

MEMO

To: Aaron Ponce, author

From: Lucy Billingsley, Ian Ouzts, Madison Hooker, Mackenzie Simms

Re: Chorus of Another Earth: first draft thoughts and suggestions

Opening

To begin, we want to give you our sincerest thanks for allowing us not only to read your wonderful piece but also give us a chance to provide our insight to help guide you through this strenuous writing process. As writers ourselves, we understand the difficulty of putting together a novel this detailed and intricate. It is also daunting to give people your work and receive feedback, so we appreciate you being open to our comments. This developmental plan was written to help share suggestions and overall details of the piece, in order to both improve our editing skills and help you shape your novel. The plan includes summaries, potential visions of the book, recommendations for ways to improve, areas the manuscript flourished in, and even the intended readership profile of this book. We have meticulously read over this manuscript multiple times and spent long hours discussing the possibilities of both your writing and this world you have created.

Our group consists of writers that love fantasy and are familiar with the genre; as such, we understand what makes a fantasy world appealing and captivating. With this knowledge, we hope we can provide a helpful perspective from people who are personally interested in the complex worldbuilding of your book. The way that you discussed the topic of religion in your world is complex and truly immersed us in the story and characters. You were able to pull the reader in and weave together religion and identity in a unique and compelling way. The manuscript you gave us captures your understanding of religion in a way that helps us think about its effects on society, the consequences, the bright side, the parallelisms in our own world, and much more. Your vision of the topic is remarkable, and we cannot wait to see the further developments of your work.

Content Summary

The book *Chorus of Another Earth* is a prime example of adult literary fiction. It uses high-fantasy with hints of medieval fantasy and fable-esque elements to tell the stories of animal characters in a uniquely fictional world. We are taken through the journey of Edna, Quimby, Keene, Garrison, and their companions as they embark on a harrowing escapade through a land torn by past wars and prejudice. As we follow these characters, we are additionally taken through a continent ravaged by the effects of the “rage-plague,” and a coven governed by a fanatical Patriarch with extreme, and dangerous, teachings. We are also taken on a parallel journey with Richen and his companions, Brock and Lassette, as they deal with lies, scandals, and domestic treachery that threaten to rock the very foundation upon which Yori is built.

The book explores themes of national and religious identity through the different points of view of each character, leaving room for the reader to see what life is like from many different perspectives in this imaginary world. Given the adult-fantasy genre of the book, this novel also addresses themes of gender and sexuality through the lens of animalistic characters. We get to ponder themes of abuse of power and defiance in this world, surrounding a set of fundamental beliefs and societal roles. The book wraps us into the fantastical animal-world, leaving us to contemplate and reflect on our own lives as humans in our world.

Problem Summary

Although the book has a strong foundation and story, there are some aspects of the novel that could be improved upon in order to fully achieve the maximum potential of the story and its characters. These core issues of the novel are present throughout the book, rather than in individual chapters or pages. A list of smaller, individual issues can be found at the end of this plan.

Context

One of the first things we noticed was the delivery of information, and the difficulty of understanding the context of the world, the characters, and the religion. The world you have created is detailed, intricate, complicated, and interesting. However, we believe that in the chaos of writing a full-length novel such as this, a lot of the key information was lost before it could reach the reader.

This became an issue with the delayed explanation of certain important events. With this vast world of unique concepts, it can become confusing for a reader to get what a term or idea means when it is defined far later than when it is introduced. Sometimes this works; for instance, when referencing the “Feigned Death,” the suspense of finding out what it means was well-written because it was not completely necessary to the plot to know anything about it until far after it was introduced. Additionally, people who know anything about possums can guess what it means. Therefore, the suspense of delivering the definition for this affliction made sense. Yet, this does not always work, and sometimes the information is too important to skip over and get back too. Especially when there are a lot of terms and characters constantly being introduced, it becomes hard to keep track. Throughout the book, it would be beneficial if there were a few changes to better guide the reader, without ruining the quality of the writing or comprehension.

Alternatively, some non-essential information would be immediately expressed to the reader within the same sentence of it being introduced, which made the writing feel clunky and awkward. This happens pretty often when the characters would over-explain information. For example, in chapter 26, when Richen and Brock are speaking in the bar about the history of Yori and the religion, the background and history is presented all at once. The dialogue does not seem natural in this place, and it seems more as a means-to-an-end in regards to context for the

founding of the Sky Decree. Although this book is written using shifting narratives, that does not mean dialogue should be the only medium to convey information to the audience. Utilization of the third-person omniscient point of view could be used to go outside of what is specifically inside the character's heads. The narrative perspectives could be used to guide the reader to who and where the story is focused. Better use of this point of view could help guide the reader to a better understanding of the context of the story, without heavily relying on dialogue.

Busy

We understand that one of the acts you struggled with the most was Act II, and it does come across as too busy and chaotic. This world is very detailed, and it is understandable that there are a lot of concepts and ideas that need to be introduced. Yet, by introducing so many at once, it distracts the reader by throwing a wide variety of shallow explanations at them. Instead, having strong core aspects of the story with in-depth storytelling would better benefit the reader in immersing themselves in this universe. Our group felt the biggest issue with being too busy were the fighting or escaping scenes. In Good Burrow, there were a lot of descriptions of fighting, dodging, and hiding that, although they created a good atmosphere, became very repetitive at times and felt a bit irrelevant to the story. Rather than have a bunch of small scenes in Good Burrow, it would help to have less action and more significant scenes. This also becomes a bit of a problem when it comes to the connections of the various plots. When there are so many concepts and scenes, the connections get messy and hard for the reader to keep track of.

Character Development/Motivation

The last core issue that our group found was the development of the characters. During our meeting with you, it felt that there was a lot of meaning for each character, as they all had a unique perspective that you wanted to incorporate. A lot of that comes across, but there are still a few areas where it could be improved upon. Garrison, for example, has an interesting plot; he is supposed to be a dutiful and strict rule follower that has his beliefs shattered when faced with reality. However, he still seemed to be a secondary character with only one significant part to his story and nothing else.

In relation to motivations of the characters, there seems to be little reasoning behind a lot of characters' actions, or they act outside of their personalities. For instance, Garrison suddenly killing the guards in the Castle of Promise seemed strange and without cause. Garrison goes from not having a lot of first-hand fighting experience outside of survival to easily and ruthlessly killing people who posed no serious physical threat to him. Our group also struggled to understand the motivation behind the actions of the Bird Patriarch, and why he threw himself out of the window. The characters' decisions seem as though they are being used to create drama, or force a plot, rather than act truly to their ideals and characteristics. This is not always the case, but having unexplained actions can take the reader out of the experience of the story.

When it comes to the main characters, they all seem to survive the absolute worst scenarios while other characters are eaten or killed within seconds. The group is composed of mostly weak, young, or inexperienced characters, but they somehow survive dire situations due to what we can only assume to be plot armor. These instances happen on the ship, Good Burrow, and the High Patriarch's coven. After having the group separate, a lot of them survive on pure luck while capable soldiers are killed in an instant. This can work sometimes, but it feels as though Quimby being bit and Edna losing a toe are the only pain the main characters have gone through, and those events happen at the beginning and end of the whole book. For the story to seem more realistic, it would be better to see more narration of them overcoming hardships, rather than intense illustrations of them narrowly escaping death and injury, especially since Possums are naturally slow animals.

Overall, there seems to be too many characters throughout the book. Although it is realistic that these characters would come across lots of people, most encounters are drawn out and highly detailed for the character to be around for only a couple of pages. This is an issue when the reader is constantly trying to keep up with characters, a new religion, history, and even different locations. On the ship, for instance, the captain of the ship and Draxton are valuable characters for dialogue and general functioning of scenes. Yet, there were a lot of characters added for a trip that did not seem to need that many people. Potentially, the three assassins could have been the only three extras on board the ship in order to allow the reader to better comprehend the scene and later confrontation.

Vision Statement

This fantasy novel from Aaron Ponce focuses on an eclectic group of Possums on a mission to dethrone a false patriarch and return a wounded feathered-kind back to his home. The group travels across the lands and faces the rage-plague that is stripping animals from their sentience. The book focuses on issues of identity, social role, religion, and politics. The story puts the characters through trials that test their beliefs and allows the reader to see the unique perspectives of a corrupt religious society. Through the additional development of characters, added emphasis to religious and social contexts, and a more precise focus, the story will be able to develop a meaningful connection with the reader and expand the topics explored in the book.

Readership Profile

Having read this book and spoken with the author about influences and inspirations, we have compiled a list of potential target audiences. This list is divided into three categories: geographic, demographic, and behavioral. The following readership sketch draws on elements from the book, including setting, themes, topics, similar titles, genre, and identity. Our sketch includes readers who:

1. Geographic:

- a. Live in the North American Midwest. (Per data on midwestern novels by goodreads.com, some of the most influential and popular books in American history are based in the Midwest, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. The Midwest has often inspired and lent itself well to fantastical situations and magical realism, and midwestern readers often take pride in the awe-inspiring landscape they call home. Since this novel is based around the Midwest, the landmarks, weather patterns, and animals will be most familiar to a midwestern audience.)
- b. Live in an area that is religiously diverse. (Based on the Religious Diversity Index by the Public Religion Research Institute, religious diversity is highest in urban centers such as New York City and Baltimore, Maryland.)

2. Demographic:

- a. Are a member of the millennial or Generation Z population. (As stated by bookriot.com, one of the largest independent editorial book-sites in North America, 79 percent of the Generation Z population say that diverse representation in books is important, and 60 percent are more likely to seek out books that highlight marginalized groups. Those same statistics for the millennial population are 66 percent and 40 percent, respectively.)
- b. Consider themselves to be liberal. (According to The Survey Center on American Life, 44 percent of young women and 25 percent of young men consider themselves to be liberal. Additionally, based on statistics from the American Democracy Project hosted by the Middle Tennessee State University, about 55 percent of youth in 2016 aligned themselves with the Democratic party.)

3. Behavioral:

- a. Are interested in *Game of Thrones*. (Per *TIME* magazine, the *Game of Thrones* series had amassed a fanbase of over 23 million Americans by its final season. Compared to book-sale statistics from winteriscoming.net, a *Game of Thrones* fansite, 45 million copies of the saga sold in the United States alone, which reflects the massive popularity of both this genre and this style of writing.)
- b. Are interested in *Lord of the Rings*. (According to *Publisher's Weekly*, over 150 million copies of the entire trilogy have been sold worldwide.)
- c. Are interested in action and fantasy. (According to *Publisher's Weekly*, fantasy novels experienced a 45.3 percent growth in sales in 2021, which is the most growth experience in any genre between 2020 and 2021.)
- d. Are interested in themes of social injustice and inequity. (In a recent poll conducted by the NBC News Center, 70 percent of participants expressed a desire for calls toward, and representation of, social justice in media.)
- e. Are interested in exploring the role of religion in their personal lives. (From the Pew Research Center's data in the Religious Landscape Study, approximately

22.8 percent of Americans did not affiliate themselves with a specific religion and participated in interfaith dialogue to seek differing religious experiences.)

- f. Are interested in themes of gender and sexuality. (According to a study done in 2023 by the Census Bureau, 7.6 percent of adults identify with the LGBTQ community, with nearly a quarter of those respondents being aged 18–25, and according to the Pew Research Center, 70 percent of millennials are in support of same-sex marriage and expression of gender fluidity.)

This is just a snapshot of the potential readership profile intended to give the author a better idea of the audience that is most likely to take interest in this novel. It is not meant as an exhaustive list; in fact, many of this manuscript's themes will appeal to a wide variety of readers, even those outside its target demographic. However, we hope that this list is helpful for marketing and content purposes as the manuscript takes its next steps toward publication.

Premise

Within the manuscript, the author gives a rich perspective about the complexity of religion and its political power over people. Throughout the piece, characters embark on a fantastical journey into places they have never been before. They grow and explore parts of themselves together, such that by the end of the manuscript, they are different than they ever thought they could be.

However, the characters are not the only compelling piece of this story. The world also takes the grasp of indulging readers in the complexities of politics, war, discrimination, religion, family, and power. As the story goes on, more of these themes sprout and present their significance, giving the story layers for the readers to dissect.

Each of these aspects of the story come together in a multifaceted journey that leaves the reader wondering about themselves, the landscape that they traverse, and what they owe to the people that have helped them along the way. This novel, and its characters, push the boundaries of social expectations and personal shortcomings with a colorful mosaic of bright and distinctive characters.

Working Title

We believe that the title that the author has now, *Chorus of Another Earth*, should be changed. One of the main reasons we hold this belief is because of how closely the name resembles another popular high-fantasy novel, *A Chorus of Dragons*. We fear that because the two are so similar, when readers go to look up the book, the search engine will obscure *Chorus of Another Earth* for the more well-known *A Chorus of Dragons*. This may make it hard for the book to stand out on the market, or gain traction with a concentrated audience.

We also think that the book title may not reflect the book as well as it could. For that reason, we suggest changing the book title to something such as *The Sky-God's Choir*. If that name is not something that reflects what the author wants out of the book and possible future installations, we propose changing to another title so that it hints towards the themes of the book; which, in our revision, included subjects such as religion, power, identity, society, and disease.

Revised Contents

	Suggested Table of Contents	
ACT I	13. Quimby	27. Quimby
1. Edna	14. Garrison	ACT III
2. Richen	15. Richen	28. Keene
3. Quimby	16. Quimby	29. Richen
4. Garrison	17. Edna	30. Edna
5. Keene	18. Keene	31. Garrison
6. Edna	19. Richen	32. Quimby
7. Richen	20. Garrison	33. Keene
8. Quimby	21. Quimby	34. Edna
9. Garrison	22. Edna	35. Garrison
10. Keene	23. Keene	36. Richen
11. Edna	24. Richen	37. Edna
ACT II	25. Edna	38. Asher
12. Richen	26. Garrison	

Our revision of the table of contents focuses on changing the order of the point of view. We believe that a more balanced structure of how the point of view is passed between the characters will give both the main cast and the narrative arc a range of benefits. Some of those benefits include allowing the reader to understand all the characters better, seeing more of the world in different perspectives, granting more characters a fleshed-out development arc, and better distribution of the tension.

At the beginning of the book, we believe that a map would do justice to the lands mentioned in the novel. With all the differentiating names of the regions, countries, continents, and towns it becomes hard to understand where continents are in relation to one another, and what cities are located on which continent. This is not necessary, but maps are always very exciting to see from a fantasy reader's perspective, while also allowing readers a reference when reading about political and social issues occurring across those lands.

Another possibility our group discussed was editing the beginning of the book to start similar to a storybook. This story or history book would begin from the perspective of a narrator telling the religious background and founding of Yori, such as who the prophet was and how he came down

and declared the Sky Decree (similar to what Richen and Brock discuss in chapter 26). Then, the writing would transition to Josie yelling at Edna for not paying attention to this information. We thought this would give a strong fantastical start to the book, while also giving better context to how Yori and the Sky-God came to be.

In Act I, we thought that a lot of the movement between characters was done well. We kept this idea in mind, while making sure that it continued throughout the whole manuscript. We enjoyed that it started with Edna and chose to keep that the same. Although, we thought that from there it could move to Richen, rather than Quimby. This adds the tension of not knowing whether Edna has saved Asher or not. We also think that moving to a different perspective will help the reader process the significance of what has just happened after being thrown into the vastness of this world. Richen could provide more context for the politics of Yori, before jumping back into the situation with Asher.

The only other big change that we believed would help this act was to not have the Patriarch join them on the boat because it felt unnecessary. Instead, we thought he could stay behind and be killed in Yori. By having him killed in Yori, Richen will have a more immediate conflict to deal with. In turn, the future chapters involving Richen will focus on him engaging in Yori politics as it slowly becomes more chaotic. This will give a more central focus on what the government, politics, and power structure of Yori looks like, which is something that we struggled to see.

In Act II, we propose much bigger changes. We believed that there was too much action, to the point that a lot of the tension was dissolved and became meaningless. To combat this, we thought that spending more time on the boat would be beneficial to the reader. We think that devoting three or more chapters to the boat would allow the reader to get a full understanding of characters' motivations, struggles, and backstories. The boat also acts as a way to get the characters familiar with one another before the action.

From there, we think that splitting up the characters, like in the original, could work. In our version, we propose having Garrison, Asher, and Edna traveling through Good Burrow together. This gives the chance for Garrison to become a father figure to both of them, which will highlight his position as a prospective father and make the eventual shattering of his character in Act III make more sense. Then, Quimby and Keene would travel together to find Benedict's house. Eventually, this ends up with Quimby splitting from Keene, whereupon she finds Leo and the others. Once Leo dies, Keene would stumble back on Garrison and the others. Quimby, of course, finds Benedict's house, and then gets kidnapped (perhaps with Potter). The Act would end with Quimby.

In Act III, we think that the pacing needs to be kept steady until the end. The book does a great job at making sure to not jump around in the pacing so much that it becomes confusing. Because

this intends to be the first in the series, it is important to start strong. This is why we think that having the book not rush to get scenes in is integral to keeping readers interested. For this, we suggest allowing the reader to get familiar with the unease of the Bird covenant before the climax of the book, the Ascension.

Which leads into our biggest change, the ending. We believe that the book should end with Asher's point of view of the ascension ceremony. We think that in the original manuscript, the events that proceeded after the ascension ceremony were too rapid, which led to characters doing things that felt out of place and created plot holes. With our revision, we feel that there could be a better cliffhanger with the Ascension. It would end with Asher passing out, and the reader is steeped in suspense, which would be an impetus to purchase the next book in the series. Not only that, but having the last point of view come from a character that is central to the plot, but has not yet gotten a chapter, would be meaningful. This, of course, is not meant to undermine or rewrite the plot you have already created; rather, it is meant as a presentation of ideas that might help you when considering how to bring the religious and political themes forward, while giving the characters and setting adequate attention and development.

Itemized Structural Issues

This is just a list of a few of the structural issues we noticed throughout the manuscript. These things are addressed in our revised contents, and many of them are also referenced in the line edits. We hope that these will be useful as you think about revising and finalizing the manuscript.

Chapter and Setting Issues

- Many of the chapters in this book are of varied length, which may make for a somewhat erratic reading experience; most chapters average around ten to fifteen pages, but there are occasionally chapters as short as five pages (chapters 8 and 17, for example) or as long as twenty pages (chapter 37). It may be beneficial to even the pages out to provide for a smoother narrative, achieve better pacing, and avoid information overload in longer chapters.
- Most chapters begin with an “in medias res” opening, and end with dialogue or a cliffhanger. This structure is good when used sparingly, but it can quickly become tiring for a reader, particularly because it does not lend itself well to clear chapter transitions. It may make for an easier read to begin chapters with a more concrete anchoring in time and place, and end chapters with an indication of the next chapter's action.
- Although this book is intended to be a high-fantasy landscape with an imaginative cast of characters, we believe that it relies too heavily on conventions of our world to ground it in a recognizable reality. Many of the themes and conventions of this world are based around real-world issues, religions, governments, and

ethnic groups, so we did not feel that the setting stood out enough as its own world with its own unique rules.

- Some of the settings of individual scenes in this book did not provide for enough detail to fully immerse readers in the moment (for example, the shore and the cliffs on pages 10 and 13, respectively), or they provided contradictory details that clashed with readers' understanding of the setting (for example, the Ascension room on page 310).
- As we have addressed in the revised timeline, we felt as though we lost Richen's perspective and the political turmoil in Yori during Act II and Act III. We thought that it would actually benefit the story's overall religious themes to spend more time exploring the government and domestic issues of Yori over the course of the novel, as well as provide helpful breaks between the chaos of Alfidia.

Chronology Issues

- The timeline of the rage-plague was somewhat difficult to follow, because it is never explicitly stated in the manuscript when it began or how long it has been raging through Alfidia. The closest we get is during chapter 5, when the Council of Nine are discussing the danger of holding a public forum and venturing to the opposite kingdom. Providing a better idea of how long the rage-plague has devastated Alfidia will give readers important context that will allow them to understand Good Burrow's devastation and Sanctuary's founding in later chapters.
- On page 105, the manuscript jumps ahead a couple of week's from the High Patriarch's announcement to their departure by boat, which does not seem consistent with the other transitions between chapters (which typically range anywhere from a few days to a few hours), as well as the timeline as a whole.
- Some of the pacing regarding the ship felt a little too convenient, such as that of the fire consuming the ship on page 150, or Gregor's approach on page 181. Additionally, many of the fight scenes last much longer than the audience's attention. Fight scenes comprise a large portion of this novel; in fact, this novel consists of more fight scenes than important character events in Acts II and III. This leads to a lack of development, and a decrease in both stakes and tension. A book with too much tension often has no tension.

Logic Issues

- Helios' reason for sending his son away, provided on page 286, felt incongruous with his character, the situation, and the context. It seems to make sense at first, but picking it apart shows individual flaws in the logic that make the decision seem both impractical and extremely ill-advised. Additionally, during Garrison's fight with the Eagles, it is stated that all of the adults were spared from having their wings clipped; but if that was true, then it does not make sense that Helios

would send his son on the journey alone. We recommend either developing his reason to address these flaws, making the danger that Asher was in warrant the danger of the journey, or having Helios accompany his son to the other continent.

- Hippopotamus' seem incongruous with the other animals in the manuscript. Every other animal in the manuscript is a North American-based mammal of moderate size and speed; hippos are not only larger (16 feet as opposed to 2–5 feet) and faster (20 mph as opposed to 4–10 mph) but also exist primarily in sub-Saharan Africa. The scale of the buildings would also be hard to visualize, since anything built to the scale of rabbits and possums would be very easy targets for a hippopotamus. We recommend changing this species to bears; black bears in particular are very common in the Midwest, and they are large enough to represent “giants” in this world, while also being small enough that they do not present an irregularity in the scale of this world.
- As mentioned in the line edits, dragons are infrequently mentioned in this manuscript and seem out-of-place among the other animal groups. They represent the only fantastical creatures in this manuscript, and their significance in the manuscript seems to be limited to reminding readers that the world exists within the fantasy genre. This becomes especially apparent on pages 231–32, where the dragons are alluded to having been the original rulers of the land after the Sky-God provided sentience to certain creatures. We recommend either removing them from the manuscript entirely, or integrating them into a more central part of the narrative.
- There were a few moments during the warehouse scene in which characters make decisions that seem both out-of-keeping for their character and illogical considering the circumstances. Cricket running away from the group on page 183, for example, or Eaton suddenly attacking the group after explicitly stating that he had no desire to do so.
- Due to the high volume of action in the final chapters of the book, it is difficult to see the justifications for Garrison's seemingly spontaneous decisions, and the changes to his character. The Patriarch's decision, as well, seems like an artificial resolution that is not consistent with the situation. These issues are addressed further in the line edits and revised contents.
- On page 211, the hippos indicate that Quimby is the first Possum that they have ever met who has been in contact with the rage-plague and lived. Given that multiple animals in this manuscript have already proven to be immune—therefore, immunity is not unheard-of in this world—it may not seem realistic to a reader that nobody has yet explored whether or not Possums were immune. We think that this might actually provide for an interesting avenue for the manuscript to explore; what would it mean for the Birds and the Possums if they both knew they were immune?

- Throughout the manuscript, there are many instances of animals that are killed for food or used for labor (i.e. frogs, mules, deer, etc). We do not receive a real explanation for this until page 230, and even then, it is not clearly defined why some creatures received sentience, why some did not, and how that factors into the sentients' view of themselves.
- We felt that the hatred towards Birds was not clearly explained or justified in the manuscript. At various points, it references the fact that they used to be seen as the Sky-God's "chosen ones," but their downfall and subsequent exile is never fully elaborated on. Furthermore, their acceptance of their past heretics and acquiescence to a grounded lifestyle would suggest that they would be accepted by the larger religion; why do they continue to be shunned?
- We felt as if homophobia was an example of reliance on a real-world convention to add tension to the relationships between these characters. If this is an entirely different world, with an entirely different belief system, entirely different culture, and an entirely different set of species, it is not likely that they would reach the very same conclusions about relationships as in our world. Additionally, homosexual partnerships are very common in the animal kingdom, especially among penguins and "Big Cats." Maybe that could be a point of contention in the manuscript. Would certain species view same-sex partnership differently than others? How would that affect their individual views of religion?

Focus Issues

- There are a few places in this manuscript where a great deal of focus is drawn to insignificant details, such as Nix's death in chapter 20, the tea offered to Richen in chapter 21, and the group of guards that enter the inn in chapter 26. Occasionally, when describing setting, details irrelevant to the action were described at length (such as during Garrison and Edna's flight through the Castle of Promise on pages 321 and 322). These shifts in focus draw attention away from the main events and purpose of the chapter, and confuse the reader by putting significance on apparently unnecessary details.
- As we have addressed in the revised contents, we did not feel that certain digressions necessarily deserved their own chapter (chapters 13 and 19), and that some chapters did not devote enough pages to establishing setting (chapters 28–30 and 33–38). In the revised contents, we have condensed certain chapters to establish stronger character motivations and scenes and expanded others to allow readers time to process each setting and major event as it moves through them.

Character Issues

- Throughout the manuscript, we noticed that there is not much attention given to general character description. This becomes especially apparent in the beginning of the book, as this is when we were trying to figure out the physical dimensions and level of anthropomorphization of the characters.
- Asher is a very important character in this book, yet his actions are largely inconsequential and his opinions are never fully taken into consideration. In the revised contents, we have addressed this by suggesting that Asher take a larger role in the narrative and make various decisions that affect the trajectory of the story. We have also included the introduction of his narrative at the very end of the book, in order to capture the intensity of the Ascension Ceremony from his perspective and allude to him playing an active role in future installments.
- There are a few instances in this manuscript where a character seems to know things that they seemingly have no way of knowing. Nihles, for instance, seems like he is not surprised that Redcloud is the one who sent the assassins (page 178), and he seems to possess some knowledge of the danger waiting for them at the Castle of Promise, despite having been previously unaware (page 264). Edna also seems suddenly aware of some danger at the Castle (page 269), which we have addressed in the revised contents.
- There was a slight inconsistency in character voices throughout the manuscript, as highlighted in some of the line edits. Gregor and Nix, for example, do not maintain improper speech through the entirety of their character introductions, and Edna's voice fluctuates between that of a fourteen-year-old girl, and that of a much older woman with all the wisdom and foresight of her age.

Itemized Stylistic Issues

- Throughout the manuscript we noticed a pattern of awkward syntax. This includes run-on sentences, the overuse of "and," garden-path sentences, and redundant sentences. To increase engagement with the book, we would suggest revisiting sentences containing multiple "ands," and sentences that are redundant, so that the reader's attention stays on the content. We also suggest revisiting some sentences that use vague pronouns, such as multiple "she's" that refer to two different people. We suggest paying close attention to sentences to ensure that their exact meaning shines through in an intentional manner.
- There were multiple instances of inconsistent diction and spelling issues. Some examples that we found throughout the manuscript include: "Grey" instead of "gray," "loose" instead of "lose," the wrong use of "your," the wrong use of "their," "passed" for "past," "padded" instead of "patted," "feint" for "faint," and "bemused" used for "amused." These inconsistencies can change the meaning of the sentence overall. We suggest revisiting these words throughout the manuscript to ensure consistency, so that the meaning of each sentence is clear.

- We noticed an inconsistent capitalization of Earth versus earth. We suggest deciding which version suits this manuscript best and changing the capitalization wherever needed, or removing the word entirely and substituting it for “land.”
- This manuscript uses double, rather than single, quotation marks for reported speech and citation throughout. All American style guides endorse the usage of single quotation marks for nested quoted material to create a visual distinction and avoid confusion.
- The usage of commas, question marks, compound adjectives, and dashes were not always consistent. Revision will be beneficial for grammatical errors that we found distracting from the actual content of the sentences.
- There were a few notable times that we found an inconsistency in tense. Though the book is mostly narrated in past-tense, there were a few instances where the narration slipped into present-tense. It is difficult to tell exactly what is happening in these scenes that contain tense slips, because they distract from the intense action and require the reader to put more effort into orienting themselves.
- This piece was very focused on mythical fantasy. We felt that the intention of this book was Adult Fiction, which made us feel like we should focus more on the political and raunchy tone, yet it often adopted a tone more aligned with Young Adult Fiction. There were bits of adult humor and themes thrown in throughout the piece, but we thought it should be more evenly spread to reinforce a more “adult” tone.

Closing

This manuscript takes the reader through the journey of woodland creatures in a fictional world as they navigate religion and disease-ridden cities. The book incorporates themes of identity and expectation—and how those things affect our lived realities—taking us on an exhilarating adventure that provides unique insight into the ever-changing systems that shape the way we see the world. The rotating narration of characters connects the reader closely to the conflicts presented in the story and allows the reader to get a first-hand view at life in this fictional world. We believe that this story holds great potential as it uniquely introduces questions about religion and authoritative power and asks the reader to reflect on these things in their own lives. Again, we thank the author for allowing us to partake in such a wonderful opportunity and wish you the best in your writing endeavors.