

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for the opportunity to read your work and immerse myself in this bold, chilling world you have crafted. Your use of interlocking short stories made me want to go back and read from cover to cover again, following the literary treasure map and solving the mystery linking each chapter together. There is much to mine from your storytelling, which is something that cannot be said for most authors.

It is difficult in short story collections like this to strike the balance between each chapter being too distinct or not distinct enough from the others. You have successfully given each story its own personality and aesthetic while maintaining the tone of the overarching plot. In fact, I believe you could lean more heavily into the differences of each story's period. Because this collection jumps around in time and universe, more details particular to each setting would not only add more texture, but help readers orient themselves. The more eras made clear, the more epic the collection would feel.

Playing up the details of time and place would also help readers keep track of characters. This book presents a huge ensemble cast, some of which thread between stories. Without much apart from their names to distinguish them, their importance tends to be lost. This could be alleviated by weaving more personal details; it may also be a case of reevaluating which characters are necessary and saving those that are not for another project. For example, [REDACTED]'s group of friends in chapter three are given nearly an entire page of dialogue about nothing relevant to the story until the last few exchanges between [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. The other three friends bear little on the plot, nor do they act as foils to [REDACTED]. Instead of slowing the pace down with extra names and unnecessary expository dialogue, why not use that precious page real estate to develop [REDACTED]'s character which would by extension flesh out [REDACTED] and give more import to his actions and gravity to his dilemma? I have marked other instances of this on the manuscript for your consideration.

Another strength of your writing is the use of imagery. You have managed relating the extremity of scenes without being gratuitous or crude, and skillfully so. The heavy use of exposition, then, is not only redundant but detracts from the impact your descriptions would otherwise have. Let your well-rendered imagery and action speak. No reader likes being told how to feel or feeling like the author believes they are too thick to grasp what is going on. Editing out unnecessary exposition would also greatly aid in another issue throughout the book: redundant wording. I have noted patterns and instances of this on the manuscript.

Similarly, the manuscript is heavily peppered with empty wording. The most frequent examples include *actually*, *very*, *even*, *that*, and *which*. The only thing they serve to do in many cases is clutter your sentences, making them clunky and distracting from the action. Watch out too for mixing up "that" and "which," and "was" with "were." Weeding out instances like this opens opportunities for brightening your verbs. Instead of "multiple limbs that clawed," we could have "multiple limbs clawing," which grabs the imagination and pulls the reader in more

effectively. The same applies to the overuse of infinitives. I recommend replacing as many as possible with more dynamic, vivid verbs. “To gush” isn’t nearly as visceral as “gushing,” for example.

These changes on the micro level will add power behind your ideas and aid greatly in bringing each story to life, as would varying the sentence structure. Most sentences throughout the manuscript follow the same pattern. While that maintains a certain even pace to the writing, it is not engaging and becomes easy to tune out—to the point of becoming forgettable. That is the last thing you want for interconnected short stories like these. I encourage you to evaluate each paragraph on its own merits and play around with structure. Experiment with cadence. There is great potential for your unique voice to shine through more by shifting key clauses around. Examples of this are marked on the manuscript.

In terms of narrative, the puzzle-piece approach taken is compelling. I would like to see more threading of characters between stories to make the setting feel more like the character you expressed you want it to be. Instead of isolated freak incidents within each chapter, the reader should have a sense that there is something alive (or in this case, undead) about this town, that the town itself has a sort of will and agency to act. Without that, there is no clear conflict to the overarching plot. Something bigger must tie the cast of antagonists together. It’s there; it just needs to be made plainer by the end of the book.

Congratulations on finishing this draft. You have the foundation for something hauntingly special. Your passion and voice lifts from the page, and I look forward to seeing how you emphasize that through revision. There is certainly an audience for your work, and I am confident your book will be a fast favorite for many. Thank you again for allowing me a peek behind the curtain of your imagination.

Sincerely,

Megan L. Anderson