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# Become a PROFESSIONAL AUTHOR COURSE

PART ONE:

WRITE STORIES THAT WORK

Lesson Eight:

The Biggest Problem Authors  
Have

Grant P. Hudson

# **BECOME A PROFESSIONAL AUTHOR COURSE**

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Lesson Eight:  
The Biggest Problem  
Authors Have

Grant P Hudson

CLARENDON HOUSE  
PUBLICATIONS

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

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

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

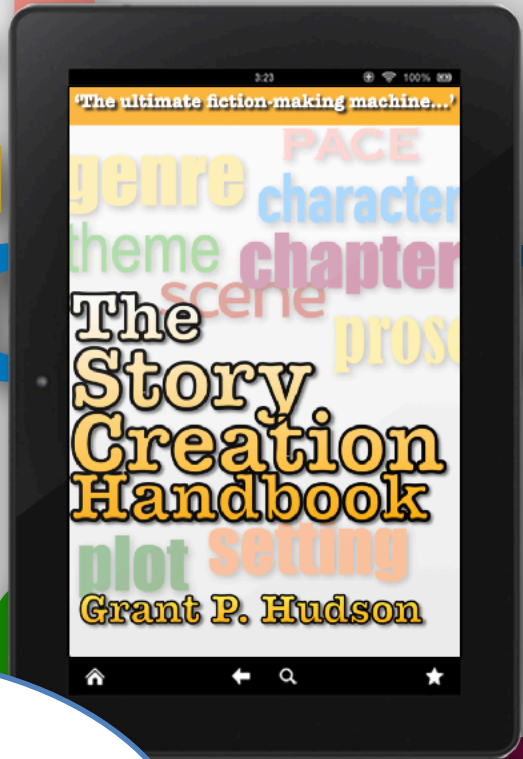
### **2. Sell Stories Effectively**

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

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

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

**‘The ultimate fiction-making machine...’**



If you haven't yet done so,  
**[DOWNLOAD YOUR COPY](#)**  
of **The Story Creation  
Handbook** for use in  
prompting stories for  
exercises.

A woman with brown hair is looking down at a smartphone in her hands. She is wearing a light blue button-down shirt. In the background, another person is partially visible, and there are some papers and a yellow sticky note on a desk. The scene appears to be a classroom or office.

## LESSON EIGHT: THE BIGGEST PROBLEM AUTHORS HAVE


'If the message is so important,' you might ask, 'how come I have never thought about it before?'

It's a good question.

And the answer brings us to the biggest problem many authors face — and why they face it.

**Authors get so immersed in the act of creation that they can't see what it is they're creating.**





I worked for a number of years in the 1990s as a business consultant in Mayfair, London. I visited dozens of small businesses and was employed to give advice. I would arrive, inspect the business, ask a few questions and come up with a plan. I studied dozens of business and quickly became aware of repeating patterns — especially the following major one.

Universally, no matter what the business type, ranging from telesales outfits to furniture designers to dentists to chiropractors to whatever, each and every business owner had fallen into the same trap:

**90% or more of the attention of the creator was on creating or producing rather than the other functions associated with the business.**

What does that mean?

It means that the telesales executives were on the phones themselves; the furniture designers were spending all their time designing furniture personally; the dentists were in the surgery pulling teeth; the chiropractors were personally fixing backs, and so on.

‘What’s wrong with that?’ you might ask.

Nothing, at first glance. Of course, creators of businesses invent their operations so that they can plunge in and do the thing that love or are good at.

The problem arises because **there is always much more to any operation than simply production.**

This is what happens to writers too: they write and write and write and never, or hardly ever, step back and examine the shape, form or meaning of what they are writing, or where that leads them artistically or commercially.





Telesales executives ended up with lots of phone calls made; furniture designed lots of furniture; dentists pulled plenty of teeth; chiropractors fixed many backs, and so on.

But all of them were struggling, business-wise (hence their need for me).

Writers end up with huge amounts of words written — and not much else.

This is the underlying problem for anyone having trouble clarifying their message: **they are too buried in it to see it.**

You think that the business of writing is just about writing and that's all there is to it.

I've even had writers tell me that 'If readers don't find, buy and love my stuff, that's their problem.'

**This is the underlying problem for anyone having trouble clarifying their message: *they are too buried in it to see it.***



But the hard truth is that, if readers don't find your fiction and buy it, they won't notice it missing from their lives.

You will notice the lack of sales, though.

So what should you do?

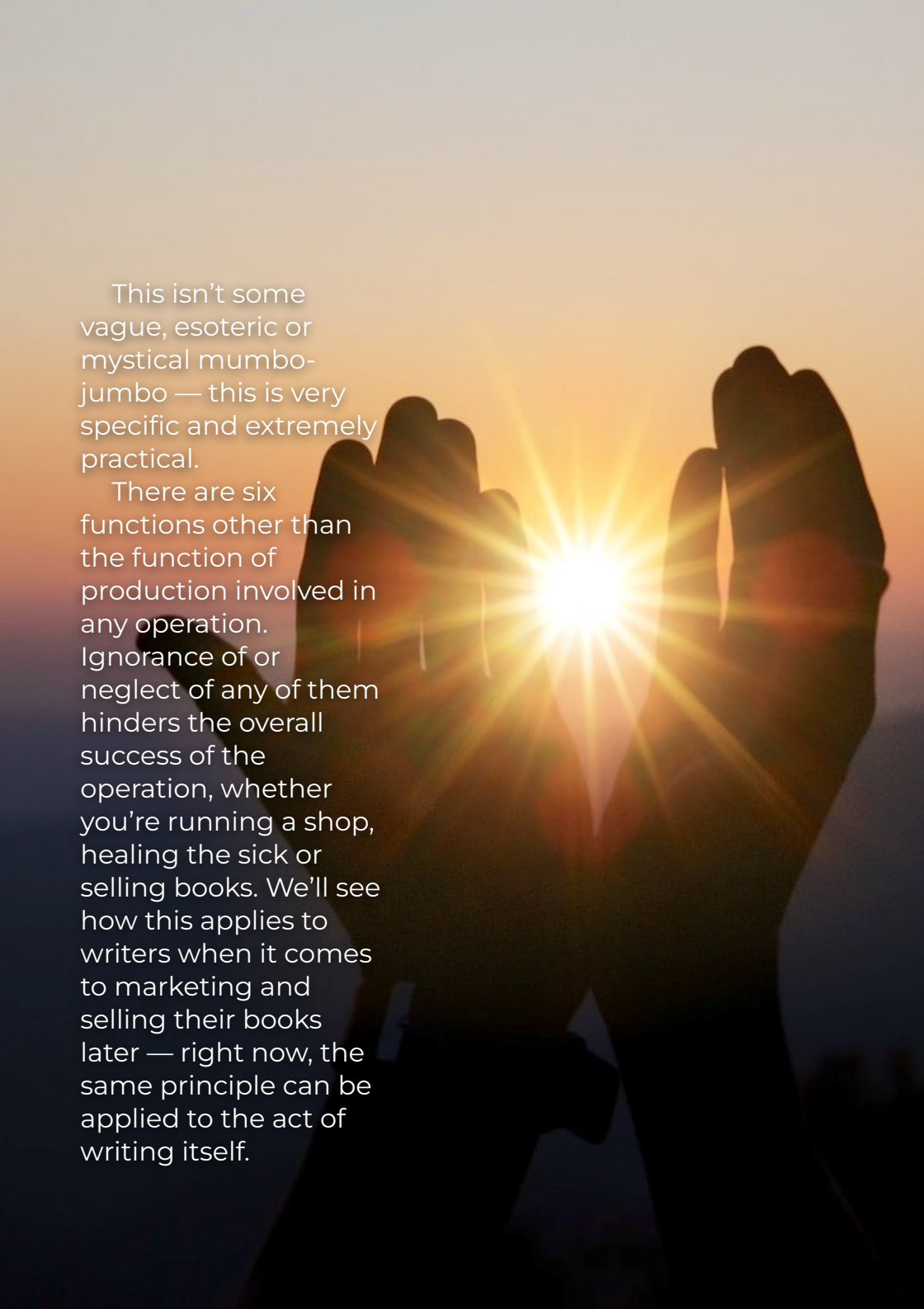
By all means, don't stop writing. As we will see later, generating a volume of writing is just as important as anything else on the road to success.

But to isolate what your message is — to find the motherlode or signal or strand or river of meaning — in your fiction, **you need to step back.**

That was my message to all those small business people too: stand back and get an overview of their business.

***To isolate what your message is in your fiction, you need to step back.***



A silhouette of two hands, palms facing each other, holding a bright sun. The sun is positioned in the center, creating a strong lens flare effect. The background is a gradient of warm colors, from orange near the sun to a darker blue at the bottom. The hands are dark and detailed, showing the fingers and the shape of the palms.

This isn't some vague, esoteric or mystical mumbo-jumbo — this is very specific and extremely practical.

There are six functions other than the function of production involved in any operation. Ignorance of or neglect of any of them hinders the overall success of the operation, whether you're running a shop, healing the sick or selling books. We'll see how this applies to writers when it comes to marketing and selling their books later — right now, the same principle can be applied to the act of writing itself.

# The Seven Functions of Fiction Writing

## 1. Generating a Message

This is your core communication. This goes beyond your theme because it is what you, as an individual writer, want to say **about** your theme. This is You, the Writer, acting as the 'god' of the whole thing and deciding what your story is really saying.

Readers' needs are visceral, almost primitive: they want convincing emotional transformation towards unity.

They want to **arrive**.

When you find your central idea, your message as a writer, you'll find that you can refine your raw material and cut half the baggage out of your fiction, replacing long-winded descriptions or extensive wordage with resonant images, reducing whole paragraphs into three or four more powerful sentences.

Ideally, there shouldn't be a single word, image, or idea in your fiction that doesn't come from your message.

# Author Message



Every  
element  
of  
your  
fiction

# Reader

## 2. Creating an Attention Vehicle

Your chief vehicle for your message—but not the **only** vehicle—is what is traditionally referred to as your ‘protagonist’. With the word ‘protagonist’ comes a whole heap of theory going right back to Aristotle, most of it irrelevant for our purposes, as we have seen.

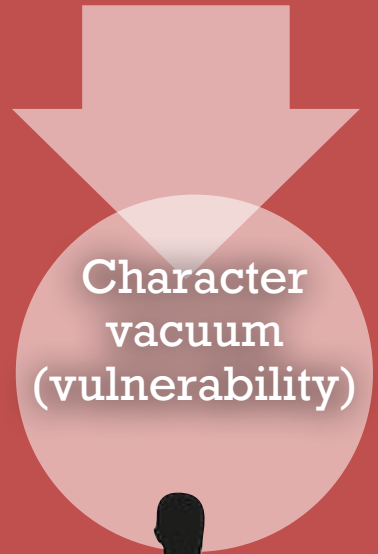
Think of ‘vehicle’ before you think of ‘protagonist’ and you can’t go far wrong.

The vehicle can be appealing, recognisable, attractive, but in essence these are secondary attributes.

You might think that your readers have to want to get aboard such a vehicle, but in truth, **you actually pull them aboard**, ready for their journey, using **vacuums**.

The vehicle is the ‘person’ who gets the job done; they carry your readers’ attention through to the resolution of the story’s vacuums, when your message is delivered.

Reader  
attention



Character  
vacuum  
(vulnerability)



Attention  
vehicle  
(protagonist)

### 3. Developing Vacuum Power

Vacuums are the main driving force which impels your vehicle forward, carrying your readers' attention. Linear vacuums create momentum; mystery vacuums create the 'glue' which sticks attention; moral vacuums engage readers personally.

Together these things form an **emotion generator**, an engine which will **condense attention into emotion**.

### 4. Steering the Vehicle Using a Mentor

The mentor is in control, as a personification of your message.



**Author  
Message**  
(embodied in  
Mentor)

**Attention  
vehicle**  
(protagonist)



Linear vacuums

Mystery vacuums

Moral vacuums

Core vacuums

**EMOTION**  
**Reader**



## 5. Providing the Raw Material

This is the creative material provided by your imagination, an often complex combination of words, images, symbols, scenes, actions, contemplations, descriptions and so forth —the raw stuff from which you carve out your story.

Unfortunately, as we have just pointed out, many authors get stuck in the flow of this and come to believe that this is all there is and that it alone will ‘do the trick’ of attracting readers and communicating meaning.

The raw material is refined by the message and powers the emotion generator.

Now all those words you’ve been writing can be refined, concentrated and have purpose.



## 6. Constructing a Sequence

Traditionally called the 'plot', this is the structured scene-by-scene progression of your attention vehicle through the vacuums you have developed.

If it is steered correctly by a mentor, and makes only short-term or temporary deviations from the message, your story will retain integrity and your readers will remain enthralled and aboard; if the journey wanders too far from the message, so will your readers' attention.

The journey is towards a specific destination. Deviate from the journey and quality suffers.



Mentor steers  
PLOT through  
MESSAGE

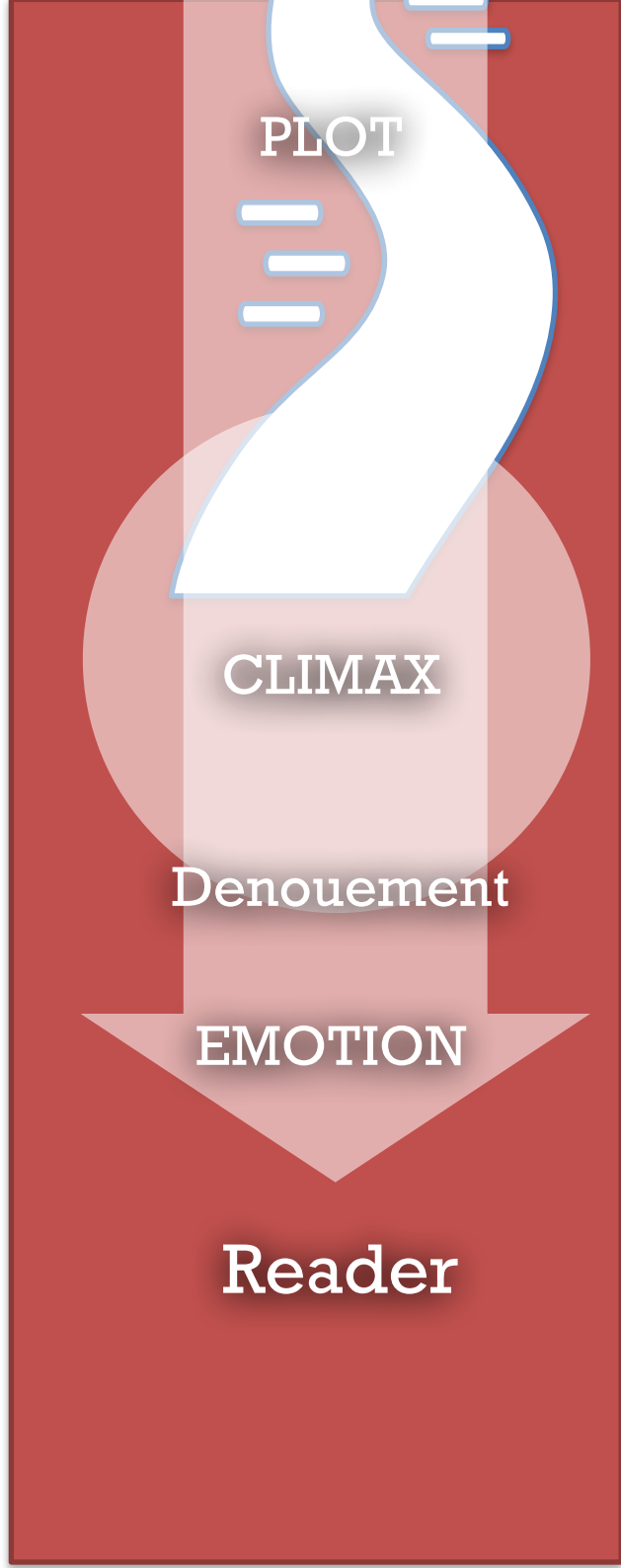
EMOTION  
Reader

## 7. Delivering Your Message

Conventionally termed the 'climax' followed by the denouement (which is sometimes a return journey), this is the point at which your message or messages are delivered and your task as a writer winds down.

'Distribution' has been achieved: the product you have created has been delivered.

Understanding the above, you can perhaps appreciate why many writers fail.





Immersed in 5, they cannot see anything but raw images, words, scenes and so forth, and they effectively drown any clarity arising from 1 in the noise of it all.

Very few writers, though, begin elsewhere than with 5: not many writers sit quietly in a room and conjure up an idea, then build a vehicle and its engine and so on in the sequence described above.

The same was and is the case with every small

business I visited: every creator was busy with the raw material. That is where the raw heat and power of writing or any business is. They were consumed in the production of calls, furniture, healed teeth and backs, and so forth, just as almost all writers are consumed by the act of writing.

But what happens if you just generate raw material and nothing else is done?

You end up with a lot of formless spillage, a vast wastage of time and energy, a cacophony of noise — and few or no customers or readers.

By all means, begin with the raw material and continue to generate it. But please step back and incorporate these other elements, if you want to be able to communicate to

readers and succeed as an author.

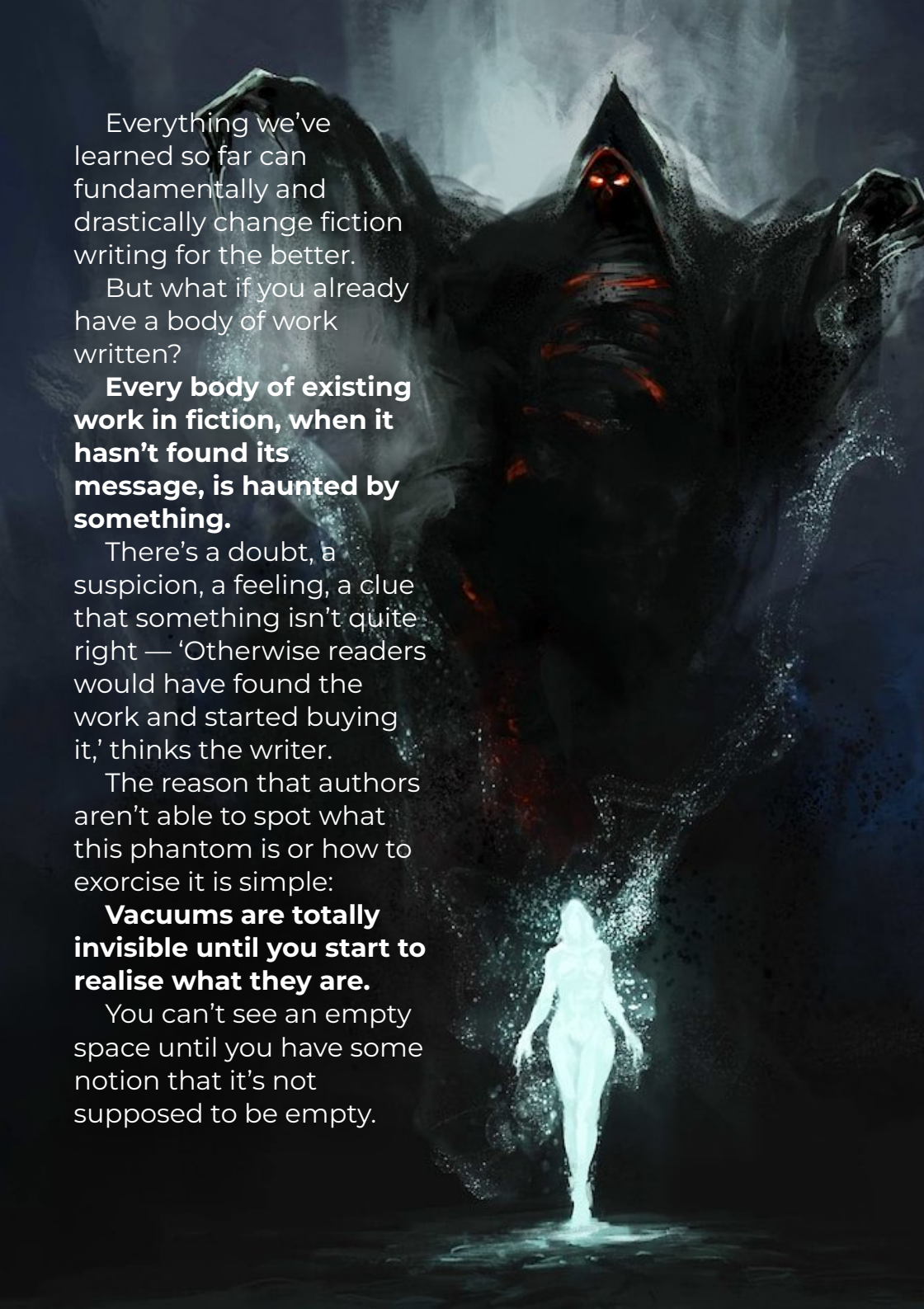
So the biggest problem most authors face is that they write without any real aim other than to ‘finish’ their stories.

Many never even reach that point.

Of those who do, by far the majority don’t know what to do next.







Everything we've learned so far can fundamentally and drastically change fiction writing for the better.

But what if you already have a body of work written?

**Every body of existing work in fiction, when it hasn't found its message, is haunted by something.**

There's a doubt, a suspicion, a feeling, a clue that something isn't quite right — 'Otherwise readers would have found the work and started buying it,' thinks the writer.

The reason that authors aren't able to spot what this phantom is or how to exorcise it is simple:

**Vacuums are totally invisible until you start to realise what they are.**

You can't see an empty space until you have some notion that it's not supposed to be empty.

The phantom is the  
'absence of an absence'.

A body of work can exist  
which doesn't have any  
vacuums, or not enough of  
them — but vacuums,  
being invisible things, are  
even harder to spot when  
they are missing.

In extreme cases this  
phantom, this lack of  
vacuums, can possess the  
very heart of the work, so it  
never quite comes together  
as a unified whole.

Some authors attempt to  
exorcise the phantom by  
stating a purpose and  
sticking it above their  
computer screens. But  
often it's only an associated  
purpose, like 'I want to retire  
and write full-time' or 'I  
want to be a millionaire.'

The actual body of work  
remains soulless and  
chaotic at the level of  
thought and message.



Great literature has clear messages cohering around a central unity, and consistently uses vacuums to draw attention to that unity, though there is a whole industry which exists to argue about the central messages of any individual book within it. But attention from critics just means that a piece's vacuums are working, pulling in that attention.

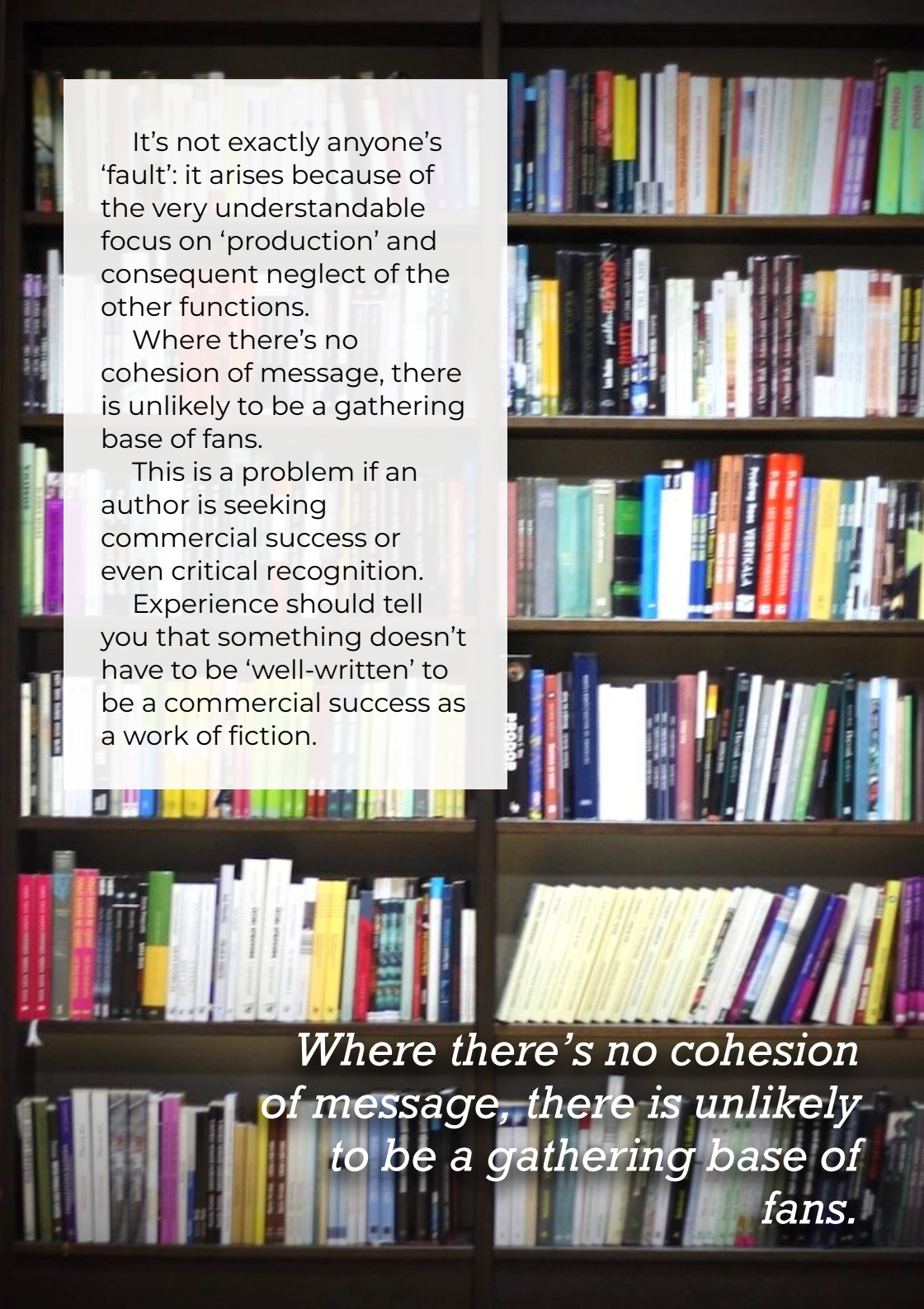
Most beginning authors, or those who haven't found an audience, are either

operating totally chaotically and lacking in vision or purpose, or have disjointed and unaligned messages in fragments, or have only some coherent messages, sporadic and inconsistent.

An individual story may even do quite well, but readers, seeking more of the same, cannot find anything that resonates with the first story, and so any momentum is lost for the author.







It's not exactly anyone's 'fault': it arises because of the very understandable focus on 'production' and consequent neglect of the other functions.

Where there's no cohesion of message, there is unlikely to be a gathering base of fans.

This is a problem if an author is seeking commercial success or even critical recognition.

Experience should tell you that something doesn't have to be 'well-written' to be a commercial success as a work of fiction.

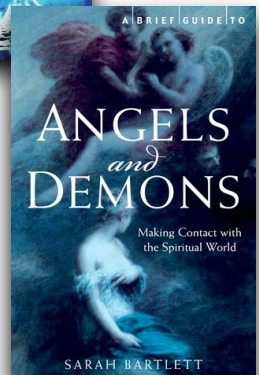
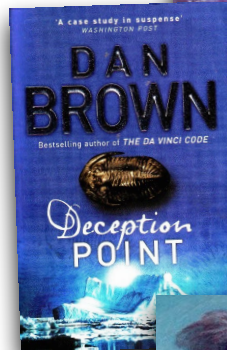
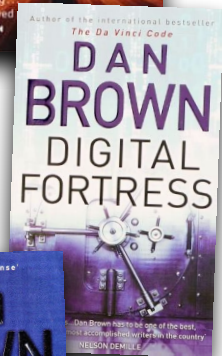
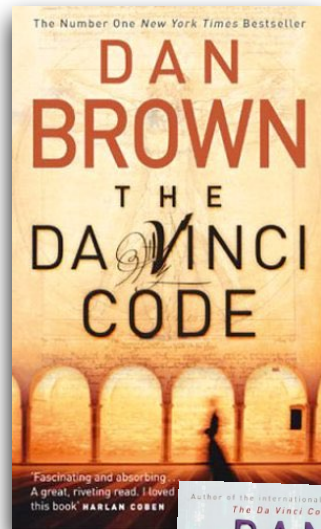
*Where there's no cohesion  
of message, there is unlikely  
to be a gathering base of  
fans.*

Take Dan Brown, for example. His career took off in 2003 when his novel **The Da Vinci Code**, became an international best seller. Brown has written seven books and sold 250 million copies of them altogether, making him one of the world's most successful authors.

But his first three books were complete commercial failures at first.

An agent convinced Brown to try writing a novel back in the 1990s. St. Martin's Press published **Digital Fortress** in 1998, but it failed to sell at all. His following two thrillers, **Deception Point** and **Angels & Demons**, were also commercially unviable.

Then came **The Da Vinci Code**, a sequel to **Angels & Demons**. The book featured complex historical intrigue and a fantastic tale about the Holy Grail. Brown was about to give up writing, but **The Da Vinci Code** became a massive international bestseller. There were millions of people out there who enjoyed the book.





What happened?

In terms of message and vacuums, **The Da Vinci Code** tapped into bottomless controversy and hype that was only tangentially related to fiction as such: its allegations, within the story, about corruption and deceit at the heart of the Catholic Church and the supposed existence of an age-old, worldwide conspiracy resonated with a large audience.

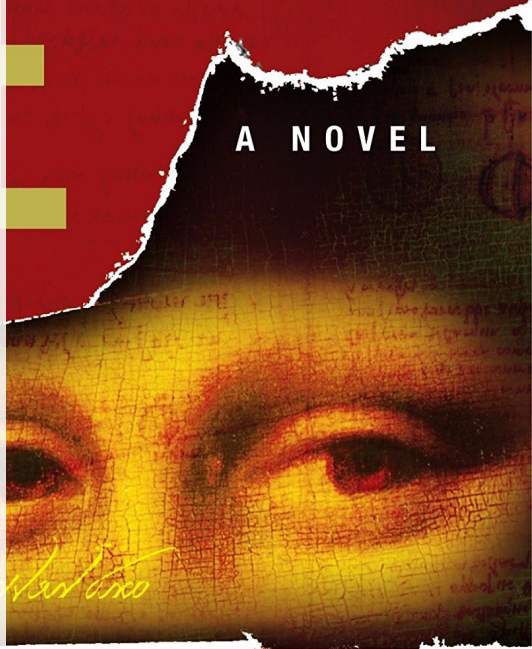
This had nothing to do with the quality of his writing.

Brown's language has been described as cheesy and cliché, his storytelling and characters plain and predictable.

The reason his work is so successful is because its message — that a vast conspiracy is actively hiding fundamental spiritual truths from the population at large (even though the 'message' is clearly fictional) —found an audience.

# VINCI

A NOVEL



# BROWN

AUTHOR OF ANGELS & DEMONS

Note this: once **The Da Vinci Code** came out, Brown's previous three novels, which had **totally failed** to sell before, went on to do extraordinarily well, each becoming No. 1 on best-seller lists, **without any changes in content.**

First lesson here?

**Commercial success can be achieved as a fiction writer with almost no attention paid to the quality of the writing itself.**

The message (and its associated vacuums) is what counts.

Meanwhile, as we have seen, many writers get stuck. They become absorbed in the often delightful, frequently gripping and sometimes completely mesmeric flow of raw material from their imaginations.



*Commercial success can be achieved as a fiction writer with almost no attention paid to the quality of the writing itself.*

Writing is by its nature an isolated pursuit. Shut away in quiet rooms, closing the door on distractions and permitting their imaginations free play, it's completely understandable — and even desirable — that a free flow of images, dialogue, character, scene setting and all the rest pours forth onto the page.

The nature of this free flow, though, is that it normally contains a huge amount of **noise**.

It can and usually does seem to writers that what arises in their imaginations has some sacrosanct quality: 'If it has bubbled up from within, then it must be included in the work,' they think. And so we get fiction overburdened with excessive dialogue, unrestrained description, superfluous and superabundant imagery, poor structure and much more, all unaligned and presenting a fairly chaotic picture to readers.





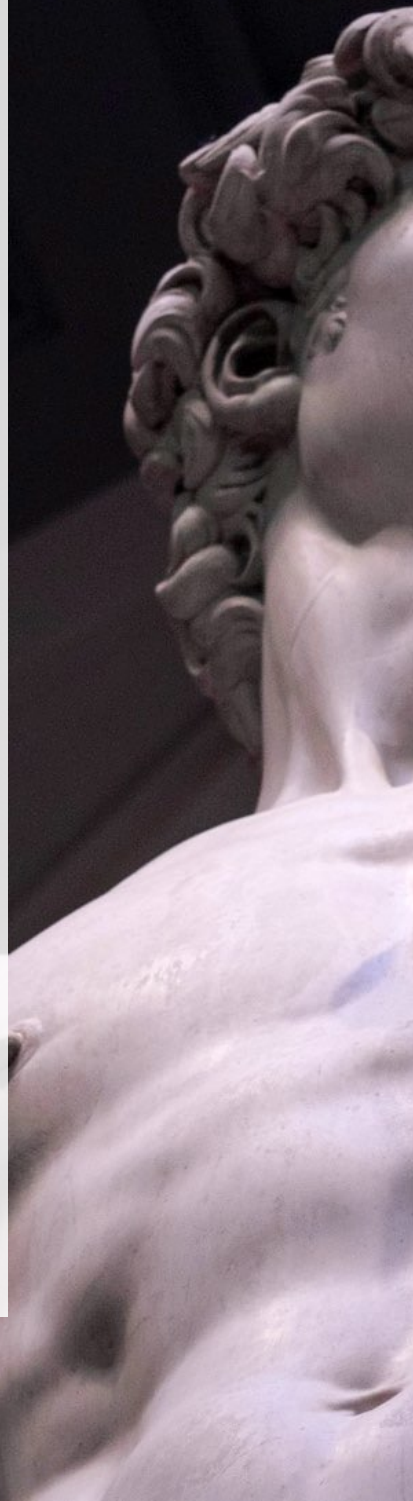
The tendency of writers is to include rather than exclude.

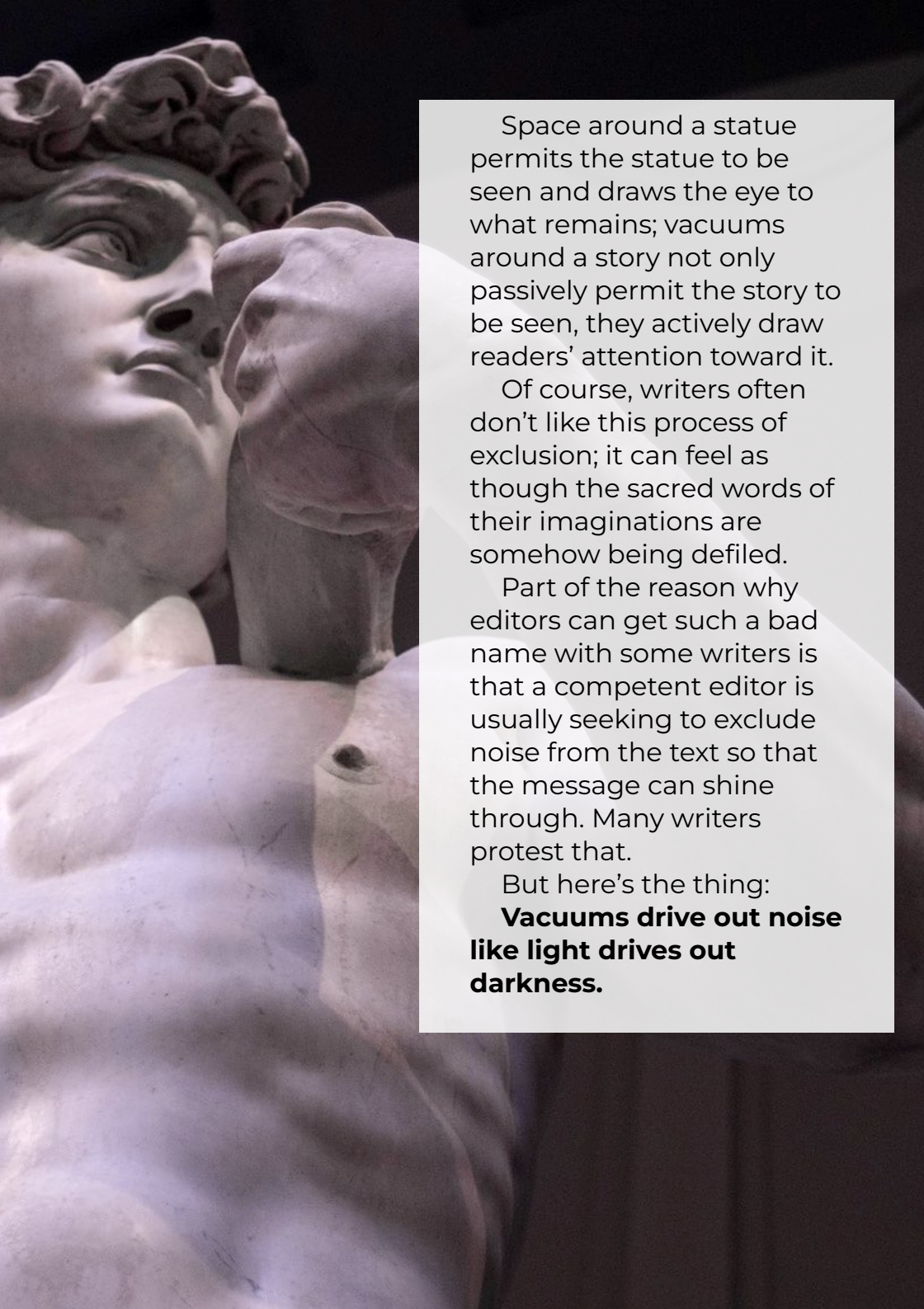
The power of a strong, theme-related message is that it starts to **exclude** unnecessary material.

As Michelangelo famously said, 'I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.' He also wrote, 'The best artist has that thought alone which is contained within the marble shell; only the sculptor's hand can break the spell to free the figures,' which amounts to the same thing.

The writer's job is similar to the sculptor's: to find the message within the raw material which has been 'delivered' by the imagination, and then, by a process of exclusion rather than inclusion, to carve it out so that it is in plain sight for the reader.

The analogy can be extended a little: just as it is space which is created around the marble statue that remains so that the carved figure can be seen, so the writer creates voids and vacuums around the core message so that it can be communicated.





Space around a statue permits the statue to be seen and draws the eye to what remains; vacuums around a story not only passively permit the story to be seen, they actively draw readers' attention toward it.

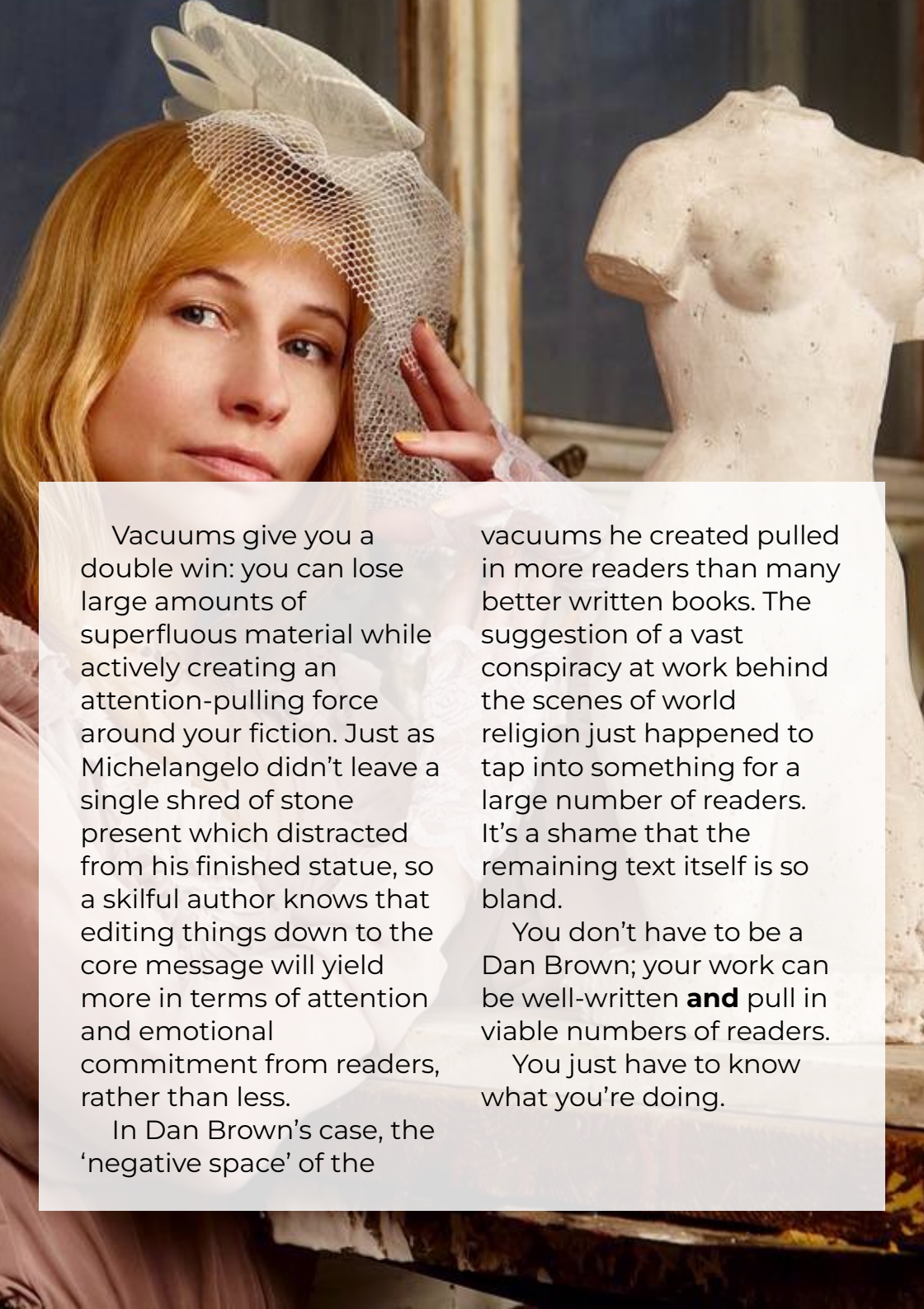
Of course, writers often don't like this process of exclusion; it can feel as though the sacred words of their imaginations are somehow being defiled.

Part of the reason why editors can get such a bad name with some writers is that a competent editor is usually seeking to exclude noise from the text so that the message can shine through. Many writers protest that.

But here's the thing:

**Vacuums drive out noise  
like light drives out  
darkness.**





Vacuums give you a double win: you can lose large amounts of superfluous material while actively creating an attention-pulling force around your fiction. Just as Michelangelo didn't leave a single shred of stone present which distracted from his finished statue, so a skilful author knows that editing things down to the core message will yield more in terms of attention and emotional commitment from readers, rather than less.

In Dan Brown's case, the 'negative space' of the

vacuums he created pulled in more readers than many better written books. The suggestion of a vast conspiracy at work behind the scenes of world religion just happened to tap into something for a large number of readers. It's a shame that the remaining text itself is so bland.

You don't have to be a Dan Brown; your work can be well-written **and** pull in viable numbers of readers.

You just have to know what you're doing.



## **When Writers Don't Know What They're Doing**

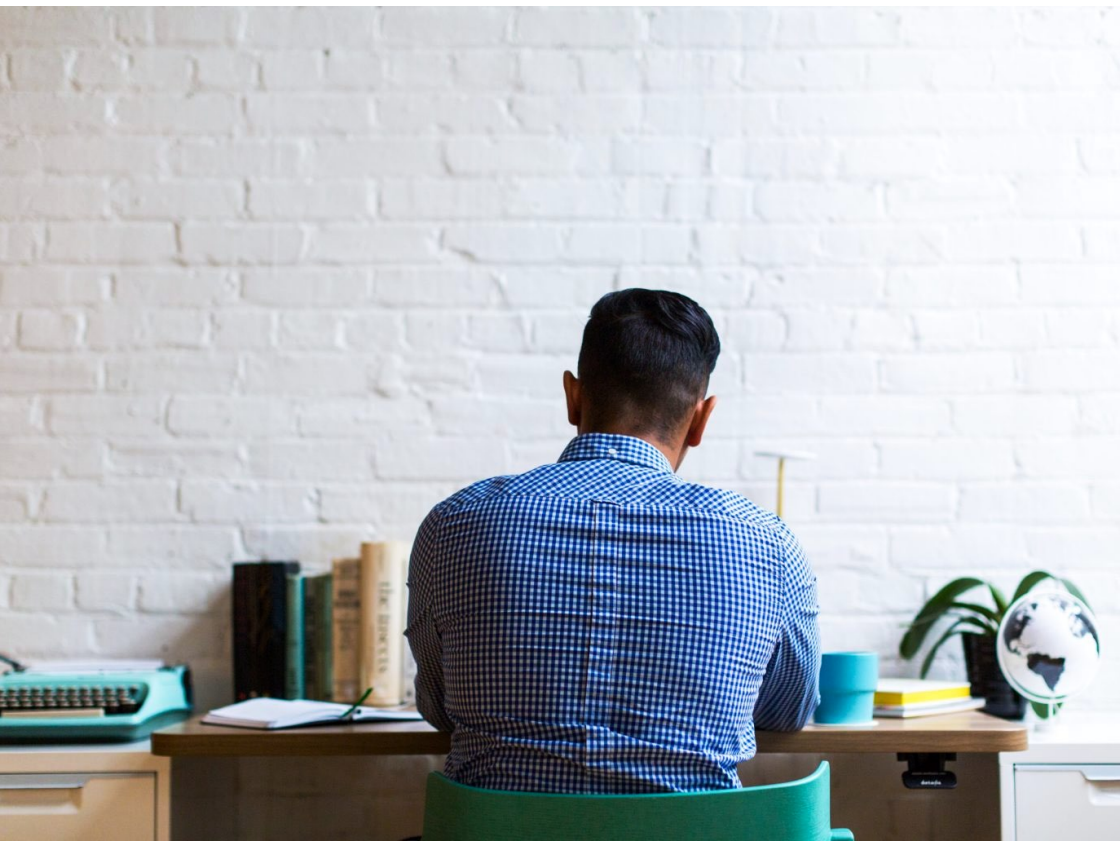
Based on talking to thousands of writers all over the world for a number of years, writers who are unenlightened about all this usually proceed like this:

i) Writers sit down at desks with vague scenes in mind.

ii) After some procrastination, they start writing.

iii) They take many breaks or are distracted easily, making progress only in fits and starts.

iv) by permitting their imagination to do the work, they manage to finish a story — as far as they can tell, anyway.



Then they repeat the above steps.

This can continue for weeks, months, years.

There's a certain amount of joy involved in being immersed in production, a degree of liberation, of therapy, mixed with some frustration.

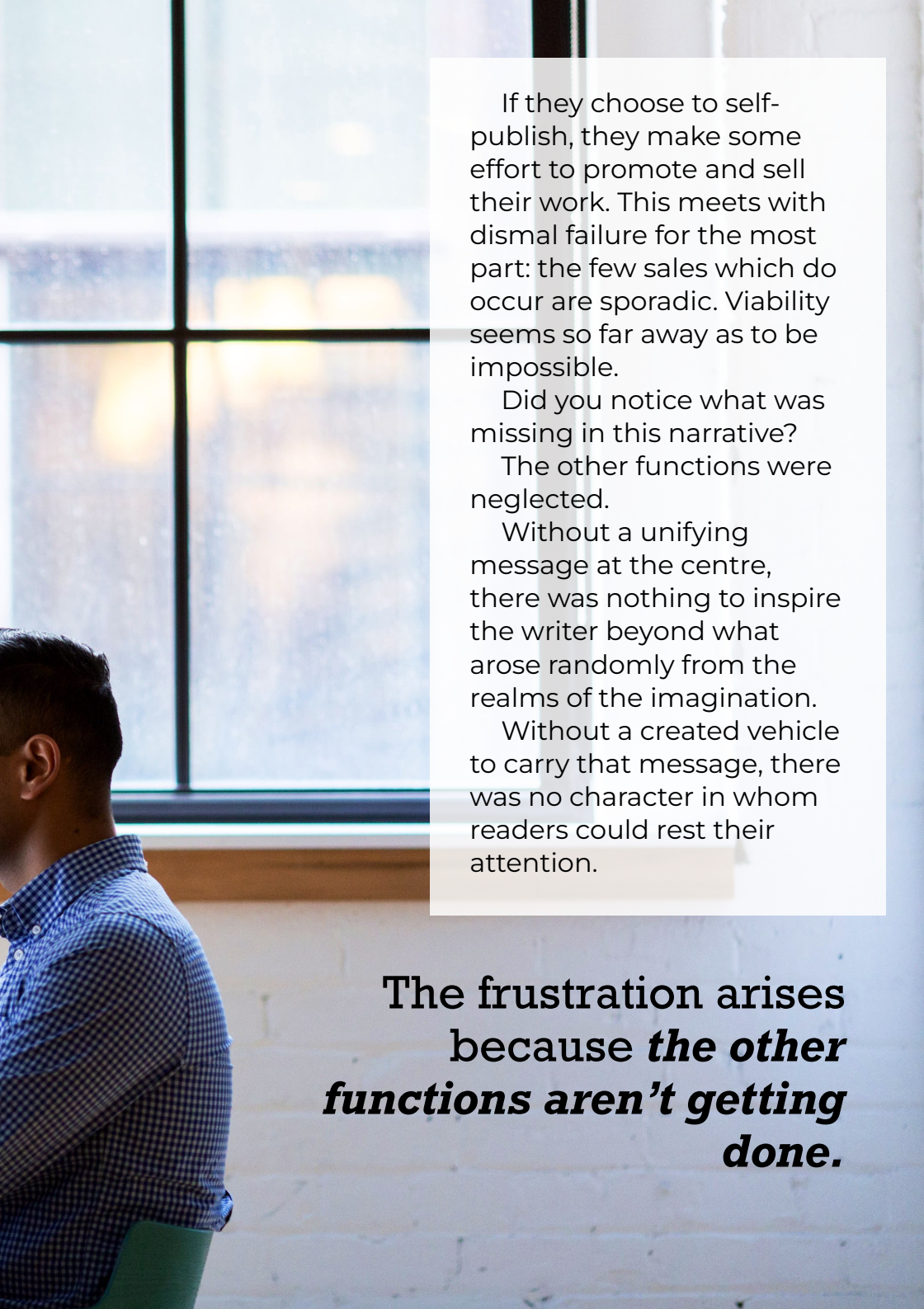
The frustration arises because **the other functions aren't getting done.**

Over time, writers in this situation do a workmanlike job of churning out story after story, some short, some long. Sometimes they work on their 'proto-novel'; sometimes they feel inspired and finish work with which they are quite pleased.

They make some feeble attempts to publish their work, but receive mainly rejections. When something is accepted, this encourages them to work harder at steps i) to iv) above.







If they choose to self-publish, they make some effort to promote and sell their work. This meets with dismal failure for the most part: the few sales which do occur are sporadic. Viability seems so far away as to be impossible.

Did you notice what was missing in this narrative?

The other functions were neglected.

Without a unifying message at the centre, there was nothing to inspire the writer beyond what arose randomly from the realms of the imagination.

Without a created vehicle to carry that message, there was no character in whom readers could rest their attention.

**The frustration arises  
because *the other  
functions aren't getting  
done.***

The writer didn't do anything wrong. **They just didn't do some of the other things that needed doing.**

illusion that effective  
fiction-making is  
occurring, when it's not.

The result of all this is that a writer occasionally achieves small to moderate success, but consigns the idea of making a career out of writing to the Dustbin of Unattainable Dreams.





## When Writers Know What They're Doing

Again based on experience, when writers are inspired by their own messages, and recognise and do even some of the other functions, the picture can change quite a bit.

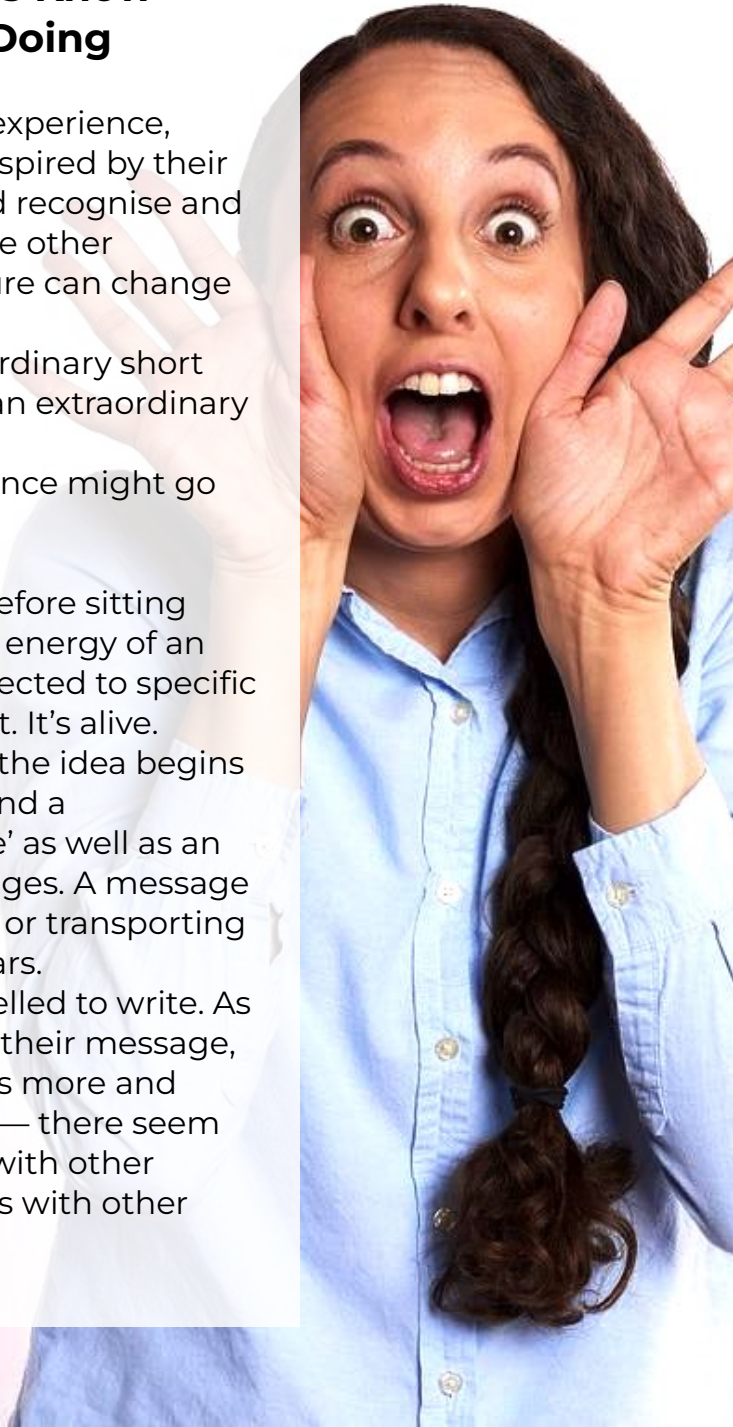
Telling even an ordinary short story can become an extraordinary adventure.

The above sequence might go more like this:

i) Writers, even before sitting down, have felt the energy of an idea, perhaps connected to specific scenes, perhaps not. It's alive.

ii) They find that the idea begins to shape itself around a protagonist 'vehicle' as well as an image or set of images. A message coalesces; a means of transporting the message appears.

iii) They feel impelled to write. As they are guided by their message, their writing exudes more and more competence — there seem to be connections with other stories, and perhaps with other aspects of life.



iv) They find the mentor manifests itself as a 'muse'.

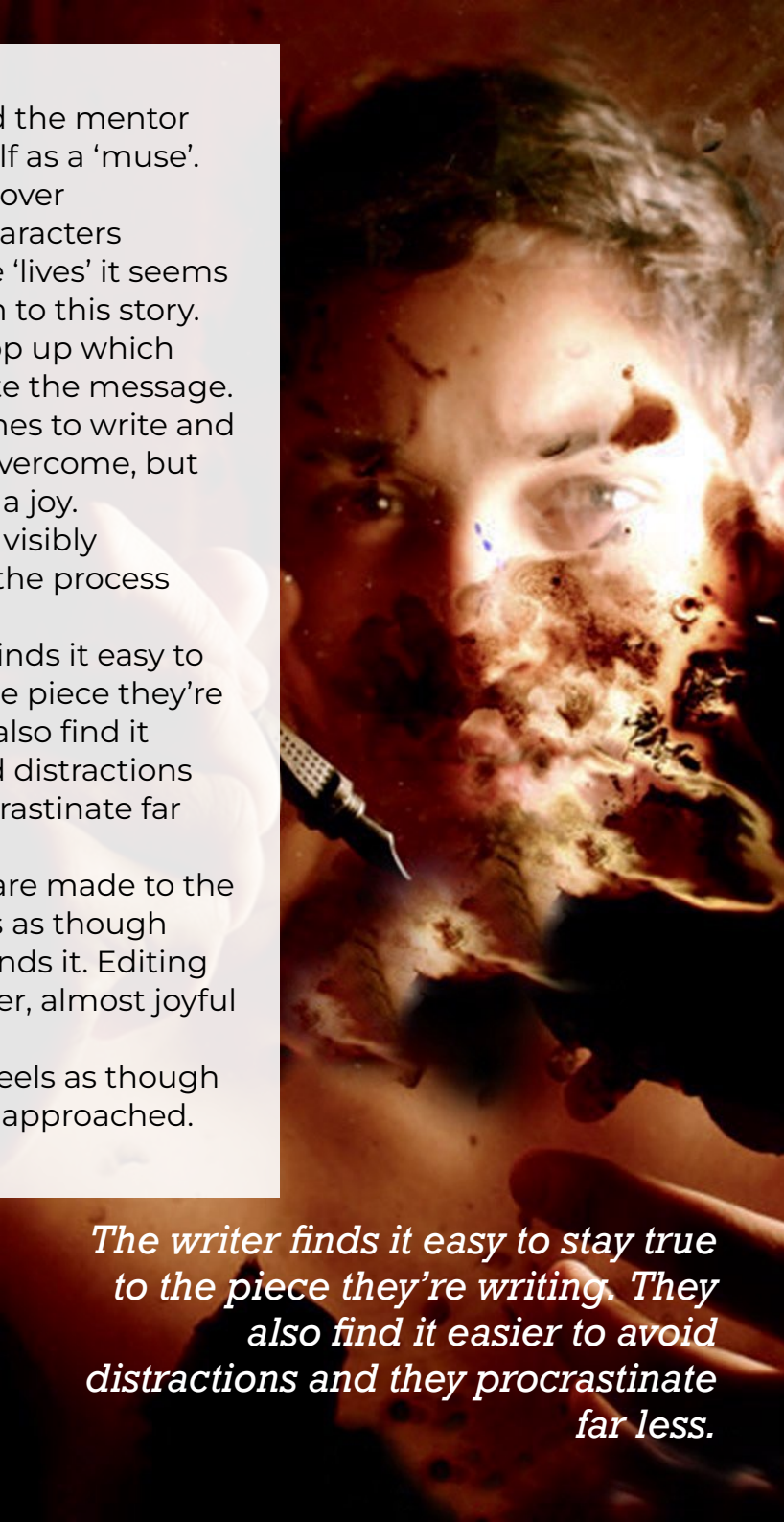
v) They discover interesting characters arising, whose 'lives' it seems have led them to this story. Plot twists crop up which better illustrate the message. There are scenes to write and obstacles to overcome, but the process is a joy.

vi) They are visibly enthralled as the process continues.

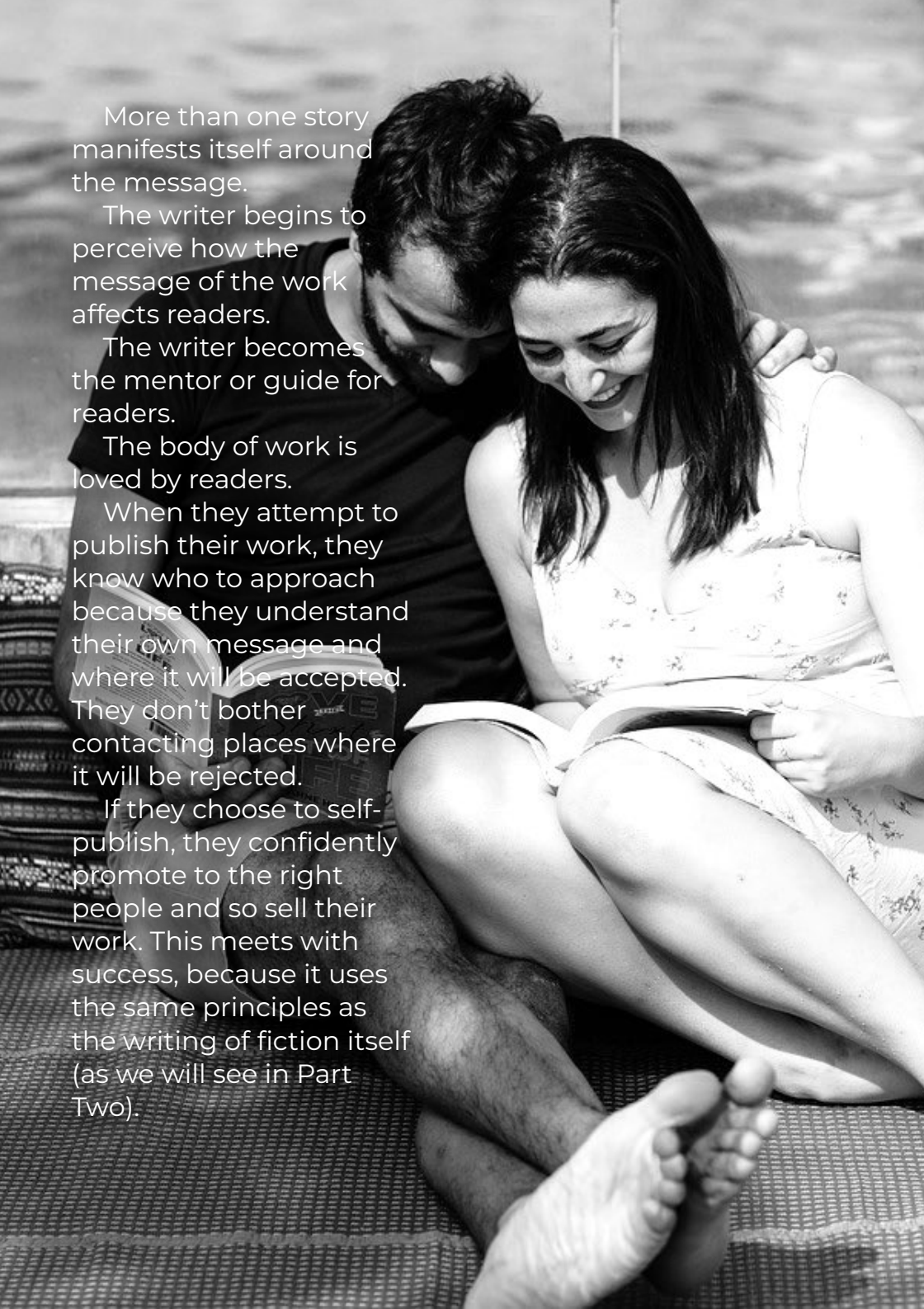
The writer finds it easy to stay true to the piece they're writing. They also find it easier to avoid distractions and they procrastinate far less.

If changes are made to the story, it seems as though destiny demands it. Editing becomes easier, almost joyful in itself.

The writer feels as though unity is being approached.



*The writer finds it easy to stay true to the piece they're writing. They also find it easier to avoid distractions and they procrastinate far less.*



More than one story manifests itself around the message.

The writer begins to perceive how the message of the work affects readers.

The writer becomes the mentor or guide for readers.

The body of work is loved by readers.

When they attempt to publish their work, they know who to approach because they understand their own message and where it will be accepted. They don't bother contacting places where it will be rejected.

If they choose to self-publish, they confidently promote to the right people and so sell their work. This meets with success, because it uses the same principles as the writing of fiction itself (as we will see in Part Two).



Sales occur in increasing volume; viability begins to look possible.

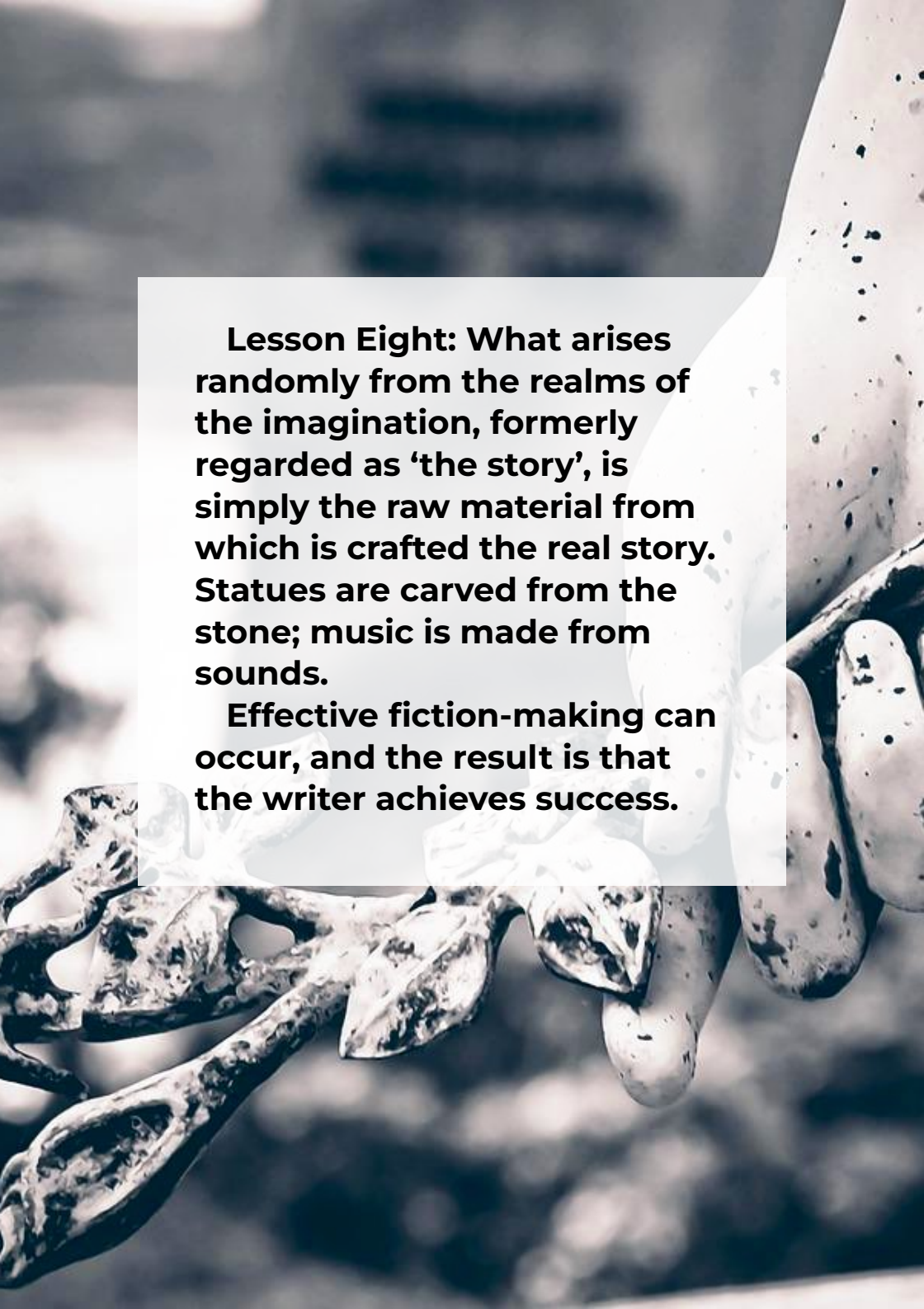
What is present in this narrative that was missing in the earlier one?

It has a unifying message at the centre, inspiring the writer.

And the six other functions involved in making anything successful are getting some attention.





A close-up photograph of a hand holding a piece of driftwood against a blurred background of rocks. The hand is positioned on the right side of the frame, with fingers wrapped around a piece of weathered, light-colored driftwood. The driftwood has a rough, textured surface with some dark spots. The background is a soft-focus view of a rocky shoreline with various shades of grey and blue. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing text.

**Lesson Eight: What arises randomly from the realms of the imagination, formerly regarded as ‘the story’, is simply the raw material from which is crafted the real story. Statues are carved from the stone; music is made from sounds.**

**Effective fiction-making can occur, and the result is that the writer achieves success.**

## Lesson Eight

### Exercise:

# PUTTING THINGS TOGETHER



**Author  
Message**  
(embodied in  
Mentor)

Take a piece of fiction  
which you have  
written during Part  
One of this course (or  
use [The Story  
Creation Handbook](#) if  
you wish to create a  
new story as  
required):  
Include as many  
elements as you can  
from previous  
lessons.  
Edit the story down  
to 2,000 words.

**Attention  
vehicle**  
(protagonist)

Linear vacuums

Mystery vacuums

Moral vacuums

Core vacuums



**EMOTION**

**Reader**

If you wish, send the  
story to  
[grant@clarendonhouse  
books.com](mailto:grant@clarendonhousebooks.com) for some  
feedback.

# CONCLUSION TO PART ONE

As an author, make it your priority to find out what's important to you and what you want to say about it.

Having no message coming through clearly loses readers immediately.

That doesn't mean that you can't write nuanced, multi-layered fiction which builds over many scenes — far from it. But the only way that you can write nuanced, multi-layered fiction that actually **works** is if your message shines through every passage.

The message that you discover in your story will intrigue the **right** readers for you and invite them into your book which will then enable you to deliver that message fully to them.



Imagine what would life look like if every one of those readers received the full power of your message. They would be transformed into advocates for your fiction, would they not?

In working towards finding your message, ask yourself the following:

Who are **your** readers?

What are the **vacuums** that need to be overcome, towards what kind of **unity**?

If you've discovered your message, you've already done most of the work when it comes to understanding who your characters are and what they want.





It's commonly asserted in books about writing fiction that 'Stories hinge on conflict'.

This will sound like blasphemy to many — but this statement isn't quite true.

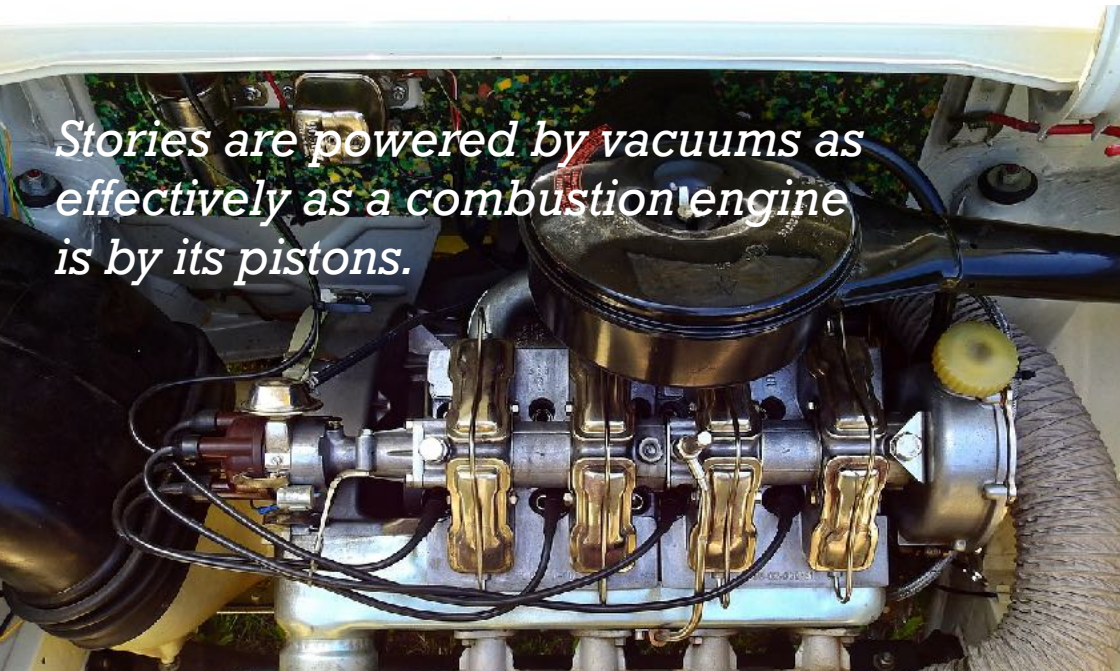
Conflict isn't central: unity and vacuums are central.

**Stories are powered by vacuums as effectively as a combustion engine is by its pistons.**

Right at the centre of them is the core vacuum, the one which will in the end deliver the story's message.

Building your story engine using linear, mystery and moral vacuums structured around a core will guarantee you readers and success. Having your mentor figure lay out directions for your protagonist, programming that attention vehicle to overcome external, internal and broader philosophical obstacles to reach its destination, will ensure that readers stay with you.

*Stories are powered by vacuums as effectively as a combustion engine is by its pistons.*



All that creative material that flows from your imagination —words, images, symbols, scenes, actions, contemplations, descriptions and everything else— all flow out into the page to form either a big blob of noise or the ‘flesh’ around a powerful skeleton you can build.

Without the skeleton, what do you get? A formless mass, like Michelangelo’s uncarved marble, incapable of holding much attention. But now, creative power can find its true freedom because it has somewhere to go and something to say.

The structured scene-by-scene progression of your vehicle through the story requires you to sit down and write and write and write. If you adhere to your message — even if the ‘outline’ is only in your head as a ‘pantster’ — your story will retain readers.



The end of a successful book is, for the reader, the climax and denouement; for the author, it's the delivery of the message and the basking in the afterglow of that successful delivery.

You only have to browse self-published books on Amazon for a few minutes to see that the market is awash with books that don't communicate anything meaningful.

The marketplace is full of noise.

The books in the marketplace are full of noise.

To help you stand out and make a name for yourself as an author, the first step is to find your own voice.

Fiction is one of the most powerful forces for good that humanity possesses. Stories can uplift, inspire, warn, move and mould.

The simplicity is that, if you clarify your message, readers will listen.



**Your next  
module:**

**BECOME A  
PROFESSIONAL  
AUTHOR  
COURSE  
PART TWO:  
SELLING STORIES  
EFFECTIVELY**

Lesson One:  
What Makes Marketing Work

Grant P Hudson