

Section 1:

#1: Opening paragraphs (I woke up untethered...) Strengths: Your vivid imagery of floating above the bed creates an immediate sense of a world without normal physics. Your metaphor of being "caught in the slow orbit of a forgotten planet" effectively establishes the dreamlike quality of this reality. Weakness: Underdeveloped sensory experience. → While you've introduced visual and olfactory elements (the membrane's "smell of mint and nostalgia"), the character's emotional response to this extraordinary situation feels somewhat understated. The character accepts their situation with remarkable calm, which misses an opportunity to deepen reader engagement through the protagonist's internal response. Exemplar: *I woke up untethered, heart racing as my fingertips brushed against nothing but air. Not metaphorically. Literally. Floating a few feet above my bed, my blanket spiralling gently around me as if I were caught in the slow orbit of a forgotten planet.*

#2: The Dissonant Plains passage Strengths: Your concept of a river flowing through time rather than space is brilliantly inventive. The talking fish with monocles adds whimsical charm whilst reinforcing the world's unpredictability. Weakness: Rapid scene transition. → The passage moves quickly from one fantastical element to another without allowing readers to fully immerse in each concept. The extraordinary notion of a river flowing through time deserves more exploration before introducing the talking fish and weather with moods. This rapid transition diminishes the impact of each inventive element. Exemplar: *I passed a river that didn't flow through space, but through time—its waters thick with memories not yet lived, rippling with forgotten birthdays and first kisses that hadn't happened. When I dipped my fingers in, I felt yesterday's rain and tomorrow's sunshine simultaneously, a sensation both frightening and exhilarating.*

#3: The Archive and Archivist scene Strengths: Your portrayal of the Archivist as having a face of "forgotten dreams" creates a hauntingly beautiful image. The concept of communication through sensation rather than sound is deeply original. Weakness: Underdeveloped central revelation. → The Archivist's insight that "The world is not broken, it is improvising" serves as the story's philosophical core, yet its delivery feels somewhat rushed. This pivotal moment lacks sufficient buildup and reflection to deliver its full emotional and thematic weight. Exemplar: *"The world is not broken," the*

Archivist whispered through my ribs, each word resonating like a tuning fork against my bones. "It has simply discovered freedom from its own certainty. It is improvising." As the truth settled within me, I felt my own rigid expectations begin to dissolve, replaced by curiosity.

■ Your piece demonstrates remarkable creativity and creates a wonderfully surreal world where physics has become fluid. The language you've used is rich and evocative, particularly in your descriptions of the Spiral Archive and the Archivist. However, your piece would benefit from slowing down in key moments to fully explore the protagonist's emotional journey as they navigate this unpredictable reality. The character seems too quickly at ease in this strange world, which reduces tension. Additionally, the philosophical revelation about the world "improvising" rather than being broken needs more development to reach its full potential. Try expanding moments where the character experiences confusion or wonder, allowing readers to process the strangeness alongside them. Also, consider developing the relationship between the character and their animate possessions (boots, coat, bag) as this offers intriguing possibilities for exploring how identity functions in a world without normal rules.

Score: 46/50

Section 2:

Where The Rules Forgot Themselves

I woke up untethered. Not metaphorically. *Literally*. Floating a few feet above my bed, my blanket spiralling gently around me as if I were caught in the slow orbit of a forgotten planet. The room had vanished, replaced by a soft, translucent membrane that hummed with the faint smell of mint and nostalgia. Outside, four suns flickered in and out of existence, like an argument between light itself. Gravity, apparently, had taken a holiday.

#1

I stretched, yawning into the odd silence. My boots were already pacing the ceiling, locked in their usual argument with my coat about what "down" even meant today. I clapped twice, and they dropped to the floor with an exasperated sigh. "Walk or float

today?" they asked in unison. "Walk," I replied. "But with flair." They shimmered with delight and fastened themselves around my feet.

I was heading to the Spiral Archive—a library impossible in every sense, perched atop a giant tortoise composed of thunderclouds and unsung verses. It only appeared when called by a melody that had never been heard before. So I hummed, letting whatever sound wanted to escape rise from within. The world seemed to tremble, and the path ahead opened.

The Dissonant Plains stretched out before me, still clinging to yesterday's physics. Up was sometimes sideways. Down was occasionally a forgotten thought. I passed a river that didn't flow through space, but through *time*—its waters thick with memories not yet lived. Fish swam backward in slow rewinds, dressed in monocles and offering unsolicited advice. One murmured, "Avoid the thought storms. They're feeling sentimental today." #2

I nodded. Here, the weather had moods.

As I stepped into the Plains, the ground forgot to be ground. I moved across colour—vivid and alive. Deep magentas and humming teals. Each footstep left ripples of laughter that weren't mine. Halfway through, I became something else—a cloud, then a flame, then a child running toward nothing. It felt like being caught in the middle of a dance, every form more curious than the last.

There was no resistance. The world wasn't breaking. It was improvising.

And then the Archive appeared—slow, spiralling, like a secret unfolding. It rested atop its tortoise host, who exhaled stars with every breath. I whistled a note that would never come again, and the doors opened like petals greeting the dawn.

Inside, silence did not mean absence. It meant presence—attention. Books floated by like thoughts not yet captured. Light bent lazily through the air. The walls were more like thresholds, portals into something not yet known.

The Archivist stood in the centre, though maybe it didn't stand. It was simply there, woven into the Archive's pulse. Its face was an ever-shifting mask of forgotten dreams—of people I could've been, or will be. When it spoke, it wasn't with sound but with sensation. A warmth, a knowing. The kind of quiet wisdom you feel in the bones. #3

"You seek what cannot be caged."

I nodded. "I want to understand why the world changed. Why does it feels like it's waking from something."

The Archivist opened a book with no pages—only reflections. I looked.

I saw the old world: clean, ordered, precise. It had rules, formulas, and borders. It had structure. And yet beneath it, something had been yearning. The laws hadn't collapsed. They had stepped aside. Not chaos. A liberation.

"The world is not broken," the Archivist whispered through my ribs. "It is improvising."

Outside, the sky erupted into applause with petals falling upward. The tortoise shifted, and the stars above stirred like sugar in tea. My bag purred softly against my back. My boots tapped to a rhythm the clouds were composing.

For the first time, I didn't want to fix the world. I wanted to *dance* with it.