



Interview with Steve P. Vincent

Danno D'Aprano

The Foundation, a political thriller about a journalist who uncovers a dangerous plot of media corruption and conspiracy, is Melbourne author Steve P. Vincent's first novel. It was published by Momentum (Pan Macmillan's digital-first imprint) and was released on September 11, 2014.

When did you start writing *The Foundation*?

April 2012.

Where did the creative spark for this novel come from? Was there a moment where a character, a scene or a concept came to mind?

The original spark wasn't mine. I was discussing a 'what if', as you do over beers. It stuck in my head, so I fanned the spark and eventually it became an inferno. Or a novel, at any rate.

I started with the big, theoretical situation and figured it out from there. That process seems to be how I work. Once I have the general scenario and a plot skeleton, I fill it with characters and stitch it together.

What do you feel is driving this novel? Themes? Your own politics? Or is it simply an engaging story?

I think the strongest theme in the book is the shift in power away from the electors — you and I — and towards media empires, lobby groups and other unelected bodies. The book plays with what might happen if this is taken to the extreme.

My own politics are in there, if you look hard enough. It's impossible to write in this genre without a bit of seepage. But I've tried to minimise it as much as I can, because nobody likes having a point of view shoved down their throat.

I'd like to think the end result of all of this is a fun, fast-paced thriller that might make people think a little bit more seriously about who controls the political agenda, and to what end.



What novels/authors do you like to read? Are there any that had a particular influence on your novel? Include any novels in the political thriller genre or other genres/authors/novels?

Thrillers are a staple, obviously. I grew up on a steady diet of techno-thrillers by Tom Clancy and his ilk. Now I'm a grown-up (ha!), I like to read all sorts of books across lots of genres. The last five I finished, all highly recommended, were:

- Marcus Sakey, *Brilliance*
- Tara Moss, *The Fictional Woman*
- Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*
- Timur Vermes, *Look Who's Back*
- Stephen Levitt, *Superfreakonomics*

Though I like reading all sorts of books, I like to write in a particular style and a particular genre. At its core, *The Foundation* is a popcorn thriller. It won't be studied in any English classes, but it will be good company on a plane or by the pool.

But all sorts of books and writers, across all genres, have an influence on my writing. I'll notice how another author handles a certain type of scene, or chapter structure, or pacing, or dialogue. It's impossible not to admire and be influenced by others.

Did you ever look back at earlier drafts or extracts and find a difference in the level of technique in your own writing? Did you find yourself learning as you were writing?

Absolutely.

My technique has improved immensely with experience, but I'm still learning. I don't think writing to a publishable standard is an arcane art. It takes some innate talent, sure, but not much. Mostly it's hard work, an open mind and lots of practice.

I enrolled in two classes while I was writing *The Foundation*: a general novel writing class in 2012 and an intense workshopping class in 2013. Both helped the book immensely, but so did constantly editing, re-writing or reconsidering scenes.



THE FOUNDATION



STEVE P.
VINCENT

What did you do to get yourself out of any writer's block or slow periods?

I don't really believe in writer's block. Or, at least, I haven't experienced it yet.

If you're not inspired enough by what you're writing to get it down, think of something new to write. If you can't, you're in the wrong game. Everyone 'would love to write a novel', but the difference between you and them is that you're working on it.

That said, there are inevitably slow periods when you're working on something as sprawling and complicated as a novel. They're a pain, but I reckon there's usually a reason. Maybe it's rubbish, or I haven't planned it properly, or I'm not in the mood.

There's a lot to be said for just grinding it out, but if it's absolutely not working then I just jump to another scene, edit or do some plotting.

Finding time to write and distractions. Were these issues for you?

Unfortunately, writing isn't lucrative enough for most writers to make a living. I work full-time and write when I can. I made it a priority, figured out the time that works for me, put it in my calendar and approach it professionally.

With the first book out, I'm dropping one day per fortnight at work to let me write a little bit more. Beyond that, I try to write something every day, whether it's a hundred or a thousand words. Once every few months I'll do a ten thousand-word day. Yes, it's possible.

Distractions are always a risk. I wrote most of my book in front of the TV, with my wife next to me. On top of that, writing is a solitary exercise so nobody is going to shout if I don't put in the work (except my publisher, when I'm on deadline).

Like anything, if you love doing it and treat it with respect, you find the time and ignore the distractions. Writing a book is hard work. If you're not going to put in the effort, don't bother starting. You're kidding yourself otherwise.

When did you get a publishing deal?

I submitted the complete manuscript to Pan Macmillan in March 2014 and I received my offer to publish with Momentum on 29 April 2014.

It's all happened quickly since I inked the deal. One advantage of a digital-first publisher is speed to market and global distribution. It's been lightning fast, which is exciting and suits me.



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How did you go about getting published? Did you have any contacts in the publishing industry?

I finished a draft, edited the heck out of it, gave it to some beta readers, digested their feedback, edited some more, proofed it, submitted it, received an offer, negotiated a contract, then edited it some more.

I had a contact, I suppose. A friend of a friend worked in sales at Pan Macmillan, and kindly invited me to send it to her. But once it was through their door, my manuscript had to live or die on its own merit. Publishers don't do favours, they can't afford to.

How many people did you collaborate with during the editing process?

Before I submitted the manuscript I asked seven beta readers for their input at various points. After I signed the deal, two staff at Momentum had input into the actual story, as well as a freelance editor.

It's incredible to see the improvements a good editor can make. I thought the book was pretty good when I sent it off, but Kylie (my editor) found issues and suggested improvements that blew me away. Plus there was lots of tightening.

Did you find the process tedious or was there some satisfaction in the project coming together?

Never tedious. It was always exciting, I was learning it all for the first time and the staff at Momentum are first class. Seeing how it all works was fun, and being able to sit back at the end of it and say 'I published a book' was a buzz that I never expected.

That said, at some points it felt like doing maths homework. By the time I'd signed the deal, I'd probably read the book 30 times. Between then and launch day I read it another 10 or so. You get sick of reading your work, and lose perspective.

End to end it has been the hardest thing I've ever done, but also the most satisfying.



Is there anything else in the works? Do you have any reflections on the writing and editing process about what you would do differently next time?

Yep. ‘State of Emergency’ is the working title of the sequel. I’m about a quarter into the first draft and it’s going well. It’s less sprawling than the first book, which lets me go deeper with certain scenes and characters.

Now I’m writing the second book, it feels easier and I know myself better as a writer, but I’m still learning and making mistakes. It’s still hard work, but it probably comes a little bit easier. I’m also planning a small novella.

I’ve learnt heaps and I feel like I know what I’m doing a bit more now. Plus, having published, the self-doubt (‘getting published is impossible’) has quieted down a little bit. The sequel is coming together a lot more smoothly than *The Foundation* did.

Reflections? Sure:

- Writing is a labour of love, involving hard work and no guarantee of reward.
- Treat it like a job. Write often, learn by doing and grind it out when necessary.
- Write a first draft as fast as you can. Don’t get stuck making one scene perfect.
- It’s possible to get too close and lose perspective. A break can do wonders.
- Receive feedback with a smile and respect for the time that was spent forming it.
- Use feedback that is useful and disregard feedback that isn’t. It’s your book.
- You’ve got nothing to lose by submitting, even if you do have some self-doubt.
- The staff at your publishing house are professionals. Respect their roles. They rock.

The Foundation by Steve P. Vincent was published by Momentum in September 2014 and is available from all good ebook retailers. You can join Steve on Facebook ([facebook.com/stevepvincentwriter](https://www.facebook.com/stevepvincentwriter)) or on Twitter (@stevepvincent). And for more on the process, check out the ‘path to publication’ blog posts on Steve’s website (stevepvincent.com).

