

Editorial Assessment of *Blood Magic*

Dear [Author],

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to beta read *Blood Magic*. I thoroughly enjoyed reviewing your story, and I hope you will find my suggestions helpful as you revise.

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 included a summary of the major items I noticed as I was reviewing your manuscript.

I've tried to suggest 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.

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

The opening chapters are very gripping; in the very first chapter, there are multiple plotlines going on (stranger coming to the Desert, Kendri's choosing ceremony) and the reader has a lot to look forward to. Kendri's Choosing Ceremony being cut off gives the reader lots of anticipation.

The betrayal and battle scene immerse the reader in the action and help the story start off with high stakes. The dragons threatening to take back *all* their magic if Kendri can't recover the lost magic raises the stakes even further. Kendri's mother being put to sleep means that Kendri has to make major decisions for herself, without relying on other people's guidance.

Overall, the first few chapters introduced Kendri as a brave and independent heroine, sent her on a dangerous quest, and raised the stakes for her quest. The varied plotlines introduced give the reader a lot of mysteries to look forward to.

My main suggestions around the hook center around the betrayal and fight scene. I've left some comments in the manuscript about possible revisions to help the scene feel more realistic.

Worldbuilding/Setting

In my opinion, the worldbuilding is one of this story's greatest strengths. It was so interesting to explore the contrast between the Desert and Darroine through Kendri's eyes. While Darroine's world may be more familiar to readers (being more modern), having Kendri experience that kind of culture for the first time makes everything feel new and fresh for the reader. The story is filled with subtle details that show how Kendri feels like an outsider (e.g., cutting her hair, riding a train for the first time). The culture of the Desert was also interesting and engaging. The reader only sees it for a few chapters, but it helps give a good setup for Kendri's character for the rest of the story.

The magic system is also very interesting. I like how the story blends modern industrial society with classic fantasy. Although the magic system itself is a little more mysterious (for example, where magic comes from remains mostly a mystery), there are clear rules and limitations to the transfer of magic. The capitalistic supply-and-demand element of selling magic felt very unique to me. There are a few questions I have as a reader about the magic system after finishing the story, so I'll include those here in case it's helpful for you to know what potential questions readers could have (Of course, these don't necessarily need to be explicitly addressed in the story). Questions: What happens if someone's magic is returned to them, then stolen again? (It sounded like magic would be permanently restored if returned to the original owner, but what would happen if that magic was stolen again? How long would it last?) How long does it take to extract magic (a few seconds? a minute?)? What percentage of the population is born with magic? Where does magic come from originally? Are there different branches of magic?

I would say my main suggestion as far as worldbuilding goes would be to have Kendri explore Darroine more. Right now, she stays primarily in the SDF building and only goes out on missions occasionally. Since the cultural details about Darroine that are already included are so interesting (e.g., r'all game, economic system, illegal market, high rates of poverty, industrialism), allowing Kendri to explore more could really help the reader feel more interested and immersed in the story.

Narration

Kendri is an engaging narrator, and it is fun to explore this new world through her eyes. In narration, there seems to be a pretty good balance between Kendri's internal dialogue/decision making and her description of action around her. The tone strikes a good balance between serious and light-hearted (leaning a bit more toward light-hearted), which feels perfect for YA. It's a pleasure to follow Kendri on her journey, and the first-person perspective allows us to understand Kendri's character and motivations.

There are so many beautiful descriptions throughout the story that help the reader visualize the world! Overall, the narration style was a pleasure to read.

Dialogue

For the most part, the dialogue feels realistic and characters speak in distinct ways. There are some places that may be a bit dialogue heavy (I pointed them out in the manuscript as I read through), which might lose the reader's interest. One suggestion here would be to look at dialogue-heavy scenes and make a list of what that scene is accomplishing (information for reader, worldbuilding, character development, conflict set-up, relationship development, etc.). Then, see if there is a way to include that same information in a scene that has a little more suspense or tension. In some cases, that could mean cutting out unnecessary dialogue. In other cases, that might mean adding a more action-packed or dangerous backdrop to the dialogue (for example, a conversation in a lion's cage might have more tension than that same conversation in a park). The main goal is to have scenes accomplishing as many things as possible--for instance, a scene that includes both interesting dialogue that builds character relationships AND an adventure that advances the plot. (A good example of this in *Blood Magic* comes from the heist that Kendri, Violet, and Xavier pull on the rich lady. In that scene, Kendri, Xavier, and Violet have dialogue that shows their personalities, relationships, and team culture. The backdrop of the tense heist puts pressure on the characters, advances the plot, and keeps the reader on the edge of their seat.)

One thing to watch out for during dialogue may be the communication rings--the rings can be very effective during active missions or combat, but when used for extended conversations *outside* of dangerous situations they may make dialogue feel unengaging. When using communication rings, there is very little opportunity for little visual description or action tags, which might make dialogue feel slow and uninteresting.

Character

Kendri: Kendri is an engaging character, and I love the physical and emotional challenges she must overcome. Her insecurities (not being accepted by the dragons or her people) and her motivations (protecting her people and getting back the magic) help the story be character driven. It's a pleasure to follow along in Kendri's head, and the reader keeps rooting for her. Kendri's reluctance to kill (and the guilt that comes along with unintentionally assisting in others' deaths) makes for some great internal conflict.

I did find myself growing a bit frustrated with Kendri in the middle section of the manuscript (when she works for the SDF). The first part of the story is very character driven, with Kendri independently making deliberate choices to protect her people. However, this independence is lost toward the middle, when Kendri is mostly told what to do by her SDF team. When she did act independently, most of her actions ended up causing trouble for the team. It did pick back up for me when she became Malek's bodyguard and she had to make choices with high stakes (for example, the scene with President Cristyn). But I think I would have liked it if Kendri was able to be a contributing member to the team *before* she becomes Malek's bodyguard.

Xavier: Xavier feels like a complex character who makes an interesting and complex love interest for Kendri. I loved learning about his background and what brought him to the SDF. The plot twist about him and Violet being siblings was very surprising! I'm curious about the people in red jackets--that sounds like it will be a very interesting plot point in future books. I was curious what other jobs he was doing for Malek--it might have been interesting to see some of his double life as a spy.

As far as his relationship with Kendri goes, his deception makes him an interesting love interest from the start. This betrayal adds some great tension to their relationship, but he still manages to redeem himself by the end. The scenes where they have to work together were cute, and the few times they made physical contact felt meaningful. However, right now a lot of the scenes between him and Kendri can be dialogue heavy and may feel a bit repetitive. The conversations between Kendri and Xavier also seem to follow a set pattern: Kendri has a problem, Nike tries to fix the problem or comfort Kendri, Kendri feels better. (This pattern can be seen in the haircut scene, following scenes with Violet, after the death of President Cristyn, etc.) It may be beneficial to try to mix up this pattern a bit to help their interactions feel new and fresh to the reader.

In addition to reworking some of their dialogue scenes to have more action-packed backdrop, you may also consider having Xavier and Kendri have scenes together with less dialogue and more action. One way to do this could be to have them in a situation where they can't talk to each other, but they still need to interact (For example, if Xavier were to do a mission with Malek while Kendri was Malek's bodyguard they would be unable to talk normally, but they would still have to interact physically and emotionally. Of course that's just an example--any situation where they have to communicate or interact without dialogue would work.) The lack of dialogue can help add more physical and emotional tension to a romantic relationship.

Another idea could be to have Xavier and Kendri connect at a superficial level in addition to connecting at a deep level. Right now, a lot of their dialogue is very emotionally raw and powerful--which is a good thing! But balancing that deep connection with some more light-hearted scenes could help readers invest in their romance even more. (For example, does Xavier show Kendri around Darroine? Do they get food together? Do they have similar interests? Do they do something fun together? Do they teach each other fun traditions from their cultures?) With all of these suggestions, the main goal is to have Xavier and Kendri's relationship evolve in new ways throughout the story.

Tianna: Her betrayal felt like the perfect plot twist! It was completely unexpected, but it made total sense at the end. I loved the contrast between Kendri's perceived idea of Tianna (loyal, steadfast, trustworthy) with Tianna's actual motivations (jealousy, power, revenge).

Dragons: I loved the distinct appearances and personalities of the dragons. The dialogue of each dragon was distinct, and the descriptions of them were beautiful. The twist at the end of them being human without their magic was fascinating. I'm excited to see that explored in later books.

The Director: I wish we had been able to see a bit more of him, since he only shows up in person twice. I'm especially curious about his background and his motivations, and I wonder if he is as morally upright as he seems. His initial interaction with Kendri is very enigmatic, and I wish we got to see a bit more of him. I kind of wonder if he is going to turn out to be evil! But I think showing more of him could help immerse the reader in the structure and politics of the SDF--right now the SDF itself doesn't feel very interesting to the reader. Expanding more on the SDF setting and on the character of the director could help readers feel immersed in the SDF world.

Violet: Violet felt like a fun character with a distinct voice and personality. Her animosity toward Kendri adds some great conflict and gives Kendri the chance to prove herself. I assume a lot of her dislike of Kendri stems from jealousy (since her brother is spending more time with Kendri). I know you mentioned in your revisions that you are having Kendri pretend to be Violet's bodyguard, and that sounds like an effective way to help develop their relationship more and show more of the tension between them.

Dan: He's a fun character with a quirky personality, but he did feel a little two-dimensional to me. It seems like Kendri viewed him as a father figure, but I didn't quite feel that come across in their interactions. I wonder if it would be beneficial to show more about how he contributes (perhaps along with showing more of the SDF dynamics and politics?). I also didn't quite understand what his purpose was in missions, aside from just creating the communication crystals. His death at the end felt emotional, but I didn't feel *too* sad about it. Kendri also didn't revisit his death after the final battle, so that might be something to touch on in the final chapter.

Malek: Malek starts off as "the big bad" but he becomes a more complex and nuanced character as we discover more about him. His reveal as Kendri's father is a great twist (him referencing a book made by an explorer was a good red herring). I do wish we had more time while he was alive to explore his and Kendri's relationship--we never get to know Malek's thoughts on the matter which was a bit disappointing to me. Kendri's mother revealing his identity at the end feels a little anticlimactic. It may make their final confrontation more dramatic if Kendri knows about her identity as his daughter beforehand.

L: I think she might be my favorite side character. Her personality is filled with contradictions--she's bright and bubbly while working for a crime lord, and she wants revenge on her family. It was interesting how loyal she was to Malek, and I liked seeing Kendri develop a hesitant friendship with the enemy.

Plot

Opening chapters (Choosing ceremony, Invasion, Kendri's decision to leave): These chapters kept me engaged the whole time! I loved how many different plot points the reader is introduced to in the very first chapters (e.g., Kendri's father, potential love interest, recovering lost magic, stolen magic, cursed mother). Throughout the story, these plot points are explored and expanded upon. As a reader, I did have some questions about the first battle (mostly logistical things), and I commented on those as I went along. I was on the edge of my seat during these chapters, and they made me love Kendri as a character.

Middle (Introduction to SDF, SDF missions, Kendri as a bodyguard): I loved the introduction to the SDF! Kendri being kidnapped added some great suspense. The sections where Kendri adjusts to her new life in the SDF did start to feel a bit repetitive for me--there was a lot of dialogue and not a lot of action. My favorite scenes were ones where Kendri got to explore the world around her (for example, going to the market and pulling off the heist). It may be beneficial to add some more action scenes to this section to make sure the story's momentum keeps moving.

Middle (Kendri as Malek's bodyguard): For me, this section picked up a lot--there is great tension from Kendri being undercover and at risk for discovery. Kendri also gets to see more of the world (for example, the train and the r'all game). We also got to learn more about Malek's motivation and personality during this section, which was very interesting.

End (Superextractor, Tianna's betrayal, Final confrontation, Resolution): The momentum from the previous section carries very well into the finale. When Kendri arrives back at Desert, the reader's expectations are subverted a bit when she finds her home is in a much different state than how she left it. As I mentioned before, Tianna's betrayal fits in so well here, and is such a satisfying surprise for the reader. The final battle with Malek where they visit the land of the dragons is fascinating! Malek's defeat is a great example of poetic justice, and Kendri is able to exploit the rules of the world in a creative way to defeat him. The conclusion with her helping Xavier over the wall again is a great callback to the opening chapter. (The finale of the book mirrors the beginning in many ways, which highlights how much Kendri has changed over the course of her quest.) The finale also does a great job tying up most loose ends, while still leaving enough options open for a potential sequel. Overall, a very satisfying conclusion!