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Mr. Ken Follett  
 Cheyne Walk  
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 FAX

Dear Ken,

First, let me say that I'm very excited about **OUT OF THE MOUTH OF THE DRAGON**. The basic idea for a timely thriller is excellent; and I think this is a story with which you can do great things. Also, for a first draft outline, I'm delighted that you have so much of the story already in place.

Needless to say, I also have some suggestions, and here they are:

1. The first third or half of your outline should become, I think, backstory. We need to begin at a more chilling and decisive point. I see two possibilities. One would be on receipt by Sue or someone else in authority of Jesse's threat. Or alternatively, when the final judgement is handed down, and Jesse and his colleagues must face giving up their vineyard. The first of my alternatives would allow us to start with Sue as a character, and the second with Jesse.

If you do it this way, we'll start with the thriller part already in motion at the outset or certainly by the end of the first chapter.

2. The building of this dam could not come as a surprise to Jesse. Nowadays in the US, no one can do any kind of major building without what they call an environmental impact survey; and we have something called the Environmental Protection Agency, which oversees such things. The construction of a dam or a huge factory or a bridge or a major highway or anything of that ilk would require all sorts of public hearings before it could get started; and so controversial a project would certainly have drawn Jesse's attention and that of his neighbors long before the thing actually started. I'm not familiar with all the steps involved, but we would need to be accurate about those for this kind of story.

Then, you would have to adjust the time frame, too. First,

there would be all these hearings, then the court case, and then of course the building of the dam; and in the outline you have the dam being built in three months, whereas it probably would take at least two years.

Also, as you have it, it appears that the only ones affected by this are the hippies with their vineyard. More likely, the area to be flooded would involve holdings of lots of other people, perhaps as many as a thousand or even more; and many of those could be quite as upset as Jesse and his colleagues. The useful thing about introducing this idea, I think, is that it could divert suspicion from him, at least for a while. Lots of people would be opposed to this dam, of whom he would be only one. Most of the others might own their property for which they would be compensated under the aegis of what we call eminent domain, i.e. the right of the government to buy up people's property for a public purpose.

3. Jesse as you have conceived him so far is an excellent character. But in your next draft, I think we need to enrich his personal life a bit. You intimate that he may have a daughter; and I think he definitely should have one and she should be a major factor in his life, both as a joy and perhaps as some kind of problem. Also, I think he should be more interested in Melanie than just as a sex object. I don't think she needs to be a point of view character, but I do think it would help if she were more dynamic, vital, intelligent, someone who could be worthy of his love.

Jesse I think also is going to need a male sidekick, someone to play off against as the cat-and-mouse action gets hot. He probably would need a whole crew to do the stuff he's going to do, but for the purposes of the story, we could concentrate on one secondary character.

4. Jesse's demand, I feel, is too broad and one that no government could ever agree to, i.e. stopping all construction. My suggestion would be to narrow it to environmental concerns, i.e. stop all logging of primeval lumber, no new power plants, chemical plants, or other major polluting enterprises. And then if you did this, we could stick with the same demands all the way through, which I think is a better idea than changing these from one episode to the next.

5. I think it would be a good idea to add a character, the person who has to cope with these demands. He could be the governor of the state or some aide to the governor, but I think this needs to be someone at a higher level than a police officer. In other words, yes, let's have Sue Chang very much involved, but we need someone who must answer to the media, who must think of the general public welfare and wrestle with the awful threat that's being posed.

6. I like the idea of Ben and Sue getting together; but I think that you should consider introducing sexual tension between

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them almost immediately, i.e. as soon as they meet; but at the same time there needs to be some major obstacle to their coming together. Maybe Sue has a husband, someone for whom she no longer has much sexual desire but towards whom she still feels some loyalty. Or maybe she has a deep-rooted prejudice against men who are not Asian. This could be a prejudice which she deplores and wishes she didn't have, but she still has to fight with it. Or he could have the prejudice.

7. I would love to see if we can work up some kind of cat-and-mouse chase between our principals earlier in the novel. If Jesse were to learn quite early on that he's a suspect and that people are looking for him and/or keeping an eye on him, then he must take all sorts of evasive action. To jump-start the plotting, you might consider Jesse having a mole or a spy either in the police department or perhaps in the media. Hayle could be reporting to this person what sort of plans they're making to catch Jesse, and these could be reported to Jesse, who then manages to evade apprehension at several key instances. You may recall that this was a technique used by Forsyth in *DAY OF THE JACKAL*, and I think it would be appropriate to this story as well. I think the story needs more back and forth intense action for its final third, and this is the kind of device which could help you achieve that.

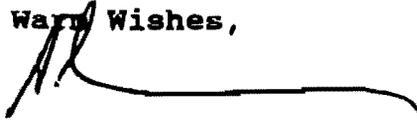
8. Your ending, I feel, could use some rethinking. I suggest you look for ways to bring all your major characters together much as you did with your final ending in *THE MAN FROM ST. PETERSBURG*. I think that Sue needs to confront Jesse and Ben perhaps needs to confront Melanie.

9. I see the novel being structured with four point of view characters: Sue, Ben, Jesse, and the fourth major character, it seems to me, ought to be the governor or his aide.

Ken, I hope that your travels are pleasant and not too onerous. The good news here is that *THE THIRD TWIN* is selling substantially better than *A PLACE CALLED FREEDOM* on its first week, and the people at Crown naturally are very excited. After only three days on sale, the book is going onto the bestseller list, and I think it's going to have a nice long stay there.

Let's try to book some time to chat about all this when you're in New York. Should I ask Greg Mowry what your schedule is going to be?

Warm Wishes,



Al

P.S. Hunting, by the way, won't work as a hippie pastime.