

20th December 1997

Attn: Ken Follett

Dear Ken,

OUT OF THE MOUTH OF THE DRAGON

As promised, here are my editorial notes on the first draft. I have to say that my enthusiasm after my first reading hasn't waned in the least, going through it with a finer toothcomb. I think it's a terrific read. Of course, I knew the outcome - or thought I did - from the final stages of the outline, but you threw in some great surprises along the way. The final confrontation between Priest and Judy worked a treat, I thought. And any scepticism that I had that you could make the 'hippy' background credible has vanished; Priest notably is a wonderful character and driving force through the whole book. I very much liked the way you topped and tailed the story.

So my notes, as usual, combine the truly trivial and the more weighty comments. If there is anything controversial, please ignore it and if there's anything incomprehensible, do give me a ring or drop me a line.

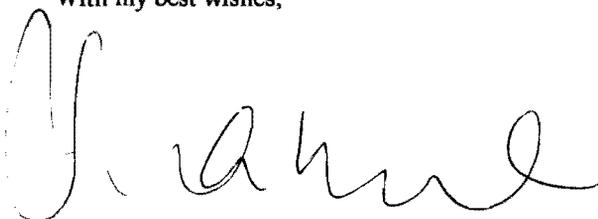
This to me has read like a very strong first draft indeed, and I have been enthusing to my colleagues and to the sales force who gathered last week for the sales conference at which your new book was one of the major features.

The only hesitation from our end has been towards the title. Many of us feel that it is too long, not catchy, not -dare I say it - thrillerish enough, and some feel they've heard it before. And that it denotes a Chinese setting. Are you wedded to it? What do the Americans think?

I hope these notes will be helpful. It's been a joy of a book to work on so far, and I look forward very much to the next draft as and when.

And I hope you all have a terrific Christmas and all good things in 1998.

With my best wishes,



Suzanne Baboneau

OUT OF THE MOUTH OF THE DRAGON: KEN FOLLETT

EDITORIAL NOTES ON FIRST DRAFT 19/11/97

PAGE LINE COMMENT

nb Dedication and acknowledgements in final draft

PART ONE

6	2	'like fur' - too soft to describe prickly pine forest?
9	2	how big is the steel plate of the seismic vibrator? Can you give some dimensions to give us a clearer picture of its scale, particularly useful later on when it's being transported by Priest. It's described variously as 'massive' and 'huge' and yet is able to be transported pretty well incognito to and from Owens Valley and concealed later on in the circus ride
	3	'it' should read 'the plate'
	6	Priest also described as 'smart' on page 46, line 21; page 55, line 19; page 80, line 14; and page 192, line 17 - once or twice too often!
10	15	'No matter how much they liked him, they would not <i>give</i> him the seismic vibrator' struck me as weak; I'm not sure the irony - if intended - works here
	21	'or beat him over the head with a wrench' - is this giving too much away given what happens later?
11	15	'twenty years <i>or so</i> younger' as on page 9, line 17, you're vague about Mario's age
	16	'for a few days' - be more precise? How long would it take Priest to drive the truck to California, if it takes 2/3 days to get to New Mexico (page 10)?
12	13	Alice band okay in America?
14	1	Where's Lubbock - how far from Clovis?
15	10-11	Is this too much info too soon about Star? Better we find out the details at the same time as Judy later on? ✕
	22	'he' should read 'Priest'
17	21	'his back to the wall' - I read this too literally at first as they're all sitting around on the floor of the cookhouse!
18	10-11	'none of them believed... different location' - this in its way is one of the crucial sentences in this early part as it is, isn't it, one of the strongest reasons for Priest's desperate action? I think therefore this desperation needs emphasizing more strongly here, and more explanation given as to why the commune couldn't simply move somewhere else rather than resort to extreme measures to stay. I read it, too, as Priest's own crusade which developed, as time went on, into something much more personal to him rather than for the good of the commune - see, for example, page 163, line 19. But we need the motive for Priest killing Mario to be clear in our minds now, so that we don't immediately turn against him this early on.

- See also page 228, lines 7-8 - again one might ask why they couldn't just move on - after all, America is a big country...
- 18 is a discharge punishment enough for actually killing a guy?
- 21 11-14 more or less direct repetition on page 86, lines 11-13, where I think we could lose it
- 22 1 'before' rather than 'ago'
- end of section I found myself asking here how Priest landed the job in Texas. I think we need to see something of what went on behind the scenes, between Priest hatching the idea in his mind and arriving on-site in Liberty in the space of only three weeks?
- 17 '*Texan* town of Liberty' to avoid confusing the reader with sudden switch of scene?
- 26 6 'Maps confused him' - see page 54, line 7 ('There was no way he could read a map') and page 153, line 15 ('He disliked maps') - overstating the point?
- 12 'Three weeks ago...' - I lost track of time here; is this when they issued the ultimatum on the Internet? We don't see them doing this 'live' and I would like to have a stronger sense of time ticking away to the deadline... (see also comments on page 32)
- 27 1 'how much money they had' On page 18, line 9, you say they have no money and on page 118, line 19, you say that Star knows about the bank account. It doesn't quite add up...
Also, on page 324, Priest hands over a month's rent - in cash - for the warehouse. Where is the money stashed?
- 9 Cut 'He had met her four weeks ago' as already established on page 22, line 1, that Priest must have met her over three weeks ago
- 13-15 A bit clichéd, the rumpled sheets and hair spreading over the pillow
- 19 Star isn't quite 50 on page 15, line 16
- 28 21 & 22 repetition of 'early'
- 32 14-15ff 'He had issued a threat... of California' This is the first mention, and I think we need to be careful that there isn't too much flashback to the commune where the momentous decision is made offstage. I wonder, should we see Priest actually sending the message? And I'd like a clearer idea of just who is in the know of the fourteen people gathered for the first discussion (page 18 on)
(nb page 235: 'Most of the communards did not know about the earthquake...')
Wouldn't those assembled and hearing Melanie's line of conversation have been curious - and perhaps suspicious later on?
- 34 19 'a thud like a car crash' doesn't sound quite right in this context
- 39 10 'Priest would make sure...' - how?
- 40 8 'within'

- 43 7 Diane sounds to me a more American name than Diana
- 45 17 You'll remember in my comments on the outline that I had trouble believing that one can be an illiterate millionaire. Perhaps that's just me, but I'm concerned that you've left readers hanging with the idea that Priest has made million/s (page 15, line 8) and still no further info yet as to how he did. Now the bombshell that he can't read or write...
- 47 1-8 I think I need more convincing here of how Priest got away with it, sceptic that I am on this point!
- 52 13 Seventh Street where?
- 21 'little' - aged 15?
- 22 There's an awful lot of grey/gray in these early pages - grey streaks in Star's hair, grey plastic castle (p 30), grey Chevy (p 48), Mario's grey brains, grey suits, grey light!
- 54 14 Wouldn't Priest have wanted to avoid drawing attention to himself and the truck by stopping to ask directions?
- 17 Wouldn't Star have been concerned about Priest's delayed arrival?
- 58 11-13 If Judy's office is only a couple of floors away from the courtroom, she could have hurried down in person to check on Kincaid and Lestrangle's whereabouts?
- 19-20 'Judy's love was an eggshell...' - ugh (sorry!)
- 61 1 'his dinner invitation' better than 'him'?
- 2 'she recalled the worry she felt' is clumsy
- 5 'very swanky premises' - but they are the FBI after all?
- 18 Kincaid also described as 'barrel-chested' on page 202, line 9, and page 221, line 19
- 63 20 something like 'two foot' makes point more strongly than 'twelve inches'
- 68 17 'a superstar at law school' - such modesty!
- 70 12 cut 'she did not see any armed robberies in progress' - it doesn't quite work
- 14 & 17 repetition of 'dedicated' (nb 'grey carpet' on line 16)
- 71 17-18 wouldn't someone like Judy find Simon's comments on her appearance a bit patronising? x
- 73 6 Here we could be given an idea of how much time has elapsed since the message was sent. This would help elevate the tension when Judy realises how little time she has left if this is for real.
- 74 12 & 13 See page 217, lines 15 & 21 where Simon and Judy's comments are awkwardly repeated

- 75 2 'us'?
- 76 11 similar ideas for splashy demands on pages 218, line 14, and 374, line 15 - careful it doesn't get too repetitive
- 73-77 Can we cut back on this dialogue between Simon and Judy? There's a fine line between fascination on the part of the reader at seeing the FBI work out the clues and tedium because we know them already, and my attention wandered in this scene. As it did between pages 211-220...
- 79 12 'an antique' sounded odd to me here
- 81 1 Spirit the dog never appears again - cut from this scene, or reintroduce somewhere else?
- 83 10 Why is Priest so keen to go in with Melanie; doesn't he trust her?
- 84 16 'date' = 'data'
- 91 6 okay that Michael goes outside clad only in a bathrobe?
- 100 15-18 this conversation about missing each other is a bit close for comfort to similar conversation on previous page, lines 5-10
- 101 end of section No more Don Riley - okay?
- 103 20-21 'plant cocaine...' seems a bit extreme even for his daughter's sake?
- 104 7 'Bo' starts becoming 'Ba'. I prefer Bo.
- 105 11-13 repetition thrice of 'door', and the 'it' on line 12 sounds as if it is referring to the door rather than the apartment
- 14 silly point, but Simon Sparrow is also wearing khaki chinos on page 71, line 13
- 115 17 I don't think we ever see evidence of Oaktree's fits - so cut here?
- 118 11-15 I don't think we hear any more about this ceremony, do we? Should we?
- 119 1-2 'He was pleased to note' is cumbersome
- 9 'four weeks ago' - longer now, surely, so cut?
- 122 9 Wouldn't someone in the commune have noticed that Flower wasn't in the kids' bunkhouse overnight?
- 21 I found myself asking if Los Alamos weren't threatened as well by the dam too being close neighbours - and perhaps this needs to be resolved here rather than later on (page 245, lines 10-11). I asked the same question further on page 225, lines 6-8.
- 124 13 'in her mother's recognizance' - does this mean Star's real name is on record with the local police? So that as well as being on the FBI's records later, it would also be registered with the police? (nb on page 230, line 7, Priest categorically states that no one has any record of them. Has he forgotten that he had a criminal record before he joined the commune?)

- 125 19 Oaktree is described as a carpenter on page 18, line 16
- 128 19 What have they done with the disks after all the effort of retrieving them from Michael's apartment?
- 135 13-14 description of capitol building repeated on page 317, lines 11-12
- 142 6 Will Melanie be back before the deadline? With only twenty-four hours to go, the movements of everyone needs to be followed closely to add to the tension... Page 153: she suddenly materialises (line 11)
- 143 11 baby suggests babe-in-arms rather than 18-month-old presumably up and running
- 144 2 'All the men...' Even the most recent arrivals (see page 28, lines 3-4)?
- 3 careful - Priest is also jealous (of Michael over Melanie) on page 95 and later on page 311, line 3
- 149 16 'straight society' - okay given today's connotations? Also 'straight' repeated on line 20. Also 'wingtip shoes' repeated on page 235, line 7
- 153 10 It seems quite late in the day to be searching for a location for the earthquake, so soon before the deadline expires. Is this because Priest, in his heart of hearts, believed the governor would capitulate? How long is it since he and Melanie secured Michael's disks? The tension seems to be dissipating a little here.
- 156 6 If they lost the truck, how would they cause another earthquake? (see also page 165, line 13)
- 157 20 But isn't the seismic vibrator massive and thus remarkable (see comments on page 9) even on a busy highway?
- 160 4 'the midday sun' - the earthquake is recorded just after 2 pm, but has two hours elapsed between then and now?
- 161 17 How far away is the truck?
- 164 2 'ten kilometres' - it was five miles on page 160, line 21
- 6 'self-absorbed' - I guess one could say the same about Priest (see, eg, previous page, line 19)
- 7 'She was smart enough...' - but she does have a master's in seismology
- 9 'four weeks ago' - longer ago now (5/6 weeks at least?)
- 165 9 'a plausible story' - which is?
- 166 6 cut 'in a Tom and Jerry cartoon'?
- 12 'Please do' - rather polite in the circumstances!
- 22 is paracetamol the kind of thing they'd keep at the commune rather than natural remedies?
- 167 20 'frightening' or 'terrifying' better than 'scary'?

- 168 4 'wriggle' sounds humorous - 'roll' better?
- 19 more tears on next page, last line - cut here?

PART TWO

- 171 13 'passive-aggressive' - meaning?
- 172 3 cut unnecessary 'unfortunately'?
- 4 'it tended to show' - better simply 'it showed'?
- 173 How come the FBI didn't know about the earthquake immediately? And wouldn't they have had someone listening in to the John Truth show that day of all days? Wouldn't the state seismologist have let them know? The FBI seem slow on the uptake here.
- 12 cut unnecessary 'the linguistic psychologist'?
- 175 13 'seven days' more dramatic and more precise than 'a week'?
- 177 6 can you hang up a mobile phone? (see page 174, line 16)
- 178 8-13 Does Judy fancy Michael? Otherwise, this preoccupation with his love-life seems at odds with the high tension of the moment in Judy's professional life...
- 179 7 'pretty blonde woman' - repeats page 106, line 5 (Judy's observation both times)
- 180 11 & 13 cut this ref to Michael eyeing her up - unconvincing
- 181 8 *Jeremy Fisher* popular in US?
- 187 15 At times I didn't find Priest's naivety about modern technology credible, and this is one of them. Also on page 190, line 7 - surely they would have realised that Star's voice would have been broadcast? Perhaps we need reminding that for 25 years they've had v little access to the outside world - though Melanie would surely know! See also ref to 'milliseconds' on page 196, line 11.
- 189 3 'lacked five minutes of six o'clock - sounds odd
- 190 5 cut 'The newsreader said'
- 14 'heard' rather than 'noticed'
- 21-22 Priest is repeating what he said to Star on page 155, lines 15-16
- 191 I found this last para ('He wondered if he had ever truly believed...' to top line on page 192) confusing. As Priest's feelings here are important, could you clarify/amplify?
- 192 4 'a couple of wheels' - only one wheel on page 276, line 12
- 193 5 Michael Quercus also described as a night owl, on page 84, line 11
- 194 7 'location' better than 'address'?

- 18 'all his life' - even the past 25 years in the commune? Bold strokes such as what? See also page 201, line 4 - has Priest taken many mad risks over the last 25 years? Only one example follows, so seems rather a sweeping statement... NB see page 80, lines 5-6, where he admits to leading a peaceful life since arriving at the commune.
- 19 Wouldn't it occur to Priest that Michael might be at the conference and recognise Melanie, or see her later if it's televised?
- 196 3-5 On pages 154-155, last line and top line respectively, Melanie is concerned that calls can be traced from her mobile and here she is once more. Also, much later on - see page 332, lines 10-12; page 351, lines 19-20; page 371, line 3; and page 420, line 17 - the whole question of calls being traced crops up and is never resolved. Could you look at this as it needs to be consistent?
- 199 17 '*I have to get on top of the situation*' sounds a bit comical here
- 204 19 Hayes is wearing a sober tie on page 202, line 4
- 205 8 'it was no big deal' doesn't tally with page 207, line 14: 'Priest suffered a moment of panic.'
- 206 2 'something about his manner' - can you be more precise?
- 207 14 Cut 'but he could not write anything else' - as we know this already?
- 208 22 My elder daughter's name is Florence! Will she ever forgive me?
- 211 4 Sorry, what's a muscles T-shirt?
- 211-220 See my earlier comments on pages 73-77. As the reader knows the identity of the callers, we shouldn't have to dwell on the detail for too long. I think you could cut back on Bo's interruptions, and take care not to repeat the observations made in the earlier conversation between Sparrow and Judy.
- 215 17 I can't believe they wouldn't know what a tape recorder was, or have I missed the point? Presumably it's Judy speaking in this line?
- 216 2-4 Cut these lines, for example
- 217 1-4 This exchange seems to be stating the obvious
- 218 2 'A frightening picture'? Not really, on the evidence of the conversation so far
- 219 21 'clicked' repeated on next page, line 1 - is Judy still reading from the article (in lines 5-7)? Make this clearer?
- 221 4 'still a professional' - this contrasts with Judy's earlier dismissal of him on page 185, lines 7-8 ('brutal, slapdash and unscrupulous')
- 224 9 How long has the equipment been there, ie how long has the valley been under threat?
- 225 16 'suppress' - not boost?
- 230 12 & 18 'We do not recognise....government' repeated
- 245 10 Weren't the communards offered \$\$ to move, like Los Alamos? Also Los Alamos

seem to be moving to another place without any trouble - see my comment on page 18.

- 248 22 Judy has already compared Melanie to a supermodel on page 179, line 7
- 251 5-6 Cut? Judy doesn't know Michael well enough and surely wants to be seen to be the consummate professional
- 20 Loma Prieta - explain?
- 252 1 Judy has already told Michael - on page 246, line 11 - that she's no longer on the case
- 254 16 Stella - too close to Stella Higgins
- 256 19 'Serious as cancer' - cut? Seems a pointless faux pas.
- 257 6 'never tasted Indian food' - this surprised me
- 260 18 'smiled' more subtle than 'grinned'?
- 262 16 cut 'particularly useless' - too obvious!
- 266 12 how does Judy know that Priest doesn't usually wear glasses, just from the photo?
- 274 13 'Dale knew nothing of all that' - repeats page 243, line 22
- 275 7 'He could not read....' - careful not to make it sound as if you are telling us about Priest's inability to read for the first time
- 279 17-20 Repeats a little too closely page 192, lines 19-21
- 285 1 'Defended'?
- 293 7 ff Judy puts herself into the position, in her conversation with Truth, of asking his advice. Shouldn't she be sounding more professional, and taking the initiative more?
- 299 18 'Raja'?
- 304 9 How did they track down Star so quickly? That her picture was in the *SF Chronicle* isn't mentioned by Priest on page 308 (line 5). And it isn't until page 387 that she's formally identified. Have I lost track here?
- 309 12 'better' seems too weak in this context of murder and mayhem
- 311 15 Melanie, not Judy here
- 316 1 'Priest said: 'Ow!' - is a bit weak!
- 317 22 Honeymoon wouldn't have a chauffeur, would he? And, page 318, wouldn't there have been greater security around the capitol building, even at that time of the morning, so someone would have seen Priest get into Honeymoon's car? He is the governor's cabinet secretary, after all.
- 326 13 Wouldn't the FBI have someone closer than Judy at hand to intercept Priest in Oakland?

- 327 16-20 'not in love with him - it was much too soon for that' - but what about love at first sight? I think Judy is great, but kind of emotionally stunted and unsexy (unlike Michael). I'd love to see her admit here that she fancies him rotten - and that the main reason she burst into his apartment that night was because she was desperate to see him, as well as checking that he was okay (the personal winning out for once against the professional).
- 334 21 Was Judy yelling?
- 335 10 'She couldn't understand how Michael could be so damn touchy...' I can, given the high tension of the moment!
- 339 12 'these people chose well' - why wasn't this location one of the five prime sites on Michael's original print out?
- 341 14 '*I'm going to die*' echoes word for word Priest's reaction to the blast in Owens Valley on page 167, line 15 - and I think it would be more effective if the link was made here.
- 344 21 'the city' more colloquial than 'San Francisco'?
- 346 13 Raja's shots, not Carl's
- 350 4 'a day or two before anyone noticed them' - but on page 349 Judy has put out a call for the carnival truck - and even face down, wouldn't the panels look suspicious on the side of the road? And, line 10 - 'hard for anyone to make out the details' - surely the FBI and police would have every resource available to search for the vibrator, day or night?

PART THREE

- 370 8 & 9 avoid repetition of 'little'
- 373 1 cancelling an earthquake sounds a little odd
- 374 19 'arrest his ass' - yet at the top of page 359 she says it wouldn't work
- 376 4 Is Judy concerned that he might have Melanie with him, who would recognise her?
- 384 5 twenty hours seems a long time to rest!
- 385 22 there've been rather a lot of dented cars recently - cut here?
- 386 cut back on the chat here?
- 398 7 nutty taste of wine - see repetition on page 98, line 9, this time Judy

Pages 401-417 duplicate pages 384-400

- 419 15 and guilt? - or is that too much to hope for from Priest?
- 420 10 cut 'he's the top seismologist in the state' - I don't think we need reminding

- 424 4 'Judy had not picked that up' - but see page 365 when Michael gives out Priest's name
- 433 3 Shirley is also Poem's real name - and 'gorgeously attractive and deeply intelligent' is a bit clichéd for a US newsreader!
- 442 5 Simon - avoid clash of names with Simon Sparrow
- 8 'Something had happened...' - wouldn't Judy have guessed that Melanie's phone call had precipitated events?

Suzanne Baboneau
19/12/97