

## ***STRENGTHS***

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### ***CHANGING PERSPECTIVES***

A highlight of this manuscript for me was your choice in showing the difference in lifestyle between Sarah and Kaleb from their reactions to the cannons.

For Sarah, it was almost mundane:

“Thu-KOOOM.” At the sound, Sarah closed the book, making sure to mark her place, and rose from her seat on the floor. She set the book on a nearby table, strolled over to the window on the other side of the room, and peeked through the vertical shutters.

For Kaleb, the sound meant a life or death situation:

THU-KOOM! At the sound, Kaleb sprung from his seat and sprinted outside in a panic.

This to me represents a great allure for your narrative. I, as a reader, get to see both sides of the conflict. This offers great opportunities for themes concerning right, wrong, and moral perceptions one what side one might align themselves with. Nice choice of how to present the narrative!

### ***PROSE***

I found a few instances within the manuscripts the showcased your potential for writing engaging prose. One example that caught my eye was:

The sound of crumbling buildings and crying survivors. A layer of ash upon everything that was supposed to be comfortable. This was normal.

I love that you describe this scene of incredible destruction, and then swiftly follow it up by saying that is “normal” for Kaleb. This sentence alone did more worldbuilding for me than almost anything else in the manuscript. It not only tells me about the environment and day-to-day expectations of these people fearing for their lives but gives me plenty of information about how Kaleb mentally approaches this tumultuous life too. The description was concise, informative, poetic, and unique. I would love to see you use more description like this.

Another section that caught my eye was:

The people of the crowd no longer moved. His words were a freezing wind upon their shores.

This section is very poetic, but still worked perfectly to describe the effect that the Forebishop had on those listening. Linking the physical and the metaphorical is a cornerstone of poetic writing and you accomplish that by using “no longer moved” and “freezing wind” back-to-back. Though it may seem minor, it is frequent use of colorful prose like this that make a manuscript stand out.

## **WEAKNESSES**

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### **LACK OF CONFLICT**

The largest critique that I have for this manuscript is the lack of conflict in the opening chapter. What I mean by conflict is a character having a defined goal, and then finding out that something is standing in their way of achieving that goal.

As far as I could tell from my reading, the only “conflict” that Sarah faces is getting away from Bronson and discovering the reasons why individuals lose their eye quirks. Unfortunately, the latter conflict isn’t introduced until the final portion of Sarah’s chapter.

In order for the audience to become invested in a character, the audience needs to know that character’s struggle. Otherwise, we as the audience are just reading about things *happening* without them being positive or negative in relation to the character’s desires and needs.

The opening chapter of a POV needs to establish what a character wants and who/what is keeping them from getting it. Also, the sooner this information comes in the chapter, the sooner the reader can start to form a genuine connection with the character.

It is completely fine to have Sarah’s first chapter focus on her relationship (or lack thereof) with Bronson, or her interest in the disappearance of quirks. However, for those things to be the FOCUS, the chapter needs to be centralized around how Sarah is going to achieve her goals in relation to those conflicts.

Conversely, you demonstrate proper execution of defining a conflict early in on Kaleb’s chapter:

THU-KOOM! At the sound, Kaleb sprung from his seat and sprinted outside in a panic.

“FATHER?!” Kaleb called out to the garden, searching frantically. "DAD?"

“Over here son! Your sister is already down in the shelter. Come now! Hurry!”...

Kaleb knew his way to the shelter, but consecutive mortars had caved in a couple of paths already.

This information sets up conflict because it implicitly tells me, “Kaleb WANTS to live, and whoever is launching these motors wants to KEEP him from living”. From here on out, I as a reader have a clear picture of the struggle that Kaleb faces and can become invested in if he overcomes that struggle.

I highly recommend looking through the character arc that you have planned for Sarah and figuring out exactly what her goal and conflict in the narrative is. When you have done that, rework her first POV chapter to distinctly include those things so that the audience can know what to invest in.

### **EXPOSITION**

My second largest critique is your use of exposition. Much of the information present in the chapters reference details about the world and its history, rather than the events that the

characters themselves are going through. A particular section that comes to mind is when Sarah started reading a book:

From Sarah's perspective, what made these authors so hard to read was their tendency to drop new terms, yet inconsistently define them... She was a little more intrigued by the subject matter now, but the writing itself was tough to work through.

It might seem innovative and subversive to have a character inside a fiction complain about exposition and poor description, but that clever writing loses all its power when you *actually* make the audience sit through lore that not even the characters themselves thinks is well written. This section of worldbuilding in Sarah I is 800 words, not to mention the other points in the manuscript where details of kingdoms, gods, families, and countries are explained.

As a general rule, exposition and worldbuilding is meant to serve the narrative, not the other way around. It is far more advantageous for a writer to establish the information of what is immediately impacting the characters before diving into matters of history and lore.

One of the hardest lessons I had to learn when writing my novels was that 90% of the material that I wrote concerning my world and the legends therein would never see the page. The bloodlines of families and the detailed battles of wars, while interesting, were of much more service to me as tools to understand my characters and the circumstances of their environments. Once I stopped presenting more information than needed to the reader, I found my writing had become considerably more concise with much better flow.

The best way to present lore and worldbuilding to your audience is to introduce the information organically, as a slow trickle, only touching upon the things that impact the characters and their interaction with the world. Not only will this make your writing smoother, the lore will be much easier to remember because the plot events will link strongly with it.

### **PACING**

Another factor of having large portions of exposition is the effect such writing has on pacing. Generally, novel chapters are between 3000 and 4000 words, give or take a few hundred words in either direction. However, because of how much information you included in the opening chapter, Sarah's first POV came out to nearly 6000 words, comprising more than half of the manuscript. And as I said before, all of this happened without a definite conflict being established either.

At just over 3000 words, Kaleb's first chapter is much more indicative of what you should be shooting for. Therein, you introduce the character, their conflict, and then we as the audience take a journey with Kaleb as he explores his destroyed surroundings. You kept us close to the character, which in turn kept you from diving into deep explanations of worldbuilding.

Pacing keeps the audience moving from one page to the next, and it is the author's job to know when to speed up the pace (fights scenes, climaxes, introductions) and when to slow it down (character deaths, finales, etc.). Keeping your chapters between 2500 – 3500 words is an

excellent way of letting your audience linger in a narrative moment just long enough to appreciate it, while also consistently ushering them on to new, exciting parts of your story.

### **CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS**

While your descriptions of characters' physical traits were not bad, I do feel I could offer example of ways to improve. In one section, you write:

Bronson was a persistent boy. And she didn't need to look at him to know he was wearing some sort of sleeveless shirt, because, *Sleeves make me overheat, and I gotta let my arms breathe, you know?* She didn't feel like turning to address his bright green eyes with massive bags under them. He always looked as though he hadn't slept in years. She had no time to look up and produce an excuse for him and his comparatively gargantuan stature topped with curly black hair that shone a reddish tone in the sun.

A smoother alternative might be something like this:

Bronson had the persistence, and the girth, of three boys. With the slightest of heat, the poor guy dripped sweat from feet to face, droplets even falling from that curly black hair of his. That's why Bronson always wore a sleeveless shirt, for as Sarah heard time and time again, "*Sleeves make me overheat, and I gotta let my arms breathe, you know?*" Bronson's eyes were just as strange as the rest of him. The bags above his cheeks were big enough to carry groceries home, making him look like he hadn't slept in years. But at the same time, that bright green color in his gaze made it seem like he had all the vigor in the world.

So, there were quite a few things that I changed, and I can go over each one of them.

In your original description, you stated why the POV didn't want to look at Bronson, but then described him anyway. This makes the descriptions seem out of place and tacked on because you had previously made a point to avoid them. In my edit, I removed that aspect to make the descriptions seem more natural. You have already made it clear that Sarah wants to ignore Bronson during other sections of the manuscript, so I felt there would be no trouble removing that aspect from here.

The next thing I did was **use events and circumstances** to aid in the physical description of Bronson. By pairing Bronson's persistence to his size and then his clothes to his size, the descriptions not only flowed into one another, they become easier to remember.

Lastly, I used a bit of **wordplay** and **metaphor** to describe Bronson's eyes. Also, setting a **contrast** between his bags and bright eyes will help the reader remember both the features.

Using techniques like this might help you improve your descriptive language going forward!