Manuscript Assessment

by The Manuscript Detective

Title: Dead London

Author: Bryce Raffle

Genre: Fiction-Horror-Steampunk

Audience: Adult

Overview:

The manuscript is in decent shape for a first draft! All the story elements are there and are compelling enough as-is to convince the reader to carry on until the end. Most of the characters are interesting and contribute to the story. Your dialogue is well written, and for the most part comes across as a natural conversation between characters. You have a great natural style for this genre.

Characterization:

* **Annabel Grey/Miss Monday/Mr. Monday, Female, Main POV, 32 scenes**: This character is a delight. She has an interesting backstory (orphan, assisted financially by Mr. Tidkins, injured & repaired after ‘zombie’ attack) and these bits come through in her personality. I caution you to avoid letting her fall into a Damsel Trap, i.e. she becomes instantly smitten with the hero & suddenly cannot do all the awesome things she could before. There are places I’ve noted in the text where she notices Jonathan in a romantic way which does not seem in keeping with her character, NOR the situation at hand. I appreciate some romance, but it isn’t necessary to have her making goo-goo eyes at him. I suggest keeping it lighthearted and strictly to teasing in the dialogue, rather than making her have these romantic thoughts at odd times. Also, she has several pseudonyms, at least 3 that I can recall offhand. Make sure that you choose one for her to refer to herself (Annabel) and only use the other names when in dialogue with other characters
* **Jonathan Grimmer, Male POV1, 24 scenes**: Overall, this character needs the most work. Jonathan remains the same through the entirety of the story and does not show any real character growth. He is the least interesting of the characters, when he should be the most intriguing. At times, he calls himself a cad/womanizer, but there is no evidence to support this. He needs a reason to be a cad, so he can have something to overcome on a personal level, while he is working on his global problem. This will give him more depth, and make him more believable & interesting. I found myself reading quickly over the scenes in which he was the only character, as he just isn’t as interesting as Annabel or Roderick. Also, if you intend for Jonathan to be the main POV, you need to see if some of Annabel’s scenes can be rewritten for Jonathan. She has 8-10 more scenes than anyone else, so this makes her the **MAIN POV** by default.
  + Give him more heartsickness over his father’s death (he never got to tell him X, growing up they weren’t close and now he lost his chance, OR, they were close but had a disagreement and left things on bad terms, before Mr. Grimmer died) so that he NEEDS some closure.
  + Give him a scene to be a dandy/fop/cad/whatever, so he has room to grow. This should be somewhere in the first few chapters.
  + Give Jonathan a more satisfying climactic moment. See below.
* **Roderick Steen, Male POV2 20 scenes**: Roderick is very interesting. A painter, a young, handsome lover, a tiny dog, and a flair for fashion. Please be careful he doesn’t fall into an effeminate stereotype. I do think that eventually he proves himself to be more than the stereotype. Also, his deductive capabilities are nearly on par with Sherlock Holmes (which is mentioned in the story, I believe). I’d probably make a point of showing that he is lucky, or inventing it as he goes, or occasionally makes a mistake, in order to avoid too much comparison. His lover, Remy, dies off scene. He needs to see this happen, and it needs to be bad…so the readers need to see it to. Later, he kills Tidkins in retaliation. It would be fitting if somehow Tidkins killed Remy, and taunts him with that info. Also, both Roderick & Jonathan make mention of a potential relationship between the 2 of them (Jonathan in a less than positive manner); you might consider this as a subplot.
* **Parson Sinews, No POV scenes:** There are vague remarks in the story indicating that Sinews is something other than human...eventually it is revealed he is fae, which honestly surprised me a great deal. There are no other instances of magic in this story, so this sticks out a bit, and there doesn’t seem to be a reason for him to be fae. Perhaps if he had a mutation of the Lazarus Virus that made him a vampire (he drank blood instead of eating brains) …or was the original source, as a vampire, and the virus has degenerated into this zombie stuff. That would still fit in with the ‘science’ you’ve got in this story. Otherwise, it’s hard believe that this guy is fae when nothing else is magical.
* **Anthony Tidkins/Jack Bernhardt, 2 POV scenes:** I really like Tidkins’ flashback scene, and his (unnamed) scene in which he releases some more of the virus. I REALLY like them. However. I’m not convinced you need the flashback scene, nor am I convinced it’s in the correct place in the story. Same with the unnamed scene. That one might work better towards the beginning, before we have any idea who the ‘bad guy’ is. If you do like having Tidkin’s POV, you might sprinkle in a bit more from him.
* **Kip & Kas**: Kas can be eliminated, and her lines given to Kip. There isn’t any reason for her to be included, and having her as a named character clutters up your already large cast. Or you could give all Kip’s lines to her, but that would be a bit more complicated to go back and fix. You mentioned the airship captain as well; Kip could become the Captain, Kas could do it, or all three could become the same character. 3 birds, one stone.
* **Dr. Karnstein & Lucy Marshall**: Could they become the same person? I think it’s reasonable to have Dr. Karnstein introduced early on, as she has a decent role later on. Lucy has no other role, and I did wonder what happened to her.
* **Remy**: His sole purpose in the end is to come back and die. I realize this is the moment that causes Roderick to want revenge, and eventually he does kill Tidkins, BUT…Jonathon is your main POV. This is a BIG moment, and you’ve given it to Roderick. I think that Remy’s death is unnecessary and can be removed, and perhaps Jonathan can kill Tidkins. If you decide to keep Remy & his death, I suggest bringing him back earlier on and giving Roderick a chance to learn to appreciate him before he loses him-this will make Roderick the more sympathetic and interesting character over Jonathan, however.

**Structure**:

I’m a huge fan of K.M. Weiland’s method for structuring your novel. It makes perfect sense, and gives you a tight plot with all the right pieces in all the right places. I’ll address Dead London using her chart as a reference, which you can find here: [Structure Your Novel Chart](http://www.helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com/resources/structuring-your-novel-visual-chart/). I’ve noted where things are working well, and where you could improve them to strengthen the structure overall, thus reinforcing the story.

**Act 1** – Your first act is fairly strong, which is a good thing as it brings the reader in. Here are my recommendations:

1. Hook: Pg. 21, “If he was to gain an audience with Lord Connor, he needed to get the man’s attention.” This information, along with the rest of the paragraph lets the reader know who Jonathan is, where he is, and why…along with doing it in an interesting way. **This should be the book’s opening scene.** It makes the reader want to continue, and find out exactly **why it’s so important he see Lord Connor**. Everything that comes before needs to be cut (prologue) or moved to AFTER this scene (Annabel’s scenes).
2. Inciting Incident: (pre-story) **Death of Jonathan’s father**. Without this, Jonathan wouldn’t have taken over the company, never would have found the paper saying “***Lord Henry Connor is Francis Varney***,” and wouldn’t have come looking for Lord Connor in the first place. The **rest of the story would never happen** if Jonathan’s father hadn’t died. This is a great inciting incident.
3. Key Event: Pg. 30. “Connor was dead. Even from where he stood, Jonathan could see the bullet hole through his skull.” Jonathan goes looking for Lord Connor, and finds him dead(-ish). In this scene, **Jonathan is now a part of the Dead London story**…the ‘murder’ of Connor by Mr. Monday, the Resurrectionists, zombies, etc. He can’t unlearn what he knows. My only suggestion here is to make sure you always show Jonathan’s POV before Annabel’s, and flip between the 2 at approximately the same moment.

**Act 2** – Your second Act needs some tightening. You have most of the right pieces, some need to be cut down & some expanded upon. I think if you are able to add a few of the scenes mentioned for the first Act, it will help this one to come into place a bit better.

1. 1st Plot Point: (This should be at the 25% mark of your book.) Pg. 32 “He hesitated before he said the rest; he was either a witness to Lord Connor’s murder, or he was an accomplice. Better, he reasoned, to be an accomplice.” This is **a make-or-break choice** for Jonathan. Once he decides to become complicit in hiding the body/helping the murderer escape, he puts himself in opposition to the Resurrectionists. Annabel, for her part, decides to allow him to live. This is a great plot point.
2. Strong Reaction: Pg. 40. “He looked at the body on the floor. He must get rid of it; that was the only answer he could think of.” Jonathan’s reaction (to help Annabel rather than tell on her) is that he now needs to do something with the body, and escape. Annabel’s reaction is to leave him, since he might have been seen coming up the stairs. This section could use a bit of work.
3. 1st Pinch Point: Pg. 48. “The sound of mechanical wings echoed through the stunned silence of the ballroom. A cloud of green and yellow gas trailed behind the clockwork crow. It spread quickly as the raven circled the ballroom, filling the room with a yellowish green haze. As it dispersed, it disappeared into the air, becoming invisible.” The **Resurrectionists release the gas in the ballroom, turning everyone into zombies**. This potentially points the blame back at Jonathan, as he could have been seen going up the stairs, and he was on the guest list. **This is where your bad guy shows some muscle**. This is a great pinch point, though Jonathan is not in this scene.
4. Turning Point: Pg. 138. This should be at the 50% mark in the story. “There were probably only a handful of people who knew about the Lazarus Virus…Jonathan had suspected that the Resurrectionists had killed his father. He couldn’t leave. Not now.” **Jonathan could go with Mr. Ocelot, but decides to pursue the truth.** He is now after the Resurrectionists rather than running from them. **A complete reversal** of his earlier stance, and shows a bit of character growth; no longer happy being the silly playboy, he is ready to be a grownup & fight the Resurrectionists. From this point ON, he should show steady growth i.e. fewer instances of his earlier immature behavior. He should try to avoid those things he knows are bad for him (drink, drugs, women, whatever) so that when he does have a “relapse” later on and is drugged, he will learn his lesson.
5. Strong Action: Pg. 162. “Jonathan’s priority was still finding the Resurrectionists…Palmer had worked closely with Jonathan’s father. He might know something about the Resurrectionists.” Jonathan returns to his publishing company to talk to his father’s oldest colleague, Palmer. This is a logical action to take after the Turning Point. I do think that **Palmer is too ready to spill the beans** about the Grimmer family helping the Resurrectionists. I would like to see Palmer trying a bit harder to let it go, or perhaps he does tell all with the aim of making Mr. Grimmer look bad (maybe he assisted in getting him killed, out of jealousy?) This could be a much stronger scene if it weren’t broken up with other POV scenes, and the Tidkins story were shortened.
6. 2nd Pinch Point: Pg 212. **The villain arrives**. “You go by Anthony Tidkins these days, don’t you?” You follow this up with Annabel giving us some memories of Tidkins. This is a great place for them, but you should consider cutting out anything that isn’t necessary to the plot.

**Act 3** –Your climax is not focused on your Main POV. Roderick has the “big” satisfying scene, not Jonathan.

1. 3rd Plot Point: Pg. 315. Palmer’s voice sounded slow, and hollow, as Jonathan lost consciousness. “Miss Monday is going to kill Anthony Tidkins, given half a chance. I intend to stop her, by any means necessary.” Jonathan is betrayed by the man he thought of as an uncle, when he needs his help the most. His weakness, absinthe, allowed Palmer to drug him. This reinforces the Turning Point.
2. Climactic Moment: Pg. 340 “Died on Saturday,” he said as he fired the first bullet. He put two more in Grundy’s chest. “Buried on Sunday.” This is NOT BIG ENOUGH for your Main POV’s climactic moment. Grundy is not a big enough adversary; he isn’t the guy in charge of it all (Tidkins) & he isn’t directly responsible for Jonathan’s father’s death or anything else personal to Jonathan. Jonathan needs to be the one to shoot Tidkins, OR **you need to give Grundy a slightly larger role, and make him directly responsible for Mr. Grimmer’s death**. That way when Jonathan kills him, he (and the reader) will have a sense a satisfaction and closure over his father’s death.

**Assorted Notes:**

A lot of time is spent with Roderick in Newgate, basically running around and getting others killed. I think these scenes could be shortened and used to better effect. Pgs. 145, 160, 172, 199, 220, 230, 237 all start scenes with Roderick in Newgate. Many of them can be cut down/rewritten, and some could be expanded upon, such as when he has to put a bullet in his long-time colleague (which would be fairly traumatic, and dare I say enough that the Remy trauma isn’t necessary?). I don’t know that both Hargrave AND Taggart need to be in these scenes, nor do they both need to die. It’s a bit overkill…ha! Probably just Taggart, and make it mean something. Shortening these scenes will help put the focus on the main POV, Jonathan.

Dr. Karnstein should be Lucy. That way she turns up at the party in the beginning, in the middle when she names Sinews as the Resurrection man to the police, and again physically in the end. You could use one of her pseudonyms, but I think it might be more confusing to the reader. The characters wouldn’t realize anything untoward, except Sinews himself perhaps. This makes more sense, and gives you a nice little character arc. Also, it makes better sense for Grundy to be at the party with another Resurrectionist, and since we know later on that she WAS there, then, well, this should be her!

All of Jonathan’s scenes, especially from the first quarter of the book, need more added to them. Descriptions, dialogue, everything. You can take a little space and show us his character a bit; make him a bit of a rogue by winking at ladies inappropriately, or stealing a dance from a married woman or whatever. All while he’s scoping out the room. Have him check out the kitchen and steal a kiss from the cook, or a tart. Whatever. I mean, steal a tart from the cook. ☺ We need to see him in his “normal,” whatever that is, before he can make a change. Layer in some of his backstory from the Prologue, specifically that which involves Annabel, throughout the first few chapters. Just enough so that the reader gets the idea that they might be connected in the end.

You showed us plenty of Annabel, in fact, I think you might want to scale her back a bit…it pains me to say that, because I love her. Or give her her own book! With not too much work, you could make THIS her story. While Annabel & Jonathan are linked via their connection to Dr. Allen & Tidkins, and the zombie virus they carry, their stories are very different. It almost reads as though we have 2 books spliced together for 2/3rds, and then the last third they come together. Also, Annabel has so many different names, and you use them interchangeably. She should always think of herself as ‘Annabel,’ and should not be called Annabel AND Miss Monday (as separate characters) in the same scenes. She is Annabel Grey at the beginning, but you might just drop the ‘Grey’ part to avoid any confusion. Later on, when all the characters are aware that Miss Monday IS Annabel, you can still have them call her that in dialogue if you wish, but her tags should still be “Annabel said…”.

Your Prologue and the flashback scenes should be shortened, and layered into the story. While well written and interesting, the Prologue doesn’t add vital information to the story, nor does it start the story right with the action, to hook the reader. We can glean most of what we need from the rest of the story. The flashback scene where Annabel meets Anthony can definitely be shortened so that the reader only receives the necessary info.

You should always use the POV of whoever knows the least amount of info; in most cases, this will be Jonathan. Any scenes that can be rewritten from his POV should be.

You’re going to want this novel to come in somewhere between 85-95K when all is said and done, for this genre. I think that you have enough material here that you can cut some to get within these word count parameters and still tell the story you want to tell. After you go through and make your own edits and rewrites to the material, I recommend you have someone read through it again. Your grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. are pretty good.