

Editorial Assessment Letter

Faedom Book 1

By Makenna [REDACTED]



Dear Makenna,

Thank you again for being willing to swap manuscripts. Your feedback was very helpful for me, and I hope mine can be just as helpful for you. I had fun reading your story. You craft beautiful descriptions that immerse readers in the story, and the worldbuilding fondly reminded me of *The Legend of Zelda*. While I've read sections of the story before, it was great to finally read the whole thing and see the full picture. My favorite chapters are 3, 24, and 35 (particularly when Cira talks to the prisoner). These chapters are all full of great conflict that sucks you in.

There are a few things I want to discuss and make suggestions for. As the author of the story, you can accept or ignore these. I only want to provide my perspective and give you tools to make improvements and address issues in the story.

Plot/Structure

Act 1

In general, the pacing was slow for me. I'd say I wasn't really hooked until about chapter 12, but even after that, there were some slow sections.

The inciting incident comes when Dagger attacks and kills Cira's parents. This doesn't occur until chapter 13, more than 30% of the way through the book. Most readers are not going to have the patience to wait that long before the catalyst and will put the book down before they reach that point. I would recommend getting the inciting incident within the first 4-6 chapters. That should be enough time for you to introduce the characters and set up the world. Keep in mind that readers don't need to know or understand everything by the time the inciting incident happens. The most important things to set up are the main character (Cira), her goal (to be more independent from her parents/do things without them worrying), her status quo world and the people that fit into it (her family and friends), and her flaws. Since this is a fantasy, you also need

to set up the world enough for readers to have their footing. For your world, this shouldn't take too long since it includes some of the classic fantasy elements that readers will be familiar with. Before the inciting incident, I would say the most important thing for readers to understand about your worldbuilding would be what it means to be an Untimely, some of Marina's history (namely that there was a massacre), that people are searching for the Light of Faedom, and that demons plague the world. Pretty much everything else can be explored more after the inciting incident.

Getting the inciting incident closer to the beginning of the story will require some restructuring. Many of the scenes in those first 13 chapters are devoted to Ash and Cira's relationship. I would recommend still having them meet and have a budding crush for one another but shifting most of the scenes where their relationship develops to Act 2. If you choose to make this change, their relationship would likely build steadily throughout the story, rather than building until the inciting incident and then backing off.

If you're wondering how you can possibly get the inciting incident within the first 4-6 chapters, here's what I would suggest, though obviously, you can do it in whatever way you feel is best.

Chapter 1: Keep this chapter as is, though you could add Jasper if you want him to have a little more page time.

Chapter 2: On the way to Iden, Cira thinks about what it means to be an Untimely as she does in the current chapter 2. Then she finds the traffickers and saves Ash as she does in the current chapter 3. She helps him with his wounds, and he gives her a ride to the city.

Chapter 3: At the city's gate, we meet Jasper. Ash takes Cira to Violet's. While she heals Cira, they talk about the upcoming Colors Festival. Cira offers to show Ash around and help him find a job.

Chapter 4: Ash and Cira meet at her parents' shop the next day. Cira and her parents have a bit of an argument as they do in current chapter 5. I'll let you decide whether they make up here (this would likely be their last on-page conversation before the inciting incident, so their deaths would be more emotional if they were still fighting with Cira, though perhaps they could forgive each other when Dagger lets them say goodbye). Her parents offer Ash a job and perhaps invite him for dinner. Depending on how long the chapter is, you could still have Ash and Cira explore the city and encounter the two drunk men who

work for the same master as Dagger (it would be nice to still have the foreshadowing here that trouble is stirring).

Chapter 5: Cira has a dream about her house on fire and a crow. Cira and Ash dance at the Colors Festival, and Cira shows Ash the secret garden area. The night ends on a good note, though Cira is still worried that she can't have a future with him. It's up to you whether she still tells him she's an Untimely and whether he tells her that he's a prince; I'm not sure they would trust each other enough yet. Ash can still invite her to come to Ignis, though it would be more casual.

Chapter 6: Cira returns home from the Colors Festival to find Dagger with her parents. The chapter proceeds as the current chapter 13 does.

I believe this way would hit all the points you need to and speed things up for readers. However, you're welcome to do it a different way. If you're worried about there being less time with Cira's family, I think this will actually make readers feel more emotional about their deaths. Both Cira and readers will feel like they didn't get enough time with them, so readers will be able to relate to Cira in that way. If you're looking for a good example of an early death, *Stranger Things* season 4 does this very well as [this video](#) explains.

Obviously, Ash and Cira won't have as strong of a connection, but I could still see him offering to take her (and Violet) to Ignis after the attack. I believe this would also help strengthen the reason for her starting as a maid in the palace.

Act 2

Moving on, Act 2 unfortunately had some qualities of a "Muddy Middle." I believe this is largely because we don't see much of Cira actively pursuing her goals. She doesn't meet Mytheni until she's in Ignis for about 10 chapters, and during those chapters, she only actively looks for Mytheni in the city once. We also don't see her learning her magic or trying to learn more about the Abyssel Lord or Marina during this time (save for the chapter she speaks to Nimeria again). Because of all this, Act 2 feels a bit directionless. Cira has just lost her family, found out she's the princess of Marina, and agreed to be the Light of Faedom because she believes it's what her family would want. These things should be the most important things to her in this act, yet

instead, this act focuses on Cira's life as a maid and then Emberly's companion. While I do like seeing how she navigates life in the palace, I'd love to see more focus on the main plot.

You can address this in many ways. The first would be to let readers see Cira actively looking for Mytheni, as that's her main goal. She could search the city several times, follow leads, ask Ash and Violet for ideas on how to find her, etc. If you don't want Cira to find Mytheni right away, have her try and fail and try again. Along with her duties in the palace, Cira can also practice her magic and try to learn about her roles as High Princess and the Light of Faedom. Perhaps she could discover the library sooner and read books about Marina, magic, what it takes to be a princess/ruler, and the Light of Faedom. While she's still a maid, she could speak to the staff about how the royal family interacts with them, the royal family's expectations of the staff, and what the royal family could do to make things go more smoothly for the staff (though you likely don't need to show readers these conversations). She could use her time with Emberly as a way to study what is expected of a princess.

Act 2 could also benefit from a stronger Midpoint. Whenever a story's second act feels murky, the Midpoint is likely the cause. This is an important story beat because it's the cornerstone of Act 2; all the other beats in this act revolve around it. A good Midpoint usually raises the stakes of the story, sees the internal and external stories intersect (aka the main character's arc intersects with the main plot), and ends in either a false victory or defeat. If you haven't read [Save the Cat! Writes a Novel](#), I'd highly recommend it. It revolutionized how I think about Midpoints (and story structure in general). I have a [series of blog posts](#) on it too if you want a quick guide to the story beats.

I have some ideas for what you could do to strengthen your Midpoint. Right now, the Midpoint falls at about the time the king summons Cira and assigns her to be Emberly's companion. This section does have a lot of nice conflict and tension. However, this Midpoint doesn't raise the stakes of the story, connect to Cira's character arc, or have a false victory or defeat. However, if you tweak a few things about this, it could work well as the Midpoint. To raise the stakes of the story, perhaps becoming Emberly's companion makes it harder for Cira to hide who she is. Maybe she has to wear a certain uniform that doesn't include gloves, and she has to fight to let them allow her to wear the gloves. Perhaps, as part of her duties, she's expected to practice magic with Emberly, and she's forced to think of excuses to get out of it or find clever ways to

hide the fact that she can't do any of the typical types of magic. To connect to Cira's character arc, she could struggle to decide whether to accept the position or not. Though she can't really deny it because it comes from the king, she can still debate ways to get out of it. Emberly wants her to have the position, but is it something that Cira really wants? Is she just doing it to please Emberly and the royal family? Throughout the rest of the act, this could be a recurring struggle of hers as she carries out her duties. This Midpoint could become a false defeat if it were clear in Cira's mind that she wanted to remain a maid and continue to fly under the radar but felt forced to accept the position. After the Midpoint, we'd need to see the consequences of it continuing to impact Cira's life.

There are several other ways you could handle the Midpoint, however. If Cira met Mytheni at the Midpoint, the story could have a false victory because Cira would be accomplishing one of her goals. At the same time, the story's stakes could be raised when she learns from Mytheni that she must go to Marina by her 20th birthday to claim her throne, otherwise they'll establish a new royal line and/or agree to merge with Ignis (I can't remember if this deadline is in either of her mothers' letters or if someone else mentions it before she meets Mytheni, but this would be a good spot to reveal it). The internal and external stories can also intersect here as Cira must weigh her own desires with other people's expectations for her (this only works though if her desires contradict what Mytheni expects of her). This could potentially be a stronger Midpoint since it connects more to the main plot of the series; however, the other way would still work.

The Midpoint is also the point in many stories where the protagonist shifts from being reactive to active, so you may want to think about how Cira can become more active than reactive in the second half of Act 2.

The end of Act 2 is usually marked by the hero's lowest moment when they've lost everything and don't know how they're going to continue. While Cira is forced to reveal one of her secrets to Ash at the end of Act 2, this wasn't devastating enough for me to consider it to be the all-is-lost moment. Ash reacts very well to the secret, and I don't believe he's going to reveal the information to anyone else or use it in any negative way (he doesn't in this book at least), which means that there are no consequences to him learning this information.

This rock-bottom moment plays an important role in a character's arc. This is the moment that leads the character to finally grow and change. Up to this point in the story, the protagonist has

been ignoring their true needs, but now they can no longer ignore them. In fact, this moment works even better when it is caused by the character's refusal to address their internal conflict. This moment also causes the break into Act 3; in the pit of their despair, the hero realizes what they need to do. Act 3 begins with them carrying out this new plan.

For Cira, this rock-bottom moment could come from many things. Perhaps her magic isn't just revealed to Ash, but to others who will use the information against her. Perhaps she and Mytheni had a plan to get her out of Ignis, and it falls through at the end of this act. Mytheni's original informant could be discovered and executed by King Knox, causing Cira to have no way to get to Marina before her birthday. If this were the case, then Celeon could be the revelation Cira has in the depths of her despair. Her plan going into Act 3 could be to charm him into agreeing to take her to Marina without knowing who she is (and when she realizes she can trust him, she could reveal her identity but perhaps that doesn't happen until the next book).

As I mentioned in a couple of comments, I had trouble understanding the difficulty of getting Cira out of Ignis, so a change to that plan could help clear the confusion and add a layer of conflict. It also felt a bit convenient that Celeon was the informant, but it wouldn't feel that way if she convinced him to take her to Marina without revealing who she was. I was also confused about why Mytheni wouldn't give Cira enough information about the informant for Cira to trust them, especially if Mytheni was expecting an informant she knows and usually meets with.

In chapters 30 and 31, Cira has a lot of confusion about her position as Emberly's companion, but it all comes from not knowing what's expected of her in her position. It adds conflict to the chapters, but it's a conflict that's easily solved. It seems unlikely to me that no one would tell her what to wear or outline the role for her. The royal family would have some kind of assistant who would go over these things with her. It makes the palace seem unorganized, which didn't appear to be the case when she was a maid.

For more tips on Act 2, [check out this video](#) from Abbie Emmons. If you haven't heard of her YouTube channel, I think you would like it. She gives lots of excellent actionable advice on writing.

Act 3

As I mentioned, a stronger all-is-lost moment and a subsequent revelation will carry the protagonist into Act 3. I'd love to see Cira carrying out a specific plan during this act.

You did well with the climax at the ball. It was exciting to read. However, I do think it could connect with Cira's character arc more. I find the strongest finales interact directly with a character's internal conflict. To me, Cira's arc has been about the struggle between doing what others expect of her versus doing what she wants/thinks is right. All you need to bring this struggle into that scene is some internal dialogue. Revan just told Cira to get out of the ballroom, but she sees that Celeon is in danger. Her parents, Violet, Ash, and Mytheni would all tell her to protect herself in this situation, to leave Celeon and save herself. This is a big moment as she decides to protect him rather than run. I'd love to see her think about how many times the people in her life told her not to put herself in danger. She could think about their expectations for her to act a certain way as a princess, but how she just can't stand by and watch Celeon die, even if he's a near stranger to her. She's choosing this for herself rather than following someone else's expectations.

I liked seeing the setup for Cira's new role in book two; however, I think the section after the climax dragged on a bit too long. One popular piece of writing advice is to get in late and get out early. It's often applied to scenes (which is a good way to cut your word count down if you still need to), but it can also be applied to beginnings and endings. The most important scenes in this section after the climax are meeting Celeon as the informant (if you choose to keep him as such), talking with the prisoner, and meeting with High King Knox. I believe the rest of the scenes could be combined, condensed, or cut.

Conflict

Should you choose to restructure as I've suggested, I recommend also focusing on conflict. The parts of the story where the pacing felt slower were often caused by a lack of conflict and tension. Conflict is one of the main things that pulls readers in and makes them want to keep reading.

One way to keep the conflict towing readers along in a story is through cause and effect. I believe I mentioned the "yes, but/no, and" method in a comment on the manuscript, but here is a [blog post](#) that goes into some more detail.

Another way to create conflict is through character motivations that conflict with each other. Sometimes your characters seem to get along too well and agree with each other too much. In real life, everyone has their own agenda; we all have things we want, and they don't always align with the desires of the people around us. Characters should be the same way, and though they don't always say what they want, their desires should come through in the subtext of their dialogue and their actions.

Let's look at an example with Cira and Ash. In chapter 16, Ash directly asks Cira where they stand in their relationship. In turn, Cira tells Ash exactly how she's feeling. While I love that they're good at communicating, it doesn't feel totally realistic (especially since Cira's never been in a romantic relationship), and it causes the scene to lose its tension. Many people who had just witnessed Cira's loss wouldn't feel confident asking directly about their relationship status. They'd still want to know where they stand in the relationship, but they'd probably go about finding out more subtly. Additionally, many people who'd gone through the loss that Cira just experienced wouldn't even be able to think about their romantic interests at a time like that, much less talk about them. In this scene, Cira and Ash would likely have conflicting desires: Ash wants to know about their relationship though he's conscious of the hardship Cira is going through, while Cira has just lost her family and wouldn't really be able to think about much else. Yet to read the conversation, you wouldn't know that they have opposing motivations; they are both very amiable and state their thoughts directly. I'd expect Ash to indirectly ask about their relationship and Cira to dodge his questions, creating a compelling scene that readers eat up because they want to see how those motivations clash with one another.

This wasn't the only scene where I noticed this kind of thing. I understand if Cira is the kind of person who is blunt, bad at lying, and willing to share her feelings; however, not every character should be like that. I'd encourage you to think about each character's motivations to see how they might conflict with one another.

Characters

Overall, your characters are very fleshed out, and I enjoyed reading about them. There are just a couple I'd like to discuss.

Cira

Cira is a well-rounded character. I admire that she could hold her own in a fight before she had signature magic and her love for her family. However, at times, I struggled to connect with her. As I was reading, I pointed out places where internal dialogue would help with this. But internal dialogue isn't the only factor at play here. I believe in some ways Cira has characteristics of a Mary Sue or the stereotypical chosen one.

Mary Sue characters often have little to no flaws or weaknesses, are naturally good at most things, don't actively pursue their own goals/let the plot push them around, and are liked by everyone. Likewise, Cira is kind and caring, intelligent, honest, charitable, observant, organized, a good daughter and sister, a good friend, a good tutor, loves to clean, etc. She's good with her knives, though we don't know whether that came naturally to her. She struggles with her magic the first time she intentionally uses it, but after that, she creates whatever she needs with no issues. She's bad at lying (which isn't really a flaw), and she puts herself in danger (but only ever to help others, so that's not really a flaw either). Her mistakes as Emberly's companion come from a lack of communication about her role, not from anything she did wrong. I'm wracking my brain to think of other potential flaws she has, but nothing comes to mind.

Not only do flaws create character-driven conflict in a story, but they also make characters more relatable and believable. Your readers will have an easier time connecting with Cira if they see her making mistakes and failing. Additionally, since the book is part of a series, if Cira has only a few flaws at the beginning, she has less room to grow throughout the series. I'd encourage you to pick one major flaw—a fatal flaw, if you'd like—and a few minor flaws for Cira to make her a little more relatable and cause some conflict in the story. If you need help thinking of flaws, [this site](#) has a bunch of great generators, including a character trait generator that will give you good or bad character traits.

I also wanted to discuss Cira's motivation further. It's a little unclear what drives her to make the decision to become the Light of Faedom. She mentions her family when she makes the decision, but to understand her personal stakes in the story, we need more. I'd love to see more of her internal dialogue in the scene when she makes this decision (in chapter 14). You describe her body language as she debates, but what does she think about? Does she imagine what her parents and Jasper would say? Would they want her to do it because it is the right thing or would they be worried about the danger she'd be in if she agrees? Does she imagine reuniting with them in the

After and being at peace? Does the pain in her heart from losing them make that option look really good? Does she think about Violet and what she'd say to Cira? Does she think about all the other people in the world who would be at risk? What about the people who treated her poorly because she was different? Does she want to leave them to their own devices or prove to them that she isn't what they thought? This is likely the biggest decision Cira will make throughout the whole series. Readers need to know why she's doing it. Ultimately, it seems like she decides to do it because her family would expect her to do the right thing, so make that clear in her thoughts. You can tie in her internal conflict as she struggles between what she wants and what's expected of her.

Regarding her character arc, as I've been thinking about it more, I'm wondering if we could take her arc a step further at the end of the book. As I said earlier, the climax should include the culmination of her arc, the moment she proves she's changed and grown throughout the story. The problem is that saving Celeon is something that Cira would have done in the beginning. We've seen her do it; she saved Ash who was a perfect stranger at the time. We need to see a clear example of how she has changed and grown in the time since the beginning of the book. If she's just doing the same thing she would have done in the beginning, we don't see that change. What could she do during the climax that would showcase how she's changed throughout the story? Since her arc revolves around the struggle between her desires and the expectations of other people, she needs to do something for herself that she wouldn't have done at the beginning of the book.

Violet

Violet is one of my favorite characters. She is funny and such a good friend. However, I do believe one aspect of her character can be strengthened. What does Violet want? Save for when she has her own shop at the beginning of the story, she goes along with whatever Cira's doing. She follows Cira and Ash to Ignis, and at the end of the book, she agrees to go to Marina with Cira. I'd love to know what her hopes and dreams are and to see her pursuing them.

Likewise, for all the other important characters, make sure they all have desires and make decisions based on those desires (even if Cira never learns what those desires are). With fleshed-out desires, they will all feel very realistic.

Cira and Ash's Relationship

Overall, I thought Cira and Ash's relationship was cute and fun to watch as it progressed. However, the pacing and progression of the relationship felt odd to me. This ties to the general pacing of Act 1, which I've already discussed. In the first act, Cira and Ash grow very close, but then, for lack of a better term, they "break up" at the end of the act. Act 2 doesn't see much progression in their relationship until the end, which means they're at a standstill for a large portion of the book. This could be disappointing for readers as Act 2 is typically where romances progress the most in a book. Should you choose to speed up Act 1 as I suggested, I believe that it will also address the pacing issue of their relationship. Many of their conversations in Act 1 could be moved to Act 2 so that the relationship naturally builds toward the confession of their love at the end of the act.

It also surprised me that it took so long for them to kiss. I'm not sure whether that is part of their culture or something else. Since Ash has kissed others before, it seems like it may be because of something else, though I'm not sure what.

Worldbuilding

You've done a great job with worldbuilding, especially the descriptions. I could vividly picture everything, the magic system is clear, and I understand the systems of government well enough to comprehend how they play into the conflict.

As I mentioned above, I'd like to see Cira practicing her magic—specifically failing with it—more. She accidentally uses it a couple of times and struggles to use it on purpose the first time, but after that, it all seems easy. Before this, she'd never used magic, so I'd expect there to be a steep learning curve. The book also mentions she has an exceptional amount of magic, so I'd imagine it to be hard to control. I'd love to see her make more things accidentally or for the things she makes to not turn out like she expected and wanted them to. Not only is this another way to let Cira fail and give her flaws, but it can also create conflict and tension as she deals with her magic misbehaving.

As I said, this is your story, so if any of my suggestions don't feel right to you, feel free to ignore them or come up with other solutions. As a writer myself, I know feedback can be a lot to take

in, so take some time to think about it. Let me know if you'd still like to meet over video or if you have any questions. Great job with the story so far!

Thanks,

Lexi