

Beta Report for "Marnie"

Opening Scene:

1. Does the story begin with an interesting hook, creating a desire to read more?

Yes. Right from the start something felt off about Marnie's world and I was drawn in. I wanted to keep reading.

2. Does the story begin in the right place?

While the beginning was great, I didn't think that it began in the right place. The story's whole inciting incident (the thing that made the whole cult fall apart) was the murder of Marnie's mother which she witnessed. To make the reader care about this incident, I think we should have seen a bit of Marnie's mother and their interaction in the opening chapters. This is why the revelation by Marcus that he was her father also felt flat.

Characterization & Motivation:

1. Are the characters compelling, sympathetic, or someone you can root for?

I struggle to answer this question because overall, I was rooting for Marnie to win and finally get away from Damien and his cult. But her reasons for doing so were not compelling enough. The stakes were not high enough and I think this is because of the lack of a well-shown and well-developed relationship between her and her mother.

2. Do the characters feel real and three-dimensional, with distinct voices, flaws, and virtues?

Marnie did. But I will say here that most of the time she "sounded" like she was older than 11. The nuances of speech and word choices made it her seem like an adult. I have pointed out various instances in my comments. You might want to go back through the manuscript to find and rewrite these. The book is aimed at audiences who are no more than 12 years old and they will only relate to a character who talks and acts like they do.

3. Are their goals clear and proactive enough to influence the plot (not passive)?

Marnie's goal to get away from Damien was clear and proactive. I just had an issue with how you chose for her to accomplish the goal. Amelia and Cassie for example should have developed a closer relationship with Marnie for the reader to actually believe that they could help her escape. Or, you can rewrite it so Marcus is the one who saves her with help from Amelia and Cassie.

4. Do their motivations seem believable, with well-drawn and appropriate emotions?

It is understandable that Marnie would change her mind and go with Damien when Cassie tried to save her. She is, after all, just 11. But the adults' motivations didn't seem believable or well-drawn out. For example, why was Amelia helping? If she doesn't have a compelling reason, her actions seem misplaced.

5. Are the secondary characters well-rounded and enhance the story rather than overwhelming the story or seeming like they should be cut?

I liked Elijah both times he helped Marnie. Amelia and Cassie fell flat for me. But that may be because they didn't really have a lot of appearances and their motivations were unclear. Damien did come through as the charismatic cult leader as I'm sure you intended.

6. Are the relationships between the characters believable and not contrived?

It would have been nice to see a relationship between Marnie and her mother because then the reader would care about her need to get away from Damien. Her relationship with Marcus could also use some

emotional input. Most of the time, it felt a little distant. There was no portrayal of a relationship between her and Cassie and Amelia which is why it was a bit problematic for me when they were the ones to rescue her.

Plot & Conflict:

1. Are the internal and external conflicts well-defined for each main character?

External conflict was present. The threat from Damien and his cult as well as all the dangers Marnie suffered while on the run from him created sufficient external conflict.

Internal conflict on the other hand was not apparent. I didn't feel that Marnie was troubled by her obvious love for Damien. She also just watched the man who claimed to love and care for her murder her mother. That would depress anyone and not once did she seem sad or in pain. I think showing the reader a relationship with her mother before her murder might help. But also try to inject some emotion into the story. She could cry. She IS 11...

2. Do the characters act or react to events in a plausible, realistic, or believable way?

No. As I said, Marnie seemed unfazed by the death of her mother, even going back to Damien. At the very least she should be terrified of him. When she was in the abandoned building with Marcus, she did seem afraid of him, but then when he came for her, she went with him and even felt safe enough to take a nap in his car and sleep in his house. Even for an 11-year-old, her actions don't seem plausible.

Pacing:

1. Do scenes progress in a realistic, compelling manner and flow with effective transitions?

Yes. Each scene served a purpose.

2. Does every scene add to and seem important to the story?

Every scene was important to the story. There aren't any that I would remove.

3. Does the story move along at an appropriate pace, without rushing or dragging?

It was a very easy read. The pacing was spot on and there wasn't a lot of backstory. Injecting a bit of emotion into the characters will make the story fantastic.

4. Is there a hook at the end of each chapter or scene that makes you want to read more?

The chapter endings and scenes were OK. They kept me turning the page which is what you want.

5. Is the story free from information dumps or backstories that slow the pace of the story?

Thankfully, there was very little backstory.

Setting & Worldbuilding:

1. Are descriptions vivid and give a clear sense of time and place?

Yes. I was aware of everywhere Marnie went and what she was doing there.

2. Do the details enhance rather than distract from the story?

You did a great job of describing the scenery and the details enhanced the narrative.

Dialogue:

1. Is the dialogue natural and appropriate for the story, not stilted or overly narrative?

Yes. But some of your word choices sounded a bit off, some of which, I pointed out in my comments. Copyediting can help fix those.

2. Does dialogue move the story forward and reveal the characters?

Yes. But I would suggest adding a bit of subtext to your dialogue. Subtext will help the character's emotions shine through without you having to use "telling" (adverbs) to indicate those emotions.

3. Are the characters' voices consistent and distinct from one another?

The lack of internal conflict and a clear relationship between the characters can make it very hard to decipher the consistency of a character's voice. The reader needs to be able to "feel" what the character is feeling more so if your target audience is much younger.

4. Is there an appropriate mix of dialogue and narrative?

Yes.

Craft:

1. Does the writing "show" the scene with the senses, using "telling" only as appropriate?

There were instances of "telling" and I pointed those out in my comments. Again, a good copy editor will help with this.

2. Does the writing quality allow the story to shine through and draw the reader in, or are flaws jarring or intrusive?

There are some flaws but they weren't enough to make me stop reading. I think that once you fix the relationship between Marnie and the other characters, primarily her mother, it will be a great read.

3. Is the point of view (and any changes) handled appropriately and consistently?

This is the part that I really wanted to address as I was reading. It seemed like the story was written using the Third Person limited POV, but you will see that I pointed out many head-hopping issues that I came across until I thought that maybe you were going for the Third Person Omniscient POV. If that's the case, then you may want to ensure consistency in the narrative. Right now, it seems like you are using both which is causing a disconnect in the reading experience, making the reader want to stop and try to figure out who is speaking.

The choice of POV type is up to you, but in my experience, Third Person Omniscient POV is often a better choice in stories where the world-building is more important than characterization such as Science Fiction or High Fantasy. In your case, you want your audience to connect with Marnie's plight so your story would benefit from a Third Person Limited POV.

Overall Impression:

1. Is the voice unique, fresh, or interesting?

The "telling" is hindering your voice as a writer. Try to use dialogue and action to really draw the reader in whenever you are tempted to "tell" the reader what the character is doing or how they are doing it (adverbs are a good indicator of "telling.")

2. Does the story deliver on the promise of its premise and opening scenes?

Yes. Marnie was able to get away from the cult that killed her mother. While the ending was satisfactory, I do take issue with how it was accomplished. As I said before, it was a little bit of a stretch that Amelia and Cassie would save her when she had no prior relationship with both.

3. From a reader's point of view, did you enjoy reading this story?

Yes. The middle section in particular as Marnie and then Marnie and Marcus tried to outrun Damien and his cult were particularly enjoyable. Inject some emotion into their relationship (Marnie and Marcus) and some internal conflict and you have a story Middle Graders will love.

Additional Questions for Comment:

1. Do any sections take you out of the story?

There are no sections that I would recommend removing from the story.

2. Is the story a good fit for the stated genre, and if not, why not?

It is an MG adventure.

3. What worked best for you?

The idea of the cult is very compelling.

4. What worked least for you?

Amelia and Cassie saving Marnie, a lack of relationship between Marnie and her mother and the lack of internal conflict for Marnie as well as instances where Marnie sounded and felt older than 11.