

Assessment of New Adult Portal Fantasy

Dear [Author],

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to beta read the first part of your manuscript. In addition to leaving comments on the manuscript itself, I've included a summary of the major items I noticed as I was reviewing your manuscript.

In my review, I focused primarily on plot progression, characterization, and worldbuilding. Some of my comments focus on my real-time reader reactions as I read through the manuscript, while other comments focus on effective or less effective narrative elements. At the beginning of each chapter, I leave an overall comment summarizing my thoughts. In addition to leaving comments on the manuscript itself, I've summarized the major items I noticed as I was reviewing your

I've tried to focus on areas of improvement that I feel would help the story the most, but as always, remember that my suggestions are just that--suggestions. Ultimately, this is your manuscript, and you know which suggested changes and revisions will be most beneficial.

I thoroughly enjoyed reviewing your story, and I hope you will find my suggestions helpful as you revise. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or comments about my suggestions! I'm happy to clarify or give more details on any of these sections!

Thanks,
Kelly

Hook

I loved the opening prologue--it did a great job introducing the reader to the "fantasy" elements of the world and the magic system. The chapter ending on Cecil losing his memories also builds a lot of tension for the reader. The prologue gives readers a lot of questions, which can propel them to keep reading. (For example, readers might be curious about the mystery of what Cecil and his nieces are running from, the mystery of what Fenrick is doing at the portal, the questions about the magic, and the mystery of Cecil losing his memories.) The hints at the magic system in the opening chapter were also well done--I felt like I had just enough to be interested, but not so much that it felt overwhelming or infodumpy.

Even though the chapter following the prologue is technically "normal," the tension and danger from the previous chapter carries over, which makes it exciting to read. There is also some great irony that comes from the reader knowing things the characters don't--for instance, the characters see Fenrick as a crazy conspiracy theorist whereas the reader knows that Fenrick is talking about real danger.

Overall, the prologue and first chapter do a great job establishing the themes and tone of the story. After finishing them, I was excited to keep reading to find out what happens next. (I felt so immersed in the story that I kept having to remind myself to stop and leave comments as I went along!)

Worldbuilding/Setting

I love the magic system in this story! The idea of having to pay a price to cross through portals is a very interesting mechanic. I also really liked the concept of the eight magics--it was fun to see all of the types of magic in action by the guardians.

As I mentioned under the Hook section, the prologue does a great job of introducing Landellia, even though the scene takes place in the real world. The hints about culture and language make the world feel rich and complex.

The real-world setting was also a lot of fun--I loved following Cecil and his nieces along as they went through their everyday routine. (Establishing this routine made it more impactful when this “normal” life was forcibly ripped away from the characters.) I also loved seeing how setting was important for characters--for instance, it was interesting to see Cecil, Blair, and Kendell’s grief at their house burning down. Fenrick’s house shows how much he wants to return home (since it’s shaped like houses from Landellia).

There are a few places where setting details might be a little unclear for readers. I’ve left comments in the manuscript on places where this might happen. These issues are closely related to blocking--many times the “big picture” setting (location in general) was clear, but the “small picture” (where characters are in relation to the setting or to one another) was a bit confusing occasionally.

Another thing you might consider is that many scenes in the second half of this segment take place in the forest. That’s not necessarily a bad thing, but the different scenes might blend together because of the similar settings. You might consider varying location a bit more. (For instance, the final scene at the lake is a great example of a scene with a distinct setting—Blair having to fight her way through the water is a new image for the reader and does a great job showing her character in a new way.)

Narration/Dialogue

I LOVED the tone of the story--it has a great balance of tension and humor. Cecil’s more adult narration felt distinct from Blair’s teenage narration. It was also a lot of fun to hear from Fenrick’s perspective in the prologue, then see how other people view him in subsequent chapters.

Dialogue felt realistic, and it seemed like each character had their own unique way of speaking. There were a couple bigger chunks of dialogue that could be cut down. There were a few

instances of head hopping (the narrating character intuiting another character's thoughts/emotions/motivations too accurately). I pointed out the ones I noticed as I went through.

One thing to consider is that the later part of this segment (starting when Blair is taken to the camp by the guardians) is a little dialogue heavy, particularly in conversations between Cecil and Blair. You might consider cutting the dialogue in this section down a bit, or separating the dialogue scenes with a bit more action/plot progress. (I've included some more notes on this in my in-text comments.)

Another thing to consider is that we don't hear much from Kendell in this segment--she only gets two short scenes from her POV. You might consider either cutting her entirely from part one (and exploring from her perspective more in part two) or expanding her scenes to be a little more significant (since the two scenes she narrates are mostly "holding pattern" scenes where the reader doesn't learn much new information). Expanding her scenes would also help show how her character is distinct from Blair.

The different narration POVs do make classifying this book's age range a little tricky--Cecil's chapters feel new adult/adult whereas Blair and Kendell's feel firmly young adult. As someone in the "new adult" age range, I liked having both the adult and teen perspectives, but I also regularly read YA, so I'm used to reading about younger characters. But this could be something to consider while querying, since agents/publishers might hesitate if they're not sure where the book would fit on the shelf. Right now, the story seems to straddle the line between YA and new adult.

Character

Fenrick: I LOVE Fenrick--he's such a fun side character. I love how complex his character is--he helps Cecil and the girls, but he also has his own motives and goals. The narration did a great job characterizing him as a grumpy old man--his dialogue and actions do a great job showing the reader his character. His dialogue was also HILARIOUS, and he helped add a more light-hearted tone during tense scenes. I loved the scene where we finally find out Fenrick's motivation for helping Cecil and his nieces--it makes him such a dynamic and three-dimensional character.

Cecil: I liked seeing the contrast between the fun-loving Cecil with amnesia, to the warrior who has been through a lot of traumatic events. This duality makes him an interesting character for the reader. I loved seeing how much he cared for his nieces. They had some great parental figure/teenager interactions! (I loved all the ridiculous excuses he tried to come up with.) There were a few moments where I wasn't quite sure why Cecil acted in a certain way. For instance, I wasn't sure why he was reluctant to kill Baldor (shooting his phone, then shooting Baldor in the foot), but killed the other thug. That made me think that there was some sort of history between Baldor and Cecil that made Cecil reluctant to kill him. If that's true, then it might be helpful to hint at that past relationship. If there isn't any special reason that Cecil is reluctant to kill Baldor,

you might consider either having Cecil try and fail to kill Baldor, or have the man that Cecil kills be an imminent threat against one of his nieces. Essentially, Cecil needs either a special justification for *not* killing Baldor, or a special justification for killing the man. (Or he just tries and fails to kill Baldor.)

Blair: I loved seeing Blair's relationship with Cecil. Her narration has such a great teen voice! She felt so dynamic and three-dimensional. You might consider establishing her motivation to learn more about her past/her parents earlier in the narrative. Blair's desire to connect to her family is a key reason why she chooses to go through the portal, and hinting at this desire earlier on will make the emotions behind her decision feel more impactful for the reader.

Kendell: I'm very excited to see how the eighth magic storyline plays out for Kendell. One thing is that at this point in the narrative, I'm not quite sure how Kendell's character is distinct from Blair's. Since we only have the two scenes with Kendell, we don't get enough time to see much of her character. (Although, we do get some good hints about her liking boys and sleeping in a lot.) One thing you might consider in this section is giving Kendell a chance to make more choices. Right now, a lot of this narrative shows Kendell reacting to situations, and her reactions might be a little general. For instance, when she is kidnapped, she tries to run away (which is a totally normal and believable action!) and fight back (also a totally reasonable reaction!). The only issue is that Blair reacts in an almost identical way to these same threats, which makes it hard for their characters to be distinct. One strategy you could try is being a bit more specific in the *ways* they try to fight back and run away. For example, does Kendell just run as fast as she can in the opposite direction while Blair tries to hide in a tree or cover her trail? Does Kendell fight back by screaming at the top of her lungs and headbutting her captor whereas Blair tries to sneakily injure her captor? Seeing the girls react in different ways in similar situations would help develop and distinguish their characters for readers. (Of course, these are just examples--the main goal is to give characters the space to act and show the reader who they are.)

Baldor/Trention: As a reader, I felt like I wanted a little bit more about Baldor's background and why he was a threat to Kendell. We get a lot of general information (that Baldor and Cecil have a history, that Cecil knows Baldor means them harm, that Baldor is a relentless transporter), but we don't have a lot of specific, concrete details (For instance, Cecil remembering how Baldor laughed while stabbing an old woman, or how Baldor kicked twelve puppies in one day, or how Baldor followed an enemy 100 miles in one day while transporting). Providing more specific details can often *show* the more general information, while also fleshing out Baldor's character beyond just "general evil." (Also I was just intensely curious about the Baldor/Cecil relationship and I was DYING for more hints.) Some of Baldor's actions also seemed a little inconsistent to me--for instance, at first it seems like he wants to kill Fenrick, but later he chooses to keep Fenrick alive. What changes? It also didn't quite make sense to me why he decides to let Fenrick and Kendell go--what reason does he have to do that? Was he trying to capture Cecil? A bit more clarity on his motivations might be helpful.

Winstor: I liked Winstor and his magic! It was so intriguing! He was definitely the guardian that stuck out most in my mind (which makes sense, because he's the one who communicates with Blair). I'm very curious about how well he knew Cecil before and what their relationship was like.

Plot

As I mentioned under the Hook section, the story's premise is so unique and engaging! I felt immediately immersed in the world. I felt that the first five chapters in particular had a great balance between tension/danger and recovery. (For example, the car scene with Fenrick complaining about car snacks was a fun way to slow down from the tense kidnapping scenes.) I'm so invested in what happens next in the story--the plot does a great job introducing more and more questions and mysteries for the reader. There are many different "plot seeds" that have been planted, and it's exciting to see how they will be developed.

One thing to consider is that some of the scenes might feel a bit repetitive for readers. For instance, in chapter 4, Blair and Kendell are kidnapped and try to run away, but are captured again. At the last minute, Blair is saved from death. In chapter 6, Blair and Kendell try to run away, but Kendell is captured. At the last minute, Blair is saved from death. In chapter 7, Kendell is captured and tied up. These scenes have similar events and reveal similar information to the reader. Having these similar beats so close to each other might not be as engaging for readers. You might consider cutting down some of these scenes, or revising them to feel more distinct. Each kidnapping should be "different" in some way that moves the plot forward. For instance, do we learn something new about Baldor when he captures Blair and Fenrick? Do we see how Blair reacts to being kidnapped in the first scene, but in the second scene we see how Kendell reacts?

Similarly, chapters 7 and 8 contain three different Cecil/Blair heart-to-hearts. Having so many of these close together may lessen their emotional impact on the reader. I would suggest cutting some of these down (Perhaps someone else could teach Blair about magic? Or Fenrick explains magic to Kendell? That might be a way to make the scene from Kendell's perspective where they are kidnapped feel more important to the plot.)

Another thing you might consider is expanding Blair's emotional arc. Right now, her major change (deciding to return to Landellia) occurs in one chapter which is mostly dialogue. Starting this arc before a more action-packed/dangerous scene might add more weight and tension to her decision. It might also help her change feel natural for the reader (since it happens over time, instead of during one conversation). Interweaving the emotional arcs with the physical arcs will help show how a character's actions and experiences are influencing their actions.

One exercise you could try in order to cut down repetition and better combine emotional and physical arcs is to try to cut down this beginning section by 25%--having a limited amount of scenes can help force scenes to accomplish as much as possible for plot and characterization in a

short space. After this exercise, you might end up adding some scenes back, but you might notice some scenes that can be cut or combined in a way that makes the narrative stronger. (Of course this is just a suggestion--there are tons of different ways to revise.)