The Zebulon: Manuscript Pages/Synopsis Scoring Guidelines

The main round of judging scores the submission's manuscript pages and synopsis.

Format

The manuscript pages and synopsis (two separate documents) must be formatted as follows:
- Documents must be in .doc format (not .docx).
- Double-spaced.
- Ragged right margin. Use left justification. Do not use center, right, or full justification.
- A one-inch margin all around (top, bottom, left, and right).
- Use 12-pt. Courier New or 12-pt. Times New Roman font only. (Be aware that many word processors do not default to these fonts.)
- Pages must be numbered.
- Headers may include title and page number, but not the name of the author.
- **No personally identifying information**.

Manuscript Pages

Entrants must send the **first 2500** words of their manuscript as a sample of their work. If the novel has a prologue, the first 2500 words may begin with the prologue or with chapter one, your choice. No words beyond 2500 will be read. You may break at a logical point in your story or in the middle of a sentence.

The pages must be numbered and headers may include the title as well as the page number. **Your name may not appear anywhere within this document.**

Synopsis

A synopsis up to **500** words in length is required as part of your entry. While the majority of your score will come from the manuscript pages, the synopsis is still an important element It tells the judges that your story has a plot and a resolution. No words beyond 500 will be read.

The pages must be numbered and headers may include the title as well as the page number. **Your name may not appear anywhere within this document.**

Judging Criteria for the Manuscript Pages and Synopsis

The submission **will be disqualified** if there is any author identifying information, including the author's name, web site or previous titles.

Every entry is scored by two judges. If the two scores diverge by twenty points or more, then a third judge will score the entry. The two closest scores of the three will be used. (There still may

be a gap of twenty points or more between some scores, but the entry will not be scored again.) The three entries with the highest scores in each category will advance to the VIP round. An average score of 80% or above is required to advance to the final round.

Manuscript Pages and Synopsis Scoresheet

Scoring:
- 5 = Outstanding; of publishable standard.
- 4 = Good; above average; needs minor rewrites.
- 3 = Average; needs some revision.
- 2 = Fair; some elements missing; shows promise.
- 1 = Recommend significant rewrite.
- 0 = Element missing entirely.

A note on scoring: Only if an element is entirely missing should it receive a score of 0. In all other cases, the minimum score should be 1, "Recommend significant rewrite."

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Manuscript Pages (Please judge ONLY the manuscript pages and do not include insights or other aspects of the story or characters you learned from the synopsis.)

The Opening Scene

1. HOOK. Is the opening scene compelling? Does it make you want to read more?

2. SETTING. Does the author provide a sense of time and/or place?

3. PROBLEM. Does the opening introduce the conflict and/or themes of the book?

Characterization

4. MAIN CHARACTERS. Are they interesting and/or sympathetic, despite their flaws? Are they multi-dimensional, with weaknesses and strengths at least implied?

5. SECONDARY CHARACTERS. Are they well developed? Do they enter the plot naturally and unobtrusively? Are they believable and necessary? If there are no secondary characters, is this a logical and reasonable beginning for this particular story? (If so, give the entrant 3, 4, or 5 points. Do not penalize them unduly.)

6. PORTRAYAL. Are characters described by more than just their physical traits and apparel?

Dialogue and Narrative

7. BALANCE. Do dialogue and narrative flow together seamlessly? Or does one dominate the other unnecessarily?

8. DIALOGUE. Does it read naturally for the time and place? Does it reveal information about the characters? Does it move the story forward? Does it avoid obvious and awkward info dumps?

9. NARRATIVE. Does it move the story forward? Does it avoid unnecessary exposition and info dumps?

10. APPROPRIATENESS. Is each character's voice consistent? Is the voice appropriate for his/her age, background, education, ethnicity, social standing, etc.?

11. POINT OF VIEW. Is the POV handled appropriately? Are POV transitions appropriate? Do POV transitions flow naturally or do they interrupt the flow of the story?

Pacing and Conflict

12. PACE. Does the story move along at an appropriate pace for the genre via language, sentence structure, dialogue and action?

13. FLOW. Does each scene have a clear relationship to the scenes that precede and follow it? Do scene breaks make sense, or do they leave the reader confused about where and/or when they are?

14. CONFLICT. Is the conflict compelling to the reader as well as forcing the character into action? Is the conflict appropriate for the type of story/genre? Does the character try to resolve the conflict in a compelling manner?

15. PLOT. Is it plausible? Is there enough initial conflict in the submission to pull the reader into the book?

Style and Technique

16. MOOD/TONE. Does the feeling or atmosphere created evoke the appropriate response in the reader? (For example: sorrow, laughter, sympathy, fear, etc.)

17. STYLE. Is the work free of cliché? Is the voice interesting? Has the author avoided the overuse of adjectives and adverbs?

18. SENSES. Has the author used sense (taste, touch, sound, smell, sight) to create a clear and vivid picture?

19. SHOW AND TELL. Does the balance between showing and telling work? Is the story active instead of passive?

20. SENTENCES. Does the sentence structure and length vary?

The Synopsis (Only. Do not include insights or other aspects you learned from the manuscript pages)

21. TENSE. Is the synopsis written in the present tense? The industry standard is for the synopsis to use present tense, no matter what tense is used in the book itself.

22. COMPLETE. Does the synopsis clearly define the entire storyline? Are the main characters' goals, motivations and conflicts clearly revealed and resolved?

23. ANTAGONIST. Is the antagonist a fully realized character or conflict? Is the antagonist defined by strengths and weaknesses? Is the antagonist related to the story and not just an incidental "force of nature?" (Note: If the antagonist is a thing, belief, institution or trait/struggle within the main character, is the opposition clearly and convincingly presented?)

24. CLUTTER. Is the synopsis free of unnecessary characters, names, subplots and details? Is the synopsis clear and not confusing?

25. PLOT/CONFLICT. Is the struggle between the protagonist and the antagonist enough to carry the story through to the ending?

26. SATISFACTION. Is the resolution complete and satisfactory to the reader? (Please note, satisfactory does not necessarily equate to happy.)

27. ORIGINALITY. Does the concept of the work have freshness? If the idea is not original, is it presented in a fresh way?

Technicalities

28. MECHANICAL. Is the submission free from mechanical errors? These include typos as well as spelling and punctuation errors.

29. GRAMMATICAL. Is the submission free of grammar errors? Or, if errors exist, are they necessary to the story, such as in some dialogue?

30. RULES. Was the entry presented in a professional manner, following the contest rules? This includes, but is not limited to, spacing, margins, justification and submission length.

31. GENRE. Was this story submitted under the correct genre? (Note to judges: Please briefly explain any score less than a 5.)

BONUS

32. On a scale of 0-5, with 0 meaning "not at all" and 5 meaning "very much," how much would you want to read this entire book?