

Fiction Clinic

STORY ANALYSIS & DIAGNOSTICS

SAMPLE ANALYSIS REPORT

The Silence Between Stars

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Genre: Science Fiction
Submission: Manuscript Excerpt (~2,600 words)
Report: Full Fiction Clinic Diagnostic
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This document is a sample Fiction Clinic analysis report, created to show prospective clients exactly what they will receive. The manuscript excerpt below is entirely fictional. The diagnostic analysis is representative of a real Fiction Clinic report.

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SECTION I — MANUSCRIPT EXCERPT

SUBMITTED MANUSCRIPT

The Silence Between Stars

Chapter One

The beacon had been silent for eleven years.

Yael Dross stood at the observation window of the DSV Korinna and watched the planet below rotate in its slow, indifferent arc. Dust-red, ocean-grey. She had memorized its color from the mission files — Kepler-442c, tidally locked on one hemisphere, storm-choked on the other. The habitable band was a thin ring of perpetual twilight, and somewhere inside that ring, a research station had stopped transmitting.

"We're in range," said Fenn from the comms station. He was young — too young for a mission like this, Yael thought, though she'd stopped saying it out loud. "Still nothing on the primary band. Nothing on secondary. I've been running sweeps since oh-four-hundred."

"I know," Yael said. She didn't turn from the window.

The mission briefing had been precise: locate the Halcyon Station crew, assess their condition, and if possible, restore contact. Standard recovery protocol. What the briefing had not addressed was the reason for the silence — and the agency, to Yael's considerable irritation, had not volunteered one.

She pulled up the station manifest on her wrist display. Forty-one researchers. Fourteen months into a three-year assignment. Their last transmission had been a routine status report — cheerful in the way that transmissions from isolated postings always were. A little too cheerful, she now thought, reading it for the eighth time.

Fenn swiveled in his chair. "Can I ask you something?"

"You're going to regardless."

"Why did you take this assignment? You could've had the Meridian run. Everyone wanted the Meridian run."

Yael finally turned. Fenn had the open, unguarded face of someone who still believed that asking questions was harmless. She used to look like that. She didn't remember exactly when she'd stopped.

"Someone had to," she said.

It wasn't the whole truth. But it was the part of the truth she was willing to carry out loud.

* * *

The descent shuttle was called the Minnow, which Yael found either darkly funny or deeply ominous depending on the hour. She ran pre-flight checks alone. The rest of the crew – Fenn, Dr. Solis the mission physician, and a security officer named Breckett who had barely spoken since departure – were suited up in the hold.

She had not told them what she'd found in the supplemental files. The ones that required her command-level clearance to open.

Forty-one researchers. Fourteen months in.

And in month eleven, a single notation in the psychological assessment logs, flagged and then – she was nearly certain – deliberately buried: collective dissociative episode. Duration unknown. Origin unknown.

She sealed her helmet and went to join her crew.

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SECTION II — DIAGNOSTIC REPORT

FICTION CLINIC DIAGNOSTIC

The Silence Between Stars

The following analysis covers the submitted manuscript excerpt. Each section addresses what is working, where attention is needed, and specific observations drawn from the text. The report closes with two actionable revision strategies.

01 BIG-PICTURE STRUCTURE

What is working:

This excerpt establishes a compelling inciting situation with admirable efficiency. Within the first scene, the reader understands the mission, the setting, the crew dynamic, and the protagonist's emotional withholding. The structure is clean: arrival, orientation, revelation. Each beat earns its place. The buried psychological assessment log at the close of the excerpt is a strong structural move — it transforms a rescue mission into something with a much darker center of gravity, and does so without exposition.

Where attention is needed:

The excerpt functions well as an opening, but the narrative question it poses — what happened to the station crew — is almost entirely external. Yael's internal stakes are gestured at but not yet grounded. By the end of this excerpt, the reader is curious about the mystery but not yet invested in Yael specifically as the person solving it. The structural risk is that the story becomes a puzzle-box narrative rather than a character-driven one. Both can work — but the choice needs to be deliberate, and right now it reads as unresolved.

02 CHARACTER CLARITY

What is working:

Yael is drawn with a confident, economical hand. Her guardedness feels earned rather than performed. The contrast with Fenn — his openness, his harmless questions, his unguarded face — effectively illuminates her without requiring the narrative to explain her. Dr. Solis and Breckett are present but deliberately underwritten at this stage, which is appropriate for an opening chapter.

Where attention is needed:

Fenn's function in this excerpt is primarily to draw Yael out — and he does that job. But his own interiority is thin enough that he risks becoming a device rather than a person. His question about the Meridian run is useful, but we learn nothing about why he is on this mission, what he wants, or what he fears. If Fenn is going to be significant to the story — and his placement suggests he will be — even a single line of genuine interiority would anchor him considerably.

03 STAKES EVALUATION

What is working:

The external stakes are clear and credible: forty-one people are missing, the agency is concealing information, and the protagonist knows more than she is telling her crew. The physical environment reinforces the stakes atmospherically — a tidally locked planet, storm-choked, permanent twilight — without belaboring them.

Where attention is needed:

The personal stakes for Yael are currently underdeveloped. We sense she has history — with missions like this, with the agency, possibly with loss — but the narrative withholds this so completely that there is no emotional tripwire yet. The reader needs at least one moment where the cost to Yael specifically becomes imaginable. Without that, the stakes remain professional rather than personal, and professional stakes are rarely enough to carry a novel.

04 PACING OBSERVATIONS

The pacing of this excerpt is one of its genuine strengths. The prose moves with authority — no scene overstays its welcome, dialogue is used sparingly and to good effect, and the shift from the observation window to the shuttle pre-flight is handled cleanly. The final image (Yael sealing her helmet and going to join her crew, alone with knowledge they don't have) is a strong chapter close. If there is one caution, it is this: the excerpt establishes a register of restraint that will need to be sustained. Stories that open this quietly set a reader expectation. Honor it.

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SECTION II — DIAGNOSTIC REPORT (CONTINUED)

05 REVISION STRATEGIES

The following two strategies address the most significant opportunities for strengthening this manuscript. They are not prescriptive — they are directions worth considering before drafting continues.

Strategy One

Ground Yael's stakes in the present tense.

We sense Yael has history — with the agency, with loss, with missions that went wrong. But sensing is not feeling. Before the next chapter, identify one moment — just one — where something in Yael's past creates a specific, present-tense consequence. It does not need to be dramatic. It might be a file she opens that she was not supposed to open. It might be something she says to Fenn when she should have said nothing. Whatever it is, it should feel like something only a person who has lived through what Yael has lived through would do. That moment will transform her from a compelling mystery into a character the reader is afraid to lose.

Strategy Two

Give Fenn one moment of genuine interiority.

Fenn is well-deployed in this excerpt as a foil for Yael — his openness against her guardedness is an effective contrast. But he is currently defined entirely by his relationship to her. Before his next scene, ask: what does Fenn want from this mission that has nothing to do with Yael? What does he believe that she doesn't? What is he afraid of? Even a single line — a thought he keeps to himself, a detail he notices that Yael doesn't — will give him enough interiority to become a person rather than a function. And when the story puts him in danger later, the reader will feel it.

*This concludes the Fiction Clinic diagnostic report for *The Silence Between Stars*. This is a promising opening with a strong voice, a well-constructed situation, and genuine atmospheric authority. The issues identified are addressable — none require starting over. They require going deeper.*

Coming Soon from Fiction Clinic

Do you have a detailed story outline but haven't started drafting yet? Fiction Clinic will soon offer Outline Analysis — a dedicated diagnostic for writers who want to stress-test their story architecture, character arcs, and stakes before committing to a full draft. Visit fiction.clinic to be the first to know when it launches.