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By fax – 2 page(s)

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14 June 2000	121-416	121-708	helmut.pesch@luebbe.de

Re: "Code for Zero"

Dear Mr. Follett,

Last week, I had the pleasure and the privilege of reading the final draft of your latest novel, *Code for Zero*. It is again, a finely crafted story, and even for those who do not share the fascination for the technical aspects of space exploration, the characters linger in your mind for a long time after you have turned the final page.

Since I always read these kinds of novels also with an editor's eye, I have come across a few problems with the storyline, which I have put down as a series of notes and queries. Of course, it may be that I just overlooked some hints which would emerge in a second, more thorough reading.

(1) Why did Luke stop at Huntsville on his flight to Washington? Presumably to leave the package addressed to Theo Packman in his locker. But shouldn't he have taken it to Washington as proof? He didn't suspect at that time that Elspeth was involved (see comment on note 4), so why did he have to be that cautious? Just an old wartime habit?

It may be necessary as a plot element, but it isn't sufficiently motivated, I think, or at least not self-evident to the reader. So some explanation in the novel would be helpful.

(2) Is it possible, for Billie, a private citizen, to attend a regular flight with a gun plus ammunition in her attaché case (p. 308)?

Maybe it was, in 1958; I am just wondering.

(3) How can Theo Packman be able to blow up the rocket when the package with the blueprints of the self destruct mechanism addressed to him never reached him? As the xerocopier log proves, Elspeth made only the copies contained in the envelope. She put them in the mail, but this was intercepted by Luke before it could be dispatched, and de-

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posited at Huntsville. As she knew (p. 371). So how could she expect the rocket to blow up at the first countdown? If she ever made a second set of copies later (i.e. after Luke's departure) and passed it on to Theo, it is never mentioned or even alluded to in the story.

I have no patent solution for this problem, except for actually introducing a second mailing by Elspeth to get the relevant information to Theo.

(4) It is said (on p. 371), that Luke went to the mail room and found the copies in an envelope addressed to Theo Packman. The envelope presumably was sealed. Does that imply that he opened all the envelopes in the outgoing mail, just on a slight suspicion because there was some irregularity in the photocopier log? (People do make private photocopies in offices, even at Lübbe, though they know they are not allowed to.)

Probably it would be just sufficient to say that this was the only package with an unusual or unknown address, or without a sender, or whatever. I suppose that the address was typed, because Luke should have recognized the handwriting, and it is said that he did not have a clue as to who posted it.

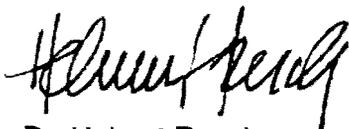
The following two are just minor ones:

(6) On p. 39, the reader is told why Pete is indebted to Anthony. The story is repeated on p. 269, as if it were new information.

(7) On p. 155, Luke is told by Colonel Bill Hide that he was supposed to see a General Sherwood at the Pentagon who is presumably also an old friend of the family. On p. 234 Billie and Luke meet with a Colonel Lopez from the Pentagon. Why didn't they see General Sherwood? Or is this just a glitch?

I wish to emphasize that these quibbles do not imply any criticism of the novel as a whole. I think it is a terrific story, and the wheels are already clicking in my head on how to present it to its greatest advantage. It is just that for me, as an editor of some 15 years' experience, old habits are hard to break. If you think that any of this is relevant, please let me know what you think about it. And I hope that you won't take this amiss.

With best regards,



Dr. Helmut Pesch
Editorial Director
Gustav Lübbe Verlag

P.S. Peter Molden just told me about the Columbia Pictures option. What great news! Congratulations!

Ken Follett

To: helmut.pesch@luebbe.de
Subject: Code to Zero

Dear Dr Pesch,

Thanks for your fax. I'm delighted that you enjoyed the book.

1. Luke made two copies of the papers in the package addressed to Theo Packman. He took one to Huntsville as a precaution. The other he took to Washington, and gave to Anthony Carroll. Anthony has it in his hand when he goes to see George Cooperman (TS p68).

However, I think your suggestion of an explanation is good, and when I correct the proofs I will add a line (TS p323) to the effect that Luke's wartime experience of clandestine work has made him ultra-cautious.

2. Yes. Scanning of luggage for firearms was not introduced until the seventies, as I recall.

3. After finding the package addressed to Packman, and making two Xerox copies of the documents, Luke replaced the original package in the mail room. This is standard counter-intelligence procedure. When a spy network is discovered, it is left in place and used to disseminate disinformation.

However, you are quite right to point out that this ought to be explained, and I will add a line (TS p371).

4. Either Luke was able to guess which envelope contained a thick wad of photocopies, or he opened several envelopes until he found the right one: I think we may leave the reader to assume that small detail, as an explanation would be ponderous.

6. (You have no item 5 in your fax!) I think the repeat is necessary. Most readers will have forgotten this detail after more than 200 pages.

7. A general would not be on duty at the Pentagon so late at night. Luke's call is dealt with by a more junior officer. Once again I think we may leave the reader to assume this, as the explanation is too boring.

I'm very pleased to have your notes and flattered that my book has been read so carefully!

Best wishes,

Ken Follett.