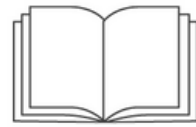


MANUSCRIPT REVIEW

Sci Fi Novel by [Writer's Name]

14 October 2023



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READER & WRITER FOR HIRE

This thoughtful, sci-fi thriller is reminiscent of Carl Sagan and Michael Crichton - it asks the big questions and is built on the kind of well-researched storytelling that hard sci-fi fans love. As a fan of sci fi, good storytelling, and good writing, I was hooked by your command of language and emotional storytelling. (Elizabeth and Nelson are *excellent* POV characters - more on this below.)

I would go on, but you asked me to focus my review on three key areas, which I will delve into below. Additionally, I've included a list of questions I had as a reader or that might help you during revisions. Let's dive in:

Plot and pacing. Your first few chapters are overly-plotted. As a reader, I got the sense that you were writing from one *Save the Cat* beat to another; the statement of the theme, spoken aloud by Nelson's adoptive father, was especially obvious. For a while, I thought this was the kind of book you set out to write, and I tried to appreciate it as such. But on page fifty, there's a tonal shift that drastically affects the story. The overly outlined, plot-by-numbers storytelling of the introduction is shattered by the discovery of the virus aboard the ISS. From this point forward, the pace of the storytelling slows - you spend more time on key scenes and allow the story to settle in some in-between moments and wander in delightful ways - yet the sense of urgency is high. It's like the first 20% and the last 80% of your book are two different novels. Since the latter section is the larger one - and because I found it *much* more engaging - I believe the tone and pacing of the latter section is the kind of novel *Novel's Title* wants to be. That being said, your current introduction sets a lot of ground work that pays off during acts two and three, so a priority for revision will be to revise your introduction while dropping those bread crumbs in a less obvious fashion.

One event in act two felt out of place: the self-sacrificing of Commander March. I believe most of your readers will see this coming, and there isn't enough payoff to justify having his death play out exactly as anticipated. (I could see the writer pulling the strings behind the story to make his death happen.) One question for revision is how to kill off Commander March in a way that will most impact the reader.

Shifting Point-of-View. Your decision to revise your first draft from first-person point of view to shifting third-person point of view has paid off fantastically. Gaining access to both Elizabeth and Nelson's perspectives allows the narrative to follow the set of characters on the ISS as well as those dealing with the fallout on Earth. Right now, this is very much Elizabeth's story, and the Elizabeth to Nelson ratio feels off. I recommend

introducing Nelson much earlier in the novel and keeping Elizabeth's perspective in the later chapters, which is when focus shifts from Elizabeth to Nelson. Perhaps because you developed them later and wrote them more quickly, Nelson's chapters feel underdeveloped. Simply looking at the page will show you that the paragraphs in Nelson's sections are shorter. In addition, Nelson engages in far less scene and more summary, and his world lacks the sensory details of Elizabeth's perspective. (Which is ironic, since Elizabeth is in space and Nelson is on Earth and engages with a wider range of environments and people.) Your stated goal was to make this a split-perspective story in which Elizabeth and Nelson are equals; at the moment, the balance isn't quite right, and correcting this balance should be one of your priorities in your next draft.

Horror. Lastly, you had asked about your decision to ramp up the horror in this latest draft. To be honest, if you hadn't pointed this out to me, I might not have identified these additions as "horror." Frightening, yes, and gory at times - but I don't see this draft engaging with the horror genre in a meaningful way. I know you're a fan of horror, but I don't think the story you are writing is a sci-fi horror. Some of the moments you added, including [specific details], feel disconnected to the rest of the narrative. In other words, these moments stand out in a bad way. However, your inclusion of the nitty-gritty physical, psychological, and health-related details like [redacted] add realism to the story. These were terrifying in a way that *fit the narrative* and your storytelling - and they enriched the story you were already telling. If anything, I think these kinds of details can be amped up, especially in the hospital scene. (And maybe when the baby is young?)

Additional Questions for Revision:

- This draft contains a variety of themes, some of which are abandoned partway through or go unexplored. (Sexism in science, the US foster care system, misinformation, etc.) If you asked me what this novel (in its current form) is *about*, I'd have a hard time stating it. And based on your blurb, I have a feeling you'd have a hard time stating it as well. So, a good question to ask yourself - and to be able to concisely answer - is what this book is *about*.
- Is Hummel in love with Elizabeth? Is this meant to be a grey area, or should your reader know either way? Similarly, how does Elizabeth feel about Hummel? We're inside Elizabeth's POV, but for some reason, the story keeps us from any thoughts about Hummel.
- Only the non-white characters are introduced by specifying their race. Why don't white characters get introduced in a similar way? (In fiction, sometimes there is an assumption by the writer that characters are white unless stated otherwise, but I recommend avoiding this pitfall.)
- Elizabeth and Nelson have the same verbal tics ("You know..." "Yeah, but..."). Was this intentional? Do you need to do more work to distinguish their dialogue, especially with each other?

Each draft you share with me gets a little tighter, a little more focused. I'm excited to see what your next revision brings. Happy writing!