

(Sci-fi?) Fantasy Romance/ 123k

First, I want to say I thoroughly enjoyed reading this story. It had me running the gambit of emotions; laughing; worrying about all the right people; and kept me interested throughout its entirety. Great job!

My job as a developmental editor is to look at your manuscript through the eyes of the reader. The goal is to help you maintain your voice and your vision while advocating for the reader and their expectations when they are reading your story.

Though there may be places that may benefit from a culling or cutting of words and/or paragraphs, chapters, my main job is to help you sell your vision. To find what it is you truly want the readers to feel along this journey they will go on with you and to make sure they are able to enjoy it in the way you want them to.

This editorial letter is broken down into sections—story, plot, descriptions/setting, characters, and then a little bit of information that will hopefully guide you through the editing process as you move forward with polishing your manuscript. I hope to give you well thought out feedback that will help you as you push to transform your story into the best novel it can be. Here we go.

Notes about the comments: Yellow is plot related. Red is specifically for traditional publishing things that will be looked for. Pink is for other comments. Green is for character related comments. Blue is for story-based comments. Obviously, I didn't leave a comment on every little thing that's good or needs help, because the goal is to give you some insight into what

things to look for, whether they are working or not and push them in the direction that is best for your manuscript.

Story.

The story is an overall narrative encompassing what you are trying to tell and the sequence in which it unfolds. It is often referred to as the backbone. The premise and intrigue for *Always Greener* is definitely a strong one. Since it is a (sci-fi maybe) Fantasy Romance, we are looking for those things that particular audience is expecting. This novel delivers on many of the elements that readers of the genre are looking for, but there are some areas that could use some strengthening.

Side Note: Since you are trying to use this manuscript for traditional publishing, I would like to point out that some Agents will also require a synopsis. While creating this can be daunting, it could help you to see where things fall flat and where different plot points should emerge and take shape. Agents are looking for a story that knows how to hit story beats, keep a tale interesting and show character growth. So, if they find that those things aren't showing up in the synopsis, they assume they won't be there in the novel.

Fantasy stories, especially romance typically fall into either a 3, 4, or 5 act structure. The 5 act is usually held for those *hero's journey* stories, which doesn't apply to your story. Yours seems to want to fall into the 3 act and I feel it works well that way. That being said, there are some suggestions I have that might help you hit these act beats more strongly and further immerse your readers into the story.

Act 1. This should be the first quarter of the story. It should bring readers into the world you've created and introduce main character(s) and give an idea of what the readers should be expecting. The end of the first act is strongest when it ends with the main character having to make a decision that forces them into the upcoming story. In *Always Greener*, this comes strongly in the form of Blinne deciding to join a team and embark on a mission to a foreign continent. One of the things I touch on is how this decision needs to be solidified with some tension right where the first act ends and the second begins.

One suggestion I have for helping to make this stronger is perhaps make the signing of the document the act one decision from Blinne. If you make part of it ominous, and have it be something they don't sign until the end of act 1 when they reach the port, it will give readers a major plot question to think about. Have the members of the team chat about it and express worries and really build up the intensity of it being a major decision for her. There could even be something about it being tough to get back to their continent and her medical condition could also cause her to worry about an immediate trip back. If they are given a last chance to head home before entering Luraelin, or sign something else that has some unknown contingencies such as them possibly leaving at any point or something else suspicious that has the team discussing whether they want to continue or not, then when she does decide to move forward it feels more like we are walking into the true heart of the story. Her reluctancies should be shown again here so the reader worries whether she will (or maybe even should) move forward with the mission.

Act 2. It starts off very strong. We get a lot of great things happening from the offset of the team trying to get accustomed to and understanding the culture. There is a little tension brought up and there has been a hint of some type of romance evolving. However, once we hit

the *sagging middle*, we lose a lot of the steam we had coming into it. My suggestion would be to have something major happen from the Coalition somewhere at the halfway point (the second act usually encompasses about half the book). It would help create new story tension and conflict and create problems for Blinne to have to work through.

Act 3. This should cover the last quarter of the book and should work to tie up all loose ends and bring closure to all the story questions. It starts off strong but lacks a little oomph when it gets towards the very end. Initially, I couldn't figure out where the beginning secrecy and suspicious activity that was brought up in the beginning was coming from. I have a suggestion that might help tie a lot of things together in the end. If the story trouble all begins because the Superintendent (whom Veremundt is close with) has become aware that someone has been receiving messages from the other continent, but they don't know exactly where it's going or coming from, perhaps that could be what prompts them to finally push to do a mission so fast. And then their suspicions rise when they feel certain it is someone on the team (not knowing who), and this is actually Kivotrun's mission.

Another thing that I feel you may want to look at is how you create tension and conflict and keep it going. In the beginning, when you create a rise in tension which leads to conflict which leads to the resolution, you either need to break up the distance between conflict and resolution, or once the resolution has happened, have it either immediately not be true, or immediately backfire and lead to something else that is a problem. That way the readers won't grow accustomed to having all the problems that arise, getting fixed shortly after. They need to not trust that all things will work out from the get-go, therefore hoping it eventually works out in the end.

You do a great job of creating these little question inducing or tension like problems, especially in the first half, and they are great. It's the ones that need to linger in the background of the reader's mind, the ones that need to stew for a bit before they come to their resolution that need the work in this manuscript. For instance, when she gets the gift from Veremundt, it isn't some super exciting plot thickening reveal when she opens it. Which wouldn't be a big deal if most of the other reveals didn't so soon after the initial problem, which doesn't allow the reader time to build any real tension or worry about it (I believe I left a comment about a possible suggestion for this). There should be a rise in tension, then a conflict, then a resolution. But it doesn't all need to come in the same chapter when it comes to some of these plot points.

Plot.

Plot is the sequence of events that happens in order to tell the story. For readers, plots are not only different scenes but something that can be measured in beats. While the overall story might have 3 or 4 acts (large beats), the plot will have many.

(I don't have as much on plot in this letter because most of the comments I left throughout the story are plot-based)

Within the first ten pages, we need to have at least one inciting incident, a strong introduction to character(s), give the setting and be given at least one of the big story problems/questions that are promised to be answered by the end of the novel (in this case it would be-can Blinne find her happiness in a career despite her medical challenges, and-will she be able to find love/romance?). It is no small task, but it is what agents require and are looking for if they are to read past the first ten pages that they most often ask for up front.

When thinking of the best way to introduce the inciting incident in the first chapter and begin the novel with a bang, one suggestion I have is to have it start with Blinne having gotten the call from Veremundt already with only a day or two left before the meeting. She can still be tinkering with things outside of work to keep her mind off it. Still have to face the medical examination; still meet up with her sister and have some of the things that are mentioned in the first couple of chapters, but now it starts with her in a “fear of the unknown” scenario. Also, we have no mention of Blinne’s love life. In the beginning, since this is a romance, we should hear her speaking of the failed romantic relationship(s) and how she feels her medical condition and/or career habits will inevitably keep her from ever finding true happiness in love. And this should come at the beginning; letting the readers know that this is a struggle that will be dealt with and hopefully overcome by the end of the novel.

When the trip was first brought up, her thoughts went to the problems between the continents. Which helps to set up some real reservations about what her trip could entail. Then with her father and friend, it turns into only being about her condition. Two possible suggestions, 1. Bring up the contentions between the continents as a major issue with both her friend and her parents so that the reader gets the sense that it is a known scary issue. Or 2. Have her not tell them where it is she’s going, and that’s why they don’t raise the issue (though if it’s still a thing where she is allowed to tell, I don’t think Blinne is the type to lie about it.) Her medical condition should feel like a sidebar at this point. She could mention that yes, the decision to go would be pointless if she isn’t deemed fit to travel, but that should not be the focus of her decision. Then it makes it stronger when she decides she wants to go but has to then rely on the medical team’s decision.

Romance. As far as the romance goes. I felt it was extremely well done. I really enjoyed their relationship and found it believable and entertaining and fulfilling. For the romance genre, readers will be expecting things early on. Since it isn't until the beginning of act two when we get to the Luraelin that we meet Ruai, it is necessary to set up in the first act that there is a struggle for Blinne in that area, preferably in the very beginning of the story. This can come from a discussion with her friend or internally, but it could be something along the lines of her wondering or hoping that the mission will give her confidence and career advancement that might allow her to be okay with falling in love when she returns. But it needs to be established, this is something she's thinking and wants of (or at least her friends and family are), so that the reader believes it's something that will be part of the story.

Ending plot. The part around chapter 46, 47 where they reveal what happened and Bryld admits things doesn't feel strong enough for an ending in the way it's built up strong enough ending for the way it's built up. There needs to be one final moment of fear and panic for Blinne and/or the team. Perhaps Bryld escapes and there is another threat happening and that's why the team must leave abruptly.

The part where they've been on the ship for 3 days and another boat approaches, while somewhat tension building, would be a lot better if there were something going on with what happened to Bryld or if Blinne was left in the dark and unsure how things had really ended with the Elissinerans and the Coalition. Then Ruai could bring that information to the team to finally put an end to that aspect and then the discussion could be about how they are going to begin the next journey of diplomatic endeavors.

Descriptions/Setting.

Not too much to say here. Your descriptions are very well done, and you do a great job of putting us in the space where we are immersed in the story. As far as settings go, we do have this new place, and it feels just enough new and just enough based on reality to only need the amount of describing it that you offered. It is an amazing place with the other worldly plants and buildings and the way the society conducts itself. It feels like we are discovering this new world along with Blinne and it doesn't disappoint. I didn't feel like there were too many places where descriptions felt overused or out of place. My only suggestion is to make sure you keep it up when you go to edit and rewrite things.

Character:

Blinne is an absolutely wonderful character to get to know and read about. As a main character she is a great POV to follow along with in this story. We get to know her strengths and weaknesses early on and quickly grow to care about her as a person. Her character arc is strong enough for the story, although there are things that could make it stronger that I mentioned towards the end with the comments.

One thing that is important with characters in a story like this is motivations. We understand part of why she agreed to join the team-she wants to take advantage of the opportunity, she wants to explore new, *yet to be discovered*, tech from the other continent. However, we lose a little of the discovery aspect of her motivations as she becomes more involved in the societal rituals. This is great for the story and her character. But with how Ruai was more than accommodating of her desire to learn even on her first day there, we lose a little

of that drive for her. That motivation showing up when it becomes a necessity due to the *Coalition's* actions is great when we get into the latter portion of the story, but if she were perhaps disappointed in what little she was able to get a hold of in the beginning and work with, it might make for an even stronger gain when she ends up having to help once the problems arise.

Ruai is another great character whose motivations are set right off the bat, and his growth as a character is shown throughout. Their back and forth creates many great tensions to laughter moments and while he is often mysterious and hard to read, he is very believable and passionate and easy to want to root for.

As far as other characters and their motivations, Kivotrun's eventually comes across at the end and makes sense for what his behavior is during the story. The two I struggle to really feel was put across was the Reverend and Bryld. The Reverend came out as this charismatic, for-the-people character who was not afraid to rattle the establishment. But when it really came down to him as a protagonist, he fades into the background and other than being the voice of the Coalition, doesn't appear to do much more. A suggestion I have, is if you end up adding in a middle of the story problem that the Coalition causes, have him be a part of that one (since he isn't a part of the others) this would raise the intrigue of him as a protagonists and give an even better resolution when Blinne is able to smooth things over when they have their talk.

Bryld is well written, and her voice comes in and out at the right times for what she is actually up to. Her motivations, however, aren't quite as laid out and strong considering she turns out to be the main protagonist. As I mentioned in other parts, if she had been the one secretly having conversations with the Coalition before the trip (those in charge of the mission could still

be in the dark about who it is, hence the secrecy) then we could better feel like she was the behind-the-scenes protagonist all along.

Other notes on character: there are a lot of names, and none of these names are formal names that readers are used to. This makes it much more difficult to remember who's who and it is easy for readers to get sidetracked by trying to recall which character a name is referring to. My suggestion would be to either cut down on the number of names specifically given (preferred) or to make some of the names recognizable.

Things of mention: One of the things I absolutely love is the games that are played—the card game from her continent, and then Lurs from Luraelin—and the strategies needed that form parallels with the way the society conducts things. You juxtapose Blinne's learning of the game of Lurs and how good she gets with it directly with how well she does with handling Elissinarian society very well.

Overall, I do believe you have a very good story with many great and intriguing concepts. The characters are well thought out and believable; the settings are wonderful, and the writing itself is beautiful. It is a true sign of great writing when you can have an entire chapter on the back and forth of hand and head gestures between people and still make it tension filled, intriguing, and comedic. That's saying something! Blinne and Ruai make for a great duo and the story itself is one of fascination and intrigue that leaves the reader wanting to know what happens next.

I don't believe this is one of those cases where the story needs an entire overhaul or an extreme amount of redoing and cutting. My suggestions and comments are there as a tool. You can use them, throw them away, or come up with new things you hadn't thought of before.

Thank you so much for sharing *Always Greener* with me, and good luck with your endeavors with this manuscript.