

Dear Mr. ———,

Thank you for the opportunity to read ———. I very much enjoyed your novel. It reminded me a little of the movie *Super 8*, though your book is more grounded. I also wanted to congratulate you. Finishing a novel is quite the accomplishment, and I'm sure it took a lot of dedication and passion to find the time before teaching in order to do so. You should be proud.

There are many aspects of your story that were very skillfully done. You succeed in bringing to life an array of diverse characters who are both interesting and believable. Certainly Steve captures the sympathy of anyone who has felt weird and out of place; but you also craft unique voices for Mihn and Ken as well. Even your minor characters, whether they're Mr. Fishback, Mr. Trammell, or Steve's parents, have their own distinct voices.

I also enjoyed your usage of movie references and technical jargon. I don't know anything about making movies and I was not familiar with a lot of your references, but I still found the sections of the novel devoted to movies approachable and, even without knowing the source of some of the references, I still understood how the allusions fit in with the narrative. I never wanted to be a cinematographer or director, but I do understand the passion to create and the desire to dream, and your treatment of the film industry touches on both these things. After all, who doesn't love the movies?

The other aspect of your novel that really stood out to me was Steve's flights of fantasy. I spent most of my childhood imagining fantastic realms with my friends and pretending we were there. I have, and still do, space off as I think about distant lands and courageous heroes, terrifying monsters and epic challenges. Yet your book is not a fantasy, but balances well between fantasy and reality, showing the dual lives every creative person lives in daily.

Before we officially accept your manuscript for publication, there are some areas of the novel that need some attention. I believe the following suggestions will help correct these issues. I have separated my suggestions into three major categories of Structure, Missed Opportunities and Tone for ease of reference.

## **Structure**

### Chapters Using Other Character Voices

Ken, Mihn and Tura are all compelling characters; however, I found the chapters written from their perspectives to be very disruptive to the flow of the story. Partly, this is because not every voice transition is clearly marked. The other voices are also introduced fairly late into the novel (very late in the case of Tura). Mostly, though, the information conveyed with these alternatively voiced chapters is not strictly relevant to the plot. Ken's chapters simply contain backstory; which, while they give us a deeper understanding of Ken, do not have anything to do with *Moby Ick*. The information could easily be incorporated into the main narration. Same with Tura's chapters. Mihn's story, while powerful, does not really have to do with the current situation either. I would recommend either deleting these chapters and mentioning necessary information elsewhere in the story, or interweave multiple perspectives from

the very beginning of the novel. The second option would probably be more work, but would allow you to delve more deeply into Ken and Mihn's backstories. If you chose the second option, it would be important to keep their chapters tied to the current story in some fashion. For example, you could narrate the orange incident from Mihn's perspective and tie in flashbacks about the escape from Vietnam. Oranges aren't so bad when you've fled your country and faced pirates. Tura's chapters I would delete either way: I don't think her voice fits well with the voices of the other narrators.

The chapter where Steve's dad tells his story is a little different, as you reference the story throughout the rest of the novel. However, you only have him tell one story, despite mentioning that he tells Steve stories all the time. I don't think you need to go overboard, but I think that incorporating a few more stories by Steve's dad would work better structure-wise. Maybe having three in total. I really enjoyed having the story in there; I wouldn't want you to take it out or change the way you tell it. I actually think not having more stories is a missed opportunity, which I will go into more detail about later. The challenge would be to keep the additional stories relevant to the plot. His dad tells him a story about bigfoot and you mention Ken playing bigfoot when you first introduce him. Maybe that would be another story he could tell in detail?

### Unnecessary Chapters

For the most part I think you break chapters in good spots. Occasionally I think you break chapters where there doesn't need to be a break, such as chapter eight, which just seems like a continuation of the previous scene. Also, sometimes chapters just don't contain any useful information. For example, nothing is really happening in chapter three. The information about Tura would fit better anyway in chapter two, after your declaration "Now she loved me." Something like this, perhaps:

"Now she loved me.

Tura and I were in love – even though she didn't always understand me.

I was born on the Oregon coast, the son of an auto mechanic and a roller derby queen, and I spent much of my time immersed in a world of prehistory, myth, fantasy – and movies.

Tura was born and raised on a windblown steppe, the daughter of a blind scholar and the queen he had rescued from slavery.

And I was the only one that saw her.

We were quite the mismatched pair.

Of course, any time I was around real girls, I felt like a weirdo – which is pretty much what I was at the time. I was weird and scared to be my own weird self. "

And the section, "I still have a souvenir from that amazing week – a photograph, a frame of 8mm film, blown up to eight-by-ten size. It's a photograph of me and two good friends. We're all young and smiling, despite a pair of broken glasses, three taped up fingers, two black eyes - and blood on our faces," would work better at the end of chapter two, closing that chapter. Another example would be chapter six. While I enjoy the writing—it has some beautiful moments— nothing is really happening

here. There's no action. I think you could keep Steve's internal monologue and just move the sections to other chapters.

### Chapter Transitions

There are many times you end chapters with a strong cliffhanger or smoothly transition between events. For example, the end of the first chapter, "I was the only one that saw it," grips the attention. Or the end of chapter nine, where you have a beautiful moment of Tura singing about the coming storm and the monster it would bring with it. Not every chapter break transitions as successfully, however. For example, between chapters fourteen and fifteen you jump from the crabbing spot with the ominous storm to a very mundane and comfortable dinner at their house later. There is a big gap in time, story and tone here. Or between chapters twelve and thirteen, when the characters go from being in the bathroom to being outdoors. I don't think either of these examples would require a substantial change, just something small to link them together. In the case of chapters twelve and thirteen, adding a "When we left Otis" would be enough to smooth the transition. These are just a couple examples; I would recommend going through all the chapter transitions and making sure there is a clear connection.

There are some paragraphs which also suffer from a lack of clear transition. For example, in chapter ten, page forty-seven, you go from talking about Steve driving the bus to describing Otis'. Again, this would probably only take a simple fix like combining the two sentences together: "Dad let me drive his VW bus on the way to Otis' Electric Kitchen, which was the only restaurant with food ..."

### **Missed Opportunities**

#### Dropped Characters

*Tura*-Our introduction to Tura is one of my favorite sections of your novel. "Her long black hair had been washed in sea water and dried beside a driftwood campfire. A small scar smiled on her cheek. She wore simple clothes of stitched animal skin and sail cloth. There was an obsidian blade on her hip and she was not afraid." This is very beautiful writing. However, after the beginning she doesn't really have an effect on the story. By beginning the story with her and by going into such detail about her, you set up the expectation that she will be really important. At the very least, I would have expected Steve to fantasize about her coming to his aid again, such as when Ronny threw the orange or when Ronny tried to steal the camera or when Steve's mom busted into his room with the shotgun. You also set up Tura as Steve's main love interest for the story, but you don't resolve that conflict in any way. Why is their love important enough to mention in the story at all? Does it give Steve courage? Is it what prevents him from talking to real girls? Is it a way of dealing with his sister's death? I thought that maybe Tura was a replacement for his sister, but if so, the connection needs to be made clearer. The reason Tura's voice is on the radio also needs a clearer connection. Are the two related? Just a little bit more information when she's first introduced about how she and Steve fell in love would be nice, as well.

*Steve's Sister*-You don't tell us right away that Steve had a sister, or, once she's mentioned, that she's dead, and I like the way you make us work for that information. I think it works. I think you also show

the pain the family feels in a very nice way, without being over the top or too saccharine. You never tell us how she died, though, and that bothers me. Plus, you don't have any resolution to this conflict. I don't expect Steve to suddenly not care his sister died by the end of the story; however, since you spend so much time probing that wound, her death needs to have a real affect on the story. As I mentioned, it would make sense if she were linked to Tura, because then both their presences in the novel would make more sense. If so, though, the connection needs to be made clearer.

*Lan*-I learn a lot of interesting information about Lan in the course of — — —; however, her role in the story is purely background. I think you could give her more of a presence.

*Julie*-You spend a lot of time at the beginning of the book on Julie and how Steve has a crush on her, and you mention her at the end, but otherwise she disappears from the narration. You set up the expectation that Steve's feelings for her will be important during the course of the novel. I like her as a character, but honestly I think you could just delete her. Otherwise, I think you need to develop Julie and Steve's non-relationship more, give her more of an active part, and show how Steve moves on from his crush on her.

*Mr. Fishback*-Mr. Fishback is a great character and he definitely has a presence in the book—the scene where he talks with the reporter is funny—but I definitely think you could do more with him. After all, he's the guy who found Moby. His name is in the title of the book. At the end, you have him talk about the trilobites and the bite marks. I expected this theme of willful ignorance to be more pervasive in the novel, and for Mr. Fishback to be the voice of scientific curiosity, and an objector to the plan to just blow up Moby without studying it.

### Dropped Plot Points

*Steve's Imaginings*-The beginning of your novel with the T-Rex looming outside of Mrs. Ellerath's classroom is one of the best scenes of the book. It hooked me into the story immediately. I was therefore a little sad when there weren't any other scenes quite of this magnitude where Steve's imagination gets away from him. I was really surprised that Steve didn't have a major fantasy moment when he first sees Moby in chapter twenty-three. You even mention that he thinks he sees Tura at the end of the chapter (though he doesn't). While I think you do a good job at peppering the book with smaller flights of fantasy, I would suggest considering adding at least one more intense fantasy scene. I have a hard time believing that when Steve first sees Moby he doesn't see it as being alive, rearing up, tentacles grabbing people, ready to pull them into its maw, oh, Tura's here to save him! But it's not really Tura, it's his friends and Steve was just imagining things.

*Death of Moby Ick*-The destruction of Moby Ick is the climax of the novel, but there's not really any conflict about it. You hint in the novel that it's a shame Moby is getting destroyed without anyone studying it, but no one gets up in arms about it. This could be a source of conflict, but isn't currently. Or, you could make Steve's journey to get the footage of Moby's destruction a point of conflict. Right now, they get the footage too easily and without a pressing enough reason; there's no real conflict there. Maybe Steve feels an obsession with getting the footage so he can capture the magnificence of the creature to counteract its ignoble end? Or, if you incorporate Mihn's voice throughout the story, this

would be a really great place to narrate from his perspective how he's negotiating his way so close to Moby, even with all the army around. There's a lot of things you could do, but the death of Moby needs some additional importance.

*Dad's stories*—I mentioned adding in more of Steve's dad's stories earlier. The reason I think this is a missed opportunity is because it's obvious the stories are important to Steve, and I can't help but wonder if part of the drive Steve has for the cinema comes from his dad's stories?

*Retrospective*—I like how you begin and end the book talking from the future about the events you're relating—I really love the scene with Steve's daughter—but I don't think you go far enough with this. Part of why you wrote this book is to give kids hope, so why not show how Steve has succeeded at his dreams? Did he make it in the film industry? Did he make a film about Moby? Some additional insight into his future life is called for, though it doesn't have to be a lot. Give kids hope that their dreams can come true and then, if you need to, you can always say, "but that was a different story for another time."

*End of Ronny*—Ronny is the main villain of this story, so I'm not sure why you have his symbolic "death" off screen, as it were. I think you handle every other aspect of Ronny well, but you rob his downfall of its power. And why did Don take it so hard?

*Foreshadowing Scheibb*—For the most part, you do a good job foreshadowing Scheibb as the force behind the suits; you have Steve's dad mention tires and you highlight him puking into his cowboy hat. The one thing that fell through, which is unfortunately the most important part, is that you never give us Scheibb as a candidate to suspect. We never meet him before he is revealed as the hidden bad guy. I don't think this would take much—maybe just a jingle mentioning his name and the tires while Steve listens to the radio, or a billboard seen while driving through town or while Steve is riding his bike—just something to give us the information necessary in order to connect the dots; because people really like figuring stuff out. It makes us feel clever.

### **Tone/Steve's Voice**

I love Steve's voice. He's weird, which I sympathize with, and he doesn't suddenly turn into a hero during the course of the novel, which can be unbelievable, but struggles with his fears. He's great and really fleshed out. There are some times, however, when his voice wanders a bit. For example, in the second chapter Steve seems very aware that he merely daydreams, but his impulse to jump up and warn everyone seems too extreme for someone that is completely aware that he is fantasizing. I think that you could find a better balance between these two. Maybe Steve knows he just daydreams, but in the moment he gets so caught up in the story that he loses track of reality? Whatever you decide, just make it clear and consistent.

The other thing to keep in mind about Steve is that you set him up to not be a reader, but he makes a lot of references that seem to be about books (Jules Verne, Treasure Island). I think you could clarify that he's thinking about the movie versions when you cite these to avoid confusion. In chapter twenty-three, you have Steve quote an entire passage from Moby Dick, even though he's been struggling to read it. I

did not find this believable, given what you've told me about him. Maybe he could paraphrase it? On a similar note, Steve sometimes uses words that seem to me to be beyond his age range, such as "benthic" at the top of chapter twenty-five. Did he learn this word in Mr. Fishback's class?

## **Miscellany**

These are just some small details that need to be thought about.

### Excerpts

You use some quotations at the beginning of the novel. Are these all in public domain or do you have permission to use them?

### Forshadowing Moby

You foreshadow Moby's arrival a lot in the beginning of the book. You have some really great foreshadowing of Moby's coming, like Tura singing about the coming storm. You also have some that's unnecessary, like the beginning of the following chapter where, after just talking about the coming monster, you talk more about the coming monster. I think you could take out about half of your foreshadowing references. I would recommend just going through every instance you mention the horror that's about to come and think about if that one is doing all that you want it to and it's really earning its keep in the story.

### Misplaced Information

Occasionally you have information in a paragraph or section of the story that doesn't really belong there. For example, on page fifteen you are describing the cafeteria and then wander into a treatise about how Seaport is mostly white folk. The cultural information would be better placed in a section where you talk about Mihn.

### Descriptions

On the whole, I think you write really evocative descriptions. There are a couple places where I could have used a little more description, such as when you describe the lunch room groups at the top of page sixteen; or when Steve bikes home from school, you could go into greater detail about the town. I feel like your town should be a character in this story, and we don't really get a glimpse of it as a whole, just parts.

I hope you find these suggestions useful and inspiring. We are very excited at the possibility of working with you and this manuscript. We see a lot of potential for this book: in its possible popularity, in its ability to give hope to children who feel like outcasts, and in its ability to encourage children who aspire to jobs in creative fields. We hope you take the time to successfully address our concerns—which you've already shown you have the dedication to do—and we look forward to seeing your revised manuscript.

Thank you,

Brandon