Gina Denny

Editing Services

Developmental Edit – ███████████████████████
███████████

Hello, ████████

Thank you so much for letting me read your work. It was such an honor to follow ████████ through this complex journey of emotionally fraught decisions she has to make. I respect how you're tackling big issues by connecting us with the very real people at the center of those issues.

I left comments in the margins, mostly with questions and suggestions. Every single suggestion is just that: a suggestion. You know your story best, so you have the best vision for the manuscript. My feedback centers on these things: Structure and Character Arcs, Setting Descriptions, Scene Layering, and Fulfilling Promises.

First, though, I want to address the word count. I know you said this is the first novella in a trilogy of novellas. But novellas are just as deep and immersive as novels; they just simply cannot be any longer than they are. You've landed on a novella-sized word count because you've skipped over that depth. You pulled your punches and skipped over the hard stuff. But here's the thing: You didn't need to. There are times where your descriptions are so powerful and your character interiority is deep and your social commentary is so, so sharp. You have the chops to dig in and really explore this dark, heavy concept in a way that is immersive and powerful.

You didn't write a novella, I'm sorry to say. You've written a skeleton draft of an 85,000-word novel. My suggestions will all be made with that in mind.

Structure and Character Arcs
This is the biggest and most difficult piece I'm going to address, and I think it will trickle through the rest of the advice I'm going to give you regarding this story. Right now you have a story where a lot of stuff happens but I didn't see enough deliberate connections made between the various plots. Some of this can be attributed to the fact that they don't have quite enough interiority on the page, which can be helped by showing instead of telling, but most of it comes down to the way the plot is structured.

This manuscript has a *lot* of scenes. Combined with a short word count, it makes for a very choppy feeling structure, which doesn't give me enough time to connect with your characters or understand how all these scenes impact them. A lot of short, choppy scenes usually indicate that each scene is only doing one thing (more on this later, too), but it also means the author is focusing on *what* happened instead of *why it matters.*

Attached to this email, I've included a beat sheet for your story. At the bottom of the spreadsheet, you'll see three tabs. One is labeled, "As is" and it describes the structure and

scenes of the story as they are now. You can see clearly just how very many scenes are in the novel, plus how many "sequels" happen in a row. Sequels, in this context, are scenes that don't push the plot forward or don't feel momentous. Novels need these quiet moments; this is when the reader digests information or regroups emotionally or prepares for a big upcoming scene. Novels do not need multiple sequels in a row, though.

The second and third tabs are labeled, "Space" and "Desert" and have new outlines based on what I believe the novel's emotional arc is meant to be. In both options, the story still starts and ends in the exact same place and I believe I've understood everyone's arc and the purpose of the story. The characters need to grow and learn over the course of the story; ███████ is the cycle-breaker, even though she breaks the cycle too late to save her own life, she is able to protect her sister. In this way, ████ serves the same function Cosette does in *Les Misérables.* She's the phoenix that rises from the ashes, the triumph at the end of torment.

Since you mentioned that you're planning this to be book one in a trilogy, I assume book two will reveal that ██████ did not actually die. But in order to sell the tragic ending of this book, there will need to be some of that grim satisfaction—the phoenix rising from the ashes— somewhere.

On the second and third tabs, you'll see I added bright yellow boxes; these are scenes that have not yet been written, but I think will add to your overall narrative. You'll notice that I cut a lot of scenes that weren't adding to the narrative, but I've still suggested a longer word count for the novel. I'll explain some ways to achieve that later in this letter, but some of that word count will come from these additional scenes that are going to be emotionally complex.

This will be the hardest piece of advice to implement, since it requires a lot of rewriting and at first glance will look like I've ruined your book. Please know that I wouldn't make this suggestion if I didn't think it was the best thing for your book. It's really just taking the story arc you have now and clarifying it, moving some of the clutter out of the way so the incredible characters you have can really shine through.

Setting Descriptions
Immersive settings are important in every book, but it's doubly important in a speculative story. Your story is dystopian fiction, a subgenre of science fiction. You'll need to clearly describe the ways in which ████████ world is different from our own. This will include some things that are the same as they are in our world, but it will also definitely describe the differences. You've sold this as ███████████ *Outer Space*█ Everyone is going to want to explore the very foreign concept of going to outer space. The difference between east L.A. and outer space should be stark (and fun... until it turns sinister, but even that sinister nature should be immersive in order for it to be as terrifying as possible).

In realistic fiction (which this partially is), it's extremely easy to fall into "white room syndrome," in which the characters are sitting in plain white rooms and having conversations. As an author, you think, "Well, everyone knows what a diner looks like, I don't need to describe it." Or replace "diner" with any setting: a living room, a convenience store, a street corner, a mess hall. And you're right, to a certain extent; we do know what those things look like.

But we don't know how they look to your character. A convenience store can be a grimy place that she only shops at because she has no other choice, or it can be a brightly lit utopia of sustenance. A street corner can be a dismal crossroads, or it can be a stalling point, or it can be a joining of opportunities. A pair of spandex leggings can feel like a hug or they can feel like they're suffocating her. Everything in your setting is a chance to demonstrate your character's POV and how she's feeling.

Be sure to include all five senses: what does the character see, hear, smell, feel, and even taste? Not all at once, of course, but peppered throughout the scene. This will take more words, of course, but I think you can safely aim for more like 85,000 words and still be telling the same story you're telling now.

Scene Layering
Every scene should be doing more than one thing.
1. Push the plot forward
2. Demonstrate setting or the world (specifically the world of drug dealers in this story)
3. Demonstrate interior character changes
4. Demonstrate exterior character changes (i.e. the way characters treat each other)

Ideally, every scene would do all four. At a *bare minimum* it needs to do two, but three would be better.

Right now, for example, you have scenes that show ▮▮▮▮▮ struggling under the weight of her debt (these are your best scenes). You also have scenes that show what outer space is like. Then there are scenes that show how ▮▮▮▮▮ and Niall's relationship is evolving. And there are scenes that show ▮▮▮▮ making a decision, making a change.

Imagine instead that one scene does all those things. ▮▮▮▮ and ▮▮▮ are working together on a task set for them on the ISS, there are descriptions of outer space and how it makes them feel. They are confiding in one another, growing closer, but they're also physically getting closer by working on this task together. ▮▮▮▮ admits how worried she is for ▮▮ and talks about the months of nearly starving; ▮▮▮ talks about the desperate situation his mother is in. They grow emotionally closer, they complete a task that shows their competence, ▮▮▮▮ comes to a conclusion about something, and you've described the very fun/cool setting of outer space.

That one scene takes more words, but again, I think you have room to grow in the wordcount department.

This will also help with pacing and overall structure. Combining scenes, layering them together like this, will naturally increase the overall pace. When it's more difficult to see where a scene begins and ends, the plot takes on seamless quality, making the entire book feel like you could read it in a single setting.

Fulfilling Promises

You titled this book ██████████████ OUTER SPACE. The promise inherent in that is *outer space.* Every single person who picks up this book wants an adventure in outer space.

Now. If you do not want to write a book set in outer space, that's fine. I offered a non-outer-space-focused outline suggestion in the beat sheet; if you decide to go that route, I recommend a different title.

But I think your current third act contains some really gritty and compelling storylines. ████ learns coding because it's a "useful" skill (implying that all her other skills are useless, which your reader knows is not true), and then she uses it to uncover the danger of the situation she's in. Imagine she also used it to her advantage, wiping out her student loan debt. You currently have an under-developed plot line of ███ being a salesman who sells their data for millions of dollars. This is *grim.* This is such a good hook for a dystopian novel; it reeks of the way the Hunger Games were exploited for profit in the books. It's gross and horrifying in the absolutely best possible way. It's social commentary of the highest order and I would love to see you explore it more fully.

This will take more words. But I think you have more words in you. When you did choose to dig into a scene and show ██████ interiority, you did it beautifully. You have the ability to really make this novel a biting social commentary wrapped up in the shiny packaging of a science fiction romp.

You have such a gift for crafting a complex, emotionally powerful plot that your story is worth the effort. These women are such fascinating characters and but are still so relatable, which is a difficult mix to pull off. Your readers aren't being forced into outer space, but they know what it means to risk everything to protect the people you love most.

Thank you again for letting me read your work. It really is an honor. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Gina Denny