

***Sam Shelstad's brilliantly funny, slightly unhinged creative writing guide is How Fiction Works by James Wood meets Pale Fire by Vladimir Nabokov.***

To the untrained eye, Sam Shelstad may look a lot like a Value Village cashier who shares an apartment with his Uncle Herman and has just emerged from a failed relationship with a woman forty years his senior whom he met at his mother's book club. But Sam is a successful novelist—or will be soon, he's certain. The manuscript of his debut novel, *The Emerald*, is currently on the desk of a celebrated indie publisher. While he waits to hear back, he's hard at work on two ambitious writing projects. The first is the Molly novel, a fictional rendering of Sam's newly defunct relationship. The second is a guide for aspiring fiction writers like yourself. The two have much to teach one another, and much to teach you.

Drawing on examples from the work of greats like George Orwell, Henry James, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Alice Munro, Kazuo Ishiguro, Clarise Lispector, and Sam Shelstad, *The Cobra and the Key* takes the novice through aspects of character, detail, plot, style, point of view, dialogue, and meaning. Before long, you'll be ready to print off your first draft and embark on revisions. Then it's time to learn some of the tricks of the publishing biz. Having just been threatened with legal action by his soon-to-be publisher for stalking said publisher's son via Instagram, Sam knows a thing or two about that too. Are you ready to get serious about your writing?