

Dear Author,

Thank you so much for the opportunity to edit your document. This opening scene is pretty cool! The world is intriguing. The action is exciting. James Garrett feels sympathetic, and Arad is wonderfully terrifying. I feel like the world-building and characterization needs more depth, but it feels like a story with potential, and as a reader, I'm already interested in reading more.

While the action and setting feel pretty cool, it may be difficult for readers to connect to the characters. Below are some big-picture elements that I feel could help strengthen this in the scene (and possibly throughout the rest of the novel):

- **World-building: The setting could use additional context.** You don't want to infodump everything on your reader—in fact, you do a good job *avoiding* infodumping—but the reader does need additional context to understand the emotional weight of the scene and the contours of what Garrett is feeling. For example:
 - What happened to put the world in this state? Was it war, zombie apocalypse, climate disaster, something else? Give us some clues.
 - Why are they camped on the beach? Are they on an island or in some rural area? Or are they near a city (as a beach camp with a concrete lifeguard station would suggest) but the city is unlivable for some reason?
 - What is the camp's purpose? Are they people just trying to survive, or have they come together to defend against roving hordes, or do they have a larger purpose?
 - What about other camps? They're mentioned at one point, but what is Garrett's camp's relationship with them? Are they enemies, warring tribes? What makes them different, and what does the world outside the camp look like (even if it's just a quick sketch)?
 - Does Garrett's camp have any hope for the future, and what might that hope be? Or are they just trying to survive day by day with little hope that it will get better? (In my opinion, there probably should be some element of hope. Otherwise, the reader will also have nothing to hope for.)
 - Why is the camp being run by the military? Did they take control because of a power vacuum, or is there a governmental power that Garrett answers to? Or did the people choose Garrett as their leader, and he just runs things the only way he knows how? The reader may not *need* to know this yet, but there could be a hint of the answer even in this opening scene.
- This context does not need to be infodumped on the reader of course, but it can be trickled in in the same ways you already trickle in information. Garrett's thoughts and emotions can and should be a key window into this information, and it will help us understand the weight and the stakes of what Garrett is trying to accomplish (and consequently give Arad's appearance even more weight).
- In most if not all cases, the answers to the questions above should be given in their relation to Garrett, since he is the reader's window into the world. For example, don't just talk about the nearby city that's overrun by zombies (if that's what it is), but show how Garrett wishes they could live there, or how he lost his wife when they first fled the city, etc. You already do that pretty well, so just keep doing it.

- Some of this information might come later on in the novel, and that might be okay. In the beginning of a novel, especially science fiction, it can be very difficult to know how much information the reader needs and what you can hold back. The goal here is not to fill the reader in on the entire world, but to help the reader better understand what Garrett's feeling and why, to better get in his head.
- **Characterization: Give us more insight into Garrett's emotions.** Garrett is not only the vehicle by which readers learn about the world but also the window through which they *care* about it. We definitely get some good information about his emotions—slumping in his chair, tugging from a bottle of brandy that he normally saves, etc.—but these still feel mainly surface level.
 - What does Garrett care about? Is he trying to serve himself, serve the people in his care, serve his government? Give us a stronger sense of his motivations.
 - What does Garrett *want*? Obviously, he wants the camp to survive, but why? Is there a personal stake in it for him, or is it just his job? Is he afraid of his own death or the death of his people—maybe his own family—or is he thinking about the existential annihilation of humanity?
 - What are the stakes for Garrett? What happens if he can't achieve his goal? Does he care about his own death, the death of humanity, the future of his five-year-old son who didn't ask to be born into this bleak world? Why should the reader care whether Garrett lives or dies?
 - What does he feel when Arad shows up unexpectedly? What does he feel when Arad kills Private Emerson or the other soldiers? Show us his fear or his anger or whatever other emotions he feels. Show us who Garrett is by how he reacts emotionally to this situation.
- **Characterization: Arad might come across as overly cartoonish.** Don't get me wrong, he's a cool and scary villain. If this were the opening of an anime series, I'd be all in. But novel readers typically expect more of their villains. Granted, this is just the opening, and Arad is meant to maintain an air of mystery, but I think there are still some ways to give him more depth and make him more relatable, even in this short introduction.
 - For example, instead of giving a threatening, arrogant ultimatum, Arad could have an air of negotiation about him. Maybe he wants something and hopes he can get it without blood shed, but that's not coming across in this scene. It feels like he almost *wants* to show off how much more powerful he is, like he's just a sadistic killer who's toying with his prey. I mean, if he's so willing to kill Garrett and all of his men, why bother talking to Garrett anyway? It almost feels like he doesn't actually need Garrett's men.
 - If he *is* just a sadistic psychopath, then maybe that should come across more clearly instead. For example, Garrett might call out (either out loud or in his own internal dialogue) that Arad's "offer" doesn't seem genuine and that he's just a serial killer. Maybe Garrett has seen men like him before, for example.
 - This is another place where letting us more in to Garrett's thoughts and emotions could help us understand, relate to, and even fear Arad more. Knowing how Garrett feels

about this intruder—whether he’s a wannabe dictator or a complete psychopath or something else—helps the reader to feel something about Arad.

Overall, it’s good to understand each of your characters like full, real people. Nobody in real life is a caricature, and that’s true of most novel characters as well. Each of them is the hero of their own story. So even though Garrett might think of Arad as a caricature or a terrible horror, that horror feels more real when the reader feels it through Garrett’s emotions.

I have left more comments in the attached document to help further clarify my comments here and call out additional items you may want to pay attention to. If you have any technical issues with the document, please let me know.

Thank you again for letting me work on this opening scene. Good luck with your revisions, and let me know if you want any additional editing in the future!

-- Adam Heine