

Critique by You

Overall Response

- What spoke to you about the piece?
- What is unique or effective about the writing style? Aspects that are well done, word choices and turns of phrase that shine, passages that so swept you up that you forgot you were critiquing,
- Answer the writer's questions.
- Does the book work? Does it hold together overall? Does the premise make sense and is it engaging?
- Is it clear what audience the author is writing to or are there problems? For example, a book written for young adults that might be too technical or sophisticated for their age group, or have too sex or violence that may be inappropriate.
- Is the idea/premise original enough to draw interest?
- Does the book feel too long or too short?
- Are there scenes that seem to be missing and what are they?
- Were there story aspects that you felt were lacking or needed enhancement? Points of confusion, points where the story lost your interest, points where you were bumped out of the immersive reading experience, or passages or story elements that you felt detracted from the enjoyment or clarity of the story? Focus on specific things that the author might address to make the story a smoother, clearer, more enjoyable read, not the writer as a person. In short, be of assistance, don't be an ass.
- Did you get a sense of completion and resolution at the end of the book or is the ending vague, confusing, or dissatisfying?
- Are all the subplots satisfactorily resolved at the end of the book?
- What did you enjoy or respect about their characters?
- Which phrase or paragraph especially stood out to you? Why?
- Which authors were you reminded of as you read?
- What good things do you hope the author will leave untouched in the story?
- Summarize the most important changes you feel are needed, and what you hope the author builds upon.

Title

- Did the Title draw you in and make you want to read more?

Plot

- Did the first page grab you? How?

- Did you understand the setting right away? Could you see the setting in your mind? Understand the general time and context in which the events were happening?
- Were there clues to the genre on the first page?
- Did you feel sympathetic toward the main character? Why? Did the main character do or think something that let you know what kind of person you were following?
- Does the action come across clearly in the novel? Does it have a beginning, middle and end?
- Did the story make sense? Was the overall story satisfying and believable?
- Is the plot interesting and engaging?
- Was the story cliché? Did you feel like you had seen this plot before?
- Is there a plot question that draws you through the novel? Does the climax satisfactorily resolve that question?
- Are the scenes strung together in a cohesive fashion that drive the plot? For example, does one event cause another, which in turn causes something else to happen?
- Was it easy to follow the passage of time from scene to scene?
- Do all the scenes serve a purpose (progress plot and/or develop character, plus describe setting) or were there scenes that could be eliminated or combined?
- Do the subplots in the book work with and reinforce the main plot? Are they also resolved before the end of the book?
- Did flashbacks and backstory add to the story or were they unnecessary and interrupted the flow?
- Did the story start and end in the right place?
- Does the beginning clearly establish who, what, where, grab you and pull you into the story?
- Was the ending satisfying and not too predictable, yet supported by the story?
- Could you relate to some of the plot because some events had a universal element? For example, maybe you don't cook meth in your RV, but you have done something that could get you in trouble in the past.
- Did things build up steadily to the climax? Did the stakes get higher? Deeper (more personal to the main character)? Or wider (encompassing more people or more important to a community of people)? All three?
- Did you feel like the Climax answered the main story question that kept you reading throughout the book?
- Did the ending give you a satisfied, cathartic feeling?
- Or did you feel somewhat cheated? Why? Did you feel like the ending came out of nowhere? Were there clues that this ending was possible or did the writer pull a fast one and introduce an element at the last second or switch genres in the last chapters of the book?
- Were you surprised in a good way by the ending? Did you think, "I should have seen that coming ... but I didn't." Or did you see it coming? For how long?
- Did the ending remind you of the beginning in some way? How?
- Did the main character change in some meaningful way? How?
- Did that change remind you of something in your own life? Do you feel like sharing what that was?

Conflict

- What goal is the character trying to achieve and what stands in their way? Is that believable in context? Why or why not?
- Does the protagonist face one conflict or obstacle after another (each worse than the previous)

that force him/her to have to make a tough decision(s)?

- Is there an overarching conflict present in the story that is key to the premise and grows to a climax and resolution?
- Does the conflict serve the interest of the story or is it just thrown in the book for excitement?
- Does this conflict create an emotional response in you? Are you hoping the character succeeds or dreading that they will get what they want? Why?
- Does the story begin with some sort of conflict—internal or external?
- Does the beginning set up the bigger conflict of the entire novel, the issue that drives the protagonist toward his/her end goal?
- Are there too many conflicts going on in the book? Too few?

Pace

- How does the pacing of the story feel? Does the book drag in spots due to excessive narration or from uninteresting scenes? OR is it a real page turner?
- Is the writing over-wordy or vague, slowing down the pace of the scenes?
- Are sentences too long and/or repetitive?
- Are the scenes moving at a good clip to keep interest or do they need trimming?
- In faster action scenes, does the pace speed up with shorter sentences and paragraphs?
- What parts held your attention the most? How did the writer make you stay with him?

Tension

- Tension is the feeling in you that makes you want to know what happens next. It creates worry or curiosity in you that feels like an itch that only reading further can relieve. Is tension created at the outset of the book?
- Is the tension you feel compelling enough to make you care about the main character?
- Are scenes adeptly left hanging in order to create tension?
- Do the elements/clues/details that propel the story forward invoke a sense of tension in you when you read them?

Characterization

- Is the protagonist clearly presented as the main character of the story?
- Is the protagonist sympathetic from the start? Likable? Did you root for their cause? Why or why not?
- How is the protagonist character unique? Interesting?
- Does the protagonist have a clear character arc that shows growth/change by the end of the book?
- Did the protagonist increase or decrease on the Empathy Scale?
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- Is the protagonist or other POV character describing one or more characters in a way that is different than how the other characters see that same person? (Unreliable narrator?)
- Are the characters believable and distinct (and not stereotypes)?
- Does each character have depth—a past, a need, a fear, a dream—and are these brought out clearly in the story?
- Do you see growth in any of the non-POV characters?
- Do they have clear and believable motivations (wants and needs)? Are their actions consistent with their character?
- Do any of the characters act in an unusual or inexplicable way? Any of them you wish you

could get inside of their heads?

- Are some of the non-POV characters particularly unique? Are any of the non-POV characters as interesting as the POV characters?
- Do the secondary characters enhance and enrich the protagonist's story?
- Are there too many characters or too much time spent on secondary characters that detract from the main plot of the story and the focus on the protagonist?
- Any specific thoughts about each of the main characters?
- Did you confuse any of the characters because their names were too similar?

Point of View

- Any POV violations? Are there times when you are told things that the POV character should not know or hasn't seen? Are there unexpected, unannounced shifts in POV (head hopping?)
- Do you feel totally attached to the body of the POV character? How close to the character do you feel? Right behind the eyes or in a helicopter looking down on the whole scene? Does that distance vary during the scene or stay constant?
- Are you privy to the personal knowledge of a POV character? For example, how the character's body feels inside or emotional responses not acted out in public? Personal thoughts? How are the personal thoughts conveyed?
- Does the author do a good job getting into the head of the character(s) or do they tend to tell rather than show what he/she is thinking or feeling?
- Are there multiple points of view? Does the shift from the previous POV jar you, or were you ready for a change? Do you remember where this character left off? Are you curious to see what happens next to this character when the writer returns to this character? Why or why not?
- Is there only one POV character in each scene and is their "voice" distinct from all other POVs?
- Are there any scenes told in a POV that would be better in another POV?

Back Story Management

- Is there any back story told in this story? How was the backstory conveyed?
- When you read the back story the first time, did it bore you? Or did the back story answer questions you wondered about?
- Does the backstory make someone's motivations or actions more clear? Does it change how you feel about the character? How?

Dialogue and Attributions

- Does the dialogue sound natural?
- Is the dialogue believable and easy to follow?
- Is there too much or not enough dialogue?
- Are there places where dialogue is unnecessary filler and accomplishes little to reveal character or advance the plot (or reveal back story)?
- Is the dialogue stiff? Uninteresting? Too wordy?
- How formal or informal is the language? Does the formality change depending on who is speaking and to whom?
- Are there places where the author uses dialogue to tell the reader important information (info dump)?
- Does each character's speech and style of talking fit their personality? Do the characters behave and speak consistent with their backgrounds and upbringing?

Body Language and Emotion

- Did the body language make the character seem more real? Or was it stiff and unnatural?
- Only present to serve the writer's purpose? Felt like filler?

Theme

- Does the book have a theme or point that is well delivered or is it missing an overarching theme?
- What themes dominant the story?
- Did these themes make the story more interesting to you?
- Is the theme universal enough to engage most readers?
- What human values were the characters wrestling with? What value "won" in the end?
- Did elements of the story recur throughout the story (words, colors, elements, behaviors, objects)? Why do you think we are seeing this thing again and again? How do you feel when you notice the repetition while you are reading? Satisfied or annoyed?
- Do you think these elements are symbolic of something else? What do you think the symbolism means? Does the meaning of this symbol change over the course of the novel?
- Even though you don't live in the story setting, how do the events in the main character's life speak to you about your own life? What do you think the writer was thinking about when s/he wrote this story?
- Is the theme worked into the book and brought out in the title and opening and closing chapters?

Setting & Environment/World Building and Presentation

- Does the author portray a believable, interesting setting that draws you in?
- Does the author spend too much time describing the setting? Not enough? Was the setting clear to you?
- Is the setting portrayed through the eyes of the characters or presented in flat narrative?
- Does the setting seem to fit the mood and serve the plot?
- Are there too many or not enough (or too repetitive) locations in the book? Are any locations boring or not good choices for the scene?
- Are all the senses engaged: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, internal body sensation and intuition? Does any one sense overwhelm the others?
- Does the setting seem to have a "mood?" For example, the setting is fairly mundane, but the character gives you the setting under the influence of an emotion that taints what they see and feel? Or do the surroundings set the stage for a particular emotion, like a haunted house in a horror movie? How is the writer creating that mood? What word choices give you a clues to the mood?
- Does the character manipulate anything in the scene? How is it shown to you? Do you also feel it in your hand? Is the thing familiar already to you? If not, how does the writer make it familiar?
- What's different in this story world than in your world? How is the writer making you aware of those differences while still making you realize that it is the everyday world for the characters?

- Is the world believable and well developed (sense that this is a real, working world with an economy, social order, power structures, specific beliefs, etc.)? Is the amount of detail right, too much, or too little? Are the setting details specific rather than generic?
- Has this world/setting been overly done before? How does this version compare to others you've seen?
- Is there a speculative fiction aspect to the story? Is the world building done well? Is there a well developed magic system or tech system with consistent rules and limitations? Are the fantasy or alien cultures developed and not clichéd?

Details and Technology

- Anything seem unreal due to laws of physics or other constraints of reality?
- Do you have any special knowledge that could help the writer with this story?

Style/Voice

- Is the story written in a consistent tense. Did the story tense work for you?
- Is there too much fancy language and purple prose?
- Any wasted words? Wasted words are those you throw in out of habit. Often they are pesky adverbs like “very” and “just,” or phrases like “began to” or “started to.” Words you can take out without altering the intended meaning.
- Does the story have a strong voice? Is the voice consistent and appropriate to the tone of the story (formal, comedic or parody, over the top, casual teen speak, scholarly, etc.)? Does it have the right “feel” (does it “feel” YA, or hard Sci Fi, or urban fantasy, or whatever the intention is)?
- Any images or metaphors that really stood out for you?
- Shown vs told?
- Any info-dumps?
- Can you hear the writer's voice at all or is this story solely in the voice of his character?
- Does the writing have too many clichés or sound like the author is trying to impress his/her audience with complex words or sentences?
- Do the different characters speak differently? How? Are there some words or phrases that are specific to some characters? If another character had to say the POV character's first three lines, how would they change for each character? How does the voice give you a better picture of who the character is?
- Any repetitive spelling or grammatical errors?

Credibility

- When you were reading, did you sink into the story and feel like it was happening to you? If not, what do you think prevented that from happening?

My comments are just suggestions—different options for you consideration. Take what you can use and discard what doesn't work for you.

Warmest Regards,
You

