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DGM – 4000

**Peer Reviews**

Overall, I liked the story for the most part. It had a gripping series of events and an interesting plot. I also felt like the characters were interesting and had some fun traits. That being said, there is some improvement that could be made considering the characters and plot.

For the characters, there were some rather jarring moments. For instance, James exhibited a wide breadth of characters traits. Having this be the case really made me lose focus of who he was. In one paragraph he was a concerned father, the next a hardened spy, and for me, I also got the impression of a hitman. Similarly, there were some moments in the writing that diverged from that perspective completely. Looking through the paper the biggest thing I could find was the moment where he was unsure of working with a partner. It seemed contradictory to the cool masterful spy that had been portrayed prior. He almost seemed unconfident at that moment even though we have no reason to see him have this weakness. One of the last things that stood out to me about James was the weird mix of emotions he expressed through the paper. Specifically, there was a moment when he got off the plane. Starting off he was in one moment cool and calculating and the next boisterous and upset and then that would loop for the next couple paragraphs exhibiting the same emotions. Doing this was very jarring from the readers perspective. I would suggest maybe writing in that he felt that way internally so there is a clear distinction of emotional weight.

One other character that I had a difficult time with was the president of the united states. I felt it odd that he knew about all the events and was very cool about the whole thing. To me, it didn’t make much sense for his character. When I imagine the president, I can see him meeting thousands of people daily. It felt odd that there wasn’t a specific plot point that explained why the president had so much vested interest in James. Overall, I didn’t get a clear read on the type of character that the present was.

One thing that did disappoint me about the characters is the fact that Smith died in a peculiar and quick way. I felt like she was a strong character in the story. Killing her after not expressing more of her involvement made her feel like a token character made to give some advancement to the plot and nothing more. To me, I really didn’t like that. I didn’t get a clear feeling that she was the mentor, and this made me upset when she died because I felt like she had more to offer the story and main character.

Plot-wise I got a little confused. There were a couple moments that took me out of the story because they didn’t seem believable. For example, I mentioned the president earlier. I felt like it was hard to believe that there were no security checkpoints or guards that would have stopped James from killing Smith. It really didn’t feel like there was a lead up to such an important figure. I would have liked it if it was the president of Morocco or some drug overlord with how short the story was. Doing this would make it much easier for a North American audience to understand how the flow of events happened.

Other than that, there were only a couple of small things that bugged me. First, there were a lot of explicit things that we as the reader didn’t need to know. For instance, there was no prior mention to why it was important that the code for his weapons was the same as his daughter’s birthday backward. Similarly, there were things like explaining what he was doing on his phone. I didn’t really care for knowing that he was opening an app or navigating or anything like that. All I need to know is what the text read. Similarly, that is my last critique for the story. Being an older gentleman, it felt odd that he was on his phone all the time. It also felt distracting from the story. I liked how I didn’t know what was going to happen to his family and getting little tie ins really broke that suspense for me. I would recommend getting rid of the little phone chats that happen and use Smith in their place. It would give more weight to her death and make her feel like an important character.

Really truly though I liked this story. The above was a real stretch for me to come up with. I felt like I really had to nitpick to give you proper feedback. I loved the drama of James fighting the bad guy, the relationship between him and Smith, and the fun interesting tools that he used to remain subtle. I also liked how he was a rough and gruff PI who had an old movie opening vibe where he looks out a dusty window. I also liked how he was a family man who put his family first above the job. All in all, the story was great.

This was a fun story. I really liked Alec and Boris. Alec was just who I imagine when I consider someone with the same character traits expressed in the story. I also felt like the twist and suspense added a lot to the story. One moment Boris was the mentor who was helping Alec and the next he was a B plot villain! I thought that was truly great. All that being said I’d like to try and offer some constructive feedback for the story as best I can.

For starters, I felt like the A-plot needed more weight. I got the impression that it was a man vs nature kind of story. Alec was too afraid of venturing through the forest so that he could reach his friend but chose to anyway. I felt like we only got glimpses of his negative feelings toward the forest through the story. It did really come back around when he leaves Boris’s house where he was now capable of navigating the forest and wasn’t afraid of it anymore. However, it felt like the B story pushed the A story a little too much. I got a clear feeling of Alec and Boris’s relationship but never really a good picture as to why he didn’t like the forest. I would add in a little snippet about some cousin or something going missing in the forest. It would level the A and B story enough to add suspense to the whole Boris interaction.

I never really got an idea of who the characters were because there wasn’t as much description about them. Boris was great no problem there. However, I would have liked to know what Alec looked like. I am always a big advocate for a blank character that you can project onto. However, this time it felt like Alec had too much of a specific character and I would have liked to attach that character to someone. Doing this would have let me experience the drama that happened to Alec. When I try to put myself in the same situation as Alec it’s a lot less suspenseful. I feel like this is because he was a very specific character. If I got in the same situation I probably would not have followed Boris at all. I also personally don’t experience the same level of fear about nature as other people do. So, I couldn’t connect with the main character as much as I would have liked to.

One last note about character. Who was the girl? A mom? Sister? Love interest? Knowing this would have made the story feel more complete. Again, we never really know why Alec doesn’t like the forest or leaving home for that matter. If it was to go meet his girlfriend or something similar I could very much understand why he chooses to face either fear. I also felt like it would be fun to imagine what kind of person she was to Alec. For me, there was just too much ambiguity with her in my opinion.

Story-wise I thought there were a couple hang-ups too. I would have liked to know what happened to Boris. Did he just live in the forest killing innocent people still? Did he get arrested? Not knowing this made me get distracted toward the end of the story. I do feel like if it were a scary story then not knowing what happened would be great. However, I have to get the impression that Boris is still dangerous and out for blood. Doing this would make me equally scared to enter forests as Alec. Could Boris be lurking in the forest today as we know it?! I feel like picking either side to write about would greatly enhance the story.

I really liked this story. I did have to nitpick a bit but that is because I felt like the story flowed very well. It had three characters and two conflicts which is great for the length that this story was. I felt like all the story elements were there as well. Overall, I really liked reading the story.