

Ken Follett
The Follett Office
The Old Rectory
Old Knebworth Lane
Stevenage
Herts
SG3 6PT

9th January 2004

Dear Ken

I hope you got my message that I've now finished and hugely enjoyed reading WHITEOUT. It's very compelling, full of atmosphere, and has a terrific cast of characters, plus some truly terrifyingly dramatic scenes - and all over 24 hours. The actual siege itself is brilliant, and I think that's what's so clever about it: it's very cleverly paced with a great central core. And of course, I really approve of the new Scottish background! Very many congratulations to you.

Oddly, I had a dream last night where I was driving with one of my sons in an opened-topped Rolls Royce, the silver lady right in front of my nose - on my way to a football match or something. I woke up thinking 'Where did that come from?' and of course, it's all the really terrific details of cars in WHITEOUT, somehow come out all gobbledygook in my subconscious.

I made a few page notes as I was going through, which I'll jot down here, just in case they are at all useful. There are a couple of things that could need tidying plotwise, but you will no doubt think I've been fantastically pedantic, so just ignore wherever you want to.

P1 1.1 are they called 'personnel departments' now - ours is, but I know that often they are referred to as 'human resources' though you use that phrase on p7

1.7 probably capitalize 'Facilities Director'

5 lines up: suggest 'gothic' pointed arches, since it's Victorian

p4 1.11 'three people responsible' sounds a bit odd, suggest 'three people remaining'

1.13 typo 'manager'

p5 1.14 suggest 'tallied with' rather than 'agreed with'

p6 3 lines up: typo 'a delicate situation'

p7 1.1 suggest 'whether they are at home or on holiday'

1.7 'human resources' here

p20 last line: suggest slightly more beguiling line such as 'Why Toni, as if I would' or some such

p23 5 lines up: 'rear' sounds slightly coy - could we not just use back or ass?

P26 First para: we've had reference to the Christmas break and the perfect timing at the end of p23

1.11 'Throw himself off Forth Bridge' – he sounds a bit wet here, perhaps simply 'wanted to be sick'

P29 1.5 He's called Michael Ross, isn't he? But actually, he's also called Mark Ross a lot, so we need to decide which name you want to use and make corrections throughout.

Bottom of page, you refer Kit not wanting to commit suicide, but on p26 he's mentioned, perhaps not seriously, wanting to chuck himself off the Forth Bridge (I said I'm a pedant).

P31 1.8 Mark Ross here, and several times on forthcoming pages. I haven't noted them all.

P35 Last para: we, the reader, know about Kit's misdemeanours, so it seems a bit odd to have this background information again so soon.

P59 Harry spitting into the pool made me want to gag! V. successful image, then!

P70 I love this scene with Tom and his Game Boy. V. apt for a young boy.

P74 Top of page: 'She was able to say this with confidence because she was the person who gave Frank Hackett the dud information' – can we delete this line, because the reader already knows about it, cf p19

P86 1.11 I think to call Stanley 'Daddy' in speech is good, but to refer to him as such in the narrative seems odd – why not just 'her father'?

P105 V. good here and elsewhere on teenagers, young love and fumbling etc.

P161 1.9 'to alert Stanley' – to what? To the phones being out of order? Last line, again use of Daddy, but not in speech, sits oddly. Can you look at this usage throughout if you agree with me, because it comes up a lot.

P163 1.7 'surreptiously' seems a curious word to use – do we need it?

1.17 'made haloes' rather than 'put'?

P164 1.1 'Daddy might have a brilliant scientific idea and go this study to use the computer' Do we need all these three possibilities together? Might be more effective to have something like 'People were always walking around in the middle of the night: someone getting a drink of water, his father busy at his computer' or something?

P165 1.1 'tire tracks' – American spelling deliberate here and elsewhere?

1.3 and 5: repetition of suspicion. Suggest line 5 'and she would be none the wiser' instead. And Miranda knows that Kit has gone out, doesn't she? On p163 he stalks off.

P167 1.1 'doctored to show them in their new guises' rather than 'as disguised'?

P170 1.9 suggest 'Toni shook her head, perplexed' rather than 'in perplexity'

P173 1.7 'ravening' – this is an unusual word to use, but I know what you mean. Would 'voracious' or 'rabid' be better? And we've still got Mark Ross here, rather than Michael.

P183 1.13 'Kit studied the bank of screens' better?

P188 1.10 Should Kit say something like 'The guards can't go in there, and I've doctored the monitors' Just to make it clear that while the guards can't see what's going on in BSL4, the gang CAN still see reception and the corridors – hence Daisy watching Susan.

P189 1.2 I think it's been made clear enough, though, that Kit has moved the recording screens to show the previous night's footage?

P192 1.1 What's a 'hot hatch'?

P197 1.4 'youths' better than 'boys'?
1.13 typo 'It was one o'clock'

p215 1.6 'Kit was depressed beyond measure' sounds a bit too considered for a man in a panic – he's gutted, isn't he? Would something like 'distraught' or 'really panicky now' be better. And the word 'prank' also sounds a little too coy – because Kit knew from the first it would be more than that. I'd delete it and leave it at 'heist'

p216 1.1 Do we need 'bleeding from their eyes'. 'Thousands of people would die' is somehow more impactful.

1.17 Can we re-jig this to read 'Who would spend Christmas at a motel, he wondered? Stranded businessmen, perhaps?' and get rid of the reference to Hindus – it seems a bit odd to pick them out, rather than Muslims, or Jews, or any other faith.

P226 Bottom line. Why 'Scottish' thieves specifically? Just 'thieves' would be better, I think.

P227 1.11 How about 'and I think we need to grab a snowplough so that we can catch up with the getaway van' – it's more colloquial, I think.

P232 1.15 It's 'Puffa' jacket, isn't it? A brand name. Wish I didn't know this!

P243 1.11 'falling down with exhaustion' sounds a bit wordy. How about simply 'and they were all exhausted'?

P244 1.16 Doesn't Miranda know that Kit has gone out. She knows he's left abruptly (p163), doesn't she, but perhaps not that he's actually left the house?

P246 1.5 'benison' This is an unusual word, isn't it? Would 'blessing' do?

P252 1.1 'the getaway vehicle'. I may have missed something, but how does the receptionist know about it – Carl's TV report hasn't been shown yet, has it? Maybe he's just putting two and two together.

P255 1.8 'elegant but vulnerable'?

P256 1.5 Kit worried again that Miranda might have noticed he wasn't in his bed. We've had this before, so I don't feel the reader needs to know again.

P259 1.11 suggest 'enough charm'

P266 7 lines up: 'It's a system we installed to prevent foolish people getting in' Wouldn't Frank be unable to resist reacting with a jibe to this from Toni by saying something like 'Well, didn't do much to stop the thieves then, did it?' After all, Toni's system has failed. Or mention that thieves must have been clever, or something.

P268 last line: I think it's 'Smart Aleck'

P269 two lines up: 'on routine matters' better, or delete the phrase and just have 'waste precious time and miss important connections'

P272 lines 4 and 8 – rept uncomfortable/uncomfortably. Suggest 1.8 'Now, however, she felt unsure of herself' or something.

P319 last line 'She had an ace up her sleeve...Frank had a guilty secret' We know this from p20 where she reminds him of Farmer Johnny Kirk, so the reader doesn't need to know all the detail. We could have instead 'It was time to play her ace. This was an emergency, and anyway, he had shown no loyalty to her lately' Then she goes on to her conversation with Frank re Johnny.

P324 1.3 suggest 'just an ignorant thug' for a slightly more punchier tone?

1.9 they've had this almost identical forecast (albeit with the presenter in a Santa hat) when they arrived at the house, on p247 and turned on the TV

p325 1.14 the phrase 'irresponsible robbers' sounds a bit twee. What about simply 'a gang' or something.

P342 1.9 'something beginning with 'g' 'sounds a bit naïve – after all, Toni would suspect that they are armed, and anyway, doesn't she know this from her visit to the lab and finding the guards tied up?

P346 1.15 'can we change this to 'He didn't want Miranda to learn of their destination' – it's a bit neater, somehow, and we know he's referring to the airfield, don't we?

P384 I think we should delete the sentence 'The old man did not know whether to throw a tantrum or burst into tears' because I think the phrase 'he saw anger there, as he expected but also grief' is very poignant on its own and somehow 'throw a tantrum' is too toddler-ish for the distinguished Stanley.

P394 6 lines up typo 'see'

P396 1.3 this paragraph: wouldn't Olga know, both as a barrister, and through press reports, what Daisy's sentence was? Is that she isn't dead?

P400 I don't want you to overdo tying up the ends, but do Carl and Frank get any come-uppance do you think? It may not matter here. And what about Toni's mother: you could add something about her and the puppy, in a light-hearted way. Again, not necessary!

Enough Ken! Please forgive some of these slightly picky points, but I thought it worth jotting them down. Give me a ring if there's anything you want to discuss, won't you?

With very best wishes

Imogen