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Re: Out of the Mouth of the Dragon

Dear Ken:

Thanks so much for sending me the first draft of your latest. I thoroughly enjoyed it. As usual - once I'd started I was unable to put it down.

I think that the earthquake idea is brilliant. Not only are earthquakes the greatest fear of all Californians and one of the greatest terrors of most people - this also provides a great, great plot for an action movie.

I've attached my comments. I hope that you find them helpful.

By the way - the cloning story in the US and the UK is very interesting. Of course, you foresaw this didn't you!? What excellent timing for the paperback of THE THIRD TWIN.

lots of love,

Jann.

## ***Out of the Mouth of the Dragon***

comments on the first draft

20/1/98

pg. 6 and 7 This beginning isn't working for me yet. I like the italicised almost-first-person that runs through the book, but somehow this long chunk of it is more bewildering than gripping. I like the idea of slipping behind Priest's eyes from time to time and it's certainly evocative and sinister, I just found it too oblique as is.

pg. 18 "Within a year there would be nothing here ..." I am confused about their plight and feel I want to know a little bit more than this at this stage. This is the only paragraph that explains what is happening so far. (I like the way the information trickles in and that we build up a picture slowly, but this first mention just seemed too sketchy.)

pg. 26 typo - last word on first line "doo" instead of "door"

pg. 26 "their way of life" What is their way of life? I guess I do get the picture, but only very sketchily. By page 27 and 28 it does begin to get clearer and perhaps that is enough to answer my question. Nevertheless, this question distracted me from the building suspense. I felt there was detail missing.

pg. 52 "He was afraid he would see Mario hitch-hiking at the side of the road ..." I found this a bit flip. Somehow Priest's fears are hard to believe after his murderous cruelty.

pg. 53 I feel Priest would remember the name Deep Purple, he has a very good memory otherwise and the 60's and its icons are deeply engraved on his mind in all other instances

pg. 54 "They left the Honda in the car park and drove on together ..." What about all the discussions that went before about what to do with the truck? After that I felt I needed to know why they simply left the Honda in the car park.

pg. 57 Don Riley, Brooks Fielding ..... There are so many new names all at once. I found them too much to digest all in one go.

NB. Don Riley disappears from the book after he and Judy have dinner together. He's potentially a third plane in a triangle, with Judy at it's apex and Michael on it's other side.

pg. 68 Don's reaction to Judy saying that she's quitting the Bureau seemed lame. Surely he'd feel amazement and disbelief at first. The Bureau is almost everything to Judy, I felt he would be far more stunned. If he isn't, then perhaps she would clock his reaction and count it as insensitivity to what she's all about

pg. 70 "But she had never yet shot at a real person" What about the shoot out mentioned in the last paragraph on this page?

pg. 74 Simon seems to get the fact that Priest is illiterate far too quickly. It just feels too easy. Also, no one ever does find out that he can't read. What if Star

discovers his secret near the end? I felt all along that revelation would make for a dramatic moment

pg. 87 Michael's reaction seems a bit mild here. Surely he would want to know about their child - who has been gone with Melanie for 4 weeks. He didn't know if they were alive or dead, a man who gets upset about his child being left in a car alone would never react to his wife disappearing with his child in so mild a way. I think Michael would take a lot longer than this to be calmed down.

pg. 89 "Melanie shot him a questioning look ..." Surely she would figure out that this is because they are in the middle of doing something dangerously illegal?

pg. 98 When Judy decides to take on the case and apologise to her boss, surely she would have a few more thoughts leading her to this conclusion? She is a long term thinker, she has ambitions and plans for the shape of her career. I think we should know that her decision to stick with the Bureau for now is on the basis that she feels she can weather this bad patch out or something like that .... Otherwise it's too quick a turnaround. Especially when this is a case that could turn out to be a hoax. We only have Simon Perry's word that it's serious and that doesn't seem enough so far. Judy has yet to be persuaded that they actually can make the earthquake happen. So she is deciding to stay with a case that may simply be a matter of going through the motions and I feel that a woman like her would need to have spelled out for herself the reasons why she is making such a compromise.

pg. 102 "For some reason that shocked her ..." "I think the reasons why that shocked her are pretty obvious.

pg. 103 Bo now - becomes Ba later ...?

pg. 103 "She decided not to tell Bo any of that. He might get vengeful ..." Is Bo that kind of cop? It seems like a weird and insufficient reason to get vengeful. Why not get really vengeful with Kincaid - who refused to give Judy her promotion?

pg. 114 At this point I feel I want to know more about the plan to "take it all" away from Priest at this stage.

pg. 112 typo "duwy" instead of "duyu"

pg. 123 Isn't the movie star called Leonardo DiCaprio?

pg. 123 Seemed odd that Priest took the cop to the cookhouse without being pressured into having to do so. Wouldn't he leave him at the car or something? Priest seems to do this too easily.

pg. 124 Why does he put the suit on for this scene and not any other where he goes out into the world? Doesn't quite work for me, though it is funny

pg. 130 Do the others not know what's going on at this point? Surely questions would have been asked about Priest's long absence. Feel like this needs to be clearer by now.

pg. 130 typo "faced" instead of "faces"

pg. 132 But Judy has only been on the case for one day - how could she have caught Stop Now in a day?

pg. 137 " Judy said: " We haven't caught these people yet, I'm afraid""  
She's only been on this case for a day. It seems unlikely that she even expect to have caught them. The time frame isn't quite working for me here.

pg. 138 Judy's talk here feels like too much repetition from the scene with Simon earlier. Found myself skip reading it.

pg. 149 " he might abuse his immune system ..." Do you mean that he might get Aids? Wasn't sure what this meant.

pg. 157 The paragraph explaining their philosophy feels to me like it should have come earlier in the story. I have been wanting this information for some time.

pg. 160 I feel Melanie needs more of a reason for getting into something as serious as causing an earthquake. I wanted more of an explanation of who Melanie is earlier in the book. The fact that she has fallen completely under Priest's spell should also be heightened. Michael's workaholism and Dusty's allergies aren't enough of a reason for her to want to preserve the peaceful way of life she has only just found.

pg. 172 "... not wanting to ask about the investigation because they knew it was going badly." Surely it is too soon to know that the investigation is going badly? No one knows - until the first earthquake is caused - if this threat is for real or not.

pg. 176 Raja Khan feels unnecessary. He's yet another name to remember. What is Raja going to do that Simon Sparrow can't do?

pg. 186 I found that the seriousness with which the case is treated inconsistent and confusing. One minute it's a matter of going through the motions, then next Kincaid is giving it to his favourite agent. Kincaid has convinced Honeymoon that there is nothing in it and he's already told Judy that this investigation is a mere formality. WHY give a dud case to his favourite agent?

pg. 192 typo "th" instead of " the"

pg. 199 What is the meaning of this scene where Melanie rejects Star? The scene is powerful and it feels to me that it should have more consequences. The scene seems to me to suggest that Melanie has a mind of her own and that she is ultimately not going to be controlled by Star and Priest. I suppose that does pay-off when she calls the FBI and gives away the location of the seismic vibrator at the end. But in the short term she would at least sulk, or argue, or confront the next day, but instead none of them mention it and nothing seems to change in their triangle.

pg. 201 You made a point of mentioning the suit when Priest went to fetch Flower at the police station in Silver City. Now every time he is out in the world I want to know if he is wearing the suit!

pg. 207 "Priest signed his name and gave her back the clipboard" This seems to easy after the sweat of the last time he had to sign his name.

pg. 233 Whenever I've been stopped by a cop in the US they've asked me for my drivers license with my Social Security number. This could be an even bigger headache for Priest.

- pg. 240            “The agent added: “ We also need ages and permanent addresses””  
What about Social Security Numbers?
- pg. 251            When Judy makes the joke about wanting the seismic vibrator it  
didn’t work for me having her say that in front of her father.
- pg. 253            typo - “ saying” instead of “ say
- pg. 254            Is this “ Stella” in fact Star? I don’t remember this question being  
answered in the book.
- pg. 257            It seems to me that Milt would have some good advice for Judy  
at this point.
- pg. 270            “ If this is what you’re like when you’re kind of tetchy, I’d hate  
to see you when you’re real mad.” It took me a couple of re-reads to figure out whose  
point of view this was.
- pg. 271            When Judy goes ahead and does the TV interview it made me  
wonder if this was proper procedure. Could she decide to go ahead and do this on her  
own? It seems a bit implausible.
- pg. 275 - 276        I felt that Priest answered the question about Mario too quickly  
and too completely.
- pg. 281            “ a” is missing between “There’s” and “computer”
- pg. 293            typo “ either” instead of “neither”
- pg.                The word “ Raja” appears inexplicably between two sentences on the  
fifth line up from the bottom of the page.
- pg. 306 - 307        I don’t quite buy this scene where Judy bursts in on Michael and  
Melanie. I think it’s the right substance for the scene, but the detail of it - the action and  
reaction - didn’t work for me. It veered towards comedy and I don’t think it should  
because it’s a scene about betrayals.
- pg. 310            Star has disappeared for now. Why? What about the  
consequences of her arriving uninvited in Melanie’s room the other night? What is she  
doing at the moment
- pg. 319            typo “ Honeymoon” instead of “ Honeymoon”
- pg. 326            How does Judy know that Priest was in Sacramento at six?
- pg. 326            I felt that there needed to be an extra scene between Judy and  
Michael where they would address her awful interruption. It would be a pretty  
devastating and embarrassing moment to overcome and here it seems to have been  
glossed over somewhat. I feel cheated of that exchange.
- pg. 333            I keep wondering about how Star and Melanie feel about each  
other. It’s as if the bad moments have no consequences between them, whereas in fact I  
feel that the bad vibes between them must be obstacles in the team work of what they  
are doing.

pg. 352 I feel that Michael would want to know where his son was living - he's too precise and responsible. Otherwise you need to make him remiss about his child - perhaps one of the reasons that Melanie left him?

pg. 360 Does Sally Dobro need to come into the story? She feels like yet another name. And wasn't there a Sally in Kincaid's office?

pg. 387 This scene with all the detail about finding the record seems long and a bit ponderous after the adrenaline rush of the previous scene. I started skimming here.

pg. 388 I found myself irritated with Maddox for not just buying the record. Is there some special procedural reason why she can't?

pg. 401 Chapter 18 was the same as Chapter 17 with different page numbers.

pg. 433 The line about Shirley Day "looking gorgeously attractive and deeply intelligent at the same time" is almost ironic. Wasn't sure what it was saying.

pg. 445 It seems too convenient that Michael gets out of the helicopter with Judy just before the craft goes down - I felt you needed a bit more here to give him a reason for following her when the other agents don't.

pg. 455 This final piece from inside Priests head doesn't quite work for me - in the same way that the beginning piece doesn't quite work. I'm not entirely sure why, but they both jarred somewhat.