

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 This report was based on an unpublished novel and is not an actual client's work.

Sanity Check Report

Manuscript Title: *Hematite and Glass*

Manuscript Author: Jane Doe

Summary

I wanted so much to like this novel, but Elessa's incessant crying and Kasanar's macho, couldn't-care-less attitude really dampened the romance and story in the first half. The action at the end and Elessa's bold decision to leave the city didn't really redeem what was otherwise a boring, overwrought, and repetitive plot alongside a bland setting.

Report

The first and last chapters were basically the only compelling parts of this novel. I loved the mysterious set-up, starting mid-action. I also liked the final fight scene with Elessa and Alexei, Elessa finally standing up to Kasanar and his crappy treatment, and Elessa's excellent decision to move away. I mean, come on, Alexei treats her way better than Kasanar even though he barely knows her! Of course she should go with him.

But the opening and ending were not enough to redeem the boring rest of the manuscript. The fantasy world was wholly unoriginal, with Tolkien-like elves in Rivendell-like cities. In a similar vein, the magic system was also a muddled and rehashed nod to elemental magic, with no interesting twist. Most of the middle of the book was supposed to be Elessa in a fish-out-of-water situation in her new home, but given that she's a more powerful magic-user than anyone else *and* she's the king's new protégé, is there really anything for her to complain about? The vague allusions to her abuse and racist treatment were too told and barely shown. Watching her slog about all day, shopping and eating amazing food and meeting famous people, felt more like it belonged in a contemporary billionaire romance novel and not a high-fantasy tale.

The side characters were the best part of the book. The king was empathetic and witty. Tilan was thoughtful and charismatic. Alexei was pretty much wholly delightful (although he only gets, like, one decent scene). Elessa was wilted and sad and boring. Kasanar had no consistency—does he love her or not? Is he pushing her away or not? Does he feel pulled in different directions by his responsibilities or not? His arc was confused and incomprehensible. And since he and Elessa spend most of the novel not talking, her chemistry is stronger with literally everyone else except for him... the love interest.

I would go back to the drawing board on this one. Give it a real plot with story beats. Give the world-building and magic some flair. Find a way to make Kasanar likeable, and get him in the same room as Elessa once in a while so their relationship can build. Tie in the greater political issues and assassination attempt earlier in the novel, so it doesn't simply come out of nowhere. This isn't a hopeless project, but it needs a lot of oomph to make a reader want to keep going and to make it stand out from a sea of look-alike fantasy novels.