



SAMPLE MANUSCRIPT CRITIQUE

*Shared with permission from author. Character
and setting names have been changed.*



EDITING & PUBLISHING SERVICES

from Victoria Griffin

MANUSCRIPT CRITIQUE

Project Title: [REDACTED]

Author: Safiya Maouelainin (writing as [REDACTED])

Strengths:

- Strong atmosphere
- Character-driven plot

Weaknesses:

- Underdeveloped relationship between romantic leads
- Lack of stakes

Analysis:

- Although this fits in the adult category from a plot perspective, it often reads like a YA. Elements like excessive exclamation marks add to that tone.
- The setting and imagery are extremely strong. Both the Moroccan culture and the fantastic elements pull the reader in. This is definitely one of your strengths, and I recommend playing to this when submitting.
- As a romance, the relationship between the two leads should be at the forefront. Nina's desire for love is a primary conflict, along with her relationship with the "dream hands." However, the actual relationship between Nina and Elias is not emphasized. This leads to their happily ever after falling flat.
- The prologue is unnecessary and deceptive. It sets expectations that this will be Elias's story (at least 50%) when it's really Nina's story. Chapter one is more gripping anyway, leading with the atmospheric elements that make this so engaging.

- There are a few places near the beginning where the story is broken for character descriptions. Most of these are unnecessary.
- The overall pacing is strong, but the long chapters often make the story feel more drawn out than it really is. Consider shortening the chapters to improve the overall flow.
- The uncles' scenes are some of the weakest. They wind up sounding like stereotypical villains and are not characterized beyond their desire for power. The uncles need specific objectives.
- Bell needs further characterization. What are her personal goals and desires? She's a big player in the story and deserves characterization beyond how she supports her sister.
- Nina's specific desire for love, rather than just a husband, should be clarified earlier. Throughout much of the story, she seems to be more interested in getting married, and it even feels like she would abandon her doctoral research if that happened. Once she begins dating Hugo, it becomes clear that that is not the case. But it should be clarified throughout.
- The story is very character-driven, even with the concept of fate playing a huge role. Great job.
- Many of the transitions between scenes are unclear. There were points where I needed to re-read paragraphs to understand the new setting and how we got there.
- The sisters' reaction to the term *empath* is a bit strange, since *empath* is a pretty common term in our world. Naming it something less familiar would help.
- Nina jumps to her feelings for Elias so quickly and with no reasoning except the draw she feels toward him. That's understandable from a plot perspective, with them being destined. But Nina has been characterized as rational and analytical. I would expect her to put up more of a fight against feelings that don't make sense to her.
- Why is Bell suspicious of Daris? She clearly doesn't trust him, but the reader doesn't know why. Has he done something to make her suspicious?
- Hugo is an inconsistent character. Much like the uncles, he seems to have been only developed as a villain. What are his overall goals? How do his actions and conspiring with the uncles help him reach those goals? The attempted rape scene, in particular, doesn't hit home from his perspective. He wants to own her—we've seen that—but he hasn't demonstrated the level of violence or instability it would take to attempt rape. The scene feels out of place in the context of the story. Plus, Jane's reaction is extreme and not believable. Again, nothing she has done so far would make us believe that she would blame Nina or defend Hugo after witnessing that.

- When Nina and Elias reunite in the end, they don't work through anything. They just seem to fall together, and everything is okay because they're both in the same place. This is another example of their relationship needing more development. Why do they work? How do they complement each other? Leaning on the idea of soulmates too heavily can make the romance fall flat.
- There's a small plot hole with Hugo changing Elias's number in Nina's phone. It would have removed all of the old messages, including the one she sent Elias. She would have noticed that suddenly the new message from him was the first in the chain.
- Along with finding and connecting with Elias, Nina's main goal throughout the story (even when she doesn't know it) is to unlock her power. But it's not impactful when she finally does. This is largely because there were no concrete consequences if she fails. The easiest way to correct this would be to give the uncles a real method for stealing her power and set a timeline for their doing so. She has to unlock her power before the uncles complete their ability to steal it. Then, define what the uncles are going to do with the power. It's clear that they wouldn't use it for good, but how bad would it be? Exactly what would they use the power to accomplish? This increases the tension by adding stakes and a deadline. It will also help characterize the uncles further, since their specific goals will become clear.
- Work on introducing Elias earlier, if not into Nina's life then at least through his own chapters. To care about him and about his and Nina's relationship, the reader needs to get to know Elias as a person and not just as the dream hands.
- You may want to reconsider the title. It doesn't tell us much about the story or genre and isn't likely to entice readers.

Action Plan:

1. Plot
 - a. Add a method the uncles can use to steal Nina's power.
 - b. Introduce Elias's character earlier.
2. Structure
 - a. Remove the prologue.
 - b. Review transitions between scenes to ensure they are clear.
3. Pacing
 - a. Shorten the chapter lengths.
4. Character
 - a. Develop the relationship between Nina and Elias.
 - b. Define Bell's goals.
 - c. Clarify the uncles' ultimate objectives.
 - d. Flesh out Hugo.
5. Setting
 - a. No action—well done!
6. Voice
 - a. Ensure the voice fits expectations for the adult category.