

**Note: This is an example beta reader report produced by Angela Traficante of Lambda Editing. This report was based on an unpublished novel and is not an actual client's work.**

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# Beta Reader Report

**Manuscript Title:** *Hematite and Glass*

**Manuscript Author:** Jane Doe

**Manuscript Word Count:** 75,000

**Reader:** Angela Traficante [Lambda Editing, [angela@lambdaediting.com](mailto:angela@lambdaediting.com)]

**Edit Date:** January 2021

**Note about confidentiality:** I never share any of your work with others. Once the project is complete, I will delete all your content from my laptop.

## Introduction

Thank you again for selecting me to provide beta reader feedback on your novel! This beta reader report is intended to provide general feedback on the plot, pacing, characters, setting, and writing style of your novel from the perspective of a reader. What that means is that I will be giving my opinions of your work such as: whether it feels engaging and compelling from a reader point of view, what aspects of it I enjoyed or didn't enjoy, notes on the characters, what I felt was done well and what might need more work, and whether I understood the overall plot. I will also include a brief editorial assessment regarding what next steps I think would be best for your novel.

If you have any questions, please let me know. Keep in mind that I am merely an outside reader giving my opinion of your work. Ultimately, you are the author and owner. You understand the intent and goals of your writing and have far more context on your own experiences and ideas and how to translate them to the page. Take my advice—and anyone's advice—with a grain of salt. None of my feedback is intended to hurt or attack your work and all of it should go through careful consideration by you before being integrated into the manuscript.

## About Me

I am a thirty-three-year-old woman from Boston, Massachusetts, USA. I have a dual-major degree in Computer Science and Literature from Bennington College (Bennington, Vermont), and I worked in the tech industry as a software developer and product manager before switching careers to be a full-time editor and author. I enjoy books of all kinds, although primarily adult and young adult fantasy, sci-fi, paranormal, romance, thriller, mystery, horror, historical fiction, and literary fiction.

# Feedback

## Overall Impressions

*Hematite and Glass* was just my style of book—a slow burn fantasy with a lot of world-building and character development. I really appreciated the time taken at the beginning to introduce Felrendyre as a place with its own society, because it really highlighted how out of place and different Elessa felt there. That said, I do wish there had been a little bit more action mixed into the first half of the novel. I loved that it came to an explosive ending, with Alexei's assassination attempt, but for a world filled with magic and unstable politics, I wanted to see more of that firsthand.

## Plot / Pacing

The opening of the novel was super interesting. I was immediately hooked by the mystery of who Elessa was and where she was. Her own panic and tension definitely came through and affected mine as she slowly tried to piece together what had happened. When Kasanar appeared, I was terrified of what would come next, since I wasn't sure where the story was going—my mind definitely went the same dark places that Elessa's did at first.

From there, it was nice to let that tension drain as Kasanar explained what had happened (that he'd found her nearly dead and brought her to Sortha), and it was touching to see how kind he was to her as she revealed her own trauma with her husband and the slavers.

I loved how quickly you opened the world, getting Elessa and Kasanar out and about together, integrating her with the new city, and finding a place for her there. I also love how that was often juxtaposed with Elessa's own insecurities.

I'd say the novel slowed down a bit in the 20% - 60% range. While it was nice to see the descriptions of Sortha and Elessa's experiences there, it all felt a little too much like world-building and not enough like plot progression. I didn't feel like I needed to know every detail of Elessa's life, down to what she was wearing in each scene, where she got her clothes, and what tea she was drinking.

Although some of that detail was nice, what I felt myself most drawn to in the plot was how Elessa was going to use her magic and knowledge to help the archive, how she was going to use her community among the dancers to heal her trauma, and how she was going to pursue a relationship with Kasanar. And because she basically flames out early on that last one, the middle section felt devoid of a large amount of tension that could have existed. Instead, it ended up being stalled because of Kasanar's rejection and their shattered friendship.

The final 30% - 40% (when Alexei arrives and the Winter Lights celebration begins) really upped the pacing, though! I loved Alexei's strong characterization and his potential as a

love triangle character. The assassination attempt upped the action and really drove home both Kasanar's friendship with Alexei and also his feelings for Elessa.

I really loved the epilogue and the hook for the next book. It was nice to see that things didn't work out 100% perfectly for all the characters, but that they were all on interesting and workable paths for the future. The potential of seeing Alexei's home in Evendyre really excited me, especially with all the hints dropped about how the Eastern Elves are much different than their Western brethren. If there was a Book 2, I would have bought it immediately.

## Grammar / Writing Style

Considering that you said this was a first draft, I was really impressed with the overall writing style and cleanliness of the manuscript! Although there were some issues with comma misuse and some typos here and there, it was very readable. The style was consistent, and I felt you had a good grasp on the differences between the way Elessa, Kasanar, and Tilan talk. It was refreshing to feel like they each had their own style, and it really helped differentiate their characters.

The major style issue I noticed was your tendency to use interrupts (with em dashes) a lot. See this example from Chapter 12:

Kasanar frowned. "I don't know what you mean—"  
Elessa cut him off. "You know exactly what I mean! I've stayed here for you and you've hardly noticed. Don't act dumb—"  
"I'm not," Kasanar said. "I don't want... I never wanted this to get between us—"  
"Well, it has."

I would use interrupts like that a lot more sparingly, since it really makes the conversation feel choppy and disjointed.

Finally, keep an eye on the number of times you use filter words. Filter words are words which put distance between the reader and the action/emotion. In particular, Elessa likes to use "felt", "looked", and "saw". Because the novel is in the first-person perspective, the reader can just assume that Elessa is feeling, looking, and seeing. It usually doesn't need to be stated. Take this example:

I **saw** Kasanar look at me. I smiled back, **feeling like** all the breath was leaving my body at once. As I **saw** him make his way toward me, I automatically stood up straighter, checking quickly in the glass to my left that my hair wasn't askew. I **saw** that it was perfectly fine.

All the extra filter words are a little clunky and distracting to read.

## Characters / Relationships

**Elessa** – I thought you did a really great job on a realistic portrayal of her abuse and trauma. Elessa comes through as very complex—she has strength and confidence, but she's also processing a lot of change and a lot of pain. I love how she's almost always able to talk herself into positive outlooks on things, like her foray into dance lessons and her taking on a much larger role in the archives than she might be ready for. I loved the visual of her moving from the beginning of the novel where she's trapped (literally) by magic, all the way to the end where she has used her magic to save Alexei's life and is now on a path to branch out on her own. I found that I enjoyed her character much better in the second half of the novel, where there was a bit more balance between her uncertainty and her strength. The first half of the novel, she was a little boring to read because she relied so thoroughly on Kasanar (and, to a lesser extent, Tilan). While I don't think this was unrealistic given what she experienced, I think for the sake of the story, you could speed up her recovery without impacting it too much.

**Kasanar** – I loved Kasanar, but my biggest gripe with him was he often seemed *too* perfect. Aside from his mixed feelings about Elessa and pursuing a relationship with her, he had literally everything else. He's a prince, he's rich, he's kind, he's infinitely patient, he's smart... I didn't really get the sense that he had ever struggled or failed. I think you were trying to set something up there with his interesting dual magicks (healing and destruction), but I didn't get to see a lot of that in action and it was mostly told through exposition, which felt a little distant and removed. His magic was really the most interesting thing about him, and I would have loved to see him use it more! The early tense scene with Dregain brings in hints of it, but a more action-oriented event where Kasanar and Elessa get to use their magicks together would be pretty cool.

**Tilan** – Tilan was such a sweetheart! It was nice to see that she had a much different personality from Kasanar, and I liked that she was shaped by her mother's death and needing to step into that public role, whereas Kasanar has a much different focus. It was interesting to see her perspective when it came to preparing Elessa for life in Sortha.

**Hasulis** – I adored how Hasulis handled Elessa. With all his vast experience, it was clear he understood how best to approach her after her trauma. He gave her options for the future which didn't trap her, which is exactly what she needed. His offers of support and, later, his offers to let her go to Evendyre with Alexei were the sort of compassionate and informed moves I would expect a king to make, and they showed his wisdom in a low-key yet firm way. I also liked that he was willing to let both Kasanar and Elessa make mistakes and grow from them, rather than force them both to do his will even if ultimately it seemed like he knew what was best for them.

**Alexei** – Alex was a great foil for Kasanar. Dark to Kasanar's light. Carefree to Kasanar's careful. Open to Kasanar's closed. It was really interesting to see that despite all those differences, they understood one another quite well and considered themselves to be brothers in spirit.

**Elessa / Kasanar** – I actually liked that Kasanar stepped away from Elessa. I knew that she was looking for more from him, but the power dynamic between them was so drastically different that it felt nice for Kas to acknowledge it. He should have done a better job at communicating, but I think it was necessary for Elessa to get used to Sortha and establish a life there on her own, without Kasanar overshadowing it. Their honest conversations at the end of the novel felt very real, and I loved how they left things—with potential, but with no real promises. I think they had a lot of chemistry in the novel even when they weren't together, so it felt like a natural progression into a relationship without making this book a pure romance novel.

**Elessa / Alexei** – I didn't really like Alexei's insistence on flirting with Elessa all the time. I think you were trying to set him up as a viable alternative to Kasanar, but Elessa's heart was so focused on Kasanar and she was so clear about that with Alexei that his advances seemed a little over the top sometimes. The rest of their friendship—where she opens up to him slowly about her past—was fine, but the physicality and jokes were too much. Especially given that they end up pretty firmly in the realm of friendship at the end of the novel, it was a lot of romance set-up and no payoff.

## **Level of Detail / World-Building**

I loved, loved, loved the descriptions of Sortha, the world-building surrounding magic and the various races, and the descriptions of magic. Although none of it was entirely unique, I thought you brought the elements together in a refreshing way, and I liked how you shined a light on Elessa's feelings of nonconformity and culture shock.

Although I got a lot of detail of what Elessa was feeling and thinking because of the first-person perspective, I would have loved to get a little insight into the other characters with some more details of them. In particular, Elessa didn't really note their reactions during conversations or events. What were the looks on their faces? What gestures do they use? How do they carry themselves? What are their tones of voice? Although I vaguely knew what each one looked like in terms of eye color and hair color, I wanted to be able to picture more of that.

Kasanar, as the love interest, could definitely get more focus. What does Elessa notice about him? In particular, what are signs of his negative emotions? There's a lot of tension between them, especially in the middle of the novel, but there wasn't enough showing of that.

## **Editorial Assessment**

I think a developmental edit or manuscript critique could really help smooth out the romantic development, Elessa's recovery from trauma, and the politics leading up to Alexei's assassination attempt. Although the manuscript was quite readable, there seemed to be consistent issues with comma usage and repetitive word usage that a line editor or copy editor could fix.