

1. FICTION (*The Red Moon Trails – A Novel in Progress*)

FEEDBACK FROM 'OUR VOICES' PROJECT BY BY CREATIVE SCOTLAND AND THE ASSOCIATION OF SCOTTISH LITERARY AGENTS (ASLA)

The Red Moon Trails by Nabin Chhetri

I am actually quite blown away by this sample. And I don't say such things lightly. The notes I made whilst reading are primarily quotes that leapt out as being quite special. Having read the submission, I understand the author has stalled for some years. That is such a shame - often the most talented writers are the most self-critical. Having read the sample and synopsis, I wonder if there is more to read - even in draft form - that the author hasn't shared? If so, this may be where the 'Our Voices' process can provide the most constructive help.

Voice, storytelling and characterisation are all excellent. The atmosphere and sense of place stand out to me as exceptional. The early scenes in the village and subsequent scenes in the prison are so detailed and vivid you could almost be there. The poetry and lyricism of the writing is beautiful. There are a few moments which might be described (by some) as over-written, but that is searching for something to critique and the lightest of line edits would resolve.

The early scenes have descriptions that are an absolute joy to read. The witch doctor grandmother being so successful at healing humans that people start taking sick cows, buffalos and goats to her clinic... The father 'despising her profession because it was noisy'... the father eating a whole goat on his own because he is 'obsessed with meat'... the grandmother having her head shaved at her own living funeral, after which the narrator can't look at her because 'she was nothing more than a bald nun'. It's all just brilliant!

The author succeeds in immersing the reader so deeply that the devastating lurch into the brutality of war and sudden loss of innocence is all the more heightened. The story of a sweet boy hardening and becoming cruel is painful to read. The prison scenes are powerful and accomplished. Again, it is the poetic and descriptive language that brings the horrors into full focus.

There is no doubt about the author's writing talent. However, I have only read c.20K words of the intended 100K. What I would be keen to see next is a very rough sketch of the rest of the novel

and a clear vision for the finale. Having the end point in sight might help the author get back on track. I wonder if the author's methods of writing poetry are perhaps holding him back from finishing the novel. Crafting each sentence this beautifully requires zoning in so closely that taking a step back can become difficult - especially if writing without an editor. I represent another novelist who is also a poet, and he had a similar issue. Once it was unlocked by the right editor there was no stopping him!

Jenny Todd (Panelist)

Founder (The Literary Office)