

For the attention of Ken Follett

Company

Fax no 0171-352 5168 Date 11/02/97

From Suzanne Baboneau

Company Macmillan

Our fax no 0171-881 8291 Total pages 3 incl

Fax

Message

Dear Ken,

OUT OF THE MOUTH OF THE DRAGON (first draft outline)

Terrific outline, I must say!

I like the premise enormously and even in these few pages I had a sense of the minutes ticking away and I don't think one can stress too much the importance of this - of tension mounting unbearably to the final climax.

My comments, page by page:

4: is the term 'hippie' ok? In terms of the UK, it sounds outdated (we talk of travellers now) and I'm assuming the story takes place in the here and now. But perhaps still current in the US.

Fast transition between Melanie moving in with rich stock-broker, then taking up with dispossessed Jess - how does she reconcile this? What are her political leanings? Is she accepted by the commune, bringing with her as she does a certain amount of sophistication (and not least laptops, mobile phone)

5: (line 5) has Michael's earthquake formula proved successful already? I'm anxious that he has a strong stamp of authority which makes it credible that Judy would seek him out (also see comments, page 19)

(line 13): okay that Michael is still paying Melanie's mobile phone bill? She strikes me as an independent sort and wouldn't be relying on (ex-) husband to keep her means of communication with the outside world open!

6: description of Judy as half-Vietnamese - how significant is this? And will her father (page 7) feature again? How much will her private life, and roots, be enmeshed in her professional role?

9: (3 lines up) wouldn't it be simpler for Jess to cut his hair to disguise himself more effectively? ✕

10: Does Flower have any significant role to play? Eg, might Star exploit Jess's paternity to keep him from Melanie? ✓

Is it credible that Jess would make his millions aged 23, and then give it all away? It sounds unnecessarily cliched and, by extension, casts a somewhat unconvincing air about him and the commune as a whole.

11: How did Jess find out how to make a nuclear weapon and the president's address? Things seem to come pretty easy to him and, as one of the key players, his credibility must be watertight.

18: how does Jess get the phone call from the carnival if the commune has no phone/electricity? Again, he mustn't be seen to be relying on modern means of communication etc at his, or the plot's, convenience when he (and the commune) have been seen to renounce them!

19: Does Michael ever suspect Melanie of stealing the disc (we know and he knows she is a computer whizzkid) and on page 9, Judy must sow a seed of doubt when she questions him about the disc's disappearance. I don't think he should be cast as too naive or in thrall to Melanie which would weaken his responses

21: (line 4) here we see Jess 'talking the hippies around' as he does on page 17. Careful not to repeat yourself, and again make it look too easy for Jess

22: Dusty comes to the fore here, but how much of a role will he have played up till now?

What motivates Star (line 12) to betray Jess here? Is it the ultimate two fingers to Melanie, or deep-seated resistance to Jess's line of action? Was she among the hippies opposing him earlier?

(last line) presumably Michael will tell Melanie that he is taking Dusty to his parents (ch 30)

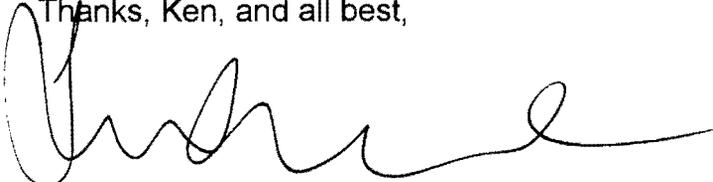
23: Timing: when and how do we learn that the deadline has been brought forward 24 hours, ie is going to happen the same day Dusty is at the toy warehouse? Truth's bulletin gave the deadline as 48 hours away so the

reader will be thinking along the same lines as the grandparents, ie that it's happening 'tomorrow'. 'Several hours before the deadline' (lines 3 and 14) is confusing, as it sounds as if the earthquake is to be triggered off later on the same day.

Some of these queries are, as it were, rhetorical, as I'm sure they will come through in the fleshing-out. But if you want to discuss any of these points, do ring me.

It's going to make a terrific story and I can't wait to read the first draft.

Thanks, Ken, and all best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Suzanne', written in a cursive style.

Suzanne