagonist either escapes his torture at the hands of a totalitarian regime, or is just fantasising about escaping, based on how the last scene is interpreted by the audience.
- v) Epic actions follow a simple linear pattern of cause and effect, moving forward in time.
- vi) In Tragedies, flashbacks or internal dialogues become more acceptable. That's because Tragedies tend to feature internal, psychological vacuums which can usually only be glimpsed in this way.
- vii) In the Irony quarter, actions can appear inconsistent and inappropriate.
- viii) Drawing maps and diagrams can help you to organise your fiction visually.

Genre Checklist

If you are not clear whether you want to provide or withhold - that is, write an Epic or Comedy or a Tragedy or Irony - you might find this checklist useful. It lists features of a story and then in brackets the genre that the story is most likely to fit:

1. Does your story end with the protagonist winning (though possibly injured or dying) and most things resolved? (Epic)
2. Is the old man in your story truly wise and knowledgeable? (Epic)
3. Is the quest or conflict between clearly defined Good and Evil sides? (Epic)
4. Is there a sense of some 'higher power' at work for Good, behind the scenes? (Epic)
5. Is there a comic companion who is loyal and around whom key events take place? (Epic)

6. Does your protagonist have an outward scar or wound of some kind? (Epic)
7. At the end of your story, is the protagonist cast out of society and dead? (Tragedy)
8. Is the old man in your story wise and knowledgeable but powerless or outcast? (Tragedy)
9. Is the quest or conflict between sides which can no longer be clearly defined as Good and Evil? (Tragedy)
10. Is there a sense of some 'higher power' at work behind the scenes, but you're not sure whether it is working for Good or not? (Tragedy)
11. Is there a comic companion who is loyal but who is foolish or irresponsible or who perishes? (Tragedy)
12. Does your protagonist have an inner psychological scar or flaw of some kind? (Tragedy)
13. Does your story end with massive uncertainty or horror? (Irony)
14. Is the old man in your story twisted in some way? (Irony)
15. Is the quest or conflict hard to discern? (Irony)
16. Is there no sense of some 'higher power' at work other than random chaos? (Irony)
17. Is there a comic companion who is foolish or who dies? (Irony)
18. Does your protagonist behave in a crippled manner in some way? (Irony)
19. Does your story end with a marriage and happiness all round? (Comedy)
20. Is the old man in your story supposed to be wise and knowledgeable but actually a figure of fun or ridicule? (Comedy)
21. Is the quest or conflict light and funny? (Comedy)
22. Is there a sense of some kind of 'luck' at work, behind the scenes? (Comedy)
23. Is the protagonist a somewhat comic figure? (Comedy)
24. Does your protagonist have a foolish idiosyncrasy of some kind? (Comedy)

Great Story Endings

In finishing your story, you are trying to do two basic things:

1. Make the ending seem like the consequence of everything that has happened so far - in other words, not suddenly resolve everything by have it 'all be a dream' or have events occur which make no sense on the context of what the reader has come to see as the story's world

and

2. Surprise the reader.

This can be a tricky act to pull off, especially with audiences and readers growing more and more sophisticated as they are exposed to far more fiction than was the case, say, fifty years ago.

You have (or should have) created a series of linear vacuums as the basic outline of your plot: these need to come to a close in a fairly logical way so that the reader feels comfortable knowing 'what happened next'.

You have (or should have) created a series of mystery vacuums as the 'glue' to hold your reader's attention: these need to be explained to some degree (in an Epic or Comedy) so that the reader feels 'released' from any further mystery, or left unexplained in a satisfying way (in a Tragedy or Irony) so that the reader feels intrigued and captivated beyond the confines of the story.

If the ending isn't a vacuum-related inevitable result of earlier events, the reader can feel cheated; conversely, if the ending is plainly obvious, the reader can feel cheated.

As author William Goldman said, 'The key to all story endings is to give the audience what it wants, but not in the way it expects.'

Conventional creative writing guides and courses will talk a lot about 'conflict' in fiction. Conflicts in a novel, internal and external, converge at the climax, they will say, with the protagonist fighting for a prize and either winning it (perhaps at great cost) or losing it (perhaps with consolation). This victory (or defeat) delivers emotional and physical consequences for the characters. With what we know about vacuum power, this looks a little different: the climax is *when the character and plot vacuums merge* - the protagonist has his or her vacuum filled or not; most of what we are used to calling 'characters' are either fulfilled or left empty at the end.

Let's run a few examples through these requirements based on some of the works we've been looking at throughout the course.

Needless to say, there will be plenty of spoilers ahead!

At the conclusion of the original *Star Wars* trilogy, in the film *Return of the Jedi*, Darth Vader takes Luke Skywalker to the new Death Star to meet the Emperor, who is intent on turning him to the dark side. Luke's major character vacuum, the thing which has stuck our attention to him the most throughout the trilogy, is his loss of his father whom he discovers is Darth Vader and his hope that he has a correct perception of the man behind the mask and can therefore recover Vader as a father to be loved.

The Emperor reveals to Luke that the Death Star is fully operational and the Rebel fleet have fallen into a trap. He tempts Luke to give in to his anger and join him, in effect rejecting Luke's character vacuum (as antagonists do) and promoting an ongoing inner emptiness, a powerful 'dark vacuum'. In the film's terminology, this is captured by the expression 'If you only knew the power of the Dark Side': what that means is the power of an ongoing, deep psychological loss creating vacuum power for that character. Luke, partly falling prey to this temptation, engages Vader in a lightsaber duel, during which Vader senses that Luke has a sister and suggests turning her to the dark side. This pushes Luke to the limit - increasing his vacuum power to breaking point, in other words - and he manages to overpower his father, severing Vader's prosthetic right hand. However, the sight of

the severed artificial hand triggers in Luke an awareness that he might become like his father, a walking vacuum. Luke rejects that outcome, and refuses to kill Vader. There is a moment of eucatastrophe. He fills his own vacuum, in effect, by saying 'I am a Jedi, like my father before me'.

Vader, observing the Emperor's consequent attack on his son, has an internal struggle with his own dormant character vacuum and 'finds himself' in a similar fashion to Luke, turning on the Emperor and destroying him, even though he dies in the process.

With the core vacuum filled, the rebels celebrate their victory over the Empire, and Luke, now whole, smiles as he sees the ghosts of Obi-Wan, Yoda, and his father Anakin, all of whom have no remaining character vacuums, watching over them.

The ending of the trilogy seems like the consequence of everything that has happened. The 'surprise' for the reader comes in two parts: Luke's eucatastrophic decision to reject the Emperor's perspective and instead become a Jedi, and Vader's consequent parallel rejection. Knowledge of how stories work might have led an audience to suspect that at least one of these was coming, but the odds against either of them happening seem overwhelming and therefore they sneak up on the viewer. This is no accident: the odds are overwhelming at the end of Epics like this precisely in order to make the vacuum-filling moment as revelatory as possible.

Linear vacuums have driven the *Star Wars* plot along at a fast pace: in *Return of the Jedi* alone, we have had the dramatic rescue of Hans Solo ('Will they be caught?' 'How will they escape?' 'Can they all survive the execution?' and so forth) forming almost a film-within-a-film as the first act, followed by the breathless attack on the second Death Star with two plot strands keeping us guessing right to the last moment. These are resolved in typical Epic fashion: the Death Star is destroyed, Luke saves his father, everyone is at peace (including the 'villain' Darth Vader at the end).

The mystery vacuum created by Yoda's enigmatic statement 'There is another' in the preceding film *The Empire Strikes Back* is also answered; the question as to whether or not there is actually any good in Vader is resolved. The brilliant compression of Luke's character vacuum, the moral vacuum of a choice between good and evil, and the core vacuum of the plot in that final scene before the Emperor make those last minutes of the film resonate powerfully, and gives them enough depth to be watched again and again.

Yes, conflict has converged at the climax, the protagonist fighting for a prize (his father's soul and the triumph of the Rebellion) and winning it (at the cost of much pain and his father's life). Victory delivers emotional and physical consequences for the characters. But in fact the climax is a merging of character and plot vacuums. The successful interweaving of all of this is why *Star Wars* is not only a successful film franchise but a cultural phenomenon.

The Lord of the Rings, as an Epic, similarly achieves a mastery of vacuum power. In the final volume, *The Return of the King*, Dark Lord Sauron unleashes a heavy assault upon the forces of good. A large array of characters experience growing vacuum power: the Steward of Gondor, Denethor, deceived by Sauron, commits suicide in despair; Aragorn feels compelled to take the Paths of the Dead; meanwhile, Sam rescues Frodo from the tower of Cirith Ungol, and they set out across Mordor towards Mount Doom, the physical representation of the core vacuum of the tale. Once there, Frodo is at the last moment unable to resist the Ring any longer and claims it for himself. However, in a eucatastrophic moment, Gollum, the depraved creature, a walking vacuum and shadow protagonist, seizes the Ring by biting off the finger on which Frodo wears it before losing his footing and falling into the fire, taking the Ring with him. The Quest is completed: Sauron is undermined, his chief servants, the Nazgûl, perish, and his armies are thrown into such disarray that Aragorn's forces emerge victorious.

As the core vacuum is filled, so are most of the others: Aragorn is crowned Elessar, King of Arnor and Gondor, and marries his long-time love, Arwen, daughter of Elrond; the hobbits, upon returning home, raise a rebellion and overthrow Saruman. Merry and Pippin become heroes, Sam marries Rosie Cotton and uses his gifts from Galadriel to help heal the Shire. Frodo, though, has not fully had his character vacuum filled and remains wounded in body and spirit before making the journey to the Blessed Land across the Sea, where it is implied he will be fully healed. After Rosie's death,

Sam passes on the account of Bilbo's adventures and the War of the Ring as witnessed by the hobbits and goes west over the Sea himself, the last of the Ring-bearers.

Tolkien's work is so thoroughly detailed and meticulously crafted that the extended ending certainly seems like the consequence of everything that has happened before, and yet he is still able to surprise the reader: Frodo, who has remained steadfast to his quest throughout the tale, suddenly on Mount Doom is unable to do what he came so far to do, and it is Gollum's 'accidental' death which accomplishes the destruction of the Ring upon which Sauron's power is based.

All of the many linear vacuums are filled, from the kingship of the Two Kingdoms down to the marriage of Samwise Gamgee.

The major mystery vacuum in the novel is intriguingly what is occurring in Frodo's mind. We see Sam and Gollum as external players, symbolising to some extent the internal psychological struggle with vacuums which is taking place inside Frodo, but we rarely get a glimpse directly into Frodo's mind after his experience upon the hill of Amon Hen, right back in the first volume of the trilogy. Tolkien takes us right up to the brink of the Cracks of Doom before revealing that the hobbit has lost his resilience and has effectively been overwhelmed by the character vacuum within, constantly exacerbated by the power of the One Ring. Released by Gollum's attack, Frodo returns to himself immediately and mystery disappears: 'In all that ruin of the world for the moment [Sam] felt only joy, great joy. The burden was gone. His master had been saved; he was himself again, he was free'. The protagonist has won (at the cost of more physical harm); character and plot vacuums have merged.

What happens at the end of a Tragedy? Vacuums are not fulfilled, emptinesses and questions are supposed to remain. *Macbeth* gives us a typical example:

In the final act of Shakespeare's play, Lady Macbeth enters in a trance with a candle in her hand, like the embodied vacuum typical of many female companions in stories. She tries to wash off imaginary bloodstains from her hands, and unconsciously gives clues as to the terrible things she knows she and her husband have done. She leaves, and the observing doctor and gentlewoman marvel at her descent into madness. Meanwhile, in England, Macduff is informed by Ross that his 'castle is surprised; [his] wife and babes / Savagely slaughter'd' (IV.iii.204–5) and his own character vacuum is magnified to the point where it motivates him into action. He vows revenge and together with Prince Malcolm, Duncan's son, and an English army, he rides to Scotland to challenge Macbeth's forces. Before Macbeth's opponents arrive, Macbeth receives news that Lady Macbeth has killed herself, causing him to sink further into the deep psychological vacuum which has haunted and motivated him all along. Clinging to straws as the enemy advances upon him, he boasts that he has no reason to fear Macduff, for he cannot be killed by any man born of woman. Macduff declares that he was 'from his mother's womb / Untimely ripp'd' (V.8.15–16) - that is, born by Caesarean section - and Macbeth realises too late that he has been deceived by the witches' words. His chief motivation is revealed to be worthless. He continues to fight but Macduff kills and beheads him. Malcolm discusses briefly how order has been restored, declares his benevolent intentions for the country and invites all to see him crowned king.

Shakespeare remorselessly makes the ending the consequence of everything that has happened earlier while managing to surprise the audience with such things as the soldiers chopping down trees to make it seem as though a wood has moved, or Macduff's birth by Caesarean section, or, indeed, Macbeth's final decision to fight Macduff despite the overwhelming likelihood of his own death.

Linear vacuums - 'What will happen next?' - are resolved as the impending battles are fought and the protagonist Macbeth comes face to face with his shadow protagonist Macduff. The dark mystery vacuums of the witches' prophecies are one by one unravelled and revealed as tricks; the audience can feel 'released' from their mystery, while still being fascinated by the enigmatic nature of the witches. Character and plot vacuums have come together, but as this is a Tragedy, they are left intentionally unfulfilled: though Scotland has a new king, Macbeth dies a rejected failure.

The same patterns to do with endings translate across to the genre of Irony, as we will see by examining Priestley's play *An Inspector Calls*.

In the play's final act, the audience is aware that, as a result of the mysterious inspector's interrogations, each member of the Birling family and Gerald Croft have contributed to Eva Smith's despondency and suicide. Inspector Goole reminds the Birlings that actions have consequences and that, 'If men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish', before leaving. The Inspector is the 'old man with a stick', the attention commander who directs the other characters (and the audience) to the core vacuum which powers the tale, but, as this is an Irony, his advice is not respected. The family begins to suspect that there is no 'Inspector Goole' on the police force at all, and, by implication, that there may be no dead girl. Confirming all this, the older Birlings and Gerald celebrate, with Arthur dismissing the evening's events as a clever trick. The younger family members, Sheila and Eric, however, realise the error of their ways and promise to reform. The play ends abruptly with a telephone call, taken by Arthur, who reports that a young woman has died, a suspected case of suicide by disinfectant, and that the local police are on their way to question the family. The true identity of the inspector is never explained, but we are left with the ramifications: the Birlings will be disgraced publicly when news of their involvement in Eva's suicide is revealed.

Priestley's ending, though enigmatic, follows a series of unremittingly logical events, each of which depends on the one before. And yet he pulls off a mammoth surprise for the audience by twisting the entire story at least twice and leaving us in mystery. Yes, all the linear vacuums are wrapped up with the strict methodology of a police investigation. We are left in no doubt as to what happens next in plot terms. But with the power of an Irony, the central mystery is left unexplained in a satisfying way and the audience is captivated beyond the confines of the story.

The play's real protagonist doesn't even appear on stage. Eva Smith, fighting for some personal dignity and freedom, loses her life with savage emotional and physical consequences for both herself and the other characters. Character and plot vacuums have merged but are left empty at the end.

Now with Comedy or romance, we see vacuums being filled again - namely the vacuum of the female companion fulfilled by marriage to the warrior companion archetype.

After dramatic events involving the other members of the Bennett family, in which their reputation is effectively salvaged by Mister Darcy, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Darcy's aunt and the chief antagonist of *Pride and Prejudice*, pays an unexpected visit, having heard a rumour that Elizabeth will marry Darcy. She attempts to persuade Elizabeth to agree not to marry, believing that Elizabeth is beneath her nephew. Elizabeth - much like Luke Skywalker in front of the Emperor - refuses her demands. Disgusted, Lady Catherine departs, promising that the marriage can never take place, but later, in a rare moment alone, Darcy and Elizabeth have the conversation in which all the vacuums of the novel are resolved. He renews his proposal of marriage and is promptly accepted. The novel closes with a chapter which summarises the remaining lives of the main characters.

Austen's plot is a sequence of gentle linear vacuums, logical and measured. She pulls off her surprise for her readers because she has been so restrained in revealing their innermost thoughts that Darcy's revelations at the end and his proposal are like unwrapping a present. Elizabeth Bennett is the female companion and protagonist and ends up with the warrior archetype who, in typical form, has emerged from the shadows and become a leader. Character and plot vacuums have merged and are fulfilled in marriage.

In this way, Epic, Tragedy, Irony and Comedy or romance are shown to have mastered the patterns of vacuums required to attract readers or audiences, glue attention, drive things forward and bring things together in a vacuum-filling (or not) climax.

Revising, Aligning and Focusing

How can you apply all of this to your own fiction?

A key approach would be to work out the ending first, then work backwards.

If you have an idea of the effect you want to create - uplifting or chilling - then you can determine which genre pattern best fits your tale. If writing an Epic or Comedy/romance, then apart from making sure that the ending is a consequence of everything that has happened before, devising some kind of surprise for the reader, and resolving all the linear vacuums, you should also bring any mystery to its proper resolution. Your protagonist should win (though at some cost) and your character and plot vacuums should merge in the climax of the story. In Epics and Comedies, loose ends are normally tidied up; if they are not, the reader can be left with doubt and ambiguity which may work against the effect you're trying to create.

If writing a Tragedy or an Irony, then the ending should also be a consequence of everything that has happened before, there should still be some kind of surprise for the reader, all the linear vacuums should be resolved, but mysteries can be left open to interpretation. Your protagonist should lose even though character and plot vacuums still merge in the climax of the story. In Tragedies and Ironies, loose ends are sometimes left open - leaving the reader with doubt and ambiguity is part of, and can enhance, the effect you're trying to create.

Working backwards to make every page of your story support your ending means that you can foreshadow what happens subtly, through events or images or both. Repeating images, motifs and phrases throughout the work, make the reader recall events or characters and enhance the theme of the novel. This acts like another kind of vacuum-filling and satisfies readers' cravings for vacuums and their resolutions.

In striving to make your ending unpredictable, you may want to experiment with writing several alternative endings before choosing the best one. Then go through the whole work and point in various ways to that ending.

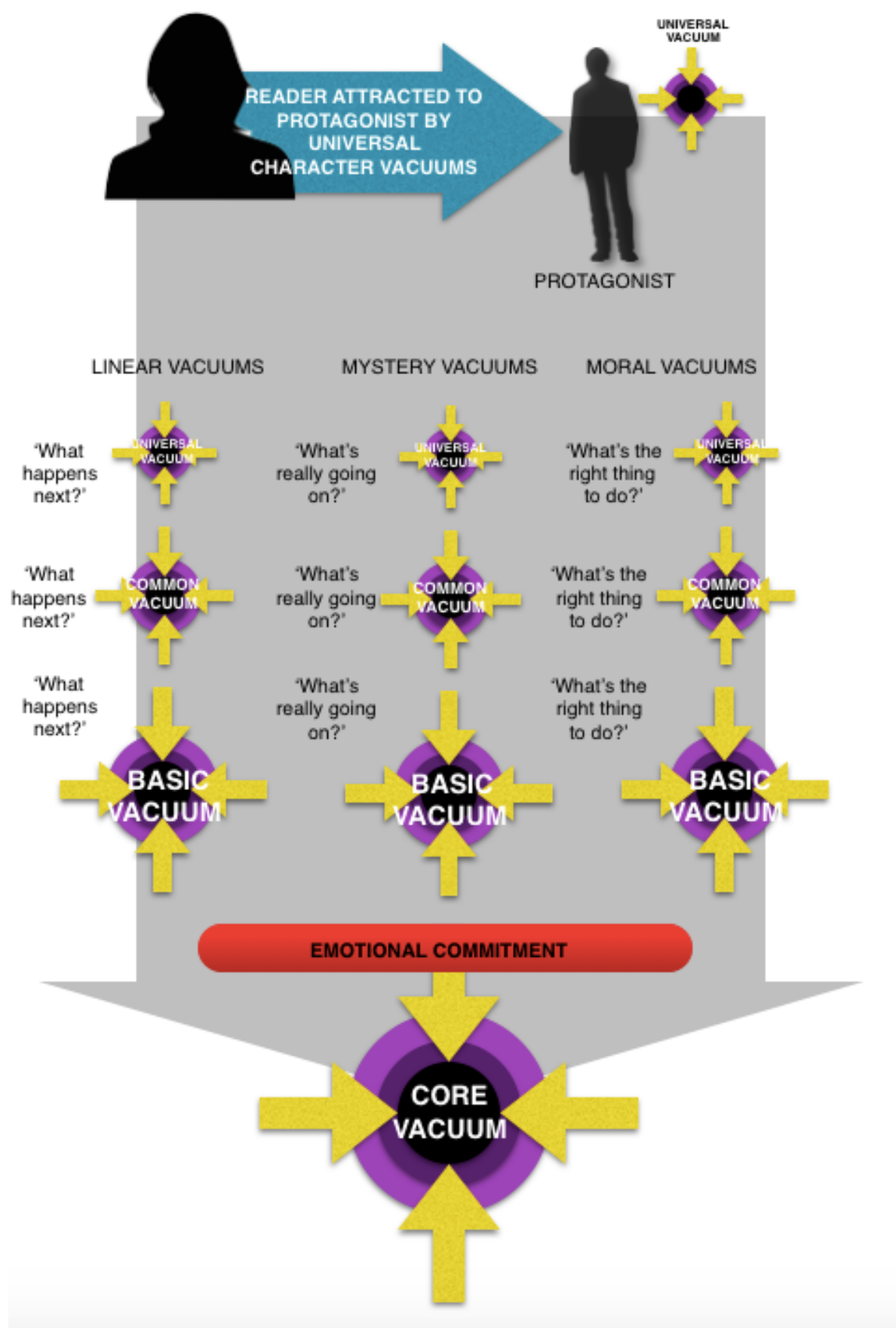
Here are some further specific tips:

1. Don't rush the ending. Take your time and get it right. This is where the reader or audience is satisfied or not. Mess this up and all the rest of your work will have been in vain. The key question to keep you on track here is 'What effect did I want to create in the beginning?'
2. Think big: create big core vacuums, threatening life itself, or at least the limits of the life you have been able to create in your story. In *Star Wars* the future of the galaxy is at stake; in *The Lord of the Rings*, the fate of Middle-earth; in *Macbeth*, the destiny of Scotland; in *An Inspector Calls* and *Pride and Prejudice*, the future of a family is in the balance.
3. Resolve as many loose ends - linear, mystery and moral vacuums - as you can before the core vacuum is tackled, to avoid anti-climax.

At the end of the day, this is the important question you have to answer:

'Are there any reader expectations which I have created which I have failed to fulfil?'

Here again is the key diagram to help you put all this together:



Well done!

You've reached the end of ***Week 8: Fulfilling Expectations!***

You've tackled the all-important stage of ending your story!

You've learned more about

- how to make sure that you wrap things up in a satisfactory way based on what you promised in the beginning.
- what exactly is your reader looking for

And you've asked yourself whether or not you want to provide it, or are you willing to withhold it a little longer and create more of an effect.

You've seen how the great authors in history - and modern screenwriters - ensure maximum impact at the end of their stories.

Now you can work backwards through your entire story to revise it, align everything and focus on laser-precise results.

Week 9: Editing and Formatting a Manuscript

How to Proofread Your Own Work

Independent Publication

Saving Time and Frustration

SUBMISSION TIME

Here you'll learn how to proofread your work and how to set it up so that independent publication is as smooth as possible. There are tricks in this lesson that will save you hours of time and frustration!

Submit your finished work for a final checkover from me and any last recommendations, then get ready to publish!

WARNING: If you are purchasing this module separately from the rest of the course, welcome, but beware! You won't get the complete benefit of the 'How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published' e-course unless you do the whole thing! By all means extract what wisdom you can from this week's 'episode' - but take the plunge and get the whole course as soon as you can!

You can get it [here](#).

How to Proofread Your Own Work

Markets of various kinds all around the world are being transformed by the rise of the internet, and the world of publishing is no exception. The music industry, media enterprises and the retail world are all undergoing a massive process of change and if we can understand why that is, we can see how it will affect publishing and what to expect in the next decade or so.

If we start with a simple enough fundamental, it should be easy enough to grasp what is happening.

And the fundamental is *customers and their needs*.

Before the internet, the only way customers could obtain a piece of music they wished to listen to, or a news item which they wanted to know more about, or anything from the retail sector, including a book, they had certain mechanical obstacles to overcome: they had to actually get to a shop or contact someone physically in order to obtain whatever it was that was going to fulfil their needs. The arrival of the World Wide Web revolutionised this relationship between customers and the sources of the products they required: instead of having to do anything, people could order what they needed with the tiniest, almost involuntary twitch of a finger muscle. Everything else became automatic, including payments.

Traditional publishers - a centrally-controlled 'brand' based in a big building in a major city, full of editors and other decision-makers - face the additional challenge today, as do many others, that the production of the thing that they make, along with its promotion and distribution, has become just as easy as ordering and buying it.

Once considered a 'back-up option' for rejected manuscripts and fringe literature, self publishing is in the process of becoming the mainstream method for authors who want complete financial and creative control over their books. The traditional publisher - along with the traditional music studio, media broadcaster and shop - is fading away, an increasingly irrelevant middle-man in a world of high-speed broadband and direct shipping.

There used to be three categories of self-publishing:

Vanity Publishing: the author simply wanted to record something for family or posterity and to see their words in print or create a book for a limited audience with no intention of generating a viable income from the book.

Credibility Publishing: the author planned to use their book as a marketing tool to give credibility to a professional profile in another field – though profits might be part of the plan, they were not at the core.

Professional Publishing: a full-time or part-time author intended to make his or her book viable as a source of income.

This range has now expanded.

Self published books are still tainted by a slight stigma of amateurism, but this is vanishing fast. Rather, we are entering a golden age of independent publishing, in which formerly centralised skills like editing, marketing and distribution are developing as new 'cottage industries'. The internet is assisting this too: apart from supplying easy channels of communication to potential readers, it also supports the independent author with means of distribution and even training in things like editing and formatting. Many of the new independent publishers offer quick and easy-to-use templates for the most basic tasks: all the author has left to do, really, is write, at least initially.

Nevertheless, there are certain questions that anyone planning to launch as an independent author or publisher need to keep in mind:

1. Is your writing good enough?

It used to be hard to determine this for yourself. Your biggest assets in the field were a wide reading of works of a similar kind, and Time. If you have read enough in the genre and around it, you would develop, almost by osmosis, an ability to tell whether your work is of sufficient commercial quality. And then you needed to have enough time between the completion of a draft and its editing for you to be able to distance yourself from what you have written.

Now, if you have done the preceding modules of this course, you should have realised that *it's not that hard anymore*. The previous 8 weeks of the course have placed in your hands the tools to write stories that work.

You just have to apply them.

Your biggest enemy? Pride.

You may simply override every skill and instinct you may have developed just to 'get the book out there', ignoring or not seeing its faults. You may think that you 'know best', defying the skills and knowledge used by master authors through the centuries.

Or you might just take the tools you've been given and use them to write a story which actually attracts readers and creates the effects you want to create.

2. Has your book been professionally edited?

See above. By all means, given enough time and little pride, you can do a reasonable job of editing your own work. What tends to happen, though, is that you become 'blind' to certain errors and, even worse, unable to see fundamental flaws in the structure or nature of the work. Some tips on how to avoid the pitfalls relating to this are coming up soon.

3. Are the production values, format and cover of your book up to a marketable standard?

There are plenty of tools and even more individual experts out there, available through the internet, to help you with this aspect. As stated, most independent publishers produce automatic templates for most of this kind of thing now. More on this below.

4. Is the price of your book appropriate and have you factored in all of the costs?

You can easily get greedy and think that of course people will pay a premium to read your writing. This is another thing that traditional publishing used to claim the expertise in: how to judge whether something would sell at a profitable level. But you have many options, including electronic publishing, where you can test the water and see for yourself if you have the price right. And there is some data on pricing coming up.

5. Do you have a strong marketing plan?

There's more to being a successful writer than writing a book and then trying to get it read. There's a vital concept involved: *strategy*. Again, this was a field that traditional publishers claimed as their own, but it can be learned. The key thing to keep in mind here is how to make every action count: when you sell one book, are you also planting the seeds for several more? Do you have the channels set up so that the various types of potential customer out there can find you? And are you making yourself as attractive as possible in a number of ways? These and other questions are answered for you below and in forthcoming weeks of this course.

6. Are you a 'publicity-friendly author'?

Many authors are solitary creatures who became authors because through writing they had the best of both worlds: they could shut out society while communicating with it through their work. Traditional publishing took care of the rest - the marketing, the media, the vast amount of communication which takes place after a book is printed. Nowadays, though, the independent route is changing all that. Self-published authors have to be able to present themselves along with

their book if they really want to break through into the big time. That can be quite a trick if you are shy or a sociophobe generally.

Independent authors and publishers need to consider and investigate each of these points before financially committing themselves. But one of the biggest advantages of this new golden age of independent publishing is that the amount of exposure and behind-the-scenes work is also determined by the author rather than anyone else. It all depends what you want and how much work you want to do.

The Secrets of Proofreading

So let's assume that you have something which will attract readers in terms of its fictional content. Before we move over into actually publishing your work, you have to buckle down and do the hard and often tedious work of checking over the mechanics of what you have written. It's unfortunate in a way that the mechanics are a part of what you are trying to do. You may have written an exciting and highly effective tale, full of vacuum power, but just as the work reaches the reader you can be tripped up by factors which have nothing to do with the story's content: spelling, grammar, punctuation, errors of expression, all those annoying things which are not essentially very creative but are part of getting a communication across.

The word 'proofread' is based on the word 'proof' which comes from the Middle English *preve*, and ultimately from the Latin *probare* 'to test, prove'. It might help you to think of this stage as a test: you *think* you have produced something that readers want to read, now you have to *prove* it.

Just as you have learned the secret language of fiction in terms of content, you now need to make sure that the work follows certain mechanical conventions and procedures that readers are expecting. Below are the kinds of things to look for and fix in your work. This might seem frustrating, but treat each of the ten steps as a separate proofread. Yes, that means going over the work ten times. But I can almost promise you that on each time you will find errors of almost every kind.

As you do the first three steps, obviously you can also correct the obvious typos, spelling errors and grammar mistakes that you can see, even though these are specifically covered in later steps. What happens is that if you focus on spelling and grammar and so on in the first few steps, you quickly develop 'error blindness' and your eyes will start to skim over that kind of mistake. Miraculously, if you're looking for something quite different - as in the first step you are looking for discrepancies in mood or tone - then spelling and grammatical problems suddenly appear.

It's as though you are shining different frequencies of light onto your work. Looking for mood or tone or positioning problems flushes out obvious spelling errors and so forth. By the time you get to focus on spelling and grammar in step 4, the most glaring errors will have already been picked up and you'll be right down into the nitty-gritty, digging out the most hidden mistakes.

1) Tone or Mood

Check for your own distinct voice. If your writing is normally friendly and encouraging, you don't want too many sarcastic or negative remarks creeping in. We called this level of writing 'Stage 5' in earlier weeks: it's the 'coalface' where readers engage directly with you, word by word, sentence by sentence.

Tone or mood editing is about looking over each sentence and word to make sure that it fits with the genre you've chosen and the effect you're going for. For example, in Tolkien's work you don't find any modern colloquialisms or slang; in Austen's work you won't find many references to the existential darkness of the soul or even to the Napoleonic Wars which were raging at the time when she was writing - they simply weren't relevant to her Comedy/romance.

Look for, and adjust or remove, inappropriateness.

If you're writing a mock-mediaeval High Fantasy, don't use modern political 'speak', for example. George Lucas almost gets this wrong at one point in *The Empire Strikes Back* when Princess Leia asks Hans Solo whether or not she should 'get out and push' when Solo has a problem starting his ship, the Millennium Falcon. It's a colloquial reference to problems with Earth automobiles and has no place with spaceships in a story that supposedly takes place 'Long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away.' It survives because it's a throwaway joke and isn't lingered upon.

Look at the overall work in this way, and then in particular focus on the 'persona' or line through which you are communicating everything to a reader: is the voice of the persona fitting? Or (for example) is the voice being too flippant or adolescent when you need solemnity?

What can happen if you get this wrong is you end up accidentally producing Comedy - which rests upon juxtaposing inappropriate things to create mini-vacuums which are filled with laughter - or a strange kind of Irony, which also depends on placing inappropriate things next to each other but to create different effects. Stanley Kubrick creates Irony, for example, by intentionally having a rape scene take place to classical music in *Clockwork Orange*, and again by having a piece of lighthearted music playing as the world enters a nuclear armageddon in *Doctor Strangelove*. But unless you want to create an unsettling effect common to Irony, you need to be watchful for this kind of inappropriateness.

And remember to pick up typographical, spelling and grammatical mistakes as you go along too.

2) Logical Flow

Each sentence or paragraph should be followed by one that makes sense, unless, as outlined above, you are purposefully trying to disturb the reader. Spotting illogical leaps from one sentence or paragraph to another or things that might make sense to you but don't to a reader can be quite a trick, because as the author you know what fills the gaps whereas readers don't.

Key to this is your knowledge of vacuums: if you have mastered the use of various kinds of vacuums, from linear to mystery to moral to core and character, you will know exactly what you have left out in order to attract reader attention, and will be less likely to do so by accident.

3) Grammar and Spelling

Now you get to the most mechanical step.

If you've done as recommended, you will have already found the most obvious errors, but there will be more. One way of addressing this is to read each sentence backwards. It takes time, yes, but by removing the words from their immediate context your eyes are separated from your mind to some degree and their sense becomes sharper.

Grammar mistakes slip through if you're tired or working fast. Things like 'their' instead of 'they're', errors you wouldn't normally let happen, sometimes need another's eye to spot. But you can do a remarkably thorough job just by doing as recommended.

Using a built-in spell-checker to see if you get any red or green squiggly lines is only the beginning. It can help to cut down on any human error that may have occurred but is no substitute for a human eye. Computers are not yet smart enough to detect the fine points of context, and may never be.

4) Consistency of Style

This sounds a bit like tone or mood, but is more to do with the detail of such things as what are you capitalising and what are you not. Errors or inconsistencies of this kind make your work look sloppy and ill-thought-out. If you've capitalised a subject, for example, like Maths, make sure you've capitalised it throughout. If you're using a line of asterisks **** to mark a pause in the middle of a chapter, use the same line with the same number of asterisks throughout. Formatting of this kind is supposed to be invisible, and you achieve invisibility by achieving consistency and regularity. Think of formatting like glass - a window through which the reader sees into the room of your fiction.

Marks on the glass can pull readers out of a story; inconsistent formatting can really distract from any reading experience.

Formatting is part of style. Formatting errors such as double spaces after a full stop, double carriage returns between paragraphs and uneven indents can be reduced by keeping your manuscript as plain as possible.

5) Region-Specific Spelling and Jargon

If anyone from anywhere in the world can find and read your content, you should be interested in making sure that they understand it. This doesn't necessarily mean that you should be looking to eliminate country specific spelling and jargon - especially if your main audience is local - but you might need to have it toned down so that it makes sense to someone in another country. If your work uses British slang, for example, and that use is part of its flavour and atmosphere, leave it in, but perhaps adjust it slightly so that an American or Australian audience can still follow it. You should also look over a piece of work that you have translated into English but need to feel more confident about to make sure that it fits perfectly into the English scene.

7) Images

Dickens and Shakespeare both make use of images of darkness and death in their works 'The Signalman' and *Macbeth*, as we have seen in earlier weeks. These images recur in different forms throughout these tales. What images are you evoking in the reader's imagination? Are you making the most of them? Are they consistent? More importantly even than those questions, are the images forwarding your overall message? No point in lacing a high-spirited Comedy about a madcap couple meeting on holiday with images of funerals or thunderstorms, unless that blend is what you are going for (in which case you'll probably end up with a black or Ironic Comedy).

Here's another checklist of tips based on experience, which we'll touch upon again later:

i) Wherever possible or practicable, proofread from a printed manuscript or copy. For some reason, your eyes and mind adopt a slightly different relationship to each other when you are holding a printed copy of a text in front of you than when you are reading from a screen.

ii) When going through the work, simply circle with a pencil any error you find and make a note if you think you won't recognise what the error is later. Yes, professional proofreaders have a whole vocabulary of special symbols which are designed to speed this whole process up, but you aren't in training to be one of them and probably don't have time to learn another whole new language. Circling the error will do for now.

iii) Put a firm tick on each page upon which you see no errors at all.

iv) Having gone through the whole work in this way, go back to your keyboard and simply adjust each error on your soft copy manuscript, page by page.

There are two key points when you'll be doing the most proofreading:

A) before submitting your manuscript for publication

and

B) after receiving your printed proof copy.

Importantly, as stated in an earlier week, there is one key point you should *not* be proofreading, and that is *while you are writing the book*. 'Editing as you go along' will turn out to be more destructive than constructive for three reasons:

a) it slows you down tremendously.

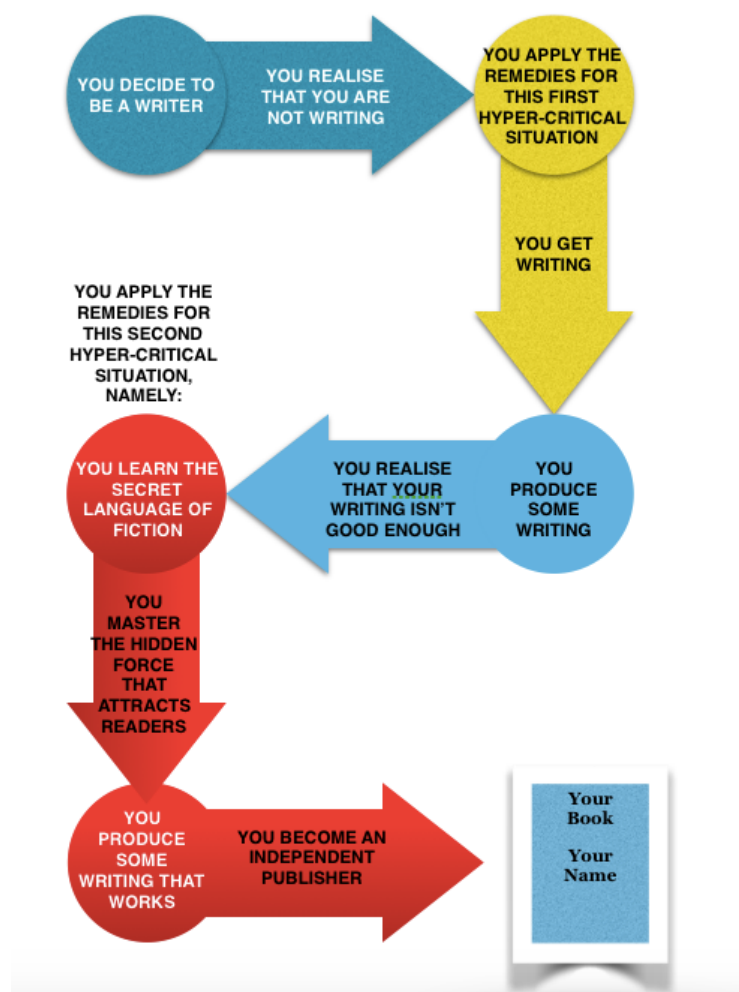
b) it undermines your confidence.

c) it cuts across the flow of your writing, acting as a self-interruption.

Independent Publication

Back in **Week 1: Building Your Creative Enthusiasm**, we developed a route map from the decision to be a writer through to publishing a book independently. You're now on the home stretch.

This can be a daunting section, but there is hope. Of all the data and requirements you're about to be bombarded with, about 85% of it is now possible to handle very easily through online publishing, as you will discover shortly. Though you are entering a marketplace in which literally millions of books are published in various formats around the world each year, the good news is that there is plenty of good news.

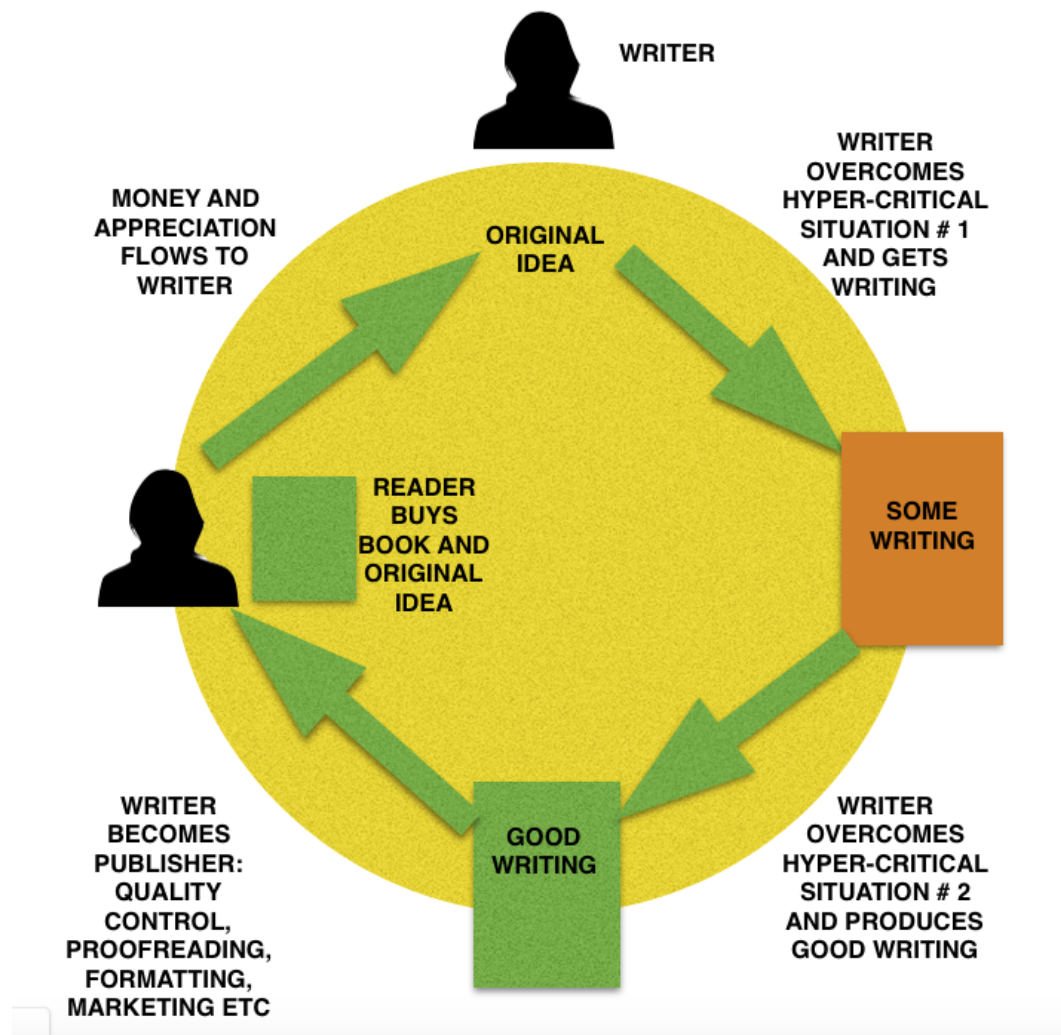


Firstly, you have the advantage over many writers in that *you have learned the secret language of fiction*. In trying to get readers to pay money for your work, you at least have some 'inside knowledge' gleaned from the master authors, on how to meet reader expectations.

And secondly, the mechanics of all this have been simplified greatly for you.

The job of a publisher, though, is to turn a good manuscript into a great book.

You probably haven't thought of yourself as a publisher at all. You are burning with the desire to create effects upon readers and the mechanics of getting a finished work into readers' hands probably wasn't part of your vision. The process needs to be broken down a little so that you can see the different functions involved.



If you want to independently publish your work, it follows that you must become an independent publisher - the clue is in the name.

How exactly do you do that?

In the diagram above we see that there are two distinct roles and that one takes half the circle while the other takes the second half. Having reached Week 9, we're going to assume that you've done the Writer bit. Now you are a Publisher.

Is this just a matter of pushing a button and getting what you've written to come out of the end of a printing machine?

No, there are different stages involved in publishing a work, and if you really want to make it as a writer, each stage needs to be confronted and dealt with.

You could think of it like this, again based on the above diagram:

The product of the writer is a piece of good writing.

The product of the publisher is money and appreciation flowing back to the writer.

The publisher role shouldn't be permitted to interfere too much in the writing role; and the writing role shouldn't interfere too much in the publishing role. Each have their own jobs to do.

Traditional publishers work by

- a) looking for writing that grabs readers' attention distinctively
- b) looking for compelling stories and well-realised characters
- c) judging the commercial feasibility of the work based on what they feel is the core premise of the book, the state of the market and the author's potential.

As you can see, by learning what Weeks 2 to 8 had to teach you, you have a grasp on a) and b) and most of c).

The rest of part c) is a little different. Publishers have editorial, sales, marketing, publicity and production departments and design a business plan for each book which looks at it from each of these different perspectives. Such a plan would cover issues such as:

- i) Is the book 'strong' enough to hook the reader? By which we can now see is meant 'Is the work built around a sufficiently powerful core vacuum?'
- ii) Which genre does the book fit in? This comes with a whole package of expectations, some of which you may not yet have thought of, such as how genre affects pricing, cover design book formats, types of reader, etc. Asking about genre is another way of asking who the readers will be for the book and how will they be reached.
- iii) What kind of competition is there around in that group? This needs to be specific.
- iv) What makes the book under examination different enough to stand out in the crowd?
- v) In what format will the book be published? Does it need illustrations?
- vi) How long is the book? Is that the 'normal' length for a book of that kind? (This is an interesting one because many books of course have defied the norm and gone on to success. When Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* there were no 'High Fantasy trilogies' around - Allen and Unwin, the original publisher, took a risk and basically created a sub-genre.)
- vi) What will the book cost to produce? Include any cost that might come up, such as editing, marketing, distribution and so on.
- vii) What will the price of the book be?
- viii) At what point would the book become profitable?
- ix) When would the book be ready for release?

You don't have to do all of this on your own and if you feel that your emotions might get in the way, perhaps it would be best not to. There are professionals around who will do some or all of this section for reasonable rates, myself included. But if you feel that you can be sufficiently objective about your writing, all of this can be feasibly done by you.

You have access to the tools you need to affordably publish and market your books internationally. As part of this course, we are going to take advantage of the ready-made publishing production lines which have appeared over the last ten years. Next week, I will walk you through the process of using one and you will obtain a proof copy of your work soon afterwards!

Like it or not, the way readers operate is as consumers do all over the world: they look at the outside of something and make a judgement as to what might be inside. In the case of books, the appearance contains so many subtle clues that this point is even more crucial. Readers will not only make a purchase based on the strength of a cover, but will actively reject (or most often simply ignore) books that do not trigger their mainly subconscious criteria.

What you think might work to attract readers is probably a guess. There are some guidelines that you need to follow if you want to be successful at this.

Avoid

- drawing a cover yourself
- selecting an unconventional font in the hope of 'standing out'
- unusual book formats that might sound like a good idea at the time but which will put readers off
- false impressions (like placing a romantic picture on the cover suggesting sex when there is no sex in the book).

As with everything else you've learned on this course, the practicalities of book publishing like choosing a cover should be built around the overall goal, to affect the reader in a way that you intend.

This means that a book cover should suit the genre of your writing. Identify key cover design elements and themes that your readers expect to see and are looking for. Book buyers associate certain cover styles with certain kinds of experience.

Yes, you have to consider things like

- font
- size
- placement of titles and author's name
- spacing and layout
- colour
- use of images and graphics.

Take a look at other books in your genre.

What kind of font do they use?

What size of font?

How do they place the book title and the author's name?

How are they dealing with spacing and layout?

What sort of colours are they using?

Book buyers generally spend a fraction of a second scanning over a book on a shelf or online and so part of what you are trying to do is trigger subconscious recognitions. E-books have cover images about the size of a postage stamp or smaller but you still need to use that image to good effect.

If this aspect of getting published seems too daunting, professional designers are available at reasonable rates.

Metadata

Here is a checklist of things that you might want to include on your cover. Before you panic about this though, the online platform that we are going to use deals with most of this so you don't have to worry too much.

- Title
- Author
- Publisher
- Logo
- Blurb
- Barcode
- Tagline or subtitle
- A short review
- Any awards
- Genre
- Recommended retail price
- Illustrator, if applicable
- Website link

Here are some further specific tips:

i) e-books and print books are totally different and need to be formatted differently to optimise the reading experience. Modern eReaders can play havoc with files that have been prepared for printing.

ii) Serif Fonts such as Garamond are easier to read on printed paper. The flourishes (the tiny projections and curls on the ends of the letters) help to group the letters in words together visually.

iii) San Serif Fonts such as Arial are easier to read off a screen, which has lower resolution than ink on a page.

iv) Though physical books can come in many shapes and sizes, try to stick to the standard formats at least until you have mastered the whole process of independent publishing.

Independent publishing platforms like the one we are going to use provide you with an automated series of options for most of this, so don't worry or get confused by any of it.

Setting Up the First Pages

Established convention going back centuries gives a sequence of pages for the beginning of any book. Even e-books follow this sequence to some degree. These are the important points:

- a) The first page is always a right hand page. This comes straight after the cover (or the end papers of a hardcover book). It contains the title of the book in case the cover is lost.
- b) Right hand pages are always odd numbered while the left hand pages are always even numbered.
- c) Page 2 is the first left hand page. It can be left blank or used to list the author's previous titles.
- d) The next right hand page, Page 3, must include Title, Author and Publisher.
- e) The next page, Page 4, contains the copyright and other legal information about the publication of the book. It is always a good idea to assert your copyright ownership over the material with the line: Copyright © [Author Name] [Year of First Publication].

This is followed by a Reservation of Rights statement, such as 'All rights reserved' or an explicit restriction on the reproduction of the text in any format without permission by you, the author. Almost any other book will give you an example. The copyright page should also include the full name of the publishing company, the mailing address or contact of the publishing company, the city and year of publication, the edition of the book, and when the book was printed.

You can also include a reference for the cover image (if applicable) and acknowledge contributors to the book such as the cover designer, editor and so on.
- f) Page 5 can be used for a dedication and/or disclaimer
- g) Page 6 can be left blank
- h) Page 7 in a novel is the first page of actual text.
- i) All Chapters should start on a right hand page.
- j) Give your reader page numbers and running headers where possible. Page numbers can be placed at the top or bottom of the page and either centred or against the exterior margin. Right hand pages are always odd-numbered pages. Never print a page number on a blank page. Start the page numbering from the start of the main text, not the first physical page of the book. Use Roman numerals for preliminary pages, such as a Foreword or Preface. Most word processing software is designed to help you with all of this.
- k) Running Headers are the headers that appear at the top of the page containing either the title of the current chapter, the title of the book or the author's name, and just need to be consistent. They are located at the top of the page and either centred or aligned to the margin.

Saving Time and Frustration

You're almost ready to submit your work to me, ready for publication.

Like the ingredients you need before you begin making a cake, you will need:

1. A fully edited, completed manuscript, formatted into the correct version.
2. An appropriate book cover for the ebook or print book. In the case of an ebook, the cover is just a front page which appears on the web; for print books, a cover includes a spine and a back cover. Don't worry about attaching this to your manuscript, that all happens later.
3. A book title (and sub-title, if you wish).
4. A sales description and back blurb. The blurb is what is printed on the back of your book, and also often acts as a sales description for your book on a website. Take a look at other books in your field and their sales descriptions to get some idea.
5. Some decided categories for your book. Even if your work is 'way out' and isn't easy to place in a category, most publishing platforms give you the opportunity to play with where you want your book to be seen. Look for niche sub-categories in which you could possibly get a high rank. Be as specific as you can.
6. 5 to 10 Keywords to help readers find your book which can also help you determine categories. Don't worry too much about keywords, just list some words that apply to the book's genre.
7. Some idea of pricing. This is a complex field: you can distribute your work for free if you wish, just to get readers hooked, or you can start off with very low prices and build up. You can offer the work for different prices on different platforms. Price is something you can alter later if you wish, which is another interesting advantage with independent publishing. Some specific advice on pricing comes later.
8. You might think that you need an ISBN. An ISBN is an International Standard Book Number. ISBNs were 10 digits in length up to the end of December 2006, but since 1 January 2007 they now always consist of 13 digits. They are calculated using a specific mathematical formula and include a check digit to validate the number. However, most publishing platforms offer free ISBNs as part of the process. There's not much evidence to show that having your own ISBNs actually helps you to sell any more books.

There's much more advice out there on how to publish independently, but the above checklist gives you the basics.

Go over the checklist a few times to make sure you have everything. It will save you a lot of time and frustration next week.

SUBMISSION TIME

OK, so you are at the end of Week 9 and I want to see what you have accomplished!

If you have written something, please send the whole thing (up to 80,000 words) to me for an individual assessment and feedback.

I will review it and provide you with some hands-on help and advice based on what I see.

This would normally cost a few hundred pounds depending on the nature of the work. You'll get specific suggestions and input from me based on what we have covered so far.

If you haven't yet written anything substantial, just send me some excerpts or sections or notes.

You can email me at:

grant@clarendonhousebooks.com

Send the document as a pdf attachment and the cover as a jpeg image attachment.

Make sure to include your name! And again, I'll give you some feedback as soon as I possibly can!

Congratulations!

You've reached the end of ***Week 9: Editing and Formatting a Manuscript!***

You've learned how to proofread your own work and how independent publishing operates.

Hopefully you have progressed to a point where you are able to send me the work you've been doing so far.

Get ready to publish!

Week 10: Publication Part 1

Submitting Your Manuscript

Ordering a Proof Copy

Step by step, this week walks you through the stage of actually submitting your manuscript and independently publishing it!

At each stage, if you tried to do this on your own, there are so many things that might put you off - but with the help of the course, you'll soon be ordering a proof copy of your very own book!

Hard to believe but true: within a few days of pressing the button, you'll get your very own copy of the book you've worked so hard to create!

WARNING: If you are purchasing this module separately from the rest of the course, welcome, but beware! You won't get the complete benefit of the 'How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published' e-course unless you do the whole thing! By all means extract what wisdom you can from this week's 'episode' - but take the plunge and get the whole course as soon as you can!

You can get it [here](#).

Submitting Your Manuscript

You've come a long way and you're now in the home stretch to publishing a story that works.

Last week, you should have put together some ingredients:

1. A fully edited, completed manuscript, formatted into the correct version.
2. An appropriate book cover for the ebook or print book. In the case of an ebook, the cover is just a front page which appears on the web; for print books, a cover includes a spine and a back cover. Don't worry about attaching this to your manuscript, that all happens later.
3. A book title (and sub-title, if you wish).
4. A sales description and back blurb. The blurb is what is printed on the back of your book, and also often acts as a sales description for your book on a website. Take a look at other books in your field and their sales descriptions to get some idea.
5. Some decided categories for your book. Even if your work is 'way out' and isn't easy to place in a category, most publishing platforms give you the opportunity to play with where you want your book to be seen. Look for niche sub-categories in which you could possibly get a high rank. Be as specific as you can.
6. 5 to 10 Keywords to help readers find your book which can also help you determine categories. Don't worry too much about keywords, just list some words that apply to the book's genre.
7. Some idea of pricing. This is a complex field: you can distribute your work for free if you wish, just to get readers hooked, or you can start off with very low prices and build up. You can offer the work for different prices on different platforms. Price is something you can alter later if you wish, which is another interesting advantage with independent publishing.
8. You might think that you need an ISBN. An ISBN is an International Standard Book Number. ISBNs were 10 digits in length up to the end of December 2006, but since 1 January 2007 they now always consist of 13 digits. They are calculated using a specific mathematical formula and include a check digit to validate the number. However, most publishing platforms offer free ISBNs as part of the process. There's not much evidence to show that having your own ISBNs actually helps you to sell any more books.

In addition to this, if you submitted your manuscript to me as you were invited to do, you should have some detailed, individual feedback.

We're now going to walk through the process of publishing a completed work.

Step 1: What You Will Need

The first thing you need to do is implement the feedback you should have received from me. (If you haven't received it yet for some reason, please let me know and I will see what I can do.)

This should have covered certain key areas. The most important feedback will be to do with your use of *vacuums*. If I have suggested alterations here, they may be fundamental and require that your work be re-written and even re-designed. It's always going to be up to you how much you take on board my suggestions - I can only play the part of an external advisor, the work is always going to be your own.

I will have looked at

- character vacuums
- linear vacuums
- * mystery vacuums
- moral vacuums
- core vacuums

I will have particularly placed significance on the character vacuums (as they draw readers in initially) and on core vacuums (as they pull readers along once they are committed).

Hopefully, your work won't require major re-structuring and you can move on to looking at these more mechanical aspects:

1) Tone or Mood

As part of the feedback, I will have looked over each sentence and word to make sure that it fits with the genre you've chosen and the effect you're going for. You'll need to read over any recommended changes and see if you agree with each one. If you do, you'll need to go through your work and make the changes.

2) Logical Flow

I will also have looked to see if each sentence or paragraph is followed by one that makes sense, spotting illogical leaps from one sentence or paragraph to another or things that might make sense to you but don't to a reader. Make the recommended changes if you agree with them.

3) Grammar and Spelling

Alter anything here that needs to be altered.

4) Consistency of Style

I will also have recommended any needed formatting changes, but you'll need to actually make the changes so as to achieve consistency and regularity.

5) Region-Specific Spelling and Jargon

Make any needed changes here if this applies to your work.

7) Images

I may have suggested changes to images to make sure that you are making the most of them and that they are forwarding your overall message.

Work your way through your manuscript until you have modified it all in the light of the feedback.

Step 2: An Overview of the Sequence

Now you're ready to open up a connection to Lulu.

Lulu Press, Inc. is an online print-on-demand, self-publishing and distribution platform founded in 2002, which has published nearly two million titles by authors in over 225 countries and territories. Their headquarters are in Raleigh, North Carolina. Lulu.com creates both print and digital format books. Printed books are available in many different formats and sizes including paperback, coil bound, and hardcovers. Books can be printed, in black-and-white or full-colour.

We're going to use them because they have a proven track record with regard to independent publishing. We're also going to use them because the alternative is just too much work for you. Yes, you can do all the setting up yourself, including finding a printer and a distributor, but Lulu puts all of that on automatic for you.

How will this work for you? Here are the key points:

- 1) Soon you will upload your file. Once you have been through the publishing process, you will be able to buy copies of your own book and make it available for purchase by others in the Lulu Bookstore.
- 2) You'll be offered a free ISBN and if you meet certain distribution requirements, your book can also be distributed to online retail outlets such as Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble and Apple's iBookstore.
- 3) You retain the copyright of your work.
- 4) The process of publishing your book is completely free!

You receive an 80% royalty for print books and a 90% royalty for eBooks when they are sold.

5) You don't have to worry about the selling process, distributing your book or what happens with the money. You upload a book, go through a series of steps (we'll do this together below) and publish the book.

6) Someone buys the book by visiting Lulu's bookstore. You can send them there through a link from your website or in any number of ways which we will cover in future weeks. You don't have to worry about credit cards or anything, Lulu takes care of all that. They then print the book for your customer and send it to them. The money comes to you through a cheque or, more easily, through PayPal.

What's the catch?

There is really no 'catch'. There is no upper limit to how many books you can publish or even what you charge for them, though of course you need to be sensible.

You'll see, as we go through the process, how easy this is.

If you have any other questions, just visit Lulu.com.

This is the basic sequence. We will 'walk through' these steps shortly:

0. Make your manuscript into a PDF document. (Your computer should be able to do this for you).
1. Give your book a working title and decide whether you want it to be public or private.
2. Choose the basic 'look' of your book, whether you want it to be a hardback, paperback, and so on.
3. Upload your manuscript.
4. Lulu will then convert your manuscript into the interior pages of a book in your chosen format.
5. Make your cover in Lulu's cover-creator or upload a one-piece cover which you've made yourself.
6. Add a description, license, copyright, language, etc..
7. Review what you have put together.

If you don't have a Lulu.com account, you'll need to create one to finish publishing your book.

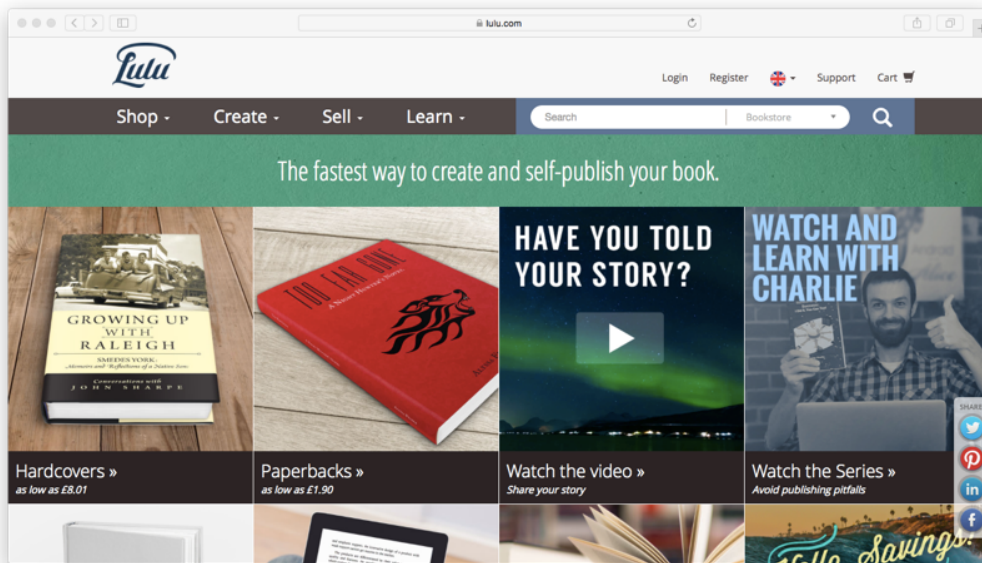
As you go through these steps, you can get more help by clicking a 'Get more information about this step' link or by clicking the 'Help' button. Most points have step-by-step instructions.

Ready to begin?

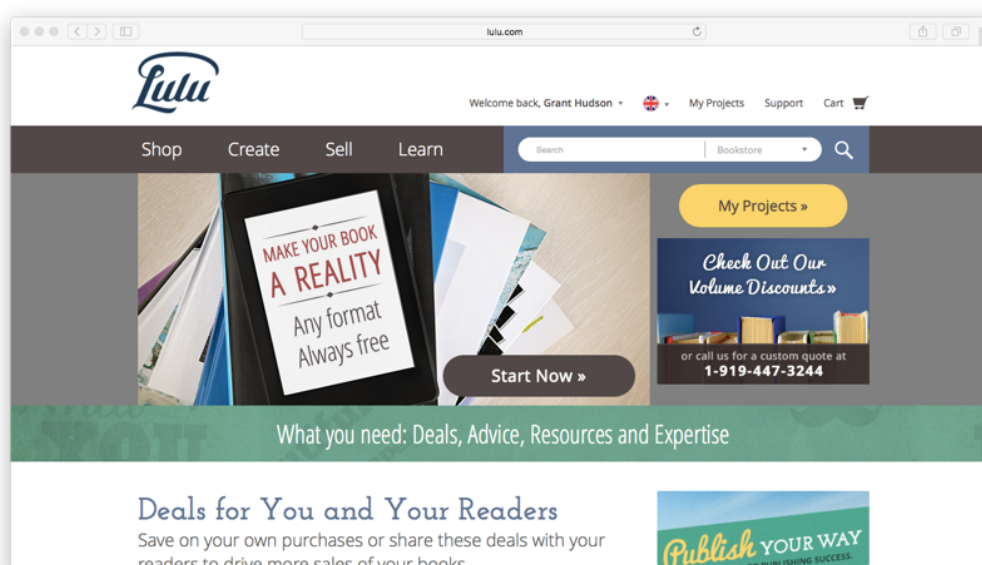
Step 3: Starting a 'New Project'

Take a deep breath and let's get started!

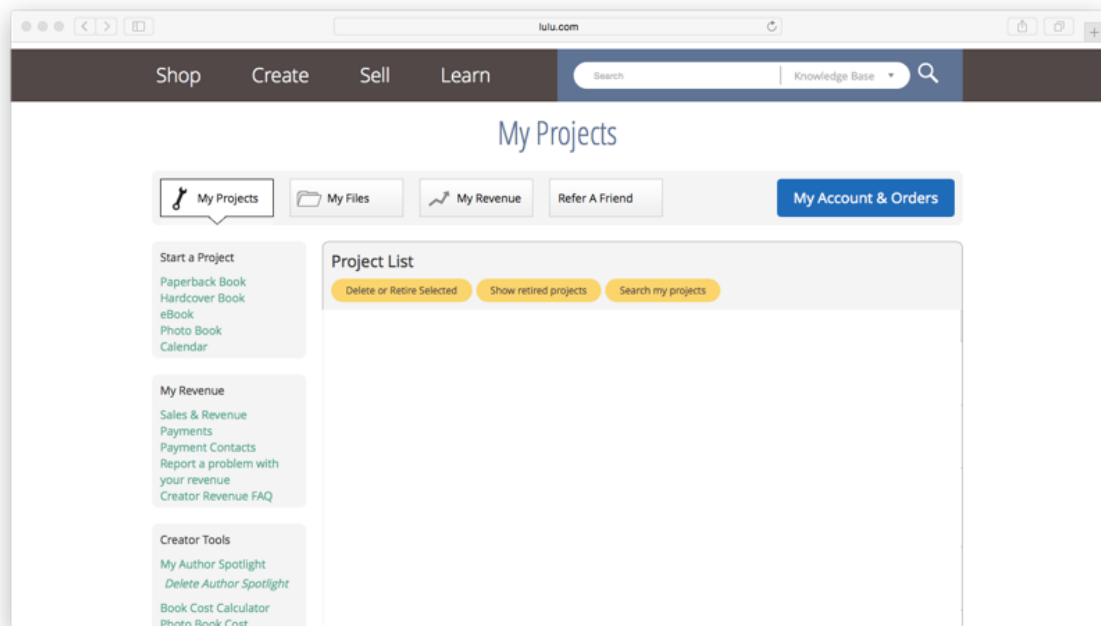
1. Go to Lulu.com. You should see something like this:



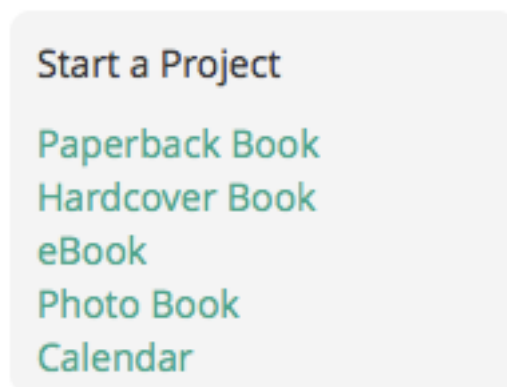
2. Register with Lulu by clicking the 'Register' button and then log in using the account details you create. That will give you a page that looks much the same, but will have 'My Projects' in the top menu:



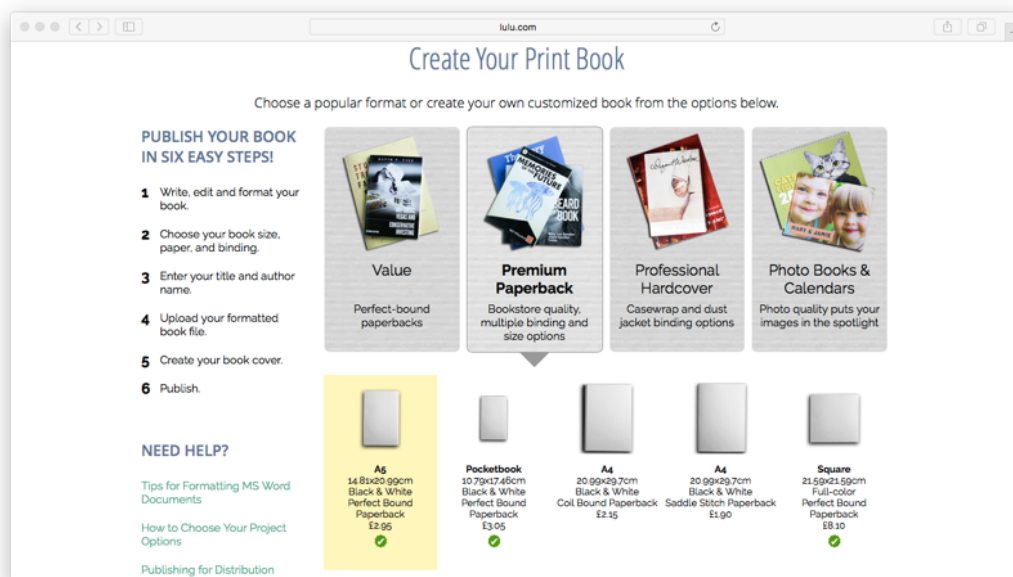
3. Click on 'My Projects' and you should see something like this:



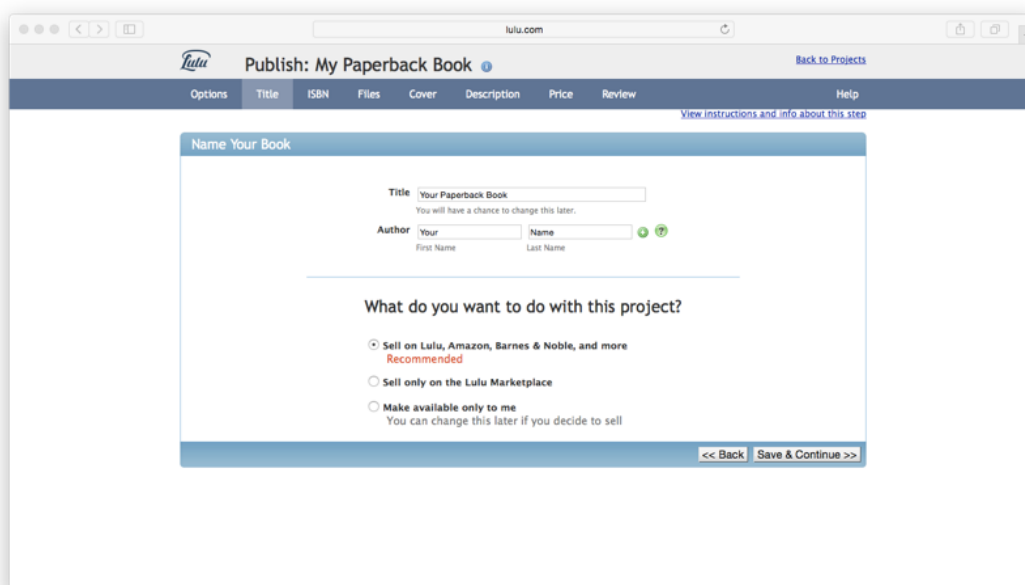
4. Go to the 'Start a Project' box. Here's where you decide what type of book you want to produce. Let's choose 'Paperback Book' for now - you can explore other options later.



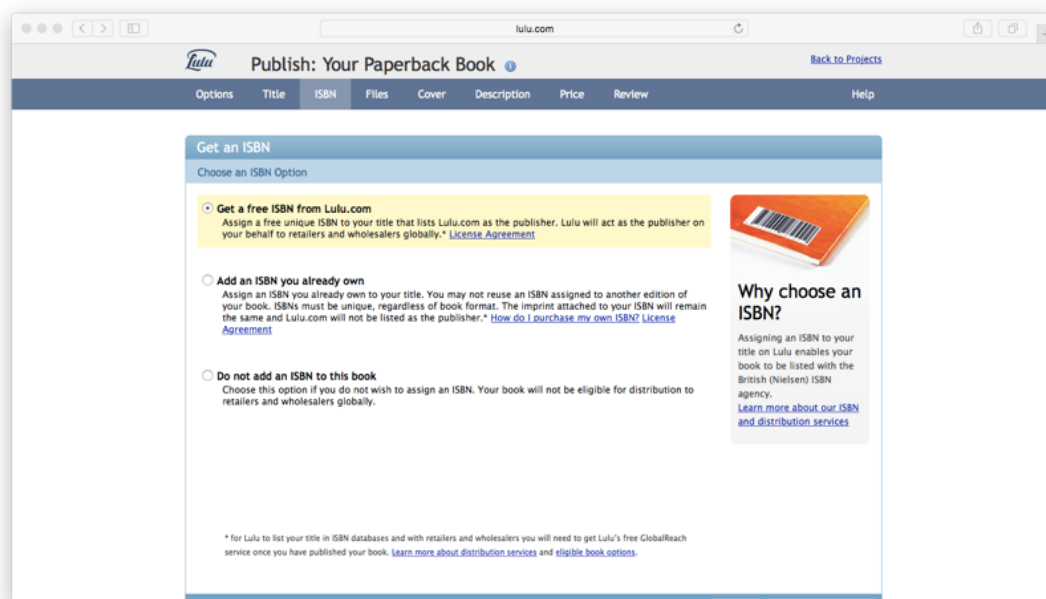
5. You should see a page like this. Explore it and decide what options you want to go with. For now, we're going to go with a standard A5 size paperback:



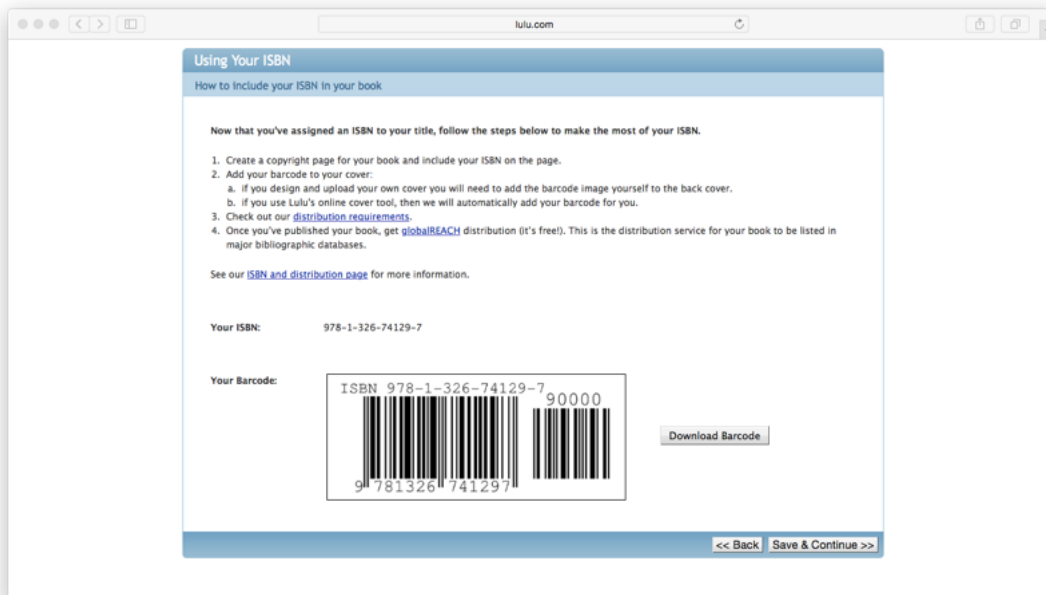
6. Click 'Make this book' and you'll be taken to the page where you decide on what your book is going to be called and you enter your name as the author. You can also decide here what you want to do with the project, choosing from the options given:



7. Clicking 'Save and Continue' takes you through to where you can get an ISBN. Choose 'Get a free ISBN from Lulu':



8. On clicking 'Save and Continue' you'll see a page giving you the ISBN and advising you what to do with it. This can be a bit off-putting but don't worry about this - let Lulu place the barcode on your cover in a future step, and, taking note of the ISBN, add it to the copyright page of your manuscript.

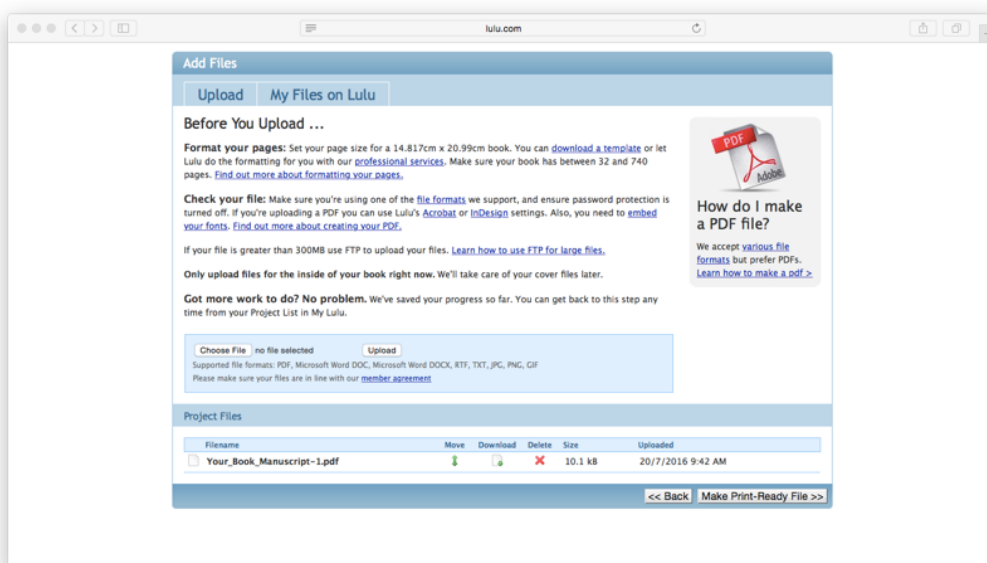


9. Now that you have added the ISBN to the copyright page of your manuscript, you will have reached a page where you upload your manuscript, looking like this:



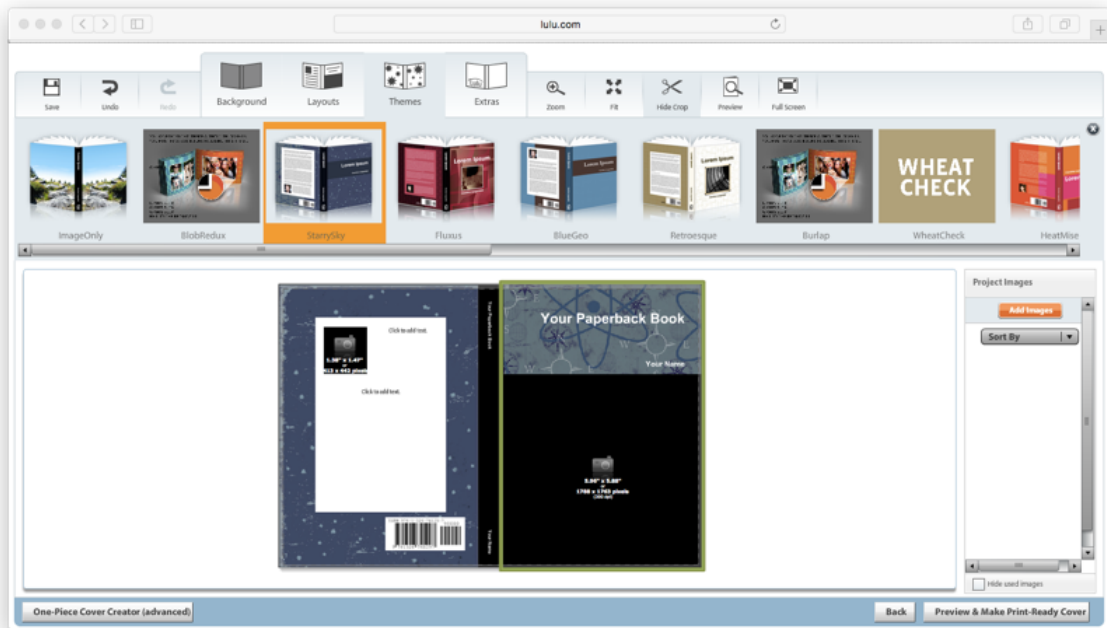
Choose your file and upload it. If you need any help, click on the links provided on this page. If for some reason your file isn't in the right format, Lulu will tell you and you can fix it.

10. Once your file is uploaded, the page should look something like this:

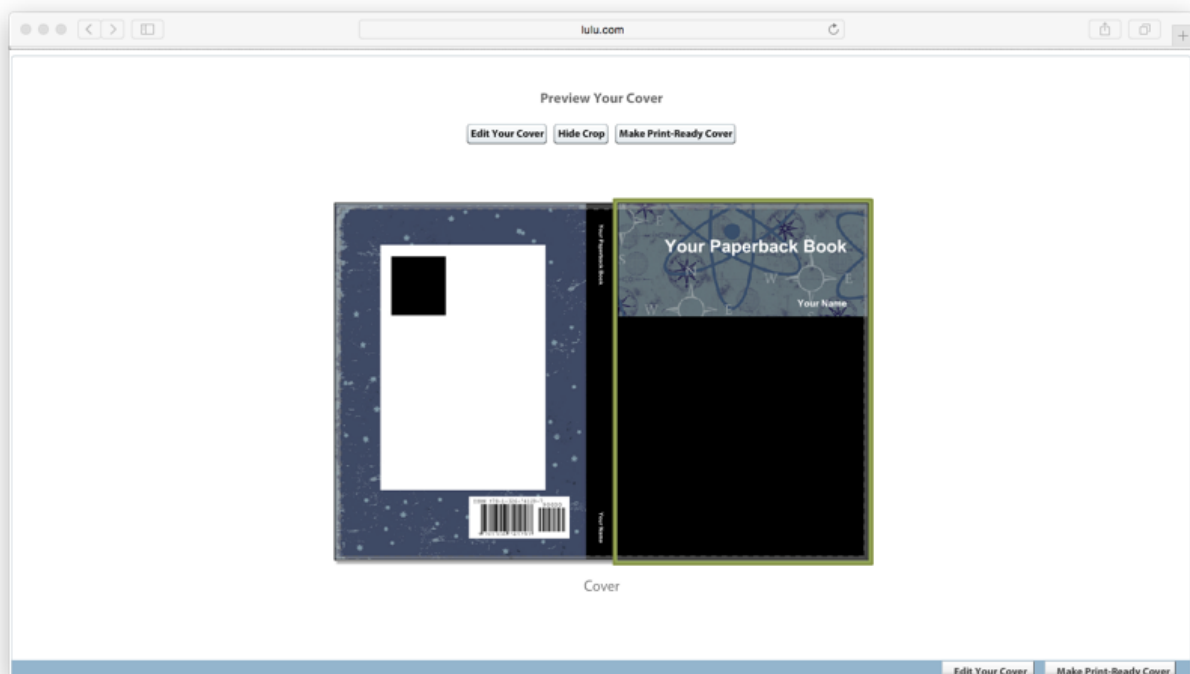


Click 'Make Print-Ready File'.

11. You'll get an acknowledgement page and then move on into the Cover Creator. You can decide here what to do with your cover, using either the 'Image Only' option to import your own cover, or using one of Lulu's templates. You can get really creative with this, or you might decide that the cover isn't all that important - it's up to you. You will see something like this:



Your book cover will be whatever you have created. In this case, we will skip forward to something like this:



12. Eventually, Lulu will have put together a print-ready cover and you'll move on to a page that looks something like this:

The screenshot shows the Lulu.com book creation interface. It features a series of form fields on the left side of a light blue background. The fields are: 'Category' (a dropdown menu), 'Explicit Content' (a checkbox), 'Keywords' (a text input), 'Description' (a large text area), 'Language' (a dropdown menu), 'Copyright Notice' (a text input), 'License' (a dropdown menu), 'Edition' (a text input), and 'Publisher' (a text input). Each field is labeled with a red 'required' text and a green question mark icon. The 'Description' field has a green gauge below it indicating character count. At the bottom right, there are two buttons: '<< Back' and 'Save & Continue >>'.

Select whichever category your book best fits into.

Tick the box if your book contains explicit content, otherwise leave it blank.

Add in any keywords you wish. These should be words that have something to do with the book you've written - for example, if you've written a fantasy epic, you can add in words like 'epic', 'hero', 'quest' and so forth.

Your book description is a short paragraph which acts as a 'blurb' to attract readers. In writing this, remember everything you've learned about vacuums. For example, a poor blurb for *The Lord of the Rings* might read:

Frodo Baggins, a young hobbit, takes a Ring of Power to the Cracks of Doom to save the world, but right at the end can't go through with it. But everything works out OK.

Using linear, mystery, moral and core vacuums, a better blurb might read like this:

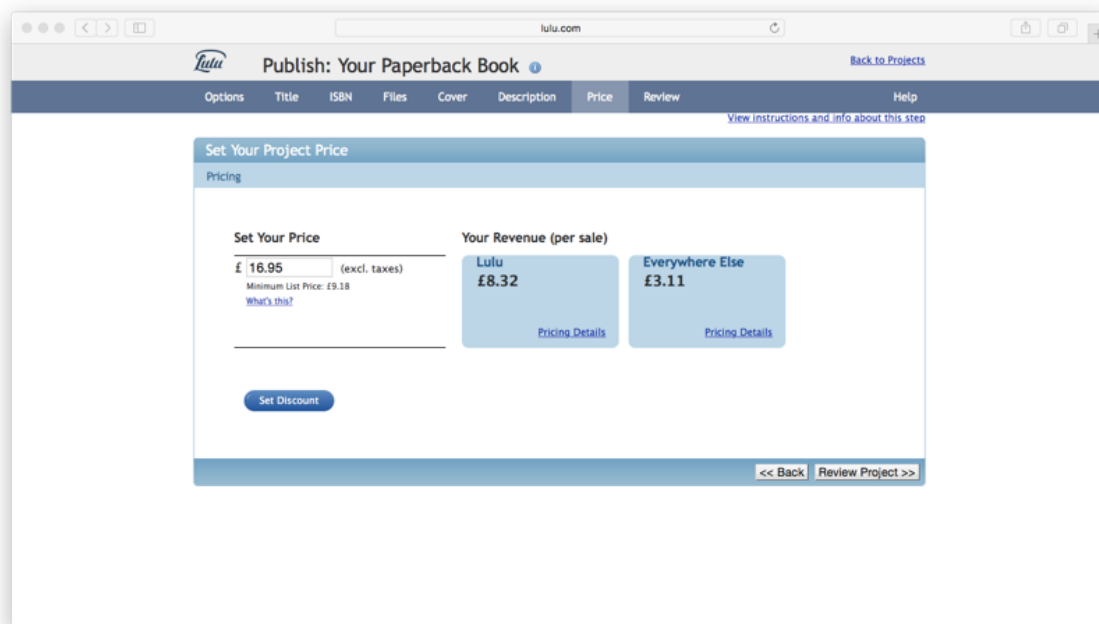
The entire world hangs in the balance [core vacuum]. A young hobbit takes on an impossible quest to destroy a Ring of Power which could overwhelm the forces of good and bring about a new Dark Age [linear vacuum], but he is pursued by mysterious creatures [mystery vacuum] and is challenged at every turn [linear vacuum]. And even if he gets to the Cracks of Doom, will he be able to go through with it [moral vacuum]?

Design something similar for your book and insert it into the 'Description' box.

Add your name for the copyright and select a 'standard copyright license'.

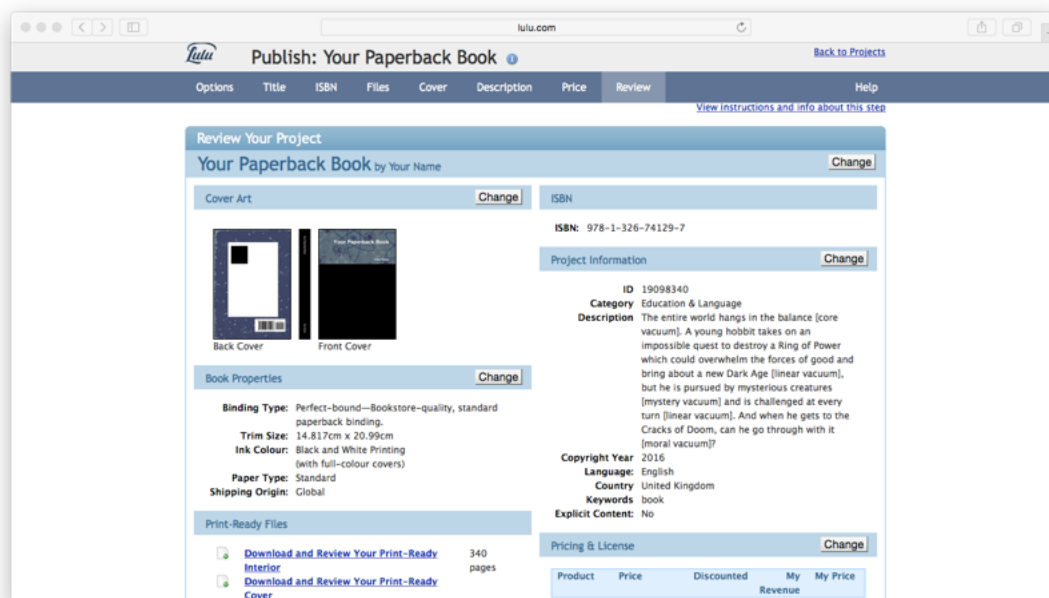
If you want to make yourself a publisher too, create a name, or just leave this blank.

13. Now you get to the pricing. As you will see, Lulu works this out for you and shows you what your profit will be on each sale, in a page which looks something like this:



The point here is that you can adjust this. If you want to charge a higher price, simply change the figures. Keep in mind, though, that readers may have a certain price in mind for a book of your type, so don't get too greedy! (Some pricing advice comes later.)

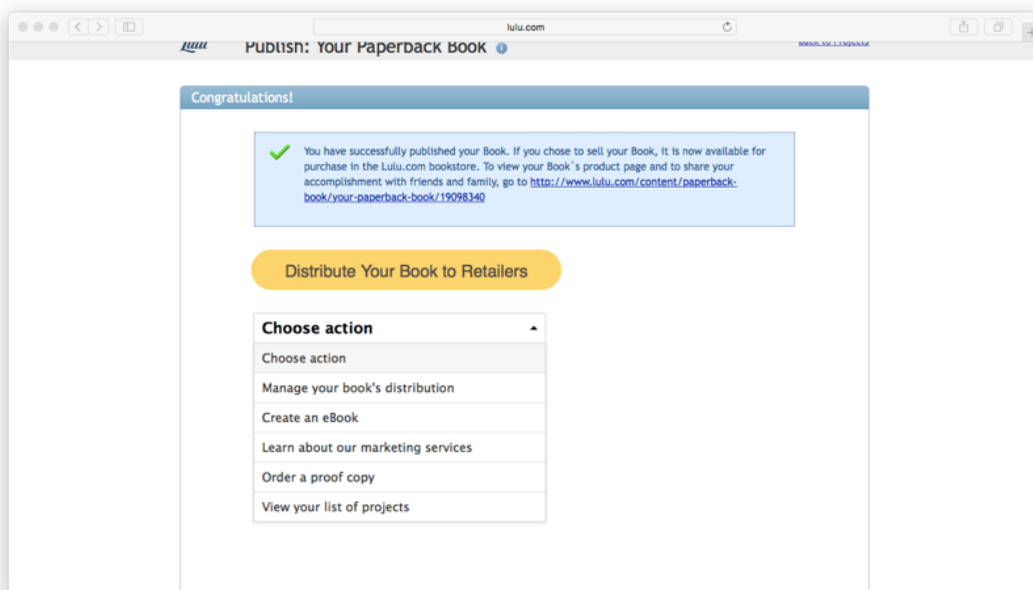
14. Now you get to a review page, looking something like this:



Explore this page and make sure that you are happy with all the details. You can go back and edit everything until you are happy.

When you're ready, click 'Save and Finish'.

15. You should get a page looking something like this:



Ordering a Proof Copy

From the 'Choose action' menu, select 'Order a proof copy' and then follow through to the checkout. It will cost you a small amount of money with postage to add, but within a few days you will receive a proof copy of your very own book!

It's quite a confidence booster, holding a book in your hands with your name on it. That's a milestone, but the process doesn't stop there.

Experience suggests that when you come to read through your proof copy, you will find annoying mistakes, even though you did a thorough proofreading job before you submitted it.

Here are some common things to be aware of:

1. When proofreading, you will tend to see what you think you wrote, rather than what is actually on the page. Having a printed copy helps, but reading each sentence backwards helps too. It's laborious and after a while you'll 'skip' sentences and skim-read. What's happening is that your mind is equating what it has read with what it read recently - in other words, if you read the word 'sword' so many times, even when it is misspelled as 'swodr' your mind dubs in 'sword'. Reading aloud helps, because it adds that little bit of distance between you and the work.
2. Don't trust spell-checking software. Spell checkers don't spot words that are spelled correctly but used incorrectly. 'They're over their' won't produce any red squiggly lines on a screen, but is an incorrect usage of 'their' nevertheless. This is why it helps to have a proof copy in your hand rather than on a screen. With a hard copy in your hand you can't rely on spell-checkers!
3. Divide the work up into small sections and take a break between sections. This helps you to stay focused.
4. Don't try to edit while you're proofreading. Just proofread. If you find a sentence or even a section which now doesn't seem to read right, make a note and move on. You can come back later and re-write it. Mixing the two functions will add time and you might miss errors.

And here is a list based on personal experience of things which I found on reading through proof copies of my own work:

- i) Right hand pages were on the left. In other words, whereas chapters are supposed to start on right hand, odd-numbered pages, mine had somehow gotten mixed up and were on the left. This is a simple thing to overlook and easy to fix - simply moving the pages forward one page can remedy the whole lot, probably. But it's annoying because you've gotten as far as having a copy of your book in our hands and have not spotted this simple mistake.
- ii) Some headers were missing. I had overlooked some pages and neglected to install the right header. Your book may not have headers and so this might not apply, but if it does, make a point of going through and making sure that the headers are in the right place throughout.
- iii) In some chapters, there was a bigger gap between the chapter title and the beginning of the text than in others. It's a small thing, but as has been said, formatting should be like glass and invisible. Readers pick up on such things subconsciously and your work loses value in their eyes if these things creep in.
- iv) There were *still* typographical errors. This is after ten or more read-throughs. Think of it like this: the average book is about 80,000 words long. Even if only one tenth of one percent of words have been subtly mis-typed and then overlooked, that's still 80 words lurking deep within the manuscript ready to sabotage your value. There is no substitute here for simply reading through again, but reading backwards, or taking it in small chunks as recommended above, can help.
- v) The cover wasn't quite right. Sometimes an image can look completely fine on a screen, but in hard copy it is slightly blurry or the colour is wrong. Luckily, as with all these things, the independent publishing process permits you to fix them easily.

vi) The blurb was too large (or too small) on the back. Again, it looked OK on the screen, but in your hands it's obviously not right.

On the plus side, it is a boost, as stated earlier, to hold a hard copy of your book after all the work you've done so far. So whatever mistakes you find, however much work you still have to do, one thing you need to do for sure is

CELEBRATE!

Of course, your mission isn't yet complete. You have transferred your intention from inside your head out onto the pages of a book, hopefully in a form which will attract readers emotionally. Now you have to consider how that book will reach your readers physically.

Sincere congratulations is due to you - you have reached the end of ***Week 10: Publication Part 1!***

The biggest week so far, in that it has produced a physical result - your own book in your hands!

Next week will take you even further...

Week 11: Publication Part 2

Some Final Insights

Distribution

Endorsements

Pricing and Revenue

Now that you've proof-read a hard copy of your own book, you're ready for some final insights into the world of independent publishing. What about distribution? What about getting endorsements? What about pricing and revenue? It's all here!

And much more than you were probably expecting...

WARNING: If you are purchasing this module separately from the rest of the course, welcome, but beware! You won't get the complete benefit of the 'How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published' e-course unless you do the whole thing! By all means extract what wisdom you can from this week's 'episode' - but take the plunge and get the whole course as soon as you can!

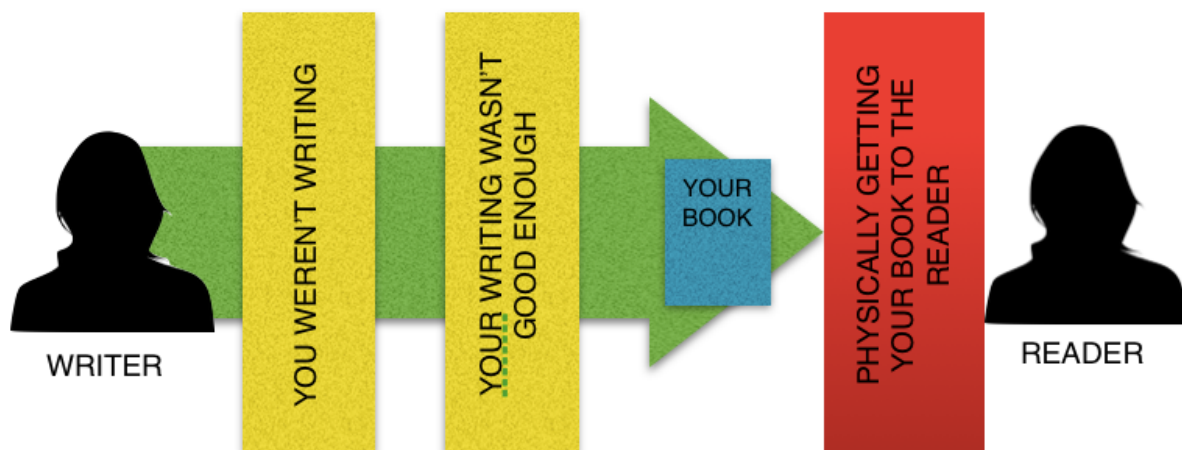
You can get it [here](#).

Some Final Insights

By now you should have at least one copy of your published book in your hands.

You've worked hard to overcome the barriers to getting writing done, then to learn the secret language of fiction so that your stories are attractive to readers. You've knocked your book into shape and had it printed.

What this means is that you have overcome some mighty barriers on your way to getting your ideas, thoughts and messages into the minds and hearts of readers. Remember you started out with all of this locked inside your head.



Please notice these significant facts:

1. You overcame the first barrier by *increasing your own personal vacuum power* until you made the time and got some writing done.
2. You overcame the second barrier by *increasing the vacuum power in your work* until you made it attractive to readers.
3. The way that you will overcome the final barrier is by *increasing the vacuum power between you and your potential readers* until they physically buy your book.

This is the week containing the most practical and immediate advice for you about getting your published book into readers' hands. You're about to receive some amazing revelations about the magic of marketing and what you can learn from it as a writer.

What this week is all about is getting a grip on your writing as a *business* and making it work for you as a *business* - i.e. acquiring an ever-growing number of readers for your work in the marketplaces of the world.

Marketing is all about the *creation of demand*. If you've been following along so far, you will also realise that marketing is about the *finding or creation of vacuums*.

And the finding or creation of vacuums is done with the purpose of *bringing the writer's work and the reader closer together*.



Of course, a byproduct of this is that you will make money from the sale of your book, but if you want to be a truly successful writer, you shouldn't be all that interested in the money. You should be all about *bringing your fiction and the reader together*.

And that leads us to another important insight, if you haven't already seen it:

The reader is the source of all the energy your writing will ever need.

Even the most 'unaware' reader carries a dozen powerful vacuums ready to spring into existence which will do all your marketing work for you.

Prices, times, logistics, special benefits, all become secondary when a reader is driven by a powerful enough vacuum.

Readers as Employers

Think of readers as your employers for a moment.

They have a job that they *need* doing. They've (potentially) turned to you to do it.

What is the job?

They want a valuable, finished piece of fiction which fills their vacuums (or leaves them intentionally unfulfilled). They want to experience an *effect*.

If it seems at first that readers are neutral initially because they don't necessarily voice these things, the truth is that in order to be a reader at all, there must be this want or need on some level, as yet unfulfilled. They are looking, by definition, for someone to do a job.

Thus they seek to employ someone who will do this task for them. Successful writers do this task for readers by, in vacuum terms:

- getting into the right places where the readers are by looking for reader vacuums in the open market: where are the readers looking?

- listening for the right signals - signals based on the reader's *needs* - not pushing out signals about how great the writing is.
- broadcasting vacuums - questions, prompts, surveys, images which convey needs, based on reader vacuums.
- delivering a piece of fiction that fits existing, predicted and hidden needs as precisely as possible.
- getting distributed to potential new readers through the word-of-mouth which arises from readers and your work coming together.

Put the reader at the heart of your writing business model. Work out everything around the reader.

Imagine yourself and your writing business as being employed by the reader.

How do you do this? It helps to ask some key questions as a writer:

- Who are your prospective employers in terms of readers? How do you reach them?
- What are they expecting? How can you find that out? How can you better things so that the reader gets *hidden* vacuums filled as well as the ones he or she thought she had?
- How exactly do they want their fiction? In what form? Is there a form which more closely matches what they want?
- How exactly is that production accomplished? Could it be tweaked to make the work more closely match what the reader wants? What tools exist for accomplishing that?

At first it can seem that you are operating in a fickle and varying marketplace of readers/employers, many of whom seem almost completely unaware of what they require. Your task as a writer (if you want a broad readership) is to isolate those needs and then fill them.

This divides into two broad areas of expertise:

1. Developing the necessary communication channels that contact enough readers effectively and economically to find out what they want.
2. Developing a writing business model which delivers what those readers want effectively and economically.

Both are established through the mechanism of vacuums: gaps or missing elements which draw reader attention.

The more work done on vacuums, the less effort you will have to make to acquire readers and sell things to them.

Let's step into the business world for a moment so that you can see how this works.

At first glance, any product or service has a number of neutral features, i.e. characteristics that do not seem to be capable of having a vacuum generated around them. But geniuses and entrepreneurs have the ability to spot the potential vacuum and create it around even the most neutral product.

A famous example of this is Apple: it took the personal computer with its casings, keyboards, wires and so forth - many aspects of which were perceived to be 'neutral', not interesting, not 'vacuum-able' - and it made them resonate with as-yet-unsuspected reader vacuums. It took so-called neutral features and inserted vacuums so what was previously a dull interface became something that readers found desirable.

Turning apparently neutral elements of any product or service (even if they are not named as such) into vacuum-packed features is a sign of true genius in business.

How does this work in writing fiction?

Any story - no matter what genre - has a number of 'neutral' features, things that writers and readers take for granted, things that do not seem to have 'vacuum potential'. Master authors have the ability to spot the potential vacuum and create it around even the most neutral product.

Remind yourself of the simple example of Charles Dickens' short story 'The Signalman', examined in an earlier week: right in the middle of the story, when the tension was mounting to a crescendo Dickens had the narrator go away and come back for no reason other than to magnify that tension even further; take the example of Tolkien's chapter in *The Lord of the Rings* in which Gandalf is explaining to Frodo the true nature the One Ring: Tolkien has the wizard's dark work contrasted with the sounds of servant Sam doing the gardening outside, thus increasing the drama.

The point is that a lesser author would have missed these opportunities.

'But I have already written my book!' you may protest. 'I have a copy in my hands! Surely you don't want me to go back and rewrite it?'

You're right - you have your book in your hands and all that work is done. What this is all about is *using the techniques that you have successfully applied to the writing of the book to its marketing.*

It's about seeing yourself and your writing as a business, but without having to become a 'business person'.



Turning your writing life into a business is done by extending the same principles you have applied in conquering the first two barriers into conquering the third barrier.

One of your basic tasks as a business manager is to inject vacuums into any product or feature that you have as a writer.

How do you do this?

Applying Vacuum Power to Marketing

The same kind of vacuums that you have applied to your work - character vacuums, linear vacuums, mystery vacuums, moral vacuums, core vacuums and so on - also apply to the world of marketing and selling your work.

Ask yourself the following questions:

What individual features or benefits (vacuum fillers) does my writing possess?

Look at the book you have just published. What feelings/sensations/ideas/impressions should your readers be left with after they have read it?

Write these down in as much detail as you can.

For example, let's say you've written a romantic comedy. Your readers, putting the book down at the end, should feel joy, a warmth toward others, the idea that true love is possible, the impression that romance is real.

This kind of thing might be what you would be tempted to say about your book if you were to be asked about it. After all, these kinds of things are what you want readers to be left with. But that would be a marketing mistake. The next question is the key.

What is the negative reflection of each of those features and benefits?

In other words, what are the main vacuums that your work fills?

Write these down too.

In the case of a romantic comedy these might include loneliness, a feeling of distance between themselves and others, doubt that true love is possible, the impression that romance is just a fantasy.

How could any marketing material about your work talk less about each of the features and benefits and stress the vacuums instead?

Work out a promotional sentence to do with your work. Instead of talking about how your work fills vacuums, talk about the vacuums it fills.

For example, in the romantic comedy, instead of writing something like this about the features and benefits:

'Josephine discovers joy and a newly-felt warmth toward others, after meeting David on a remote tropical island. She finds that true love is possible, and romance is real, and you will too.'

you could write something like this about the negative reflection of those features and benefits:

'Josephine, overwhelmed with loneliness on a remote tropical island, feeling a distance growing between herself and others, doubting that she will ever find true love, meets David, who slowly challenges her lifelong impression that romance is just a fantasy.'

That sentence sounds negative in comparison to talking about the features and benefits, but it is all stirring vacuums into life. Readers who had any kind of interest in romantic fiction, reading all of this, would find their inner fear, their hidden need, an emptiness, an absence, prompted to life within them.

Let's take another example: an Epic fantasy.

What individual features or benefits (vacuum fillers) does my writing possess?

You might want your readers to feel wonder, the joy of victory, the idea that overcoming great evil is possible, the impression that some kind of spiritual life is real.

What is the negative reflection of each of those features and benefits?

Take the features above and turn them into negatives:

A feeling of despair, the misery of defeat, the idea that overcoming great evil is impossible, the impression that any kind of spiritual life is an illusion.

How could any marketing material about your work talk less about each of the features and benefits and stress the vacuums instead?

Write a promotional sentence to do with your work, talking about the vacuums it fills.

Instead of:

'On Xarl's adventures, his eyes are opened to wonder, to the joy of victory, to the idea that overcoming great evil is possible. In his final encounter, he is left with the lasting impression that some kind of spiritual life is real.'

write something like:

'Xarl, falling prey to despair, faces the misery of defeat. Overcoming the great evil in the world was impossible even after all the sacrifice he had made, and he was rapidly forming the impression that any kind of spiritual life was an illusion.'

What about Tragedies and Ironies where the vacuums are left unfilled?

Exactly the same principles apply.

What individual features or benefits (vacuum fillers) does my writing possess?

A writer of Tragedy might want the reader to feel fear, pity, the idea that life is fragile, the impression that things rest on a knife edge.

What is the negative reflection of each of those features and benefits?

Take the features above and turn them on their heads:

A feeling of confidence, an inner strength, the idea that life is under control, the impression that all uncertainties have been removed.

How could any marketing material about your work talk less about each of the features and benefits and stress the vacuums instead?

Instead of:

'Claudius, Emperor of Rome, lives in fear, his life the subject of pity. He develops the notion that life is fragile, and has the continual impression that his power rests on a knife edge.'

write:

'Claudius, Emperor of Rome, comes to the throne with a sense of confidence, his life no longer the subject of pity. He develops the notion that life is under control, and has the continual impression that uncertainties have been removed. Then Tragedy strikes.'

You see how the innate negatives of a Tragedy are turned into 'false positives'? The reader of Tragedies is drawn in by the secret language that tells him that any positive qualities will soon be at risk. It's similar with an Irony:

What individual features or benefits (vacuum fillers) does my writing possess?

A writer of Irony might want the reader to feel terror, introversion, the idea that life is fundamentally hollow, the impression that the universe is at best indifferent and could be hostile.

What is the negative reflection of each of those features and benefits?

Take the features above and turn them upside down:

A feeling of enthusiasm, extroversion, the idea that life is fundamentally full of meaning, the impression that the universe is centred on one's individual needs and is totally providential.

How could any marketing material about your work talk less about each of the features and benefits and stress the vacuums instead?

Instead of:

'Angus, coming into his inheritance, feels a growing sense of terror, and becomes introverted, realising that life is fundamentally hollow, when he is betrayed by a universe that is at best indifferent and could be hostile.'

write:

'Angus, coming into his inheritance, feels a growing sense of enthusiasm, and is extroverted, realising that life is full of meaning, and that the universe is good - until he is betrayed.'

In each case, the sentence that we arrive at which is centred in vacuums is much more effective than the sentence based on the result you might want the reader to experience.

That's because in each case it's charged with vacuum power.

Increasing Vacuum Power Further

How can you apply these principles to the work that you have already written?

It probably won't surprise you to discover that the answer is:

Work on vacuums.

Start with your own.

Begin with what excites you - what have you always wanted to do with your writing? As a guide, answer the questions below in your own words.

'My work is called _____'

'My mission is to fulfil readers on many levels through _____.'

'Whom do I serve? Who are my readers?'

'What needs do I fulfil?' (Spend some time on this. Get large needs, medium needs, small needs; get long term needs, medium term needs, short-term needs. The more needs the better.)

'How exactly do I fulfil those needs?'

'What values does my writing have?'

'What do my current readers have in common?'

'What is different about the fiction that I offer, compared to other fiction in the same market?'

'What are the 'extras' that I bring to the market in terms of those bits of vacuum that I can fill which others might not be able to?'

Vacuums should be abounding by now - you can probably feel the pull of them yourself. But we've barely begun. Completing this exercise fully will create virtual whirlpools of vacuums which, if employed correctly, will swamp your business with readers.

'How unique is my writing? What makes it that way?'

Now begin to look on the fringes of your reader base for potentially unmet needs.

Example: in the romantic comedy market, look for

- overseas readers looking to get a feeling for life in your country
- readers who like to have a lot of action in stories
- readers who want a particular style of writing (modern and colloquial, or historical, for instance)
- readers who want family-orientated comedy
- readers who want a comedy aimed at children

Example: in the Epic fantasy market, look for

- new readers looking to get a feeling for what a fantasy epic is like
- readers who like to have a lot of magic in stories (or, conversely, a little magic used sparingly)
- readers who want a particular style of writing ('High Fantasy' or the more gutsy 'Sword and Sorcery' sub-genres, for example)
- readers who want comedy mixed with the fantasy (as in Terry Pratchett's work)
- readers who want a fantasy aimed at children

Example: in the Tragedy market, look for

- readers who like Shakespeare but without the language difficulties
- readers who like to have a fantasy element in the Tragedy
- readers who want a particular style of writing (contemporary 'gangster' style tragedy, for example)
- readers who want comedy mixed with the tragedy
- readers who want a Tragedy set in an alien culture

Example: in the Irony market, look for

- readers who like Hitchcock and other horror experts
- readers who like to have Gothic elements

- readers who want a particular style of writing (first person narrative, for instance)
- readers who want comedy mixed with the irony
- readers who want an Irony in a historical setting

and so on.

Does your piece of fiction fill any of those needs, even partially?

As you can see, potential readers divide into many different sub-sets of readers, and this yields another key datum when it comes to marketing your work to readers:

On the fringes of the market you are in, whatever that market is, you will find a forest of unmet needs, a desert thirsting for a particular kind story, an ocean of swirling vacuums, that no one or almost no one will have tapped into yet.

Know Where You Are Going

Know your own goal - and thus your own driving vacuum. Phrase it like this:

'My goal is to [immediate goal] and [effect a larger scene], plus make [financial target].'

Example: 'My goal is to capture 1% of the e-book market and transform the e-book romance scene, plus make £1,000,000.'

Example: 'My goal is to attract a steady flow of readers to my Epic fantasy series and become a leader in the genre, plus make £200,000 clear profit each year.'

Example: 'My goal is to double the number of visitors to my website and re-invigorate my local community, plus make £100,000 reserves over the next five years.'

Know your readers. Phrase it like this:

'My readers have [most fundamental need] and [peculiarities], plus [another need].'

Example: 'My reader has a burning passion for quest fantasy and lots of time, plus money.'

Example: 'My reader has a love of tragic tales about Northern dynasties and lives locally, plus has a family.'

Example: 'My reader has taste for scathing parodies and has tried conventional fiction, plus is wealthy.'

By now you should have some idea of who your target readers are likely to be: anyone with a vacuum that in any way relates to your writing.

You don't determine who your target audience is as much as they themselves do with their needs - but you can either miss them or drive them away depending on what you do next.

List out five target reader publics that you might not have thought of yet - those potential readers who have a need which you haven't yet tapped into. Each one of these could be a smaller target market but one in which you may be the only provider.

Hence the next question:

'Is my writing flexible and creative enough to be able to develop ideas for new features that inherently appeal to specific niches within my new potential reader base?'

Answering the following list of questions may help you to clarify this:

'How do I develop new writing?'

'Am I “stuck in my ways”?’

Examine your own attitude to change. Are you uncomfortable when you think about modifying what you produce or do to meet readers' needs? It's understandable if you are: you needed to have faith in what you were doing to get this far with your writing. But, as we have seen, real success depends on more than just producing something - it has to match the vacuums of your readers or they will mechanically end up elsewhere.

All of this is designed to open your eyes to the possibilities involved in marketing your fiction, remembering that marketing is largely a matter of finding or creating vacuums.

There's still the matter of physically getting your work to your readers.

Distribution

Now examine the kinds of markets you've listed above. Ask yourself the following:

'What channels do my readers have for obtaining my work? The Internet? Magazines? Retail outlets? Some combination of all of these?'

'What is it that I'm doing that distinguishes me from what's already available in all of those places?'

You could do worse than sketch out the following table:

CHANNELS TO READERS	WHAT MAKES MY WORK DIFFERENT?		
The Internet			
Magazines			
Retail outlets			
Other			

Organic Distribution

The first practical barrier will not seem very practical initially, but the fact is that unless you overcome it, you won't get very far.

And that is, your own struggle with the idea of marketing your own work. 'Surely, this is what publishers are for?' you might say. And the answer is that you are exactly correct: traditional publishers exist to deal with all of these commercial aspects, the advertising campaigns, customers, and everything that might seem very foreign to a writer, who has sat alone typing a manuscript and trying to avoid people for so long in order to get anything done. That's mainly why writers outsourced the task of selling their work in the first place, because it was so alien to have to do it themselves.

But really, finding authentic ways to make direct and meaningful connections with an audience is just an extension of what you have been trying to do all along.

All of the commercial aspects of this are simply about sharing your fiction with others. That's how markets started back in the dim reaches of history - they were the means by which people (mainly farmers) shared what they had produced with those who wanted to buy. Direct contact with the people who were going to buy your goods gave you a market, but also made you better at whatever it was you did because your work needed to be good enough to sell itself. Now that you have learned the secret language of fiction and incorporated all kinds of quality into your work, you will be amongst the most skilled fiction writers out there - only this time the marketplace is global. We have direct access to a world-wide market through the Internet.

But where do you begin?

You begin *organically*.

Even large publishers now require their authors to develop what they call an 'author platform' around their work and connect with people in different ways.

Developing an author platform means reaching out to real people and working out why they would care about what you have written. This can feed back into what you write, of course, when you find out what it is that they require - but we're starting from the viewpoint that you have produced a book and you want to move forward into selling it.

'Author platforms' first arose in connection with *nonfiction* authors. Traditional publishers wanted authors to be in the public eye in some way so that they themselves could spread the word easily and thus sell more books. Publishers and agents were looking for writers who were visible to their target audience as some kind of expert, or professional. Gradually, as the golden age of independent publishing dawned, this idea extended into the fiction realm. It became much easier with the development of social media.

An author platform also gives you a direct connection with a living, breathing audience and an inside look as to how your work is interpreted. As you broaden out into wider audiences, you will learn new things from the process of selling online and connecting with others via social networking. You'll discover distribution possibilities that you didn't exist.

How do you start?

Step 1: List out your closest connections.

Start with those who you know already care about your work, family and friends. Include a local book club or writer's group. Drop off a couple of copies at your local library or bookstore. Share your work with the people geographically close to you.

Step 2: Plan your diary.

Look at what's coming up over the next couple of months. Take a copy of your book along where appropriate and sell it to people you meet at events, gatherings, parties. You don't have to 'sell' it unless you feel comfortable doing so, but you can certainly talk about your book and show people a hard copy of it.

Step 3: Connect with your immediate online community.

You already have a network of social media connections, in all likelihood. Talk about your book. What do you say about it? Use what you learned about marketing above. Don't say:

'It's all about Xarl's adventures, and how his eyes are opened to wonder, to the joy of victory, to the idea that overcoming great evil is possible. In his final encounter, he is left with the lasting impression that some kind of spiritual life is real.'

Say something like:

'Xarl is a character with a huge burden who falls prey to despair, and faces total defeat. He fails at overcoming the great evil in the world even after great sacrifice, and rapidly forms the impression that any kind of spiritual life is an illusion. But his story is just beginning.'

The vacuum thus created will draw attention in.

Step 4: Start a blog about your book.

Focus on various chapters as discussion points, remembering to concentrate on *vacuums*. Just chat through the blog to a tiny community of friends and a small number of others, i.e. people you've never met but who seem to be interested. Create mysteries, touch upon core vacuums, talk about character vacuums, focus on moral vacuums: engage the reader.

Step 5: Develop the blog into a full author website.

This is far easier to do today than it might sound. There are many ways of creating a website for free - using Wix.com, for example - and you can then expand the subject, making excerpts or free chapters available, make a video, publicise your appearances if that's appropriate to your situation.

You can also make it possible for people to buy the book directly from your site. Lulu.com have made this very easy for you. All you have to have on your own website is a link to your page on the Lulu site. Once readers click that link, they are taken through to the Lulu machine which will run everything else: selling the book, printing the book, distributing the book and making sure that the money arrives with you.

Step 6. Stay in touch with people you don't know.

Put a sign-up form on your website. As your circle expands beyond the people you know, you'll start to accumulate identities of people you don't know. Keep that database of identities! It is worth gold to you, and represents your first faltering steps into a bigger world.

Step 7: Set up auto-responders to keep in touch with people you don't know.

Apart from engaging with people live through your website, through social media, through a blog, answering comments, sending out news and so forth, you can have a company like AWeber or Mailchimp send things out to your small database automatically. Of course this takes extra work writing whatever it is you'll send out, but it will be worth it over the medium and long term. Just make sure that whatever it is you create is charged with vacuum power!

Step 8: List the book on Amazon and/or other global marketplaces and use their facilities.

If you haven't already done this, putting a book on Amazon is an opportunity to connect with the world at large and make an impression. Use the facilities provided by these sites to introduce

yourself to strangers who will want to know who you are and what your work is about. The blurb on the back of your book will go digital when your book is listed online, and will start to show up on Google search results. Also, the 'Look Inside' feature which Amazon provides, allowing browsers to read a free excerpt to help them decide if the book is something they really want, is important for you in particular, because you are 'vacuum-trained': if you can get readers to engage with your actual writing, even a small excerpt of it, then your character, linear, mystery and other vacuums will have a chance to draw them in more deeply.

Hopefully, some of the people who read your book will go on to write reviews for you on Amazon too, which act like intermediaries between your work and other readers, adding to your vacuum power.

Step 9: Use the Six Degrees of Separation.

You're probably familiar with the idea that we are all connected together and that we are only six connections from knowing anyone else on the planet. In other words, I know someone who knows someone who knows someone else who knows another person who knows yet another person who knows you - six people form a connecting chain between me and you. Make a list of people you know and see if you can find out who they know, and so on. Politely ask for contact details and permission to follow them up, and you will soon see that the world is your oyster.

You could go so far as to send a copy of your book to someone on this chain - not too far down the chain, say someone who knows someone you know. They might like it and spread it further.

Step 10: Create a press kit.

Outline the book and provide some contact information. Include only the best or most influential or glowing reviews. Make sure your strongest selling points (vacuums) are on the first page.

Step 11: Send press releases to local newspapers and bookshops.

Find out who the individual people are who accept submissions to newspapers and who make decisions in bookshops by making some phone calls or doing some research to find out the specific person who reviews books in each place. If you are a local author, the bookshop will be more likely to accept your book as a community service than if you're not. Make an appointment to go in and show them the book. When contacting the shop, telling them that your book is available through online-only booksellers or your personal website is not a good idea - they want customers to physically arrive at their shop.

Leave a copy of the book with the manager or buyer and let them know that you would be available for author signings and readings when the time comes. Ask the contact person if they would like a complimentary copy of the book, but don't expect or ask them to read it themselves.

Every month or so, check that have taken the book and ask if they need more copies. Don't be upset, though, if, when the contract time is up, they ask you to take back any unsold copies. If the book didn't sell, it will be largely because you didn't promote it enough.

If you're in a busy bookshop, get in and out as quickly as you can. Like any other reader, they will take a quick look at the book and make their own decisions. If you are 'vacuum-tuned' enough, the book itself will attract and glue their attention.

Step 12: Advertise in local publications.

Approach your local bookstore and let them know that you're marketing the book locally so that you can put an 'available at ...' line in ads if they will accept the book for sale.

Step 13: Contact local TV and radio stations for interviews.

You might shy away from this. But radio is easier than it might seem - no one is looking at you! Ask friends to recommend you to media people they know (the Six Degrees of Separation at work again - you will find people who know media people).

Step 14: Create fliers containing information about your book.

Include the ISBN and a brief summary. Post fliers on public bulletin boards to create local interest. Ask your friends, neighbours, family, and co-workers-to ask for the book at local shops.

These 14 steps will give you a start. Next week, you will get a full Marketing Programme to take all this further. The key point to note here is that these steps are designed to get people who will help to sell your book close enough to the actual book for the vacuum power that you've built into the book to do its work!

Endorsements

There are different types of readers, all with needs of some kind.

For the reader who has no idea of need, there is no discernible vacuum. Selling anything to this kind of reader might seem to be a far-off dream. But there are magical tools or weapons that can be made to work for you even in this case.

They can be summed up as Authorities and Opinion Leaders. The section below is based on a similar section in my book, *How Businesses Really Work*.

Find the appropriate authority figure for your potential reader and he or she can be made aware of a vacuum that he or she didn't even know they had. Isolate who your reader listens to in different situations and you can have that person point out a need and bring it into being like magic.

This isn't the same as testimonies: this is using people with *altitude*, not just in the area of your work, but generally.

Why does this work?

Remember, we are talking here about a potential reader who knows nothing at all about his or her need for your writing. They aren't looking for it, aren't thinking about it, are barely aware of anything to do with it. The need has to be put in front of them and made real. It has to impinge upon them from 'outside', as it were. It has to hit them with authority, it has to grab their attention which is currently on other things.

Authority figures in the area of your writing are all very well, but if your potential reader isn't looking or thinking about that area, why should he or she pay any attention?

You need an authority figure who is accepted as such generally - someone who is an outstanding personality whose achievements embrace several fields - a celebrity, perhaps, like David Beckham whose profile stretches across sport, fashion and, due to his marriage to former Spice Girl Victoria, popular culture. Get David Beckham to introduce your work and you will grab attention.

Of course, we don't all have access to someone like David Beckham. But there are authority figures that society generally respects through convention: people like policemen, headmasters and teachers, people in the medical profession, community leaders and so on. The Six Degrees of Separation, outlined above, virtually guarantees that you will be able to find at least one of these people in your network. If you know of someone like that and can get them to publicly endorse your product or service then you have punched through the 'invisibility bubble' for those customers who weren't even thinking about such a thing.

Suddenly, they experience a 'vacuum' - because someone they innately respect has said that they favour something, a need, however slight, is awakened and a *motion* begins. Encourage that motion through the use of vacuums and the reader begins to edge towards your work.

Aristotle called this aspect of persuading people to do something 'ethos': convincing by character or personality. People tend to believe those whom they respect. You might have trouble getting through to a reader who has never heard of you or expressed any interest in your writings. But if you are someone worth listening to, someone in some sphere of authority (even if that sphere isn't directly connected to your writing), as well as someone who is likeable and worthy of respect, then you are able to create the vacuum that starts the flow.

If you think about it, why should we listen to David Beckham, a capable and well-known football player, about his choice of shaving razor or underwear? They don't have anything to do with football. That doesn't seem to matter. It's because he is an authority in his field that he can impinge upon other fields.

Rightly or wrongly, authority figures, opinion leaders and celebrities, however minor they may be, carry the ability to create vacuums where none may have been before, simply because they have a certain 'higher' profile than the ordinary mortals around them.

List possible authority figures you know or you think you could contact to get some statement of support for your writing, if you can. If you can get hold of someone and get something like that from them, you will have established a means of getting through to the first type of reader: the one who doesn't even know you exist.

You'll be surprised who you know who fits these definitions, by the way. Go through a list of your friends and the friends of those friends. A short-list of authorities and opinion leaders will swiftly develop.

Readers with little or no awareness of need for your writing can be impinged upon from outside the field even of your work.

Authority figures and opinion leaders can help you, not through inspirational speeches or motivational exercises, but by pointing out the vacuum within the reader which he or she previously didn't even know was there.

For the reader who has an inarticulate need or vague notion of need the vacuum is beginning to stir but may be weak. How can you make it so strong that it will exert a pull and draw your reader towards your book? In this case, the vacuum doesn't have to be created, it's already there. It needs to be excited or magnified.

This can be done using lively or energetic examples or narrative. Remember, vacuums create motion. If there is a small vacuum there, there is the beginning of a motion.

Excite the motion using live events, stories, things that in themselves already possess motion.

You want to employ things here that already have some kind of movement going on. They don't have to have anything to do directly with your writing, they just have to have some kind of action happening. This could be a current event, a dramatic story, a vibrant happening, an attention-grabbing occurrence. If you can connect that in some way to your book, you will have excited the vague need that was stirring into positive action.

Why does this work? Because those things that appear to us to be 'dramatic' or 'action-packed' or full of energy are precisely those things that contain *vacuums*. And vacuums (and the motions that they create) are *contagious*.

Take the example of the 'ice bucket challenge' which swept through the internet in 2014. A medical charity started popularising itself by urging people at large to dunk themselves in ice-cold water connected with making a donation to the charity. This spread across the world through social media until everyone seemed to be doing it. The event in question - dunking oneself in freezing cold water in public - was sufficiently exciting, possessed enough 'frisson', to capture the attention of the vast numbers of people who were vaguely aware that they needed to be doing more for charity. Millions were raised in various currencies. Of course, as soon as authority figures, celebrities, politicians and other opinion leaders began to get involved, even those potential customers who weren't even thinking about charities had their attention grabbed, as outlined above.

The object of the exercise with this type of reader is *to strengthen the motion until it becomes strong enough to prompt actual physical action*. In the ice bucket example, the motion became strong enough to physically motivate people to undergo a mildly unpleasant bodily sensation for a good cause. Dunking oneself in ice had nothing whatsoever to do with the medical condition for which the charity stood - it simply had enough drama and movement about it already to get the customer moving, to bring the customer and the product - in this case, a donation - together.

Other things that are moving carry the energy to boost motion and vacuums around them.

List off some things around in your environment right now - local events, happenings, news items, anything that is in motion already. Connect up to them in some way and you will have established a means of getting through to the second type of reader: the one who has some inkling of need for your work.

Successful salespeople simply work with vacuums until the reader overcomes his or her own objections and makes a purchase.

If the purchased work fits the vacuum accurately, trust is achieved and the reader will return to have other vacuums filled.

Pricing and Revenue

This section is also based on my book *How Businesses Really Work*.

There are no 'one size fits all' answers on price. Sometimes increasing prices acts as a vacuum in itself, pulling readers forward towards your book; in other circumstances or at other times, reducing the price removes an obstacle that was preventing them from moving forward. Prices are determined by promise of the size and amount of vacuum power: they go up when there is too much vacuum power; they go down when there is too little vacuum power.

How can raising prices act as a vacuum?

There was once a man in Australia who ran a small stall in a pedestrian mall through which he sold rare coins, medals and other small memorabilia. He would lay out his coins and medals, each with a tiny price tag, so that they could be clearly seen by passers-by. On occasion, a potential customer, examining the display, would remark 'This \$20.00 item is too expensive. I can get the same thing for \$10.00 in another shop.' The man would take the item carefully out from beneath the glass case, examine it closely and reply, 'Thank you for bringing this to my attention. The item is incorrectly priced. I'm sorry, but this is worth \$35.00.' Then he would put the item back and close the glass case.

Dumbstruck, the protesting customer would move on. But shortly afterwards, he would return and pay for the item at the increased price of \$35.00!

The stall owner was a multi-millionnaire. He used to drive around Adelaide in a green Rolls Royce. He described this method as the primary rationale behind his wealth. He would make hundreds of dollars a day through a stall which had minimal costs, thus earning a large profit. He had to know his stuff when it came to the memorabilia in the stall, but apart from a few hours a day of standing around in his stall, his workload was not strenuous.

How does this work?

Customers have expectations about prices and further expectations about how selling usually works. The protesting customer would probably have had two expectations:

i) that the small item he was looking at wasn't worth as much as was being stated

ii) that, if challenged, the 'normal' sales response would be to bargain - to engage in a traditional banter whereby the price agreed upon would end up being a compromise between the customer and the salesperson.

The customer clearly had a desire to possess the item - i.e. a certain amount of vacuum power. He had investigated it, or at least was alleging that he had in order to get a response from the stall owner. His need or vacuum was the impulse to have the coin or medal or whatever it was. He was prepared to enter into negotiations to get it. He perceived his primary obstacles to obtaining it as being an inflated price and the salesperson.

The stall owner's unorthodox response shattered both of the customer's expectations and replaced them with unexpected new ones: a higher price and an uncooperative salesperson. The effect on the customer was not what might logically be expected: the desire was *increased*, rather than decreased.

In other words, the vacuum power went *up*.

Firstly, the unexpected response of the salesperson suggested that he is actually knowledgeable about the item under question and that its worth was in fact greater than the customer originally thought.

Secondly, the increased price means that the desired item was now receding from the customer's reach. If he really wanted it, he had better get it straight away, before its price went up again. The perception created was that there was now too much vacuum power.

This increased vacuum power created by the increase in both the item's perceived value and its price acted to overcome the customer's objections and moved him into action.

Whatever happened, the result was a very rich stall owner.

The big questions for you to ask on Price are:

What prices do you charge at the moment for your book?

What do you think would happen if you increased the price?

What do you think would happen if you decreased the price?

Which would create more of a vacuum to attract readers, based on what you know at the moment about reader needs?

Increase?

Decrease?

Are you in a similar position to the stall owner above? Is your work suitable for a price increase or even a threatened future price increase? Or is it most suited to some kind of discount scheme?

How this will work for you depends on how the vacuum power situation is perceived in your field: if you are struggling - low vacuum power - then reducing prices might help. But as we have seen, increasing prices can also boost vacuum power. It's a question of using your judgement.

End of Week 11!

You've almost reached the end of the course!

Having gotten some idea of what a character is, you've examined plots, the other fundamental element of fiction.

This week:

- you've had a glimpse of the world of marketing and what it takes to get your book physically into the hands of the reader
- you've had the field of distribution de-mystified to some degree and you now know what you have to set up to get channels directly to your potential readership
- you've learned how to get endorsements
- you've had some advice about pricing and revenue

Though there's only one week left, there's still a lot of life-changing ground to cover.

Get ready for Week 12!

Week 12: What's Next?

Your Marketing Programme

Welcome to the final week of the *How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published!* e-course!

Here, you'll get a Marketing Programme with options to appear on Amazon, Barnes & Noble and so on. That means a step-by-step guide on how to get your book out there in front of readers all over the world!

PLUS Your FREE Bonus Material:

How to Succeed in Business as a Writer

This bonus package, worth £1,995.00 in itself, is the simplified version of a business mentoring procedure especially adapted for writers. You'll learn the basics of how to operate your writing life as a business, what to watch out for with employees, how to manage readers as customers and much more.

How to Achieve Your Personal Goals!

In this high-quality package, worth £249.00 in its own right, you'll be taught how to apply the basics of success to yourself and your immediate family and friends.

On application, you'll also get an Invitation to a Private Facebook Group

This means that you'll have the chance to connect with the other creative writers in this course. Give each other encouragement and feedback through the Facebook group.

WARNING: If you are purchasing this module separately from the rest of the course, welcome, but beware! You won't get the complete benefit of the 'How to Write Stories That Work - and Get Them Published!' e-course unless you do the whole thing! By all means extract what wisdom you can from this week's 'episode' - but take the plunge and get the whole course as soon as you can!

You can get it [here](#).

Your Marketing Programme

This programme is designed as a step-by-step guide to getting your book more widely known and sold to more and more people.

You should cut and paste this into another document and print it off so that you can sign off each point as it is done.

Some points will be ongoing, but most are finite in the sense that once they are done they are done and your book will be that much closer to making it in terms of viable sales. One of the joys of independent publishing, though, is knowing that you don't have to outlay a lot of money at any stage to print off a load of stock or store a huge amount of books in a warehouse somewhere, as a traditional publisher might have done: as an independent publisher, your book is only produced when it is bought.

You just have to make sure that it is bought. And that's what these steps are all about.

Last week, you listed off several major potential publics for your book. These should be differentiated for the purposes of promotion and marketing. List off each broad category here (you may have more than five, in which case just use more paper):

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Each one of these potential readerships has a particular approach, unique features and a distinct outcome. You might be in a position to launch several marketing campaigns at the same time, each aimed at acquiring some of each of these publics, but this program will start by connecting up with the people you already know. As your marketing campaign grows in confidence, you will be able to return to the above categories and direct a campaign to each of them.

We begin by having in place some agreements about how this works and who is going to make sure that it does:

1. 'I assume responsibility for implementing this programme.' _____

2. Read through this programme and get any questions answered about it until you feel confident. (You can contact me at grant@clarendonhousebooks.com if you need to.)

3. List out your closest connections.

Start with those who you know already care about your work, i.e. family and friends:

Include local book clubs or writers' groups:

Your local library or bookshop:

People geographically close to you:

4. Immediately establish or re-establish a personal line with each of the above, talking to them about your book where feasible or appropriate.

5. Work out for each of the above how to introduce them to your book. This could involve answering a range of questions such as:

'Has _____ any interest in anything similar to my book?'

'Does _____ already own or display anything similar to my book?'

'Has _____ any history or owning or displaying anything similar to my book?'

6. Prepare a briefing sheet about your book. This should look something like this:

First paragraph: outline your core vacuum. What is your book really all about? (Don't give too much away!)

Second paragraph: outline your protagonist's vacuum. What is he or she missing?

Third paragraph: outline a major mystery vacuum. What is a secret or puzzle that the characters are trying to figure out? (Don't give too much away!)

Fourth paragraph: outline a linear vacuum. What will happen next?

Fifth paragraph: outline a moral vacuum. What is the right thing to do?

As an example, here is a sample briefing sheet for *Star Wars: A New Hope*:

First paragraph: outline your core vacuum. What is the story really about?

The galaxy stands at a threshold: the outnumbered Rebellion, striving to restore justice, is about to be crushed by the onslaught of the tyrant Emperor and his super-weapon.

Second paragraph: outline your protagonist's vacuum. What is he or she missing?

Young Luke Skywalker, orphaned and living a life of drudgery on a remote planet, wonders about his father, one of the ancient order of the Jedi.

Third paragraph: outline a major mystery vacuum. What is really going on?

But Luke encounters a message from a mysterious princess and becomes involved in a plot to defeat the Empire.

Fourth paragraph: outline a linear vacuum. What will happen next?

Hunting in the wasteland for the droid that carried the message, Luke is attacked by the vicious Sand People and meets a secretive stranger.

Fifth paragraph: outline a moral vacuum. What is the right thing to do?

Before long, he is embroiled in a series of events beyond his control and must make a choice which could transform not only his life, but the lives of everyone in the galaxy.

Here's another example, this time for Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*:

First paragraph: outline your core vacuum. What is the story really about?

The Bennett family are in crisis: unless their daughters can be married off to rich husbands, they face ruin.

Second paragraph: outline your protagonist's vacuum. What is he or she missing?

Young Elizabeth Bennett, possessed of a good wit and common sense, cannot find a solution in the face of her mother's silliness and the restrictions of a confining society.

Third paragraph: outline a major mystery vacuum. What is really going on?

But a mysterious stranger is rumoured to have moved into the area, bringing with him the possibility of wealthy connections.

Fourth paragraph: outline a linear vacuum. What will happen next?

Elizabeth meets the haughty Mr. Darcy and takes an instant dislike to him - but soon she realises that she needs his help.

Fifth paragraph: outline a moral vacuum. What is the right thing to do?

Before long, she is embroiled in a series of events beyond her control and must come to a judgement which could change her life and that of her family forever.

And yet another example, for Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*:

First paragraph: outline your core vacuum. What is the story really about?

In Victorian England, those who cannot rise on the social ladder face a life of squalor and misery.

Second paragraph: outline your protagonist's vacuum. What is he or she missing?

Pip, orphaned and brought up by his brutal sister, has no prospects in life but to be an apprentice to Joe Gargery at his blacksmith's forge out on the lonely marshes.

Third paragraph: outline a major mystery vacuum. What is really going on?

But a stranger arrives with news of a benefactor and a legacy for Pip that totally changes his outlook.

Fourth paragraph: outline a linear vacuum. What will happen next?

Journeying to London, Pip is soon involved in a complex and much larger story where it seems anything could happen.

Fifth paragraph: outline a moral vacuum. What is the right thing to do?

Pip, coming to realise some harsh truths about his life, has to make decisions that will affect the lives of many and place his own at risk.

7. Work over your briefing sheet until you have developed a short, two-minute verbal 'patter' which will engage the attention of anyone listening (because it is using vacuum power!)

8. Either in person, or through some other form of communication, including social media, get the briefing sheet across to your immediate connections. Start with those who you know already care about your work, i.e. family and friends:

Include local book clubs or writers' groups:

Your local library or bookshop:

People geographically close to you:

9. Take a hard copy of your book to each of the above if it seems appropriate, with your briefing sheet, and either

a) sell your book to them or

b) have them display it or

c) have them communicate about it to others.

10. Plan your diary.

List any upcoming social event at which it might be appropriate to use a copy of your book and a briefing sheet in a similar way to the steps above:

11. Connect with your immediate online community.

Make a list of your immediate social media connections.

12. Use the briefing sheet and the patter you developed above to communicate to them about your book:

13. Follow up on any communications either directly or through 'Comments' sections or any other feedback mechanism. Keep the conversations 'live'.

14. Make sure that you have a website in place and that the link to your book's page on Lulu.com is live and working.

a) Direct anyone interested in the conversations above to your website and that link.

b) Have a pdf copy of your briefing sheet available on your website for people to download. Make sure that the pdf document contains the link to your Lulu.com page.

15. Email your briefing sheet, with the above link to your book's Lulu.com page, to any appropriate address in your email address database.

16. Start a blog about your book. This can be a new blog using one of the many platforms available for free blogging, or can be part of any existing web set-up you might have. Make sure that you use the blog in the following ways:

a) Focus on various chapters or excerpts as discussion points, remembering to concentrate on *vacuums*.

b) Chat through the blog to a tiny community of friends and a small number of others, i.e. people you've never met but who seem to be interested

c) Create mysteries, touch upon core vacuums, talk about character vacuums, focus on moral vacuums: engage the reader.

d) Feed people through links either directly to your website or to your Lulu.com page.

17. Put a sign-up form on your website. As your circle expands beyond the people you know, you'll start to accumulate identities of people you don't know. Keep that database of identities!

18. Set up auto-responders to keep in touch with people you don't know, using a company like AWeber or Mailchimp to send things out to your small database automatically.

19. Write a short series of newsletters, excerpts commentary, interesting conversations you've had about your book or any testimonies or other data about your book for use in the above auto-responder.

20. List the book on Amazon and/or other global marketplaces and use their facilities.

a) Use the facilities provided by these sites to introduce yourself to strangers who will want to know who you are and what your work is about.

b) Use the 'Look Inside' feature which Amazon provides, allowing browsers to read a free excerpt to help them decide if the book is something they really want (your character, linear, mystery and other vacuums will have a chance draw them in deeper).

21. Encourage people to write positive reviews for you on Amazon.

22. Make a list of people you know and see if you can find out who they know, and so on. Politely ask for contact details and permission to follow them up.

You could go so far as to send a copy of your book to someone on this chain - not too far down the chain, say someone who knows someone you know. They might like it and spread it further.

23. Create a press kit.

Include

i) your briefing sheet

ii) some contact information

iii) the best or most influential or glowing reviews.

24. Prepare a press release for local newspapers and bookshops.

This isn't quite the same thing as your briefing sheet. A press release is really a story about your book, rather than the book's story. In other words, what makes the publication of your book interesting.

Here's a template for a press release:

Press Release

For immediate release (If you want the media to use the release as soon as they receive it) or embargoed for: [time/date] (This is a good way of giving journalists time to prepare and ensures that they don't use your release until a specified time)

Headline

(Start with a snappy headline, not too clever but not too obvious either)

Photo opportunity: (What it is, where it is, when it is and contact details)

Paragraph 1: Summarise the story you want to release about your book - who, what, where, when and why. All the key information needs to be in this paragraph

Paragraph 2: Put in more details to flesh out the story you have outlined in the first paragraph

Paragraph 3: This is where you place any quotes from you or someone relevant to the story. Each quote should make one point.

Paragraph 4: Extra relevant information

Ends

Any notes for Editors

Provide background information in case they run a longer story.

Outline what you have to offer: pictures, interviewees

Briefly outline any additional relevant information or facts and figures.

Contact details: Make sure you supply numbers where you can be reached day or night. This can make the difference between your story being covered or not

Name:

Telephone:

Email:

Website:

Here's an example of a press release about a locally-written book:

Press Release

For immediate release: ✓

Headline

LOCAL AUTHOR RELEASES FANTASY SET IN SURROUNDING VILLAGES

Photo opportunity: Available for pictures Tuesday 11:30 at [insert address]

Paragraph 1:

Local author Philip Warren has written a fantasy novel set in the villages around his hometown of Bradfield due to be released next week. Mr. Warren grew up in the area and has long entertained the idea of a fictional story set here.

Paragraph 2:

The 59-year-old retired teacher explained that the story, called 'Xarl's Destiny' was a High Fantasy in the tradition of J. R. R. Tolkien, and was about a race of fairies who were threatened with extinction due to the building of a new road. Drawing on minute local detail and flavoured with local references, the story builds to a climax in which the hero Xarl must make a decision which will change the fate of his entire people.

Paragraph 3:

'I've been working on the story in one form or another for many years,' said Mr. Warren. 'It's a joy to see it actually being published.'

Local writers' group chairman Sally Hargreaves said, 'It's a great story and it's a pleasure to see the local area featuring as the setting for such an adventure.'

Paragraph 4:

'Xarl's Destiny' will be released in local bookshops on Tuesday but is already available online through the author's personal website www.philipwarren.co.uk.

Ends

Any notes for Editors:

Provide background information in case they run a longer story:

Mr. Warren has a series of stories set in the local area in the pipeline.

Outline what you have to offer: Pictures and a full-length interview, plus a briefing sheet, are available.

Briefly outline any additional relevant information or facts and figures:

'Xarl's Destiny' is an 80,000 word Epic Fantasy with an online following.

Contact details:

Name: Philip Warren

Telephone: [number]

Email: philip@philipwarren.co.uk

Website: www.philipwarren.co.uk

25. Find out who the individual people are who accept submissions to specific newspapers by making some phone calls or doing some research.

26. Send them the press release.

27. Find out who the individual people are who make decisions in local bookshops by making some phone calls or doing some research.

28. Send them the press release.

29. Where appropriate, make an appointment to go in and show them your book, remembering that telling them that your book is available through online-only booksellers or your personal website is not a good idea - they want customers to physically arrive at their shop.

30. In bookshops, leave a copy of the book with the manager or buyer and let them know that you would be available for author signings and readings when the time comes. Ask the contact person if they would like a complimentary copy of the book, but don't expect or ask them to read it themselves. Let them know that you're marketing the book locally so that you can put an 'available at ...' line in ads if they will accept the book for sale.

31. Every month or so, check that have taken the book and ask if they need more copies. Don't be upset, though, if, when the contract time is up, they ask you to take back any unsold copies.

32. Advertise in local publications.

33. Contact local TV and radio stations for interviews.

34. Create fliers containing information about your book based on the briefing sheet. Include the ISBN and a brief summary.

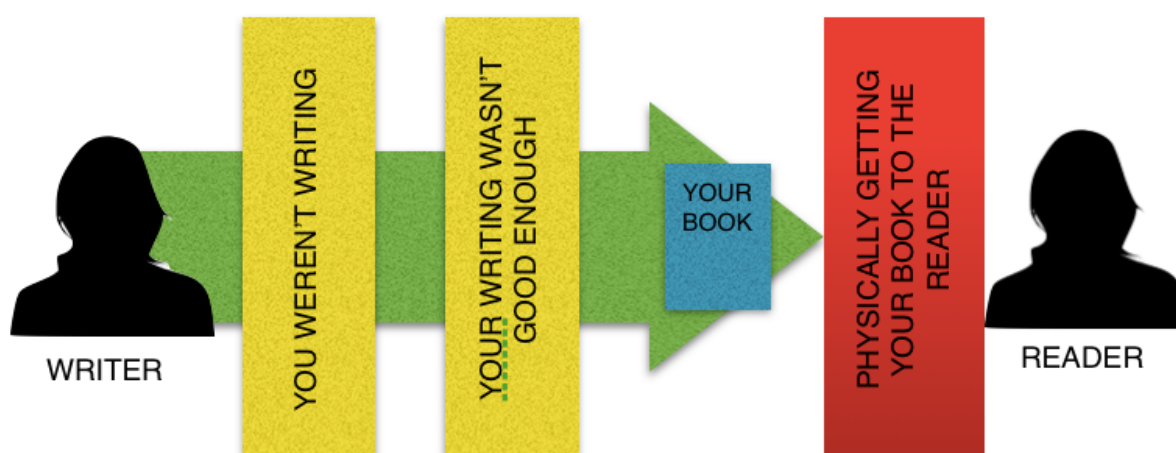
35. Post the fliers on public bulletin boards to create local interest.

36. Ask your friends, neighbours, family, and co-workers-to ask for the book at local shops.

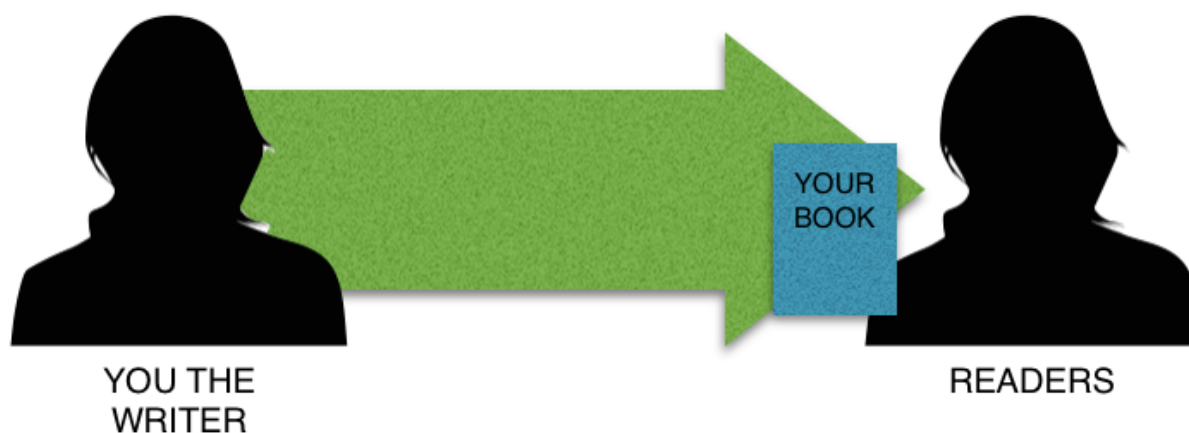
Note that the programme focuses primarily on the local area and doesn't develop many online opportunities. This is on purpose. Simply by being online, and using Lulu, you will find plenty of advice about how to market your book on the internet, some of which will be free and some of which you will be invited to pay for. It's up to you whether or not you want to take up those opportunities. This Marketing Programme is designed to get you started and to build up your confidence as a marketer of your own work.

What will boost that confidence more than anything is actually experiencing the breaking down of the last barrier on the long road to getting your work to the reader.

We saw that barrier and the earlier ones here:



But soon the diagram will need to be revised to something like this:



And that, after all, is what you have been trying to achieve all along: your book, attractive to readers, in the hands of readers.

Reviewing the Basics

Making a success of writing fiction, and the achievement of your personal and family goals require the following basic things:

1. A workable piece of fiction.

It doesn't have to be a world-class piece of literature, but to attract and keep readers' attention, it will need to use the secret language of fiction.

Your result is a reader and your work coming together.

2. Good manufacturing or delivery of your book.

This is all taken care of for you by Lulu. But you are responsible for the manuscript that you upload, its content and format.

You should strive for a constant quality of production without variation.

3. Creating channels between readers and your work.

The outlines of this are given in the Marketing Programme above and there'll be more on this below.

4. Delivering what is offered so that it matches exactly with the reader's vacuums.

Of course you need to be producing a worthwhile piece of fiction or your channels will soon dry up. But gathering vacuums, opening channels between vacuums and potential readers and then matching the product to the vacuum is really all there is to it.

So there you have it: you've written a story that works and have published it!

That's the end of the course, as such. But it should be the beginning of a whole new chapter in your life as a writer.

And we haven't quite finished yet...

Coming up are your two Bonus items: ***How to Succeed in Business as a Writer*** and ***How to Achieve Your Goals!***

May your ideas and images forever reach the minds of readers!

Bonus: How to Succeed in Business as a Writer

This bonus section is based on part of my book *How Businesses Really Work*.

You're not a business person, though. You're a writer, trying to make a success of your writing. So we're going to cut to the heart of the matter, leave out anything that isn't completely necessary, and if you want to know more, please refer to the above book.

These are the essentials, then, of running your writing life like a business. There are some stark facts, some changes of the way you operate and some things probably outside your comfort zone coming up, but this is the way a successful business needs to operate to survive and expand in today's world.

Overview

1. Ensure that you have a product or service that fully satisfies a need. In your case, this is your recently-completed book
2. Decide where you want your customers to come from. We've done this with various exercises in earlier weeks.
3. Present a vacuum in proximity to your potential customers that mirrors the customers' exact needs. More about this in a moment.
4. Immediately fulfil a minor exact need. This starts your business operation moving.
5. Present a larger vacuum. In other words - and this may come as a shock to you - you need more than one product.
6. Fulfil that vacuum completely with a larger product.
7. Create a continuing pathway of communication with customers.

Let's examine these in full detail so that you can begin implementing them at once.

Step 1: Ensure that you have a product or service that fully satisfies a need.

There's nothing more important than choosing the correct product for the correct market. Every other part of a business is dependent upon having a product or service which actually works and will fulfil a need or more than one need. This is your *Primary Vacuum Filler*, the thing which will guarantee your ongoing success. That's why we went over earlier how you must put your attention first on writing a book that fills vacuums.

No amount of work or promotion or marketing will help if you don't have a functioning Primary Vacuum Filler.

If you don't have a product that can generate sustainable vacuums, all the time you invest in building your business is a complete waste of time.

Step 2: Decide where you want your customers to come from.

Your Primary Vacuum Filler, if it's powerful enough, will make a fortune from nothing. It just needs to tap into customer vacuums often enough, deeply enough, or in enough ways.

As we have seen, there is really no shortage of customers. Almost everyone is a potential customer for something. Your problem is not a customer shortage but a problem with business design.

Amazon.com sells on the thinnest of margins but by concentrating on the number of transactions per customer builds up a momentum that has turned it into a global success and household name. That's why you see that row of items labelled 'Customers who bought this also bought...' whenever you buy anything. There are vast corporations like Google and Facebook with billions of potential customers flowing through them like rushing rivers.

All you need is *vacuums*.

You can decide upon a single, steady traffic source and add a second and third and fourth later. Traffic sources include email marketing, social media, banners, blogs and much more. These sources are, to continue the watery analogy, where potential customers flood in and pool, waiting to be motivated by your vacuum power. Email marketing machines can be built easily; Facebook advertising can be used cheaply; blogs are simple to employ; even Google AdWords can be mastered.

Traffic isn't the issue and never was.

It's all about vacuums.

Concentrate first on *increasing the number of customers*. Your initial vacuum gives the potential customer something they need. It fulfils an immediate vacuum. All you ask for is their contact details in exchange.

Step 3: Present a vacuum in proximity to your potential customers that mirrors the customers' exact needs.

You've seen this yourself numerous times whenever a website asks for your email address in exchange for a free download of some kind. Although no money changes hands, this is a purchase. You 'buy' something with your email address. Whatever that something is, it has to be genuinely fulfilling. It has to give the potential customer a taste of what you could really do for them.

So this initial vacuum has to be a powerful vacuum filler. Just as the Primary Vacuum Filler powers your whole business, this 'starter motor' has to be strong enough to continually pull in new 'fuel' in the form of interested customers.

Let's call it the *Proximity Filler*. It's the vacuum filler closest to the flow of traffic that you need. It has to completely and utterly solve some aspect of the customer's vacuum. It has to produce a powerful mini-Fulfilment.

It's usually offered on a landing page that is designed to convert even the most vacuum-blind potential customer into a lead.

The Proximity Filler exists *to capture attention*. It is the thing which takes some of the customer's faint and perhaps wandering 'plasma' of attention and turns it into liquid. It has to hit hard and accurately and it has to satisfy - it can't afford to miss the mark.

The question to ask yourself is 'What irresistible item, service or piece of information could you give away in exchange for a prospect's contact information?'

The more leads you generate through this initial vacuum, the more successful you will be.

Step 4: Immediately fulfil a minor exact need.

If you understand and execute this step, you'll be ahead of most of your competitors.

At this point, you still have no actual readers for your book. You have a lot of *potential* readers whose vacuums have stuck to your business in the form of contact details.

Every contact detail is like a fingerprint trace - someone has touched your business. You have contacted a real potential reader.

Remember, your first goal is to increase the *number of readers*. So far, you have only generated *leads* through the Proximity Filler. You now need to offer those identities a new, more satisfying, deeper vacuum filler.

For most small businesses this has to be something that is affordable to an average customer immediately, not something that requires much thought. Your customer vacuums are not yet strong enough for the customer to yield up huge amounts of money.

For a larger business, the price could be higher. It depends what you're selling. A rule of thumb here is 'What could your potential customer afford *right now*, without having to go through a lengthy decision-making process?'

This is your *Secondary Vacuum Filler*. Its goal is to fundamentally change the relationship from potential customer to customer, or in your case, potential reader to reader. It has to have strong enough vacuum power to outweigh financial considerations as described earlier.

Many businesses make the mistake of placing their Primary Vacuum Filler (in your case, your book) here. They charge the customer, satisfy a need, and say goodbye. So important is this conversion that it's worth considering making it at a loss.

This is the rule:

Put your Secondary Vacuum Filler where anyone who gets your free offer can see it and get at it. This is most obviously on a website, so that they can click it easily and acquire it with minimum effort, hopefully. Then they use it, read it, play with it, eat it, depending on what 'it' is - in your case, read it - and reach a deeper level of Fulfilment. If it has been put together well enough, they'll be satisfied and happy with you. They will recommend others as the situation arises, and new customers will continue to come in from that and from the Proximity Filler (which of course you put everywhere you can).

But don't stop there. We're not even halfway!

That covers increasing the *number* of customers or readers. The next step is increasing the *average transaction value per customer*.

Step 5: Present a larger vacuum.

If you're in business, you must have some kind of product or service. It's what you do or make or are. Now you've seen what that product or service really is: a vacuum filler.

Traditional businesses expend enormous amounts of time, manpower and energy trying to 'sell' their Primary Vacuum Fillers to potential customers. To make it worse (for them), they often stop after the sale and don't put enough attention on production, delivery, quality or distribution. Their attention is fixated on the money as a product of the business instead of seeing it for what it is: a side-effect of the motion between customer and product.

What you really want from this step is a *fulfilled customer*, not money at all.

Convert the maximum number of leads into paying customers, even at your own expense. A paying customer will deliver profit through the next three steps.

Many businesses work hard to do this, without even having the advantage of a Proximity Filler or a Secondary Vacuum Filler. These will boost your business to new levels all on their own. By the time the customer gets to your Primary Vacuum Filler he or she will have already 'bought' your free Proximity Detector (exchanging their contact details) and Secondary Vacuum Filler. That's why it's important that both of those actually fill vacuums to proper fulfilment, even if it costs you.

Your business may now proceed from strength to strength on those steps alone. But there are further steps which can secure your business, guaranteeing new stability and income levels. You'll find you could take almost all the income from your Primary Vacuum Filler and use it on these next steps and your business would only grow.

Your competition won't know what hit them.

Many of the most successful businesses in the world make no profit until they reach these levels - but when they do, they expand beyond comparison.

By presenting a larger vacuum, you indicate to the already-happy customer that there is more. Perhaps much more. Build on that vacuum; make it firm and strong; delineate all of the needs and desires associated with it.

Then do Step 6.

Step 6: Fulfil that vacuum completely with a larger product.

Having increased the *number* of customers with the Proximity Filler and used the Secondary Vacuum Filler to increase the *value* of each transaction, now you can work on increasing the *number of purchases per customer*.

Old-fashioned business-centric models don't have Proximity Fillers or Secondary Vacuum Fillers. They struggle to get people to buy their main product.

You don't have to.

Apple make almost no money on the iPhone. It's the insurance, technical support packages, accessories and apps which generate the profits.

What's happening there?

Apple - and every other super-successful business, whether they think about it in these terms or not - is finding and filling customer vacuums for each individual customer over and over again. Big vacuums, little vacuums, hidden vacuums, fleeting vacuums, luxury vacuums, vaguely related vacuums - all of these are prime fields for you to tap into.

To make massive profits? No. *To satisfy and fill every possible vacuum you can find.* Will that produce massive profits? Yes.

Key questions for you:

'What could I offer that goes with my Primary Vacuum Filler?'

Your Primary Vacuum Filler is the book you have just written. What could you offer with it?

'What could I bundle together with my Primary Vacuum Filler?'

'How can I enhance my Primary Vacuum Filler with a club membership or affiliation?'

This will generate thousands of filled vacuums instead of dozens - and every filled vacuum brings more money in as a side effect.

That effectively deals with number of purchases per customer. But there's more.

Step 7: Create a continuing pathway of communication with customers.

Now that you have very satisfied and fulfilled customers who've been serviced well beyond their initial expectations, surely your work is done? Not if you can develop ways of continuing to have frequent, meaningful communication with your customers and prospects that prompt them to buy

again and again. You have their contact details, given to you in exchange for your Proximity Filler; you have their initial fulfilment from your Secondary Vacuum Filler; now you've blown them away with your Primary Vacuum Filler. Your key question now is

'How can I stay in touch so that I can do more for them?'

You can do this through email marketing, articles, social media, presentations, events, ads, newsletters, personal letters, brochures, and so forth.

Are you ensuring that you can reach your customers again and again? What are you saying to them that could be meaningful? How do you determine what is meaningful and what will come across as 'sales patter'?

Work on vacuums.

What other vacuums - small, large, hidden, connected, subtle, not-so-subtle - could any customer/reader have who already has your Primary Vacuum Filler and all its associated accessories?

Do they want more social interaction with other readers?

Has your book revealed an even bigger vacuum in their lives that they feel they need filling?

Do they simply want more of your writing?

This interesting rule comes into play here:

An existing customer base is always worth much more than new prospects.

Marketing to existing readers is going to be much more satisfying, economic and profitable than any efforts to get new ones.

That's your 7-step guide to immense success.

Figure this out using a small-scale example:

Let's say you've written a book about a toy train that comes to life and have been trying to sell it for £10.00 a copy to whoever you can get to pay enough attention. After numerous classified ads in various dubious publications, you've managed to sell 10 copies in a year. Your idea of making enough money to retire on died in the first month.

Now, using a free Proximity Filler - in this case, perhaps a guide to toy trains all over the world - you get ten times more contact details. That's 100 potential customers.

Then you get 10 of those to buy your book - which is your Secondary Vacuum Filler for £10.00 - plus the series you've devised which takes them on a set of adventures featuring the toy train - which has become your Primary Vacuum Filler and is worth £100.00 altogether. You've made £1,100.00 instead of £10.00.

However, in doing so you've created a machine which will keep on generating an income for you for very little additional work. New customers are vacuumed up by your Proximity Filler guide, attracted by your Secondary Vacuum Filler book and drawn further in by your Primary Vacuum Filler series. If you wanted to expand upon this, you would just need to find out what else that particular set of customers needed: do they want merchandise? Maps and charts? More books?

Provide at least some of those things for them and open up direct links to those items to create other vacuums which will create additional income for you.

Magnify that to a much larger operation: a family dynasty novel spanning the life of a particular family in Northern England in the 20th century.

You've written a massive book and have been working to increase reader numbers for over a year. You've only just managed to break even. Your original passion about the book now seems an idle dream.

Use a free Proximity Filler - in this case, perhaps a free family tree chart about your characters - you get fifty times more contact details, a total of over 10,000 potential customers.

10% of them buy the book itself. That's 1,000 customers, who spend an average amount of £10.00 on your original book, which you are now considering as your Secondary Vacuum Filler. That's £10,000 you wouldn't have otherwise had. But your Primary Vacuum Filler - a whole series of novels based on each of the main characters, for example - is selling for £200 to 200 or so customers. You've made potentially £40,000 of additional income which gives you £50,000 profit.

You've also created a machine which will pull in more and more customers from here on out. They are vacuumed up by your Proximity Filler family chart, attracted by your Secondary Vacuum Filler book and enticed deeper by your Primary Vacuum Filler set of novels.

Yes, you have to write a whole lot more - but that's what you enjoy doing, isn't it? And if it earns you £50,000, it will have been worth it!

There's another hundred examples that you can now probably imagine for yourself.

Is it really that simple? Well, apart from the work involved in doing the actual writing, yes. How is it being done?

By contacting as many people as you could and telling them how good you are as a writer?

No.

By restructuring or stripping down your lifestyle to reduce costs and maximise profits?

No.

By pushing feature after feature into readers' faces until they succumbed and bought from you?

No.

By pumping out more and more advertising into an already saturated field in the vain hope that someone would respond?

No.

You did it by finding out what readers really wanted and fulfilling those needs.

You did it by finding vacuum after vacuum, small and large, hidden and connected, by listening to each and every reader.

You did it by designing your promotional materials around desires and wants and letting reader vacuums do the work.

The main shock to your system is probably that you may have thought it was all over with the completion and publication of your first book. But if you want to make a success of being a writer in a business sense, your first book is just the beginning.

The truth is that out of every 100 customers you acquire, about 20 of them will want to buy more from you.

That's worth repeating and has become famous as the 80/20 Rule:

20 out of every 100 customers will want to buy more from you.

It's very wise to have a business which is set up to provide more to them. Build a business around a Primary Vacuum Filler and all the rest will fall into place.

Once you set up your business properly, you simply tap into already existing flows of vacuum-driven potential readers. Potential customers can more often than not search for, contact, explore and place an order for a vast range of products and services in ways that were unthinkable just a few years ago. And readers are amongst them, constantly browsing the web to seek something that will temporarily assuage their 'addiction to fiction'.

Part of your business model must be to be connected to this ongoing, worldwide 'shop' through which a huge part of the world's population moves. But there is little point in setting up a stall in such a large marketplace if you are competing with so many others in traditional ways. To be successful on the internet, just as in every other way, you need to be finding and filling vacuums constantly.

If your fiction is fitted to needs that you know exist, and your promotion worded according to those same needs, you won't need to spend hours (or pay someone else to spend hours) searching for readers.

They will search for *you*.

They will be drawn to you by the same forces which actually underlie the technology of the Search Engine Optimisation or the mechanisms like Adwords.

Yes, you can bring the two things together and more customers will find out about you. But the same time and money invested in *finding and filling vacuums* will generate a machine much more effective than the constant 'hit-and-miss' of the search engine process. All it takes is for Google or the other search engine operators to change some of the algorithms which they use to guide searches all over the world - something they do regularly and often - and the work done to 'optimise' your business's website will have been wasted and will need to be redone. This of course is why businesses which offer such a service can keep going - there is a constant demand for the work of optimisation to be redone in the ever-changing worlds of the search engines.

Far better to know your reader's vacuum so thoroughly and to have a book which so completely fills that vacuum so that your reader himself or herself will act as a 'new customer finder' for you - at no cost! Then the new reader, drawn in by his or her own vacuum to your tailored book, does the same thing and goes out to find you more customers and so on.

Work on vacuums and don't get greedy for the often-illusory glories dangled in front of you by the possibilities of the technology of the internet and you will build up a loyal reader base and a steady flow of referrals which will create a consistent stream of new business for you.

How This Works

How does this all work?

Firstly, we must abandon any notion that the closure of the sale or the profit resulting from the sale is the end result of any business. Instead, let's name the end product more honestly and effectively as a *fully satisfied reader who then automatically and willingly generates further prospects for your business*.

You start off with statements, clues or items that any potential reader with a need, casual or desperate, will be attracted to without much thought. Casual readers are more likely to 'bite' at such offerings as they are small and often free; desperate readers may approach, but in reality they are looking urgently for something more.

You're building a giant vacuum machine powered by your customers. It should require very little effort from you. If you have done your homework - and most of this book has been teaching you how to do that - then almost no effort from you is required, certainly no 'pursuit' of the reader as unsuspecting 'prey'. The reader reaches for your offering with full awareness of what it is he or she is wanting.

Desperate customers who have no need for your Proximity Vacuum Filler or Secondary Vacuum Filler need to be able to immediately see your Primary Vacuum Filler. So we need transparent tiers.

It's important that your Primary Vacuum Filler is visible at all times. You can make this so in many ways. Have it clearly displayed on each website page, obviously, with a link to get more details. But even in every email you send out or in every blog entry you post you could include a paragraph after your signature promoting your book.

It's the power of your Primary Vacuum Filler to attract customer vacuums that drives your business. The more it is visible, the more vacuum-power you'll have.

The traditional business model is 'at war' with the world to find more customers and 'conquer' them with the aim of more and more profits for your business. The conventional sales funnel has an appeal as something designed to almost 'trick' the potential customer into spending more and more money. It's a wasteful, time-consuming and potentially expensive machine, but with so much written about it and so many proven 'successes' that it is a tempting way forward for you.

However, if you want to acquire more customers with almost zero effort and have as your end product their satisfaction, so that they will generate more customers for you, then a sales funnel model is outmoded.

A truly effective sales funnel is really a 'vacuum cleaner', hoovering up customers.

Where do you place your Proximity Vacuum Filler exactly?

The answer is: wherever your potential readers gather.

Classified ads sites, Google, Facebook, book sites, author sites, other social media, wherever they 'pool' - unaware potential readers, casual readers, desperate readers.

If your Primary Vacuum Filler is powerful enough, it almost doesn't matter where you place your Proximity Vacuum Filler.

If you have tried this and not had an avalanche of responses in terms of Proximity Vacuum Fillers snapped up and website hits following (or whatever the equivalent is in your business), then you will probably jump to one of two conclusions:

'I have failed to place the Proximity Vacuum Filler in the right place'

or

'I need to make the Secondary and Primary Vacuum Fillers more powerful, more appealing, more fine-tuned to the readers' vacuums.'

In all honesty, it's more likely to be the latter.

A powerful customer vacuum will overcome even slightly wrong ad placements.

Think of it like this:

If a group of people were gathered in a market square and you set up a stall in a distant corner selling your wares, how long do you think would be before your stall was swamped by customers if you were selling something that was really needed?

Obviously, it might be easier or quicker if your stall was in the middle of the square surrounded by crowds, and you should put some attention on placement and monitor it - but if you put more attention on modelling your vacuum fillers around actual needs, you'll get the same kind of result eventually.

The Power of Fulfilment

It should by now be quite clear that by far the most effective form of promotion for your writing is a satisfied reader.

The satisfaction that is generated by a filled vacuum spills over into the environment around the reader who will then be a living, breathing promoter for your work, actively, consciously and determinedly promoting your books.

It should also be very clear by now that your stories must be carefully tailored to exactly fit customer needs, or the whole thing collapses.

What tools do you have for doing this? How do you contact and get into communication with prospects so that you know what they are really looking for?

The first point to make here is that you must be open to communication from the outside world.

Successful business leaders, entrepreneurs and managers are good *listeners*. They have a knack for spotting what people want and need based on good observation and listening skills. If you aren't open to what people want to tell you, you will have real difficulty modelling a vacuum filler that works.

In the case of a writer, this translates into *reading widely*.

Concentrate on classic and big-name authors.

Your writing has to throw its doors open, metaphorically and physically, to reader feedback. And it has to be prepared to act based on what it hears.

Here's an important qualifier, though:

About 20% of reader feedback will be counter-productive.

About 1 in every 5 readers will complain or give negative feedback for the sake of it. That doesn't mean that every complaint is ignorable or invalid: it just means that you shouldn't necessarily instantly respond to every piece of feedback you receive. This requires judgement and a certain volume of data before you reach any firm conclusions. But don't take it to heart if a significant proportion of your readers respond negatively when asked how things went.

At every point of your business, on every web page, in every store, on every visit, you need to have mechanisms for getting what readers wanted, how they wanted it and whether or not you provided it.

This can be in the form of questionnaires, feedback forms, post-sales interviews, testimonials, surveys and so on.

If you immediately think, upon mention of the word 'survey', of people out on the streets with clipboards, or of potentially painful and time consuming efforts to get answers to questions on the phone from past customers, you have the wrong idea. To survey for reader vacuums there are a variety of methods, for the most part based on work you have already done.

When you have the result of a survey, it is like having targeting data for an intercontinental missile: with survey results, you can reach more and more readers and pinpoint them and their vacuums exactly.

Your writing business has to do with getting a reader to the point where his or her needs are fulfilled by the stories that you offer. A transfer takes place; a vacuum is filled. The reader has either already paid money or will pay immediately afterwards as part of that transfer or interchange.

What vacuum or vacuums do your readers have which your fiction can fulfil or can be modified to fulfil?

Nail that, and you have nailed future affluence for your writing.

As we have seen and said, attempting to write in the absence of correct information about reader needs is folly and wasteful. You can push your book all you like - unless it strikes lucky with a passing reader in terms of need, you will miss out.

You might even have some idea of what readers need, but unless it is an exact match, the vacuum will not kick in and some readers will walk right by - even if the book was actually capable of filling their vacuums. Your promotion has to be precise.

But does this mean that you need an army of people with clipboards? No.

Reader information comes in many forms, most of which you will already have.

Take a look at all your past sales. Analyse what story you have sold over the last year which has acquired the most readers.

Promote that, and you will have increased traffic.

Whatever it was about that story, however ill-thought-out the vacuums - or perhaps even with no idea of vacuums at all - it was working to pull in readers. It has some kind of vacuum effect working for it despite everything. So push its vacuums and benefit in terms of your cash flow and reader satisfaction.

Examine it and see what it is about a product that already sells which seems to find and fill vacuums. Push the vacuums of that product. Watch your sales statistics go up.

Additionally, you could then contact each of the previous purchasers with a short survey and ask what it was that they liked about the product. You can see Amazon and other on-line businesses contacting past customers all the time with short surveys.

Promote whatever it was in a product that, by survey, readers said filled their needs and you will get a sales response.

You could also review all your sales geographically and find out where your readers are. There might be some geographically related vacuum. Pump your Proximity Vacuum Fillers into that part of the world and watch your sales go up. Matching an exact product to an exact area using past sales data can increase this effect even more. Push the vacuums of that item rather than other similar items, and magnify your sales.

You can also use reader testimonies to isolate what worked in terms of vacuums and get that to work again. Find out what got the most praise, which chapter was most appreciated, what character proved the most effective.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that you only have one public to promote to.

You have many.

As an exercise, right now think of a successful market where there is a huge turnover of readers and lots of exchange of products and delivery going on.

Ask yourself: What else might that reader base need?

Ask: What are the apparently successful writers missing about their readers' needs?

Ask: What larger or deeper need might be underlying the expressed need that you see in operation in that marketplace?

If you can tap into that, the motion will be huge and you'd better be prepared to meet it!

BONUS: How to Achieve Your Goals

Obviously you've got goals - right?

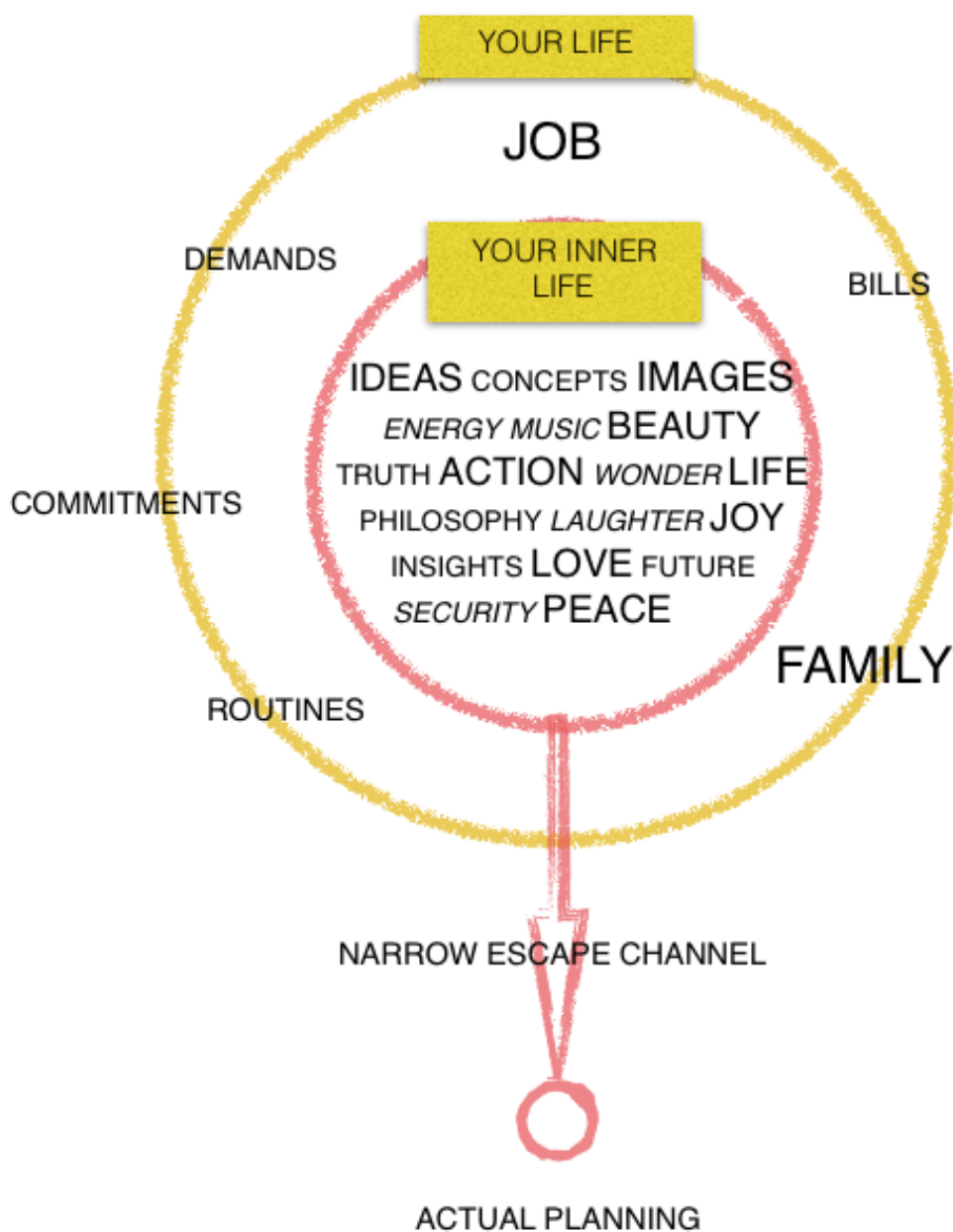
A surprising number of people don't.

I'm not just talking about money-making goals. I mean any kind of goal.

Setting a real goal involves being able to take our attention off the immediate needs of our environment and direct it towards a future beyond the push-and-pull of our immediate lives.

What happens if we don't set real goals?

We are pulled around by the vacuums which are always active in life, and very little attention escapes for longer term or more important issues.



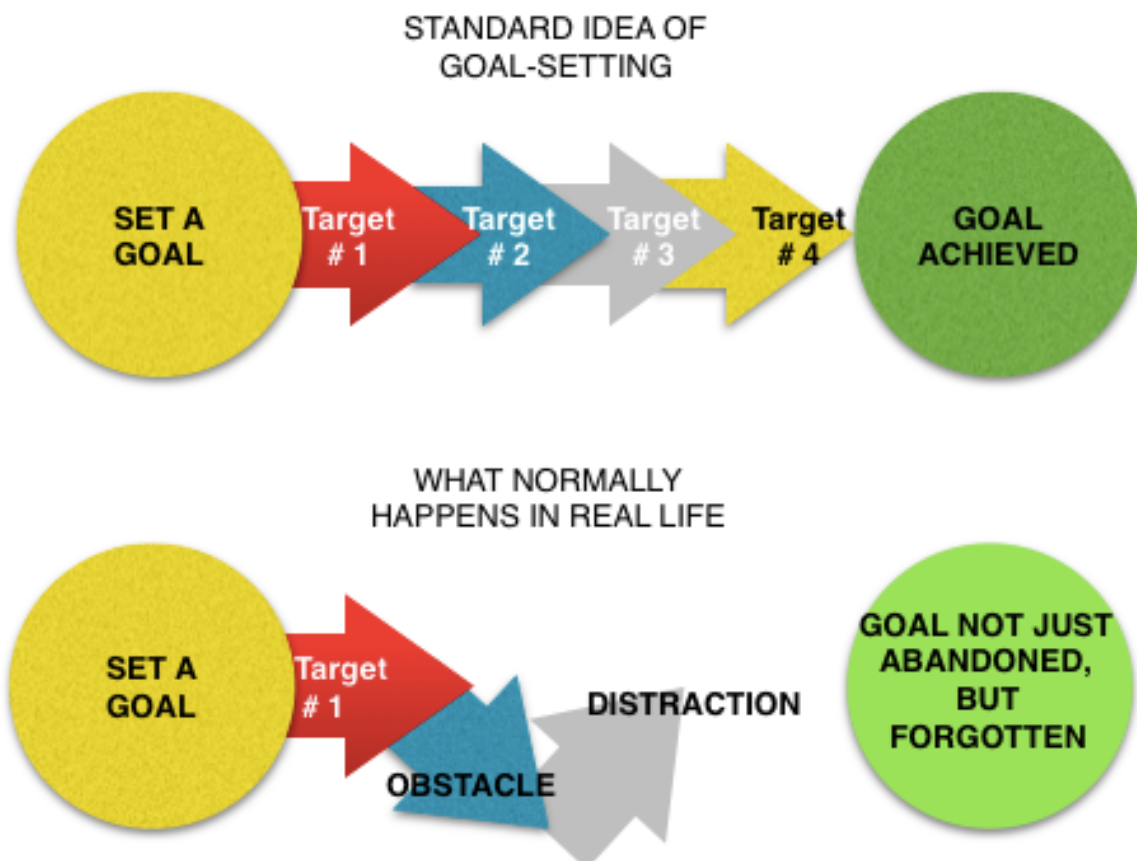
Instead of setting our own goals and creating our own future, our lives 'go into orbit' around the other vacuum-powered things in our lives: health, family, friends, work, day-to-day matters. We begin to feel 'driven'; we begin to lose hope and personal energy; we begin to lose track of the dreams that we once had. Our lives are being powered by the vacuums in the environment, rather than by our own ambitions or visions.

Setting goals properly helps you to choose where *you* want to go in life. Once done, your life will be transformed: instead of being determined by others, our futures can be determined by ourselves.

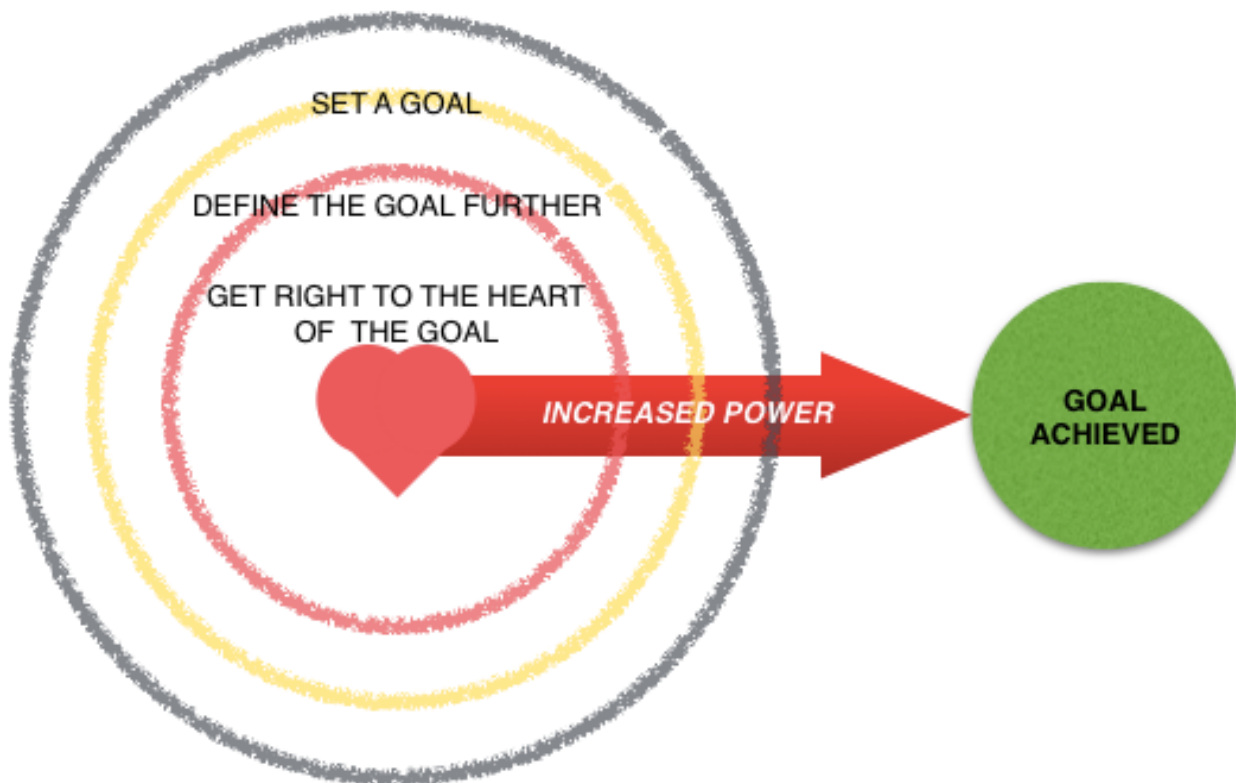
Goals can act as an engine for the whole enterprise of life.

The following steps can be incredibly motivating, and as you get into the habit of setting and achieving goals, you'll find that a kind of power builds up which can drive your future like electricity. These are steps which you can easily perform straight away.

The normal approach to goal-setting is to create a 'big picture' of what you want to do with your life, with large-scale goals that you want to achieve. Breaking these down into smaller and smaller targets can bridge over into a plan. We examined this to some extent in Week 1 of the e-course, and also saw what normally happens when this approach is taken:



The really important thing, though, is to have clear, heart-felt and attainable goals.



Fill in the following tables. Use the space to condense your goal statement into just a few words. Make sure that these goals are truly goals that you want to achieve, not those of others in your environment.

CAREER	Short Term (1 year)	Medium Term (5 years)	Long Term (10 years)
What level do you want to reach in your career?			

FINANCES	Short Term (1 year)	Medium Term (5 years)	Long Term (10 years)
How much do you want to earn?			

FAMILY	Short Term (1 year)	Medium Term (5 years)	Long Term (10 years)
How do you see your family evolving?			

EDUCATION	Short Term (1 year)	Medium Term (5 years)	Long Term (10 years)
What sort of education wil help you achieve your goals?			

ATTITUDE	Short Term (1 year)	Medium Term (5 years)	Long Term (10 years)
What kind of attitude do you need to develop?			

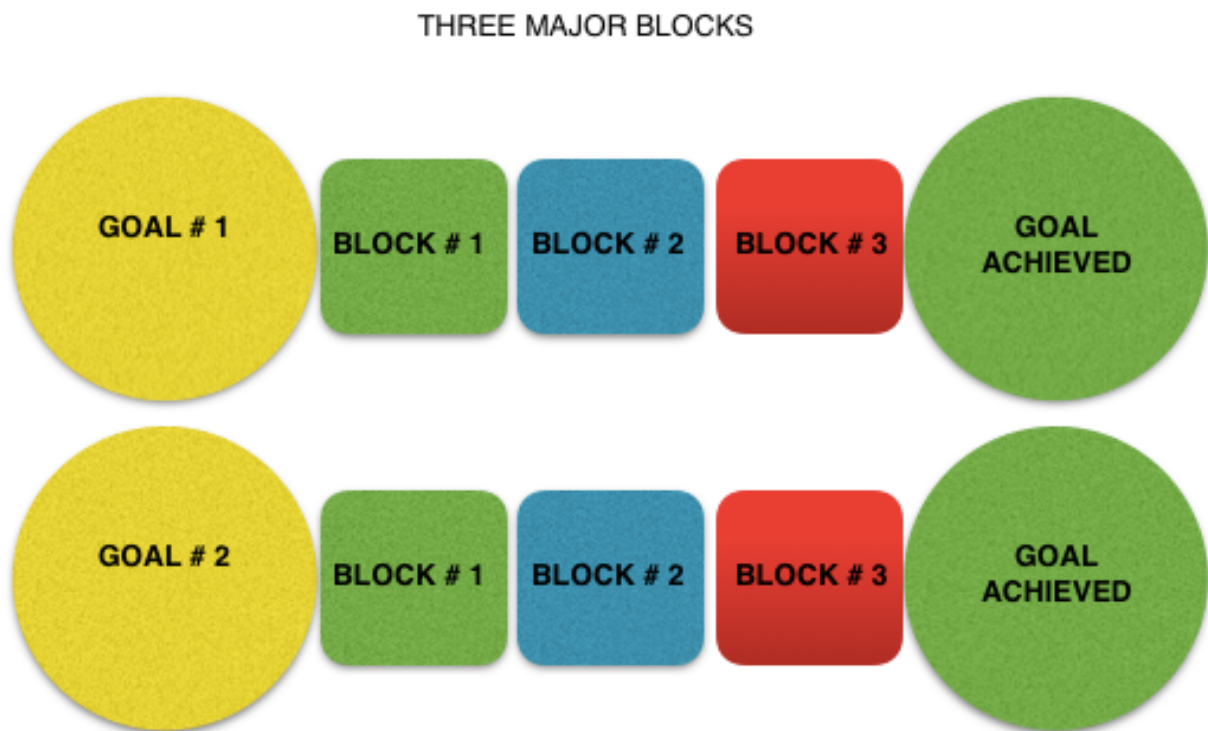
AESTHETIC	Short Term (1 year)	Medium Term (5 years)	Long Term (10 years)
How do you see your artistic life developing?			

PHYSICAL HEALTH	Short Term (1 year)	Medium Term (5 years)	Long Term (10 years)
What health goals do you need to achieve?			

BUSINESS	Short Term (1 year)	Medium Term (5 years)	Long Term (10 years)
What do you want your business to be earning?			

That should give you 24 goals, short, medium and long term.

Now take each goal and work out what are the three major blocks or missing things between you and it. There might not be three blocks to each and every goal you've listed, but have a good look and see what you come up with. Particularly look for what is *missing* between you and the goal.



Use the following table to help:

GOAL	First block or missing thing:	Second block or missing thing:	Third block or missing thing:

Set up a calendar based on these short, medium and long term goals. Decide when you want to review them and make sure you do.

Your Goals Analysis will have opened your eyes to things that need to occur in your life, and you will have seen various weak points as well as strengths in what you have already. What you might not have seen is the true power of goals.

Vacuum power is the all-powerful energy that is generated by the gap between a goal and its achievement.

To get an idea of this, choose the five most important or significant goals from all the above tables and enter them into the following table:

GOAL	How far are you on the road to achieving this goal? (Circle one)	What lies between you and 100% achievement of this goal?
	10% 25% 50% 75% 90%	
	10% 25% 50% 75% 90%	
	10% 25% 50% 75% 90%	
	10% 25% 50% 75% 90%	

	10% 25% 50% 75% 90%	
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What generates vacuum power is

a) the heart-felt significance of the goal

and

b) the gap between where you are now and your goal.

A truly important goal creates its own 'pull'. This pull is what generates vacuum power.

By focusing on heart-felt goals in this way, you are effectively 'de-toxifying' yourself of the goals set by the environment and by others, and orientating yourself to the things that really mean something to you.

You are establishing your own 'core vacuums', if you like, using the terminology of the e-course.

There's more you can do though. Let's take a look at a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis

SWOT analyses of businesses are common. If they are done honestly and thoroughly, they can really open your eyes as to what is really going on in your business and what to do about it. You can also spot gaps in the marketplace and pick out those things which put you streets ahead of any competition. In addition, dangers that are creeping up on you from within or outside your business can be spotted now and sorted out before they overwhelm you.

You can also apply the same technique to look at your life as a whole.

Fill out the following tables as honestly as you can. You might be surprised by what comes up.

STRENGTHS	1	2	3
What gives you an advantage over everyone else?			
What do you do better than anyone?			
What unique resources can you tap into?			

What strengths of yours might be visible to others?			
What do you have that means that you are more likely to get a commitment from someone else?			

WEAKNESSES	1	2	3
What needs to be improved in your life?			
What could be improved fairly easily?			
What needs to be avoided?			
What weaknesses of yours might be visible to others?			
Where are others doing better than you?			
Where might your life break down over time?			
What might cost you more than you expected?			

OPPORTUNITIES	1	2	3
Where can you see opportunities in your life?			
What's happening in society that might benefit you?			
How might social media be used to your advantage?			
What's happening in your local environment that might help you?			
What are others doing that might end up helping you?			
Are there opportunities to acquire additional resources?			

THREATS	1	2	3
What obstacles exist to your life flourishing?			
What's changing that may work against you?			
Do you have anything in your life which is pulling you down?			

What might come up that would threaten what you are doing?			
Could any of the weaknesses above actually become threats?			

Once you have completed the tables, highlight the points which seem to you to stand out as potentially most beneficial or potentially most harmful.

Now imagine that you are someone else, looking at you, and fill in the same tables from that point of view. You might have to use your imagination, but you will probably find it eye-opening.

The next step is the Involvement Analysis.

Involvement Analysis

So far we have looked at your life from your point of view, or from the point of view of a person filling out the tables or answering the questions. Already, you should be able to see things from a new perspective and you may have even spotted things that you weren't fully aware of before, either good or bad, that you can now act upon.

But one of the basic - and often unseen or unacknowledged - axioms in life is that the more people you can involve and align with your goals, the more powerful your forward motion towards them will become. Actually, you can become a total powerhouse of forward-moving energy if you can involve and align various groups of people with whom you come into contact.

You might be surprised to find that there are so many different groups. You will almost certainly be surprised by just how much help you can glean from them. The key thing you'll learn here is that you are not alone - you just have to recognise and make correct use of the various bodies that are around you.

The following table lists possible individuals or groups that probably have something to do with you. Blank spaces exist in this column for you to add any other individual or group who you feel might play a part. Some on this list may not apply to your current situation so just write 'Not applicable' in the box.

The next step is to rate them according to how much power or influence they have over you or your decisions or actions.

5 = strong influence, crucial to you

4 = some influence, important to you

3 = neither influential nor uninfluential, neutral on most issues

2 = weak influence, not vital

1 = hardly any influence

Once you have rated individuals or groups on that list according to power or influence, you will need to determine what level of support or obstruction you will encounter with each. You will have an opportunity to rate this out of five in one of the columns. This is what those numbers mean in this case:

5 = maximum support, full ally, no risk of obstruction

4 = good support, an ally in normal circumstances, low risk of obstruction

3 = neither supportive nor resistive, neutral on most issues

2 = partially resistive or obstructive, high risk of blockage

1 = maximum resistance, full blockage, obstructive

With these columns filled in, you can now list what action you need to take with each. For example, it will be very clear who you must fully engage with and make the greatest efforts to satisfy. Equally, it will be very apparent who needs to be avoided or dealt with so that they do not obstruct you.

This table, then, is the first step of the Involvement Analysis:

INVOLVEMENT	Power or Influence 1 - 10	Support or Obstruction 1 - 10	Action to Take
Close family			
Rest of family			
Close friends			
Other friends			
Your boss			
Others at work			
Other colleagues			
The public			
Interest groups			

Now take the top ten names from the list in terms of the amount of influence they might have and put them through the following table:

INFLUENCE TOP TEN	What emotional involvement do they have with you?	What financial involvement do they have with you?	What motivates them?	What do they want from you?	What's the best way of communicat- ing your message to them?	Who influences them?

Next, take the ten most supportive of the groups or individuals and put them into the following table:

SUPPORT TOP TEN	What is their current level of knowledge of you and their current view?	How could you get more support?	Who influences them? How could you get <i>their</i> support?	What are they expecting in return for support?	Can you provide what they are expecting or will expectations have to be managed?

Putting all this together will give you a strategy for managing those in your environment, harnessing their power where feasible and avoiding destructive or wasteful confrontation where possible.

Let's take a look at what happens when we gather together the data from these assessments.

The Goals Analysis helped to sort out your basic intentions and turn them into plans. That should have told you something about *why* you're alive - what's it all for.

The SWOT Analysis then scrutinised assets and liabilities and pointed out where you could seriously succeed - and fail.

Then the **Involvement Analysis** indicated from *whom* you could draw real power, and *who* to watch out for.

All of that adds up to a pretty powerful picture of where you are currently at. Plus you should now have some idea of where you want it to go and how to get there.

Here are two bonus analyses, which can be applied to your writing business or to any other aspect of your life:

Marketing Analysis

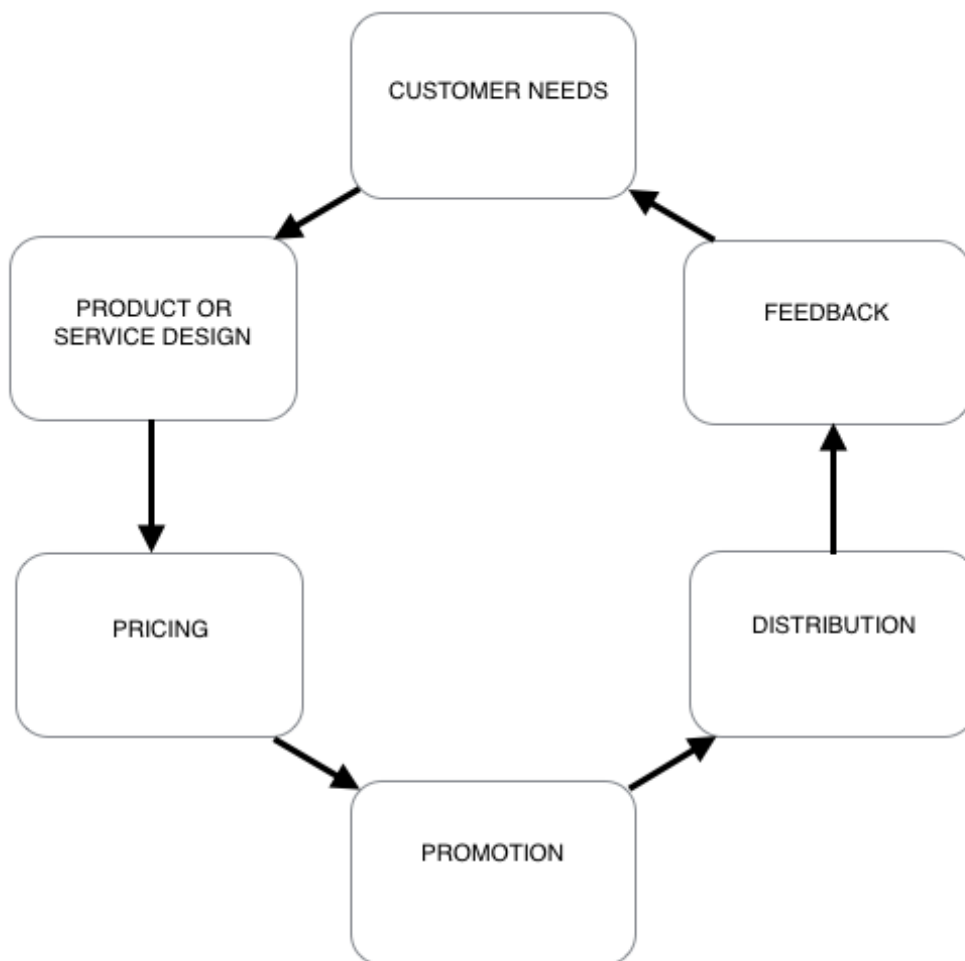
Look up marketing on Google and you'll be bombarded by definitions. You could easily forget what you're trying to do in the first place, which is very simple:

You're trying to get products or services into the hands of customers who need them.

The closer the products or services match the needs of your customers, the better you will do.

But how do you get to that point? This Marketing Analysis is designed to help you see through the fog so that you can plot a marketing campaign that will actually work.

This diagram might help you to see the various components involved:



But don't be daunted by abstractions: simply fill in the following tables to get an overview of your current set-up. Before you have gone very far, you'll see what you need to change and what you need to strengthen. Fill out the boxes concisely and honestly.

Table 1 Naming Your Product:

What are your main products or services?	

Table 2 Meeting Needs:

What needs does your product or service fulfil?			
What exact features meet those needs?			
Is there anything missing from those features?			

Are there any features that are actually not needed or used?			
How and where will your product or service be used?			
How is it different to what your competitors are offering?			

Table 3 Pricing:

How valuable is your product or service to a customer?	
How does the price of your product or service match with other similar products or services?	
Will a price adjustment (up or down) affect customer demand?	
Is there scope for discounts or special offers?	
How much profit do you expect to make per unit?	

Table 4 Getting Known:

Where is the best place and time to promote your products or services?			
What's the best medium for reaching them?			
Are your products or services affected by seasonal issues?			
How do your competitors promote their products or services? Is there anything you could learn from them?			

Table 5 Distribution:

Where do potential buyers look for your product or service?	
Can you economically access the right channels for your potential customers?	
Do you need a sales force?	
Can you learn anything from your competitors regarding distribution?	

How can you improve the ways of getting your product into your customer's hands or getting your service used?	
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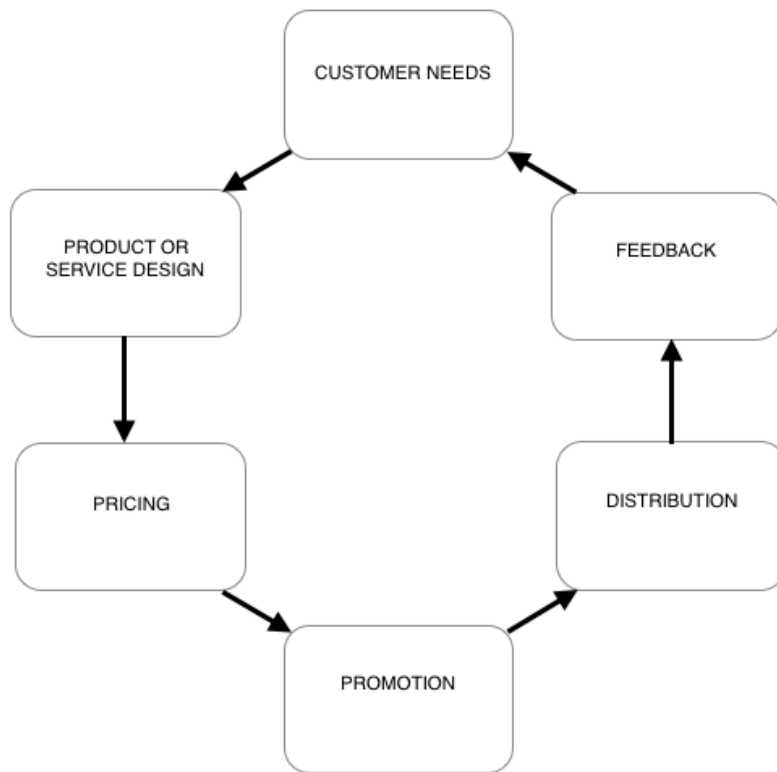
Table 6 Feedback:

What mechanisms exist for getting feedback from customers?			
How responsive is your business to customer feedback? Could you change a product or service quickly based on what you hear?			
What mechanisms exist for getting feedback from employees?			
How responsive is your business to employee feedback? Do mechanisms exist for changing a product or service quickly based on what you hear?			
How could you develop ways of getting feedback from customers?			

Now look over the tables and you should clearly see

- a) what needs work in your current marketing campaigns
- b) how you could develop a better approach.

Look at the diagram below again. Perhaps it doesn't seem quite so abstract now. You need to work over the tables above until you have this machine in place, and then you know that your marketing is working and getting your products or services into the hands of customers.



There's still one more bonus analysis to do. The point of this last analysis is to inject life, energy and passion into your writing and possibly your life by activating or re-activating your primal imagination. This analysis will get you to look at what you're doing in completely new ways.

Imagination Analysis

Name your current products or services. You should be even more familiar with them now.

What if you could expand upon those to create whole new lines of items and thereby open up the channels to whole new worlds of customers?

That's what the Imagination Analysis is all about: putting your imagination to work inside your business.

Again, by filling out this series of tables, your eyes should be opened to many and varied possibilities.

Table 1 New Forms:

CURRENT PRODUCT OR SERVICE	How could you make the same kind of product but using different materials?	How could you deliver the same kind of service but in a completely new way?	How could you develop your product or service using the most advanced technology available?

Table 2 New Combinations:

CURRENT PRODUCT OR SERVICE	How could you combine your products or services in new ways?	How could you package your products or services together in more attractive combinations?	How could combine a product with a service or a service with a product?

Table 3 New Adaptations:

CURRENT PRODUCT OR SERVICE	How could you alter or 'tweak' your products or services in new ways?	How could you adapt your products or services to changing technologies or trends?	How could you use new or different elements to make a product or service more accessible?

Table 4 New Sizes:

CURRENT PRODUCT OR SERVICE	How could you make your products or services bigger?	How could you make your products or services smaller?	How could you make your products or services adaptable in size?

Table 5 New Functions:

CURRENT PRODUCT OR SERVICE	How could you make your products or services do other things?	How could you apply your products or services in other fields?	How could you simplify your products or services or make them more complex?

Table 6 New Economies:

CURRENT PRODUCT OR SERVICE	How could you trim down your products or services?	How could you remove something from your products or services to make them more efficient?	How could you make your products or services more cheaply?

Table 7 New Horizons:

CURRENT PRODUCT OR SERVICE	What are the opposites to your products or services?	What creates the needs that your products or services fulfil in the first place?	How could you develop products and services which are mirror images of what you currently do?

What You Should Do Now

Before you finish with this course, you would probably benefit from doing the following:

Part One:

- Go through the analyses again and fill in any blanks or points where you couldn't think of anything the first time.
- Using the insights you gleaned from later analyses, re-do the earlier ones and see if anything changes.
- List out your customer bases and potential additional customer bases that you could open up with what you have now glimpsed.
- Ask yourself what are the main points of change that you now want to make in your business based on what you have gleaned here.

Part Two:

- Go back through the e-course again and re-do or re-assess anything that you weren't quite sure of or weren't happy with the first time.
- Particularly look over Weeks 1 and 2 and see if you would change anything in the light of the rest of the course.

I hope that this e-course has been of some use to you and look forward to hearing about your successes as a writer!

Private Facebook Group Application

Just email me at

grant@clarendonhousebooks.com

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-Grant P. Hudson, B.A. (Hons.)

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