

## Section 1:

#1 "The sun beat down like a blacksmith's hammer on the cracked bones of the Whispering Dunes—an unforgiving stretch of desert where even vultures thought twice. Most travelers avoided it. But I ain't most travelers. I'm Dusty Joe, the youngest courier west of the Rio Grande, and my partner? Well, he's a creature of myth and misery."

Strengths: Your opening immediately establishes a distinctive voice with colloquial language ("I ain't"). The vivid imagery of the sun as a "blacksmith's hammer" creates an immediate sense of the harsh setting.

Character introduction lacks depth → Your introduction of Dusty Joe tells us he's young and a courier, but misses an opportunity to show his personality traits beyond being different from "most travellers." ***I'm Dusty Joe, the stubborn-as-a-mule courier who'd earned my reputation delivering what others called impossible, with nothing but grit, a canteen, and my infamous companion.***

#2 "Thunder didn't move like a horse—he pitched, jolted, and swayed like a ship in a storm. But he was tireless, and when he chose to run, he could outrun a dust storm and twice the thunder."

Strengths: Your comparison between Thunder's movement and a ship creates a unique mental image. The description effectively conveys Thunder's unusual motion and exceptional endurance.

Limited sensory experience → The description focuses solely on how Thunder moves visually but misses opportunities to engage other senses like sound and feel. ***Thunder didn't move like a horse—he pitched and swayed like a ship in a storm, each footfall landing with a muffled thump against the sand while my bones rattled inside my skin, yet somehow his endless stamina made the brutal journey bearable.***

#3 "After the skirmish, the fort's commander strode over, his face still streaked with gunpowder and awe. "Dusty Joe," he said, clapping a hand on my shoulder, "you and that... formidable creature just saved this garrison." Thunder, ever modest, let out a disdainful snort and spit at a rock like he was unimpressed. But I knew the truth."

Strengths: Thunder's personality shines through his reaction, showing his character without dialogue. The contrast between the commander's gratitude and Thunder's apparent indifference creates humour.

Undeveloped resolution → The ending of this critical moment feels rushed without showing Dusty Joe's emotional response to their success. ***"Dusty Joe," he said, clapping a hand on my shoulder, "you and that... formidable creature just saved this garrison." My chest swelled with a mix of pride and relief—not that I'd admit it. Thunder, ever modest, let out a disdainful snort and spit at a rock like he was unimpressed. But I caught the satisfied twitch of his ears. We both knew the truth.***

■ Your writing paints a colourful world with plenty of character, especially in how you've developed Thunder as a unique companion with a distinct personality. The voice of Dusty Joe comes through clearly in places, but remains inconsistent throughout the piece. You might consider deepening the relationship between Dusty and Thunder by showing more moments of connection between them—how they communicate, how they support each other in danger. Additionally, the plot moves quickly through key moments like the bandit confrontation that could benefit from slowing down to build tension. Try focusing on Dusty's thoughts and feelings during these high-stakes situations to help readers connect more deeply with his character. The setting details are strong at the beginning but fade as the story progresses—maintaining those vivid environmental descriptions throughout would strengthen the reader's immersion in your world.

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**Overall score: 43/50**

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Section 2:

**Title: The Ride of Dusty Joe and the Thunder Llama**

#1 The sun beat down like a blacksmith's hammer on the cracked bones of the Whispering Dunes—an unforgiving stretch of desert where even vultures thought twice. Most ~~travelers~~ [travellers] avoided it. But I ain't most ~~travelers~~ [travellers]. I'm Dusty Joe, the youngest courier west of the Rio Grande, and my partner? Well, he's a creature of myth and misery.

Thunder was no ordinary steed. He was a towering, shaggy, foul-mouthed llama with a temper hotter than a branding iron and a spit so accurate it could shoot a fly off a cactus at twenty paces. Meaner than a rattler and braver than a grizzly, Thunder was the only soul I'd trust to cross hell with me—and often did.

We lived in Cactus Ridge, a sunbaked outpost where messages ~~traveled~~ [travelled] faster than bullets and carried more weight. One blistering afternoon, the saloon doors slammed open with the urgency of a gunshot. Sheriff Beatrix charged in, her face whiter than a sheet hung at high noon.

"Dusty Joe," she panted, hat clutched to her chest, "bandits are headin' for Fort Sandclaw. If we don't get word there before sunset, that place'll be a smoking ruin."

Without hesitating, I grabbed my hat and my gear, bribed Thunder with his daily ransom—a single carrot—and clambered onto his woolly back. He sneezed, grunted, and launched into motion like a freight train waking up angry.

#2 Thunder didn't move like a horse—he pitched, jolted, and swayed like a ship in a storm. But he was tireless, and when he chose to run, he could outrun a dust storm and twice the thunder.

We crossed the jagged teeth of Rattlesnake Ridge and plunged into the Wailing Winds Canyons—bandit land, carved by time and trouble. The wind howled like ghosts mourning their own bones, and the sun scorched every inch of flesh it touched.

As we reached the mouth of Coyote Pass, there they were—three bandits lounging in the shade, blocking the only way through. Their leader, a wiry man with a mustache that curled like a villain's promise, stood and smirked.

"Well now," he said, voice slick as oil, "what's a boy and his overgrown sheep doin' way out here? That llama carryin' gold?"

I met his gaze. "Nope. Just the kind of news that ruins your day."

They didn't like that. Steel flashed. Grins widened. They moved in like wolves closing on a wounded deer.

And Thunder?

He locked eyes with the leader, snorted, and let out a war-cry that sounded like a banshee with bronchitis. Then he charged.

It was chaos. Thunder crashed into the lead bandit like a runaway boulder, sending him flying into a thornbush with a scream. He spun and fired a glistening gob of spit directly into another's eyes. The last one turned tail, screaming something about demons and never looked back.

We didn't stop to celebrate. Thunder bolted forward with a fire in his belly, kicking up clouds of dust as we surged through the pass like a storm on legs.

We reached Fort Sandclaw just as the last light dipped below the red edge of the horizon. Soldiers were sitting down to supper, unaware of the ambush that almost was.

My warning turned dinner into a defense line. When the bandits arrived, they found not an easy target—but a wall of rifles and wrath. They didn't stand a chance.

#3 After the skirmish, the fort's commander strode over, his face still streaked with gunpowder and awe.

"Dusty Joe," he said, clapping a hand on my shoulder, "you and that... formidable creature just saved this garrison."

Thunder, ever modest, let out a disdainful snort and spit at a rock like he was unimpressed. But I knew the truth.

From that day on, legends rode the wind—of a wild-eyed courier and his thunder-hooved companion, who outran ambushes, spit in the face of danger, and left even the desert wind whispering their names.

