

# Electrifying Emotion



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# Why Does Emotion Matter?

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“Readers read to *worry*. They want to be lost in the intense emotional anticipation over the plight of a character in trouble. Only when that connection is made does reader interest truly kick in.”

–James Scott Bell



# Why Does Emotion Matter?

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Plot is  
track

Character is  
train

Emotion is  
power



# Getting Inside Your Character's Head

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**What** does your character see?

- What's the first thing they notice? Why?
- What they notice is just as important as what they don't.

How does your character **feel** about what they see?

How does your character **react** to and **treat** everything?

What a character describes says something about the object and **them**.

- Describing a bedroom like a prison.

Expectations determine emotion

Are expectations met? Upended?

- Kids crying on Christmas.



# Getting Inside Your Character's Head

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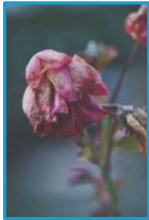
“Here’s the secret: being able to see it through your protagonist’s POV means letting us hear what she’s thinking as it happens—and not what she’s thinking in general, but her **struggle to figure out what’s going on and what the hell to do do about it**. These thoughts will be woven throughout every paragraph in your novel.”

–Lisa Cron, *Story Genius*

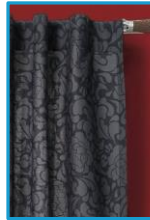


# Seeing Through the Character's Eyes

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Wilted flower...



Gray curtain...



Worn chair...



Unread book...



Empty table...



Dog waiting by the door...



Dusty car...



Cold tile...

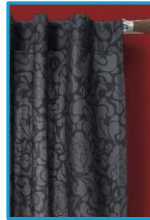


# Seeing Through the Character's Eyes

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The flower drooped in its vase, all the color faded from its petals.



I hated those gray curtains. They sucked the light out of the room.



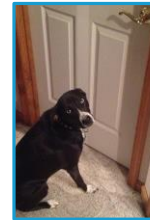
The chair had a worn indent in the cushion. I never wanted anyone to sit there again.



I picked up her book from the night stand and started reading where she left off.



The table felt naked without another plate.



Fido waited by the front door like she might walk right in again.



Boxes and dust gathered around her car.



The tile was cold, but I didn't put on shoes. She wouldn't want me tracking in mud.



# Seeing Through the Character's Eyes

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● He held his hands cupped like he was checking for rain.

● He smelled like he used a dumpster for a bed. I wanted to take a shower.

● He watched me like he could see the dark secrets in my soul.

● His hands had seen hard labor and his eyes had seen nightmares.

● It bothered me that he was smiling. He shouldn't be smiling.





# Adding Emotion: From Good to Great

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Mom breathes loudly into the phone.  
I can hear the television in the background.  
I'm not sure if she's heard me, so I try to say it again.  
The words falter in my throat.  
I remember all the times I've thought about saying this.  
I remember all the reactions I've imagined.  
"I'm pregnant," I say.  
There's a pause. I hear Mom breathing.



# Adding Emotion: From Good to Great

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She doesn't say anything, I wait and there's only her breathing.

I can hear the television in the background, laughter, applause.

I'm not sure if she's heard me, so I try to say it again.  
I'm.

The words falter in my throat, all of the last few weeks trapped in the bottleneck of this moment.

I remember all the times I've thought about saying this.  
I remember all the reactions I've imagined.

I say, mum, I'm pregnant.

There's a pause, and I can hear the colour draining from her face.



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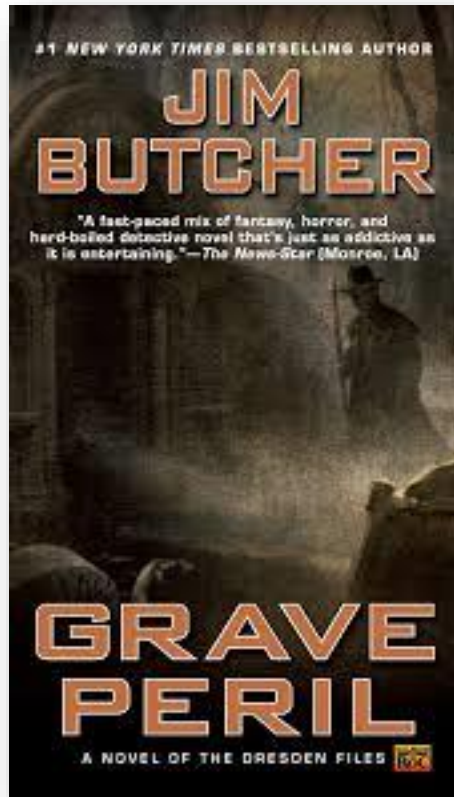
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# Adding Emotion: From Good to Great

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“Look, she knows,” I said, changing lanes. “I got her a card.”

“A card?” Michael sighed. “Let me hear you say the words.”

“What?”

“Say the words,” he said. “If you love the woman, why can’t you say so?”

“I just don’t go around saying that to people, Michael. Stars and sky!”

“You don’t love her,” Michael said. “I see.”

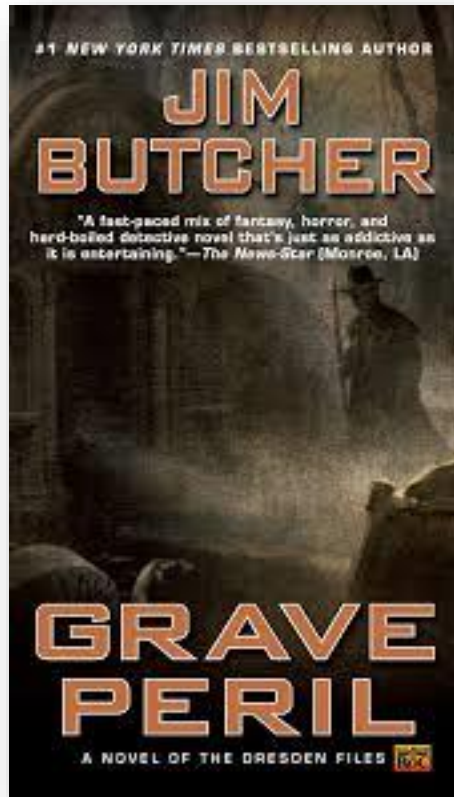
“I didn’t say that.”

“Say it, Harry.”



# Adding Emotion: From Good to Great

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“Look, she knows,” I said, tapping the brakes and then flattening the accelerator again. “I got her a card.”

“A card?” Michael asked.

“A Hallmark.”

He sighed. “Let me hear you say the words.”

“What?”

“Say the words,” he demanded. “If you love the woman, why can’t you say so?”

“I just don’t go around *saying* that to people, Michael. Stars and sky, that’s...I just couldn’t, all right?”

“You don’t love her,” Michael said. “I see.”

“You know that’s not—”

“Say it, Harry.”



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# When It's Okay to Tell

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Golden Rule: Show don't tell

But...telling gives context.

- Speech tags
- How hard are you trying?
- If your writing sounds like writing, sometimes just say it.
- A character telling is a window into their emotional state.

Telling is one of several techniques used in harmony to show emotion.

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The old woman leaned over and looked me in the eye. “What a filthy child you are,” she said **sweetly**.

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The bride starts to give her vows and I suddenly **feel sick**.

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I wanted to vomit on her perfect, white dress.





# When It's Okay to Tell

The Potters smiled and waved at Harry and he stared **hungrily** back at them, his hands pressed flat against the glass as though he was **hoping** to fall right through it and reach them. He had a powerful kind of **ache** inside him, half **joy**, half **terrible sadness**.

How long he stood there, he didn't know. The reflections did not fade and he looked and looked until a distant noise brought him back to his senses. He couldn't stay here, he had to find his way back to bed. He tore his eyes away from his mother's face, whispered, "I'll come back," and hurried from the room.

—J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*







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# Questions?



# Thank You



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*GHOST DRAGON* (Jan 2020)

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