

# Writers House LLC

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***MR. KEN FOLLETT  
BY FAX TO LONDON &  
MESSENGER TO FOUR SEASONS, NY***

Dear Ken,

It is late Thursday night and I'm dictating this immediately on my return from Florida where I spent almost all of last week going over your manuscript scene by scene and page by page. As you'll see when we meet, I have made a ton of marginal notes, lots of line changes to make these characters sound more American; and as has been our practice, most of the larger structural suggestions are presented at the end of scenes or chapters where I think changes would help.

First, I want to congratulate you on this plot. You have devised a wonderfully intricate and even ingenious sequence of cat and mouse scenes that push the action ahead brilliantly. The novel is just chock full of surprising twists and turns. And Luke and his amnesia work even better than I ever thought they could.

But there are, as I see it, three important areas of further work for you to consider. Many of the scenes from the points of view of Anthony and Elspeth work poorly or hardly at all. One solution would be to cut many of them, and as you'll see in your text, I am suggesting cutting several. Another solution would be to try and enrich and build up these characters, and I'm going to try and offer you ways in which you might be able to do this. The third "layer" which needs adding onto what you now have, is texture; and I'll be more specific later in this letter.

Anthony: For us as readers to become emotionally involved in the scenes written from his point of view, we need to feel for him as much as we did for, say, "Feliks" or "Faber." As you have it now, that isn't happening. One big thing which allied us with those earlier heroes of yours was that they from the outset were in danger. What if Anthony from the beginning is the subject of an internal investigation? What if one of his colleagues who doesn't even know about his Soviet involvement is trying to stab him in the back professionally? What if Nik for some reason is fed up with him and is threatening to have him exposed? So there you have one possible avenue.

Feliks wants to, as it were, save the world, save millions of Russians from being slaughtered in a useless capitalist war. Anthony wants communism to triumph and to bring equality and justice to everyone; But we haven't yet found a way to render this idealism of his dramatically. I believe that in the 1950's the Washington public schools were still segregated. Could this be a burning issue for him? His Communism could be rooted in a tyrranized childhood, but it also would benefit from his highly sophisticated and analytical evaluation of social and economic systems. He may hate his father, but I don't think the scenes you have with his father are working, and I'd love to see some other actions which allow us to participate in his devotion to the Communist ideal. There ought to be some contemporary news items (one in particular) which you could perhaps use.

Another way to build him up, I think, is to increase his devotion to Luke. Maybe initially the plan was to kidnap Luke and confine him until the launch, but Anthony couldn't bear treating his old pal so cruelly, and hence the amnesia. And when Luke slips away and becomes a threat, he still could struggle against killing him. Instead of a gun with bullets, he limits himself to a stun gun, a weapon that would immobilize Luke but not kill him. Maybe only at Hunstville does he become desperate enough to carry a real gun. Another way to beef up his human side would be through his relationship with Billie. I think he should be carrying a torch for her which he would like to put out but just can not. He's reconciled to the fact that he'll never have her, but he just can't keep away from her, and that explains his close relationship with Larry. He's fond of the boy

and indeed does like doing things with him, but mainly all that is an excuse to maintain regular contact with Billie.

He has been in the CIA for quite some years and has risen to an important position, but we have no idea what he has accomplished, what special things he's managed to do, to achieve this eminence. Nor do we know anything about what he has done for the Soviets. Some of this could come out in scenes with Nik and/or Elspeth.

And I like the idea that Pete is fanatically loyal to him; but as you're portraying him now, he does not seem to be the kind of character to whom anyone would be fanatically loyal. He seems narcissistic. We may need a scene in which we see him do something wonderful for Pete. Of course, where you'll put this, at this stage, I have no idea.

Elspeth: Towards the end of the novel, we find out how much she loves Luke and how devastated she is by her losing him. But earlier in the story while he's made to lose his memory and while he's in distress and being chased madly around Washington, we don't sense any of her love and concern for him. How much more interesting she would be, I think, if she tried to call off Anthony, to threaten him, to threaten Nik, in short, to be at least at moments a normal hysterical wife. To her, Luke could be a Prince, a paragon, she should worship the ground he walks on and she must hate herself almost all the time for deceiving him. She might even have fantasies about adopting a child or more than one child.

She has been working for the Russians even longer than Anthony has, but with her too, we have no sense of her accomplishments in this area, her skills, what she has done along these lines that she feels proud of.

Leftists of this period were particularly incensed by the cruel and unjust treatment of Negroes and all this could have been much aroused in her with the move to Huntsville where Negroes (as they were called at the time) lived in shacks, had to sit in backs of buses, or were confined to the balconies of movie theatres, in short, were legally, designated as pariahs and second class citizens. Maybe her favorite person in the world was a Black nanny who raised her. As a result, she has, a love for Blacks and Black culture, but this is something she can't show at Redstone. Here is another possible basis for her political orientation which I think might work better than her father being in danger or Guatemala, neither of which worked for me. There could have been a lynching in a hamlet near Hunstville. Another possibility might be a kid sister or niece or nephew who participated in some Negro Voter Registration drive, and this young person was killed by racist rednecks, a kind of thing which actually was happening if not in the fifties, then certainly in the early sixties.

Another way to give her some depth might be to make her jealous of Luke's fanatic devotion to his work. She could want him to teach at a university or do pure research and spend more time with her, and that could be part of her hatred of this rocket launch. But at the same time she could feel terribly guilty for working against something

which she knows means so much to him. To sum up, we have to find ways if not to like her, at least feel for her. Right now she's a bit of a bitch.

Texture: Harvard in 1941 was under a cloud, the threat of the war in Europe hung over all the young people in school there. Some were isolationist, some wanted the US to join Britain against Hitler. Some were pacifists. It was a time of incredible energy, excitement and fear; and all that has to be part of the goings on of your young cast of characters. There were rallies, fundraisers, protest marches, and we need the flavor of all that at the same time as your young people are having their personal adventures.

And Washington in the mid fifties had a whole other flavor. Television was becoming a major medium. Negotiations to end the Korean War were still dragging on; and there was fear that the Communists would launch yet more invasions. I don't recall whether or not by this time we had developed the hydrogen bomb or at what stage the Russians were with their own atomic capabilities, but these were all burning issues. Plainly we don't need or want a lot of this stuff, but we do need at least some references to the main political and cultural cross currents of the time. Also Washington physically is such a gorgeous city. It would be appropriate, I think, for an amnesiac like Luke to discover some of this.

Your next two environments are Redstone Arsenal and Cape Canaveral. Redstone, for me, is sketchily portrayed. Should it have an eerie lonely feeling with all

the scientists and engineers having gone to Cape Canaveral? Or is it such a big base that its bustling with all kinds of other activities and no one even notices that these scientists and engineers are gone? Are the buildings all ramshackle barracks, or are there rows of splendid anti-bellum-like houses for generals and colonels. And what's the town of Hunstville itself like? All we learn is that it is small.

Cape Canaveral could benefit from filling in along similar lines, as could Billie's hospital. I have no sense of whether the base occupies 5, 50 or 5,000 acres? And I assume that there must be a large permanent staff down there whereas Luke and his crew are only transients, but we get no sense of how all this is arranged. How far away, for example, are the buildings where the scientists and engineers are working from the launch pad? In the manuscript all these things appear to be walking distance from one another; but I would expect that the launch pad would have to be rather far away. You need to be able smell this place, and see it and sense the minute by minute jumpiness of the people who work there.

Finally, I wonder too if Colonel Hide ought to be the boob that you make him. I think the book would work better if he were a hardworking, efficient, and a first class security person. In fact, I doubt that he would have been given this position without these qualities. If you do this he becomes so much more formidable, and then Elspeth must really rise to the occasion to cope with him.

Ken, here's some stuff for you to chew over while you're on the plane, and then  
we can get into more details when we see each other on Sunday. Regards to Barbara.

Warmest Wishes,

A handwritten signature consisting of the letters "Al" followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Al

**Notes on the 1<sup>st</sup> draft—AZ 21 Nov 99**

Anthony, not Nik, persuades Elspeth to have her tubes tied. Their conversation about this explains the commitment of each of them.

At the time, many people in the U.S. military advocated a "First Strike" against the USSR.

Anthony must have achieved some triumph in order to get his promotion within the CIA. Maybe it was a piece of information the Soviets supplied him with. Maybe it was in reality some disinformation.

Harold needs to be a much stronger rival to Luke if there is to be any drama in Billie's love story. Maybe Harold is in Billie's mind when she wakes up. Shall she sleep with him? She has been awake half the night thinking about him.

Explain that Anthony and Elspeth want to remain in place as spies after the rocket has blown up. Therefore it would not be sufficient just to capture Luke and hold him prisoner for three days.

More on Billie's professional life.

What does Luke see in Elspeth? She is his intellectual equal. When he meets up with her after Peg's wedding, he goes to watch her conducting a children's orchestra, her part-time hobby. He is touched by how good she is with the children.

After the end of the first day, Luke should be calling in and speaking to von Braun and/or Col. Hide.

When he learns that his father is dead, he should call his mother and/or siblings.

Anthony is Chaim Tannenbaum.

The political discussions at Harvard should have a personal element, maybe Elspeth v. Luke.