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Dear M,

Re: TMD

Thank you for submitting **TMD** to **Daniel Goldsmith Associates** for **assessment**.

I am delighted to say that I have enjoyed reading your book and I partly share your enthusiasm regarding the potential of the series. However, I will list below my notes on what I believe needs a finer touch at the plot, style, narrative and characters level.

Style

Your writing is based on one major style feature: the adverbs. On the first page alone, you have seven adverbs ending in “ly” which gives your writing a heavy, overused feeling. In the end, too many adverbs used too often will create a

reading fatigue and your readers will develop a tendency of skipping them throughout the book. E.g.: “I certainly can definitely imagine the three of you as partners in crime.” (p. 77) The best technique of weeding out the overused adverbs is to combine the verb-adverb into a more suggestive verb. E.g. “He walked confidently, but failed miserably to block the negative thoughts from his mind” (p.222) Apart from being a too common cliché, “miserably” is a redundant add on to the verb “to fail”, since all failures are supposed to be miserable after all. Consider using more suggestive verbs, such as: he marched through the tunnel, he speeded up, he hurried up, he hastened towards the end of the tunnel, he rushed, he paced up, but could not block the negative thoughts from his mind.

Another method would be to replace the verb-adverb with more descriptive action. E.g.: he felt his confidence growing as he walked through the tunnel, while still trying to block the negative thoughts from his mind. Or: “Unsurprisingly, all three curses hit the giant wasp. Amazingly, all three made no impact.” (p. 223) Consider “as expected” and “to his utter disbelief”.

To find all the adverbs ending in “ly” in your manuscript, use the Find function on your Word processor and type “ly ” (don’t ignore the necessary blank space at the end). Click Find and you will locate all the adverbs in the middle of your sentences. Consider revising them one by one. Type “ly.” With the dot at the end and you will find all the adverbs at the end of your sentences. That’s how I found that in the last 25 pages I have received via email from you, you have used a staggering 135 “ly” adverbs.

Another suggestion would be to show, not tell. What makes fiction more interesting and enjoyable than plain journalistic style is that situations, events, thoughts and plots are shown, not told. E.g.: After three hours of being pelted by battering rain and lashing winds, morale among the group was desperately low.” (p. 181). Instead of telling frankly that “morale among the group was desperately low”, create a short dialogue of gloom mood, fiery tempers, desperate thoughts, doubts regarding the meaning of the mission, the meaning of ever resisting the

Empire, the meaning of life etc. We will soon gather that the morale of the group was really low. Consider revising the book scene by scene with this filter of “showing not telling” in mind and you will be surprised by the results.

Narrative

I must warn you that I found the book very hard to get into. The beginning is slow and packed with information that should unfold as we go in a more natural manner. The Prologue alone could form a book on its own, as far as its story is concerned. Consider offering less information in the epilogue and giving more details as the events develop.

As for the point of view of your narrator, it needs a little attention, as there are a few faulty transfers here and there. If you want to keep a neutral narrator, avoid presenting facts known to Jamie alone. E.g.: “[Jamie] took great pleasure in knocking Devilner over” (p.226) and “Jamie was therefore greatly relieved that the next challenge appeared to be a simple test of logic.” (p.237) In both cases, the narrator is Jamie’s point of view. However, there are places where Jamie is not present or not aware of the events taking place, where the point of view is transferred back to the neutral narrator. This is quite a common mistake, but it could easily undermine an author’s chances of getting published. The neutral narrator can still present characters’ feelings and emotions as long as the common sense allows that they are clearly visible. E.g.: “Jamie was scared.” (p. 226) and inner thoughts that would be the “acceptable” thing to do by any reader’s standards. E.g.: “He could see that unless something was done soon, they would all die (...)” (p. 226). We understand that Jamie’s thoughts and his plans are the logical thing to do, therefore the narrator is allowed to confirm our predictions.

Plot

The very core of the plot and the quest of all characters, The Tidal Stone, is of unconvincing origins and powers. We are told it is really powerful, but not shown.

The fact that the wizards created the stones as a last resort of resistance against Ockhander is highly unconvincing. If the wizards could create the stones once, surely they could create them again, when tricky circumstances arrive. This very weakness of origin undermines the unique and absolute power of the stones. Consider the wizards inherited the stones from ancient times and make it clear that they could not be created again or replaced with anything that these days' wizards (perhaps a lot weaker than their ancestors) could ever craft.

The whole plot and quest of all characters is then justified.

Also consider describing the stones in detail and their individual powers to increase plausibility.

Settings and Locations

I must also admit that the *mélange* between civil structures, like communities, schools, dormitories and campuses, domestic structures, like houses with “clothes and shoes, books, spare crockery and many miscellaneous objects” that get in the way of magic spells, along with the fantasy setting of the castle hidden inside a volcano is a little too mixed up to take in with ease. Most fantasy books stay away from mundane settings and congregate all action within fantasy settings, like the land of the Middle Earth, ministries, kingdoms etc. It's not all lost, since your main audience is school teenagers, the school settings could come in useful. However, consider keeping the magical action in a magical setting and the non-magical action in a non-magical one as much as you can to improve consistency and credibility. Consider removing classrooms, libraries and hospitals from the castle setting, since they are too much of a civil structure, and especially witches that borrow books from libraries. Consider letting the readers know that the Matron has inherited her knowledge from generations of wizards dedicated to “magical medicine”, together with any literature that she highly cherishes and does not allow anybody to touch etc. Borrowing a book from the school's library is really not very convincing for your readers.

The same about the wizard flying a plane (instead of riding a dragon perhaps) and offering a... painkiller (instead of a magical potion).

If you are found of the mélange technology-magic in the book, insist in making it clear for your readers that the wizards in **TMD** appreciate and fully take advantage of the technological progress the humanity has reached to save the precious magical energy for the battle with the Empire. There are clues, such as the conversation on page 94, but consider adding more. This might justify the plane and the painkiller.

Characters

As in any fantasy novel, characters are the most difficult part to build. That is mainly because a small slip in the writing could cause a character intended to have greatness, influence and power to sound implausible, weak and silly. In **TMD** characters need extensive revising in order to gain those particular personality features that portray them as they are meant to be portrayed. Alan Barbatore is meant to be a main character in the book, since a lot of the action course depends on him. However, his character resembles a complacent, oldish type of guy who does nothing more than ensuring that everyone is at peace with everyone. Besides, his character has some inconsistent or very confusing parts. E.g.: Barbatore writes a letter to Lord Sankment about the book at the Greythorn Manor, including the details that four babies need to be killed in order to get the book. This detail alone shared with Sankment, whose dark powers we already know about, creates great confusion about Barbatore's character. Is he a good guy or a baddie? The confusion grows when we learn that he was a close friend to the Roberts and thought highly of the two wizards and their four children.

Consider describing in more details why the Roberts children were so special and wanted dead. Were they destined to become great leaders and threat Sankment's legacy to the throne of the Empire? This is one commonly used Biblical myth of the infants who need to be sacrificed in order to ensure the continuity of the status quo and to eliminate the possibility that one of them will

grow to become king (of the Jews, in the Bible's case). You could use the familiarity of this myth to the readers to make your story more influential.

Devilner works as a character, it is consistent in its continuous hatred and misery. You do a good job in portraying his character as able for sacrifice too, by saving Jamie from death and injuring himself in the hospital scene on page 136. This leads us to think he is not the traitor, but still his nastiness leaves the door open that he could still be. You balance the mystery around Devilner's character very well, which is not a little achievement and it proves good potential in building gripping characters. However, consider making things clear regarding the dark liquid bottle that Devilner forces down Jamie's throat. Did he intend to kill him or was it a magical potion that saved his life in reality? At some point, we should know for sure what Devilner's intentions really were in that one episode. If his intention was to kill Jamie, then his very presence, let alone leadership of the mission of finding the Tidal Stone is implausible.

Matron Vera is by far the most consistent character of them all and it resembles a powerful middle-aged mother rather than a powerful middle-aged witch, which is not necessarily a bad point. The fact that she is genuinely concerned about Jamie's well being, that she enjoys gin and tonic, fudge cake (although she knows she needs to cut down, "but not today!" (p.126) – the typical female excuse to cutting down on fatty food), the fact that she bites her nails with worry etc, these are all details that make Matron Vera a very consistent and highly likeable character.

Ibrahim's character lacks the bipolarity of Devilner's character to make it a good candidate to the traitor title. We have no reasons at all to suspect Ibrahim and this is not a good point for your plot. We should suspect each of the three wizards for being the traitor and look for clues to solve the puzzle of his identity. We read mystery novels not because we love being spoon-fed about who dunnit, but because we love solving the puzzle. Consider sleazing Ibrahim character a bit by adding details such as: he has an obvious reason. E.g.: he hates Barbatore

and considers him a weak leader and wants to serve Sankment whose power he admires and feels that deserves his loyalty more. After all, Ibrahim is a strong man with little patience for messing around or nonsense, so he is more likely to admire a stronger type of leader than a more human one. Or: he has a contradictory behaviour. E.g.: only him and Barbatore know a secret. It happens that Lord Sankment knows the secret too with horrendous consequences (he kills a Panfield Guard member or a few). The only one who could have told the secret to Sankment is then Ibrahim. Readers will suspect Ibrahim. However, in the end, after the traitor's identity is revealed, it turns out that Lee overheard the conversation, heard the secret and told it to his mum who told it to the traitor by mistake, before she knew who the traitor was. Or Ibrahim told the secret directly to the traitor without knowing he was the traitor. You now have a twist and surprise us with the unpredictability of your story. Or: Sankment has Ibrahim's wife as prisoner, so he is the prime suspect for collaborating with information in exchange for his wife's life. Or: Ibrahim is seen doing unpleasant things, such as behaving aggressively with innocent people, or doing gratuitous unpleasant things that would lead us to wonder if there is something wrong with this guy and if he could be a baddie.

As it stands, the prime suspect is Justin. That's only because he is mostly out of the action and we suspect that you intend to keep him away only because you want us to suspect him least so you can surprise us completely when it turns out he is the actual traitor. If this is the case, the method is very weak and unconvincing and will hardly create the expected effect. If Justin is the traitor, then Justin needs to be involved a great lot in the action throughout the book to deserve the role of a respectful villain. Contrary to some beliefs, the villain remains one of the most important characters in the story and the plot's strength depends on how strong the villain is and how much opposition he produces.

Because the book leads us to believe that Justin is the traitor, we start looking for clues to prove his guilt. One is that he might know more than he ought to. E.g.:

“Just as Justin had expected, there was no sign of the soldiers.” (p.211) Or: “Nearly”, said Justin. “It is our only option. The trail is being closely watched, that much we learnt this morning.” (p.206) Or that he was left out of the action for a reason (by the end of the book, we still don’t know the reason though): “It occurred to Jamie that it had been a while since he last spoken” (p.204) Apart from these two possible clues, I could not identify any others that would lawfully lead us to the suspicion that Justin is the traitor. Whoever the traitor is, when his identity is revealed, we should be fully satisfied that we had enough clues but were craftily misled to believe it was someone else.

Consider revealing the identity of the traitor by the end of Book One, otherwise you will risk having at least two books with the same plot: to reveal who the traitor is and to get the Tidal Stone.

As it is, **TMD** feels like an unfinished book. The reasons:

- the book ends with Jamie in possession of the stone, which is not meant to be very promising, as far as the second book is concerned.
- we should at least know who the traitor is by the end of Book One.
- the book seems to end with the possibility of all three wizards to be dead, so one of the major quests in the story, finding out who the traitor is, turns out to be pointless.

Pace

There is a good distribution of action throughout the book, a well paced climax and well placed reflection fragments between action scenes. However, consider reducing the long, reflective pages about Jamie becoming familiar with the castle and learning about his family ordeal, as some of them are repetitive and redundant. Once or twice should be enough to emphasize Jamie’s feelings of hopelessness and anger about the fate of his parents and brothers.

Final Notes

Consider revising the phrase “magical community”, as it sounds rather like a social structure than a magical one. Consider “magical circle”.

Consider revising the scene of Ben’s murder on page 15 and the torture scene of the thirteen year old on page 30-31, as violence against children presented in books and films that target an audience under-18 is frowned upon and in some cases even illegal. Consider replacing the scenes with description in the passive voice of something that happened in the past or, if you want to pull the reader’s heart’s strings harder, consider replacing children with other vulnerable people, such as women or elderly people. In each case, avoid showing violence gratuitously. That means that, if in chapter 1 you present a soldier torturing an innocent person, remember to create a face-to-face scene in the final chapter between the protagonist and that particular soldier, where the protagonist wins over. This way the violence presented earlier becomes a means of building up readers’ feeling towards a villain and the readers will expect a scene of revenge at some point in the book. Otherwise, violence just for the sake of action is not a recommended method of constructing a strong plot and compelling characters.

Consider revising the highly implausible scene of the solitary soldier out of nowhere on page 191 et al. How come the soldier was there? How come none of the wizards asked themselves this question afterwards? How come everybody pays attention to Anthony’s injury instead of checking if there are anymore soldiers around or if their camp has been discovered or informed about to the Empire? Consider using the scene to deepen suspicions about the traitor’s identity and the possibility that one of the group members exposed the group’s location to the Empire.

Consider revising the scene of Keith’s death and using it as an opportunity to offer more details about the identity of the traitor, on one hand, on the other, to strengthen our feelings about the traitor and build a higher anticipation of the retaliatory end of the traitor. Consider revising the fragment so Keith’s murderer

is one of the Panfield Group wizards, who will obviously turn out to be the traitor in the end. E.g.: in battle, after eliminating a few Empire soldiers, Keith, injured and barely holding onto his horse, sighed with relief to see one of the three wizards in front of him. Instead of offering him help, the old man was shocked to see the wizard point his staff to Keith's heart level and crying "Rabnib Extrada". Consider offering clues about who the killer wizard might be, but not divulging his identity in full until the end of the book.

Consider revising the inconsistent episode of the giant wasps. Consider adding more details about who might have put the giant wasps guard the Chamber of Doom. Was it the Empire? It couldn't have been, because the Empire was not supposed to know where the Chamber was. Was it the Panfield Guard? No, they didn't know where the Chamber of Doom was either. Was it a third force? It's unlikely, since the whole action and plot involves only two forces. Secondly, in both cases, none of them wanted Jamie dead before he could share his premonitions about the right door to the Tidal Stone. Finally, how come Lord Sankment got away with killing only one wasp and got through the entrance and the Panfield Guard wizards needed to kill the other one too to gain access?

Consider revising the final scene, in which Jamie decides in favour of the Tidal Stone instead of his brother. Sacrifice of the self not of the others, especially close friends and family, is what is commonly used in the build of an action hero. Consider making it clear for the readers that Jamie's priority was his brother's safety, followed by the possession of the stone. There are many ways of combining the two without causing prejudice to the action.

Editing and Proofreading

The manuscript is neatly written and would not need an editor's review before submission to an agent.

Apart from the odd spelling mistake (“Soon you’re have a premonition” – p. 78, “threw the air” – p.112, “don’t by shy” – p.185, “not a day goes my” – p.189, “holding it’s breath” – p. 200), grammar and punctuation seem to be right.

Marketability

It’s quite easy to locate your targeted reader. It is the teenage reader, 14+, enjoying the fantasy genre, as well as the mystery genre in the Alex Rider model (see Alex Rider series by Anthony Horowitz): the ordinary anti-hero type of teenager able to face astonishing obstacles through intelligence and skills and deliver a great deal of action and suspense.

In its present shape, we do not consider **TMD** ready for agent submission. However, you have put a considerable amount of work in **TMD** and, promisingly, in **TCL**, therefore we fully encourage you to give your work the required amount of attention in tuning the fine details.

We encourage you to submit the work to suitable agents yourself and consider their feedback when you feel the book is fully ready to be published.

If you decide to consider any of our suggestions listed above, we would be happy to reassess **TMD** and make a decision about agent recommendation. If you decide to submit the manuscript for reassessment, we would be happy to remake the synopsis to required standards free of charge. The current synopsis not only does not improve the manuscript’s chances of receiving a proper read from agents, but my belief is that it is quite detrimental. If you decide to remake the synopsis yourself, consider listing an outline of the main events in the book, including the exact events, actions, methods, decisions, plot key points, as well as who the traitor is and exactly how the book ends, so the agents can see the potential of the story before deciding to read the full manuscript to understand what happens in the story. I would also strongly advise enclosing a synopsis of the whole series **TCL** together with any submission of **TMD**.

We hope our reading of **TMD** will be of some help with your reviews and we're looking forward to hearing from you again.

Best of Luck,

Lorena Goldsmith, MA, Editor