

*Gina Denny*

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Developmental Edit – [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Hello, [REDACTED]!

Thank you so much for letting me read your work. It was such an honor to follow [REDACTED] on her path to healing and heroics. You've set out to write something super ambitious and I want to see this book shine. Portal fantasies are due for a resurgence in the YA space, I think, and you've got a unique premise that could be really great if you take care of it the right way.

I left comments in the margins, mostly with questions and suggestions. Every single suggestion is just that: a suggestion. You know your story best, so you have the best vision for the manuscript. My feedback centers on basically these things: [Pacing and Structure](#), [Interiority](#), [Setting Descriptions](#), [Fulfilling Promises to the Reader](#), and [Writing the Difficult Scenes](#).

### **Pacing and Structure**

This is going to be the most difficult piece of advice to implement, so I'm getting it out of the way first. Right now, your story's structure is not serving [REDACTED] development in a way that provides the right kind of tension or conflict. Attached to my email, you'll see a plotting spreadsheet. At the bottom, you'll see two tabs. One is labeled, "As is" and the other, "Suggested."

On the As Is tab, you'll see all the scenes in your book, laid out in the order they happen, with the corresponding page numbers and story beats. What you'll notice first is that there are just a *lot* of scenes. Considering this book is only 80,000 words right now, there are far too many scenes. The story is too choppy and the main story beats are happening too late. There is also an imbalance between Scenes (in which stuff happens) and Sequels (in which the characters regroup or recharge). You'll see several Scenes in a row without any breaks (causing a confusing pace), but then several Sequels in a row without any breaks (causing a sluggish pace). By alternating between these more often, your story will feel more fluid and unputdownable.

On the Suggested tab, you'll see a suggestion of how I think the novel's structure could better support [REDACTED] character arc. I included the emotional beats that I think match the arc you want [REDACTED] to have. There are a handful of scenes that are really well developed in the novel, and the most detailed and emotionally moving one is the one where [REDACTED] heals [REDACTED] scars. Based on how carefully that scene was crafted, I assumed it was the one you cared most about, and I structured the story around that emotional beat being the climax of the novel.

Now, if that isn't true, you'll need to possibly rearrange some scenes to better match the arc you're looking for.

Portal fantasy has a medium-rigid structure. The inciting incident is almost always the discovery of the portal world and the Call to Adventure is an explanation of why/how the character can make a significant impact in that portal world. Then the break between Act II and Act III often involves a return to the real world, or a reminder of what's happening in the real world, so the hero has a big decision to make.

Right now, you've got those events on the page, but they're in the wrong order. In the Suggested tab on the beat sheet, you'll see I mostly moved a lot of scenes around, and the yellow boxes are scenes that still need to be written in order to fulfill the suggested plot.

### **Interiority**

█ is your protagonist and she has a rich inner life. She has a complex medical and emotional profile and she can jump between dimensions, which is a huge shock to her (such a fun way to explore your story, though!). I'd like to know so much more about her and how she's feeling.

Every single scene—and I do literally mean every single one—should include physiological symptoms of how █ feels. If she's angry, how does that manifest in her body: heart slamming, blood rushing in her ears, a hollow sensation in her chest? If she's horny: warmth flooding through her, a longing/pull towards someone, a zing along her skin where he touches her? If she's depressed: an emptiness, a loud pressurizing from everywhere all at once, an inability to force herself to move?

I also recommend using demonstrative expression more often and more deliberately. Eye rolls and sighs are common, but they don't really tell me anything about a character's emotional state. Instead of sighing, consider having the character huff in annoyance, let out a long breath as she's thinking, slump in disappointment, or breathe out an unamused laugh. Instead of rolling her eyes, consider making her glare, furrow her brow, scowl, or even laugh it off good-naturedly. Vary the descriptions you use and help us get to know █ better.

Likewise, you can use █ POV to pick and choose which details she sees in other characters. The way she interprets their actions tells us a lot about her and what she thinks of the world around her.

### **Setting Descriptions**

You've given yourself an uphill battle with this story. There are twelve dimensions, plus █ real life, so thirteen possible settings. I don't think you've explored all of them, but you've explored a lot of them. Even if it's, let's say, six dimensions, that's so much worldbuilding and you've cut yourself off at the knees with only 80K in this book.

I'm going to recommend more words, more worldbuilding focused on a few select locations, and then some fantastical sort of flyovers of the last few settings to balance everything out.

For a portal fantasy, your wordcount is always going to be a little on the high side. You've necessarily got more settings than a standard story. Your particular brand of portal fantasy has

many settings, and you'll need a lot of words to explore them. I'm recommending a goal of 95,000 words.

Within those words, I recommend that you spend a good amount of time describing █████ hometown as she interacts with it. What's the weather like as she walks to school? What size of street is she walking along? What is she wearing while she goes? Then spend even more time describing █████ dimension. She's a fish out of water in that setting, so there will be more detail, more things to be in awe of. When she jumps back to her real world, it should feel like a stark contrast between the fantasy world and the real world.

The way █████ chooses to interact with her setting will tell us a lot. Which bed is comfortable: the one in her mother's house or the one she rests in at █████ house? Which environment feels welcoming and warm and which one feels cold and harsh? Where does she have room to run, to exercise her body and her powers and her agency? Where does she get forced into a routine she can't escape? Of course, you can spend time exploring the fun stuff—fashion, food, and magic—but even the mundane details tell us a lot about your character and what matters to her.

### **Fulfilling Promises to the Reader**

There are a *lot* of story pieces you offer up early in the novel that never get tied to the main plot or resolved in any way. █████ theft, the way she notices repeating numbers, █████ relationship with her Dad, the way her phone keeps dying as a focal point of the narrative, and █████ part-time job and █████ and her rat. All these unresolved plot lines or unrelated story pieces make the back half of the book feel more unfulfilling than it needs to because the reader is looking for specific promises to be fulfilled.

On the flip side of this, you introduce a lot of elements or characters really late in the book. █████, █████a, and even █████ doesn't really become a major character until about 60% of the way into the book. Dragons are introduced in the midpoint, and you're still introducing new fantasy creatures all the way in Act III.

Instead, I recommend making promises early on that you intend to keep. Cut the stuff that you aren't going to keep and use that space early in the novel to better introduce the things you *are* going to keep. Spend more time teaching █████ about dragons and mermaids before we see them in action. Spend more time practicing her powers. Spend more time jumping dimensions (I'm thinking of how in Disney's *Aladdin* they take a magic carpet ride through space and time and visit six or seven different settings, all richly imagined, in just three minutes) and exploring that magical side of █████ story.

To go along with this, I'm going to strongly recommend you shift the focus of your story to be on █████ interior character arc so that the story feels more satisfying. Right now, the story sets up a promise: █████ has the power to save her Auntie through her █████ magic world. But then █████ fails in that promise. Auntie dies, █████ betrays them, █████ kills the innocent children she was planning to save, her almost-boyfriend breaks up with her, her best-guy-friend breaks up with her, she never solidifies a relationship with Oella, her mother is dead/missing, her brother is taken from her, and her father has betrayed her. She has *nothing*.

Except for the fact that [REDACTED] healed her scars and she no longer feels like she needs to hurt herself. That's the win. That's the triumph. I'd really like to see that moment of triumph sit in a position of glory within the novel. [REDACTED] has lost a lot, but she's gained herself. She's finally free from the self-imposed punishment. We can handle all the grim losses if there is a glimmer of satisfaction and hope for the protagonist.

### **Writing the Difficult Scenes**

This is a consistent issue throughout the novel. You'll build up to a scene of conflict, skip over it, and then summarize it after the fact. When you could have shown us a conversation between [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] instead you skip it and have [REDACTED] think about parts of that conversation. Instead of doing this, I'm going to strongly recommend that you dig in and write those difficult scenes. It will take more words, it will be more time consuming, but it will be worth it.

There are a dozen or more comments in which I say something like, "Show this." This is what I'm referring to. I would really like to see you dig into these emotional moments, show us [REDACTED] interiority, and explore the difficult dynamics between these characters. By skipping over the difficult parts, you're robbing your readers of a chance to really know [REDACTED] and explore the way she feels about [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and everyone else.

You've written such a complex, interesting character and you aren't giving her the chance to shine properly. By writing the scenes you've skipped over, you'll give her a chance to be fully realized and fully self-actualized.

Thank you again for letting me read your work. It really is an honor. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Gina Denny