



****This sample is from a 50k YA Fantasy. Length of memo will vary.****

Thanks so much for giving me the chance to work on this novel! First and foremost, remember that my feedback is only an opinion—and every editor will have a different one. It's up to you to decide which of my suggestions fits your vision for the manuscript. You can incorporate all my ideas, some of them, or none of them. As this is genre fiction, there are certain norms that influenced my feedback. By no means do you have to adhere to these norms—I just feel it's important to understand the norms and when you are veering from them, so you can make a conscious choice to do so. As the author, you have the ultimate decision. You know your story and characters best.

That said, I hope you find my notes helpful!

Worldbuilding:

It's clear this is a very rich fantasy world, but I think we could use some clarification so we can better understand it. For instance, giving us the name of the country Trevor is in at the beginning is a simple way to let us know we aren't in the known world, helping the reader get oriented. I also think you need to explain enough geopolitically so we understand the concept of "westerner" more fully, and why that is considered bad/derogatory. It's a fairly important concept and I didn't feel like I quite had a handle on it.

You could also name the war, though I think the amount of detail you have is enough. Wars are a pretty universal concept, so readers get the gist without you having to give away too much.

I would have liked to hear the legend of the Ictari. I think it would help a lot in understanding everyone's motivations and fears, which are a bit vague at the moment.

Could you explain the structure of the museum a bit more? I think I got a handle on it but it would be helpful to have it spelled out more clearly.

I think what you have on the rival is fine. Readers expect rivals in this sort of novel, and they don't play a role in this story, so no need to bog down with details.

POV:

You have a tendency to “head-hop.” Headhopping was very popular years ago, and there are one or two big-time authors who still employ this technique. But now, it is generally preferred that you stay in one character's POV for an entire scene (or most of it), switching POVs with a scene or chapter break (a scene break is denoted by an extra blank line, or three stars ***). That way your reader is staying in your character's head for a while, and not getting whiplash by jumping back and forth between heads. For instance, I felt your writing was particularly strong when Kreuger first woke up with the Ictari, because we are only seeing things through his eyes. It made the story feel comfortable, and not as frantic as it felt earlier with so many heads in one scene.

I feel this is especially important because this is such a fast-paced story, and moving from action to action and head to head can make the reader feel a bit exhausted. This will also help your concern about keeping characters consistent—the more time we spend consecutively in someone's head, the easier it is to get a read on them.

Most editors and agents will see headhopping as something to fix rather than a stylistic choice. Also, do not feel like every character has to have their own POV, or that the POVs need equal screen time. Trevor should probably get the bulk of the scenes, and then the rest will probably depend on which ones feature more prominently in the series. I would suggest Lucy and Krueger, and maybe Paige.

Pacing:

This moves quickly (in a good way), and feels pretty even. I do think it might be helpful to add time tags so we can more easily keep track of how much time has passed. For instance, beginning a scene with a tag like “two days before the voyage” and then putting in subsequent scenes something like “five days into the journey” can really help the reader feel comfortable.

Plot:

The overall plot is solid and works well. I did have a few points I think need some clarification:

While the characters are fairly consistent, their jobs on the ship did not feel so. Why is Trevor performing an autopsy, when he is not the medical person? Do they rotate the medical duty? Why is Paige in the engine room? That doesn't seem like

part of navigation duties. Could you clarify so we have a better sense of everyone's job on the ship? The explanations during introductions aren't quite enough.

I think the key to making Assain's dance in the market work is that he needs to acknowledge that he is playing into a racist stereotype. If he says something like "This is what people expect of me, and it brings in business" then it works. Without the acknowledgement, it is a little uncomfortable.

I didn't have any issue with the boat configuration—it reminded me what I've read in many steampunk novels with airships. Those usually have both an engine and sails.

How are they expecting to find helpful tools and supplies by finding an ancient Ictari village? This made no sense to me. Give us better rationalization.

Craig's killing came out of nowhere for me, and it didn't feel believable. Someone with Paige's personality doesn't turn like this without warning (it is not easy to kill). Plus the reaction of the other characters felt very off. Sure he's a bad guy, but they should be horrified! Good people who have never killed before are horrified when murder occurs—no getting around it. I think this might work better if it is an accident somehow. Like if he tripped, or jumped out of panic, or something. Then the reaction seems more appropriate—he's dead, but they aren't going to mourn him much because of his personality. Without the question of murder, it feels much more natural.

Why do they have to do the whole charade with the boat? Surely arriving home in a boat from the Ictar would make their story even more believable? Clarify why they must go the extra step of camouflaging the boat and then lying about it?

Characters:

You manage to create some pretty strong characters within a very tight word count, so kudos on that. One minor thing is many names with the same starting letter and similar feel: Lucy, Liam, Lydia. I generally advise against this because it can be a lot for a reader to meet so many similar names all at once. Since Lydia and Liam are using aliases, I suggest sticking to those to minimize confusion.

I did not feel Trevor was too passive—he felt appropriate for his job and the fact that this was his first mission. I really liked how he came into his own and became a leader by the end of the story. I would have liked maybe a little bit more about his life before this mission, and I'm not even entirely sure how old he is (I guessed fairly young, maybe mid-twenties). I think you can still leave trinkets like

the photo for the next book, but maybe we could get an anecdote about his childhood or something?

Krueger is one of the most fascinating characters, and I'm so glad you are planning on including more of him in subsequent books!

Lydia and Liam, for me, felt unnecessarily complicated. Or more accurately, I felt you can't really do justice to their story in such a short word count, and the snippets we are getting are just confusing. I think they are assassins, but why? Are they just paid mercenaries, or do they have their own motivation? Why on earth would they go on this trip if that is the case? Clearly they want to steal something, but how is that helping their cause? I would suggest leaving the details of these particular characters to another book. Don't give them a POV, just discuss them from what the other characters see. You can make us feel suspicious about them without having to have them have aliases or sneaking their name on the registry (wouldn't it be easier for them to steal the identity of someone already on the registry?). You can have Trevor and other characters acknowledge that they are odd, etc. But I would leave them shrouded in mystery until another book where you have time to discuss their backstory more fully. We don't need them a lot of details in this base story to understand that they are important and we will see them in the future. Their backstory isn't vital to this adventure, so put it in another adventure where it is more relevant. (The alternative would be to seriously bump up the word count, but I don't recommend this here.)

Paige was a bit of a jumble for me. She comes off as young, naïve, and a bit silly in the beginning. Why would a girl like this join this mission, knowing she would probably die? I did like how she got stronger, but it does seem too sudden and drastic. Someone with this personality doesn't kill someone in cold blood as she did—especially under stress. See the earlier suggestion of making this an accident. Also, her crush on Lucy isn't clear until the end, and since it explains a lot of her motivations (I kept making notes asking why she was going to such lengths for Lucy), I think maybe you could be a bit more obvious sooner. Maybe she blushes/stammers when Lucy talks to her?

I personally loved that the captain was a woman, and Lucy fits the bill so nicely. I attributed the quick change in her and Trevor's relationship to many days in close quarters on the ship, so I didn't have a problem with it.

I liked Assain, but would have liked a little more background on his past. It might be kind of fun for him to make even bolder claims about his adventuring: I ate dates with the Sultan of Brunei! I learned swordsmanship from Blackbeard

himself! He just keeps saying “adventures” with no real details—fake details help sell the lie.

Gidrun felt fairly straightforward until the dinner scene and his reaction the fruit, and then we start feeling suspicious toward him. I think this is a good way to do it because it adds a bit of drama by lulling us into complacency, thinking he is a good person, before making us rethink it.

Conclusion:

I can tell you’ve put a lot of work in and are comfortable with the genre. And to have gotten such a detailed story in such a short word count is really remarkable. Now you just need to tweak things here and there for clarification and so the important parts of the story really stand out.

I hope my feedback helps you toward your publishing goals!

