



**BLUE PEN**  
Blue pens. Happy authors.

---

## Sample Manuscript Critique

---

“Blue Pen was thorough when they did my manuscript critique. It came when it was promised and told me what I needed to change to make my novel better. The suggestions were straightforward and easy to understand. The critique made me feel like I had written something worth turning into a novel.”

— Peter John Schulenburg

### **Strengths:**

- Very engaging storyline
- Characters’ speech patterns and behaviors feel appropriate to their various ages
- The world of this novel, magic and all, is believable and consistent.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Many scenes are underdeveloped which makes resolutions come too quickly and easily
- Minor characters lack development
- Repetitive descriptions lead to an overall lack of detail

### **Analysis:**

- This storyline is wonderfully engaging. The adventure is consistent, and there is a definite sense of movement (rising action) to this narrative arc. As soon as the story opens, we know we are going places.
- The fantastic elements—legends, magic, and place names—are woven in seamlessly, and feel natural to the world of this novel.

- One small thing—I would recommend playing up the legend element of this story even more. Cultures that hold widespread belief in a specific legend are very often rich with legends. I'd love to see some other tales, and perhaps even superstitions, referenced; this will help deepen the world of this novel, and will lay more groundwork for sequels.
- What this manuscript really needs now is tightening and refining. I don't suggest major plot changes. Rather, I want to see greater scene development within this plot.
  - From the first action sequence (when Chrissy realizes she has this knife-throwing capability), through to the “death” of Averna, action sequences play out way too quickly and effortlessly. The result is that we don't ever believe any of the villains to be the capable threats they are said to be. Chrissy has this power, but there should still be some arc to her developing skills with this power. Even if the initial action sequence is mind-blowingly accurate, can she throw equally as well from great distances? Can she catch and throw just as well with both hands? We need moments of close calls, and moments that expose the training she still must do to truly master this gift.
  - Characters must continuously react to their reality. For example, initially, Chrissy must be in awe of her own knife-throwing powers. Our third-person narrator should be right in her Chrissy's mind, narrating her own disbelief in how this is playing out, and her fear that any time throw, any throw, her luck will run out. Her parents, likewise, should be dumbfounded, and perhaps frightened, by their daughter. They need to be reacting to the scenes they're in because right now, her parents do not come across as capable adults in the book.
  - The action shouldn't be forgotten so quickly by the characters. Chrissy's power is abnormal, and so the relationships surrounding Chrissy won't return to normal as soon as the action is over. Moments like, “pack both suitcases” following the knife fight, don't quite work yet. We need greater development of what is going on in the parents' minds: how they are struggling to reassert themselves, and to understand their daughter, to find these moments believable.
    - Chrissy's mom, for example, wants Chrissy to be ladylike. It would be natural for Chrissy's mom to react with extra strictness towards Chrissy's tomboy ways. It would also be natural for the parents to be very concerned about where their daughter learned to knife fight. Mining these moments will lead to greater character development for Chrissy's parents (which we really need), and will bring more tension to the book.
- Exposition needs to become action. Instead of telling us Chrissy and Ameer fought, show us the fight. Show us how these girls behave during a fight.
- We need some scene setting before the characters meet Ryne. This moment happens too fortuitously to feel believable.

- Descriptions must be varied in order to further develop the characters and the world of the novel. Instead of telling us many times that she's a tall girl, show us her long strides, and how quickly she can close the space between where she stands and where she's headed. The same is true for descriptions like periwinkle eyes. Instead of using this same phrasing throughout, show us the way the sky, sea, and even streetlights, reflect on those eyes. Likewise, "broad-shouldered man" must shift every time it is mentioned. Show us the way his shirt pulls across those shoulders, the way his muscles ripple across his back, or even the contrast between his great strong upper body, and the light, delicate way he holds the reins when he is the one steering a carriage.

### **Action Plan:**

#### 1. Plot

- a. Don't change the plot, but go through scene by scene and look for fresh details to flush out more of the world of the novel. The best way to do this is to watch your characters: How are they reacting to the world of the novel? What are they touching, smelling, hearing, and noticing? How are they reacting to one another? This is true even with the most minor characters, such as the advisor who saves Averna. How do other advisors react to him when he volunteers to move her body? Do they suspect anything? Why or why not? Right now, the story is plotted out very well, but this plot must be filled in with detail in order to feel complete.

#### 2. Structure

- a. Great job here. Your third-person, past-tense narration is perfect for this kind of story, and each moment plays out in a satisfying order. Information is withheld effectively when you are creating intrigue, but then revealed quickly enough to prevent frustration.

#### 3. Pacing

- a. Most of the story unfolds at a nice pace. However, action sequences turn to the heroes' favor too quickly, and are resolved too easily. Don't be afraid to extend and complicate these scenes. We need to amplify the peril in the story, and action sequences are the place to do it. Action also reveals character, (how people behave tells us a lot about them), so watching these characters adjust and react to extended dangerous moments will further develop their characters, and will feel satisfying to your reader.

#### 4. Character

- a. Villains must be more dangerous. We need some extended moments when it looks like the villains might win. (See Pacing.)
- b. Heroes must have some Achilles heels so not every fight is a foregone conclusion. Perhaps Chrissy's power is most accurate when Ameer is there to witness/

visualize it. Perhaps inner-conflict related to Chrissy and Ryne's blossoming romance creates moments of distraction... moments when mistakes are made.

- c. Minor characters, especially Chrissy's parents, Jim, the Smiths, Captain Caustic, and the advisor who saves Averno, need some degree of development. For example, Captain Caustic wants revenge on the person who killed his brother. Can we also see a moment of Caustic's grief at having lost this brother? Does he blame himself? Did he bring his brother into the pirate business?

## 5. Setting

- a. We need more detail and fresher (non-repetitive) descriptions to bring the setting to life. As you go through the manuscript and watch your characters move around in-scene, you will see them interact with their worlds. (See Plot.) By describing these interactions, your setting will also spring to life. The goal here is not to get bogged down in description, (I know that was a concern from your editing brief), but rather, to effortlessly weave description of the physical world throughout each scene by paying attention to the things your characters are interacting with. You won't be adding paragraphs of description. You won't be slowing the action. You will simply and subtly be adding rich detail to the world of the novel.

## 6. Voice

- a. Your voice is excellent. Your prose is clear, yet engaging, and perfectly attune to the young readers you are targeting. Nicely done!