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## To Kill a King

Editorial Assessment by Katy Farmer

Mr. Ford,

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to read “To Kill A King”. I’m a huge fantasy reader, so I always love a new adventure. I’m going to address a few items that stuck out to me while reading, and I hope they help you gain some perspective on your work.

First, I’d like to address narration. There is currently a mixture of first and third-person narration in the manuscript (e.g., “Crafrael reached for my sword.”). Both perspectives have merits, but I’d like to suggest first person for your manuscript because I think the work would benefit from a more intimate perspective and from more of the prince’s opinions on the people and situations around him. Also, this would be a good way to ensure that Crafrael’s relationships to others are clear. Especially in the beginning, there are so many characters all at once that it’s hard to remember who they are to Crafrael and why they matter. Having his thoughts to help label and remember characters as they appear will make connections clearer. Alternately, you could do the same thing from a third-person narration that focuses on Crafrael and still offers readers insight into his thoughts.

Secondly, the plot of the story is intriguing, particularly given the epilogue. However, I would love to be introduced to Crafrael’s family and personal issues much sooner. Because the book begins during war, the plot is not immediately clear. The beginning of the book felt like a sequel rather than an introduction because we are dropped in the middle of so many events right away. This could be easily altered by adding in informational exposition in the midst of the action. If readers can relate what’s happening in the war with Crafrael’s personal anger and drive to be a fearsome warrior, it will help put his actions in context so that he doesn’t seem to be acting so violently without reason.

Regarding the prologue, I think it would be more effective to begin with a different scene that either features Crafrael in battle, or works to inform readers about the world. Clearly, your worldbuilding is complex and impressive, but readers need to understand all the rules and history to appreciate it. You can work in these details over time throughout the novel so that readers are constantly learning, or you

could write a prologue that does some of that work for you. I do think the end of the prologue, featuring the introduction to Crafrael as the Black Lion, is very effective, but the scene doesn't currently seem to relate to what follows. I might even like to see Crafrael fighting from someone else's perspective (one of the Blacksheep or perhaps you can go back even farther to the Akademy) so we can appreciate his abilities more clearly.

I want to be more invested in Crafrael earlier in the book so that his experiences (especially in battle) have greater impact. I love the idea of Crafrael and his Blacksheep, his friends, fighting together, but I would like a clearer understanding of their bond early on so I can root for them. The history of your world is impressive and intricate, and to better understand the war they're fighting, I'd like to see some of these details in the beginning. When he tells Shemei-Kesi about his time at the Akademy, I finally felt like I understood his connection to his friends—I'd like to know some of that earlier so that their friendships mean more to the reader.

Later in the novel, Crafrael's hatred and contempt for the High King are obvious, but an earlier introduction to family politics would help set up the main plot. Right now, there is a disconnect between the first half of the book when Crafrael is at war with his soldiers and the second half when he is at home with his family. Overall, I get the feeling of suspense that you're weaving in by not telling the readers everything, but I think you need to tell us just a bit more so we understand Crafrael's motivations and agendas. I would encourage you to be more forthcoming with Crafrael's investigation into one of his men being a spy by rewinding his knowledge on the subject. Readers will be more engaged if they find out about the spy at the same time as Crafrael. We want to be there for his shock and anger at discovering there's a spy in his ranks—it helps us understand him better, and gives you an opportunity to add details about his relationships with his men as he thinks about who might be the spy.

The plot and agendas are much clearer in the second half of the book. I would like to understand Nayd better; you hint in the narration that Nayd is hiding something from Crafrael, but I think we need to understand his personality better to even guess at what he might be hiding. I'd also like more interaction, direct or indirect, with the High King so as to show his personality. I'd also advise you to condense some of the material at Crafrael's trial in Chapters XXIV and XXV. Since the reader is with Crafrael for some of the experiences he's telling, you don't have to spend time retelling them in detail. Instead, you can focus on the reactions of the others to better set the scene.

I read the alternate perspective chapters you wrote for Shemei-Kesi, but I think you should stick to one point of view. I loved learning more about her from that perspective, and I think you should try to work more of her backstory and personality into her conversations with Crafrael. For their bond to feel authentic, I'd like to see Shemei-Kesi more hesitant and maybe even more verbally

aggressive with Crafrael at first. As a victim of sexual abuse, she probably wouldn't invite a man back to her room right away—even a man that saved her. I think she would need more evidence that Crafrael is someone who won't harm her before she invites him to her room. That would make her end of the relationship more believable.

Your writing of the action scenes is delightfully gruesome. You have a keen sense of spatial awareness for your characters, and I can tell that you've researched this area thoroughly. My suggestion here is that you strive for clarity with pronouns—all of your action scenes feature men, so when you use "he", it can be unclear who you mean in complex battle scenarios. Adding a few names here and there will clear that up.

Overall, "To Kill A King" is a very compelling story and the world feels very complete. I hope these suggestions will help your writing, and I look forward to hearing more about Crafrael in the future. Happy writing!