

Gina Denny

Editing Services
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Developmental Edit – A Song for the Raven
March 20, 2024

Hello, Julia!

Thank you so much for letting me read your work. I loved so many things about this manuscript.



Your voice is beautiful. I think I say it at least a dozen times in the comments, but this is your gift. Beautiful, lush prose with a poetic bend to it. There were so many individual sentences that made me pause and just look at how beautiful they were. There is some stuff getting in the way of being able to see all that gorgeous writing, and I would love to see you strip away the obstructions and get to the incredible sentence-level writing.

My feedback centers on three things: [Length & Structure](#), [Lack of Magic & Immersive Details](#), and [Delivering on Promises](#).

Length & Structure

This is the piece of advice that will hurt the most, so I'm getting it out of the way first. I'm sorry to say this, because your sentence-level writing is voicey and beautiful, but this book is just too long to be marketable. Debut authors are expected to be under 100,000 words, and even in adult epic fantasy that number can barely stretch up to 150,000. Beyond that expectation, however, is the fact that this manuscript has some noticeable fat to be trimmed. Conversations are overly long and circuitous, there are a lot of repetitions that I think you're using to remind the reader of what's happening since it's been so long since the last time they read about that particular issue, and there is too much backstory explicitly on the page.

I strongly recommend cutting at least 45,000 words, but I think this manuscript could stand to lose as much as 65,000 words and still retain your voice and the meat of the story you're telling.

I've included a [beat sheet](#) with two tabs at the bottom of it. The first is labeled "As Is" and outlines your plot as it is right now. As you can see, you have a disproportionate number of "sequels" compared to your "scenes." This, unfortunately, will have the ultimate effect of making the manuscript feel sluggish. The second tab is labeled "Suggested" and is just that: a suggested outline based on what I think the biggest plot points are and a pace that this novel could move at.

To be clear, I don't think it's necessary to cut plot or even characters. It's backstory, repetition, and some minor unnecessary prose choices that can be cut to make this novel as powerful as possible. I did a brutal cut/edit to one brief scene to demonstrate how you can do this on the scene level without sacrificing voice, character, or setting.

Lack of Magic & Immersive Details

You have clearly spent a lot of time working on the details of the political backstory of your world. It shows! You have an exceptional level of detail, right down to the specific day or even moment that a decision is made that impacts the overall plot. You've woven a deeply complex tale of intrigue and betrayal, I admire your attention to detail and the thoroughness with which you've approached this aspect of the worldbuilding.

This manuscript is a second-world, and that means fantasy. There are a rare few fantasies that can get away without magic or with very low magic, but they are extremely rare in the adult space, and even if there is no magic, there is always a very immersive world otherwise. Aside from the politics, the world you've built is a little stark. I don't really understand their food, fashion, culture, rituals, traditions, or what really sets these cultures apart from one another. There isn't much difference on the page between the [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED]. They dislike each other. They don't trust each other. But do they wear their hair differently? Their clothes? Is the food different? The weddings? The funerals? What about their dancing? Do they speak different languages?

We don't want as much in-depth history as much as we want to feel that this world is real. I do recommend integrating some magic into the story, even if it is low-level mystical, witch-type powers of prophecy, enhanced fighting, or potion-making. Not every fantasy needs to be a flashy sword-and-sorcery fantasy, but fantasy readers really want to be transported to someplace Other.

Keeping in mind that you do *not* need to write a sword-and-sorcery style fantasy, there are several key pieces of your story that are already magic-adjacent that you could put just a tiny bit of a spin on them and turn them into fantastical elements to satisfy this part of your audience.

Potential fantasy elements to exploit:

- [REDACTED] sings during battle. The songs could be spells/infused subtly with magic;
- [REDACTED] doesn't get a lot of attention. The cause could be more explicitly magical and [REDACTED] could be regarded as powers;
- Poisons are used. These could be called potions or other similar words and be tied to sorcery or other magic-wielders;
- [REDACTED] could have powers of prophecy, Sight, mind-reading (tied to [REDACTED]), etc;
- Gods and Goddesses are already present. Giving them a larger presence, one that interacts just slightly with the characters can give a fantasy-type vibe for readers who aren't personally religious;
- [REDACTED] both are associated with animals. They could have [REDACTED] or subtle powers tied to those associations.

Delivering on Promises

I'm going to come at this piece from two different angles.

1. Some promises are made early on and then are not properly delivered.

In this category, we have:

- [redacted] sending [redacted] to kidnap [redacted] so he can force her to marry him
- It's hinted on page [redacted] that [redacted] is a lesbian
- [redacted] carrying on a torrid affair in the first act
- [redacted] presented to [redacted] in the throne room
- The [redacted] are such prominent pieces of Act II only to never be mentioned again until the epilogue
- [redacted] is described as hot-tempered and a warrior, but she's constantly sleeping or being carried around

2. Some promises are not made clearly enough, so then the delivery falls flat.

In this category we have:

- [redacted] being secretly in love with [redacted]
- [redacted]'s son dying suddenly as he tries to reunite with his father
- [redacted] and [redacted] being in love

Readers want and expect promises to be fulfilled. Some of these promises and/or fulfillments that you made might be things that you just end up deleting, or you might choose to properly balance them together. If you want to keep something from category 1, you'll need to make sure that promise is paid off somewhere in Act III. If you want to keep something from category 2, you'll need to foreshadow it more powerfully in the earlier scenes in order for the payoff to be properly appreciated.

There are two promises that I, as a reader, want to feel more strongly about. First is the affair [redacted] has with [redacted]. That was the first choice she made on the page, and it fell flat and then came to nothing. There should have been sexual tension simmering on the page and then they should be brought face-to-face at least once later on. Even the tension with [redacted] is discarded pretty quickly. Secret love affairs, running into your ex and needing to work alongside him to dethrone a usurper, falling in love with one of your guards? These things have *emotions* involved. They are difficult and messy and we want to feel all those messy things as readers!

The second is [redacted] and his son. As a reader, I was told a couple of times that the son was likely dead, to forget about him. So I did. Then he pops up suddenly and dies without his father ever knowing how close they were. This would be *absolutely heartbreaking* if I had known he was alive, if I had seen the two of them inching closer to each other on my mental map of this story, if [redacted] had seen him and recognized him, and if there had been a brief, shining moment in which I thought they might be reunited after all these years. But I didn't get any of that. Instead, he's an unnamed soldier who died and his father never knew.

Fulfill your promises. Make them pay off in the end. Delete the ones that you don't want to follow through with and emphasize the ones you do want to keep.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Sincerely,
Gina Denny