



AR - FYI <sup>SPP</sup>  
re: KEN FOLLETT

WILLIAM MORROW & COMPANY, INC./PUBLISHERS

Quill Paperbacks  
Fielding Travel Books  
Perigord Press  
Hearst Books  
Morrow Junior Books  
Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books  
Greenwillow Books  
Hearst Marine Books

105 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10016

27 March 1985

Ken Follett  
92 Cheyne Walk  
London SW10 ODQ  
England

AZ	<input type="checkbox"/>	AB	<input type="checkbox"/>
WH	<input type="checkbox"/>	FL	<input type="checkbox"/>
JM	<input type="checkbox"/>	AD	<input type="checkbox"/>
AE	<input type="checkbox"/>	SC	<input type="checkbox"/>

APR 4 1985

Dear Ken,

I'm enclosing a newsclip of yesterday's front page New York Times story. If I needed any proof that you got Afghanistan right, here it is. It reads like a chapter from your book.

This is the most polished draft of yours I've seen. You said there were still some holes in it and there are. But they have to be felt, not seen, because it all flows. The plot falls into place and the things that bothered me in the outline are now logical and believable. Remember when I said that if you drop down a helicopter just when Jane and Ellis need it, it won't do? I didn't even think of that when I came to it. In fact the helicopter hunt for the fleeing pair is so perilous it reminds me of a nightmare familiar to the human race -- being hunted from above. I wouldn't minded having seen Jean-Pierre hunted that way too. A marvelous finish for a villain.

Anyway, the story line is tight but the characters still need some work. Jane is just the other side of likeable, she's so belligerent. You begin to overdo the feminist message right away at the beginning when you have her pay for the cab twice. She jumps the gun when any non-neurotic woman would not, and a woman of her intelligence would not be so all-the-time, all-fired mad at the macho Afghanistans. She would more or less accept the fact that they were culturally worlds apart and take it from there. (Remind me to tell you sometime of my trip to a Greek island.) Yes.

On page 32 you begin a wonderful scene with Jane and Adbullah which I don't believe for a moment. Jane is eight and a half months pregnant (my calculation because she has the baby right after) and tending to a badly wounded child who should be going into fatal shock about then. Adbullah hits her. Jane does a semi-judo on him, spins him, hits him, butts him and throws him down the hill. I don't think a woman so near to term would have the leverage or balance to do all those things -- you have to roll over just to get out of bed! But physical impossibility isn't even the major objection. Jane's first natural concern would be for the wounded child and her unborn child. Not, "The

Separate scenes  
Make her action less "professional."  
She floors Abdullah by  
less more than by skill.

Abdullah snatches the child + pushes Jane aside?

-- 2 --

bastard is enjoying this" and whamo! Her natural reaction would be to point to the child whose hand had just been blown off, and the natural reaction of Abdullah would have been to forget about Jane's naked breasts in shock and concern for the child, who is after all one of his own tribe. The natural thing would be that these two enemies aid each other in a common cause -- to save the child's life who is simply forgotten during this Wonderwoman episode. It's another case where Jane's aggression becomes caricature instead of character.

The birth of Chantal is great, simply great. I loved it all.

On page 17 there is a small paragraph to which I respond -- "A whole orchestra?" It's just a touch but it lacks the Follett touch. *disagree* *C.F.T.*

The Boris-Ellis episode is pure Follett and perfect. Nobody can do spies the way you do. It bothered me at first that though we met Ellis we didn't have a hint at his profession until we actually see him as a spy. But on second thought I decided it didn't matter. That chapter had to be good because it's a total interruption of the Afghan story. I adored Ellis's boss, the High Noon manque. In this chapter also you solved that important thing: a stake which goes beyond the players and involves the readers. You made Ellis's presence in Afghanistan a boon to the Russians, if he's caught. And you made Ellis, his poetry, failed marriage, strange profession and quixotic commitment, a complex, interesting character. In that whole chapter people are full of surprises -- just like life. (I think later on you could stop watching Jane so much and give us a little more of the Ellis you created in this chapter.)

Jean-Pierre is still a problem. You do show his love for Jane and Chantal, tortured as it is by the opposite pull of his grandiose ambitions as a world-changer. You do give him an imbedded motivation with his love/hate for a father he feels he must surpass. You've given him the seeds of complexity but I don't feel you carry them through. He's not yet a Follett villain you love to hate and hate to love. In the end J-P just longs for Jane's destruction or enslavement -- practically the same thing. What if somewhere -- sometime after J-P knows Jane knows -- J-P saves Jane's life. Maybe they're walking by a cliff edge and a rock slips and Jane is going over and J-P grabs her and when he gathers her to him he knows -- from his fright -- that he wants to give it all up and just let himself love her. Just for a beat his demons have been driven away. Purely. It's a suggestion -- you'd think of something much better -- but something more is needed to make him truly a person.

More detail on the arrest + imprisonment of JP's father. (Call Asenthal?)  
When the convoy returns, J-P works day + night to save the life of a wounded man.

*disagree*

J-P's far-away motivation doesn't seem quite enough. The key word for Jean-Pierre is grandiose. He's not an avenging revolutionary like Feliks, or a brilliant master spy like Wolff, or a cynical loner like Faber. He is a traitor, obsessed by illusions of glory. It seems to me that J-P doesn't belong to anyone -- not even the Russians. That kind of grandiosity needs to be buttressed by something more than what you've given him. So what about money? Enough money (and the Russians promise him a lot) is power, it fits grandiosity. Anatoly could have read J-P very well and promised him scads of money as well as high honors in the innermost circle, promised to make him into a master spy and turn him loose on the world, loaded. (But does Anatoly need J-P that much?) And you could use those marvelous interior monologue of J-P's to dispense this info. Again, a suggestion, but I feel something more is needed to explain why J-P does what he does.

There's another bothersome question of logical behavior when Ellis lands in Afghanistan. J-P is entirely too trusting of Ellis, too accepting of his explanation for being there. "He came to teach the guerillas to fight." The obvious question J-P would have is "who sent him?" And the answer would have to be that Ellis is a US agent. Anything less than a strong suspicion of that would be too dumb on J-P's part. Jane's reaction is off too. She already knows Ellis is a CIA spy and now she knows J-P is a Russian spy. It would be feeble-minded of her to merely "glare" at Ellis when he arrives, and not conjecture on the meaning of it all, let alone not even get the wind up. When you finally mention it on page 164 it's too late. Jane should take alarm and immediately. The same with J-P. Not to do so is out of character for both of them and doesn't fit the story either. *V*.

On page 165 Jane goes into another of her feminist snits. She should be thinking of other things.

Among the Afghanistans we have Mohammed, Fara, Adbullah, Masud (almost always off-scene) and a few others who come and go. But we don't really know any of them. You're a master at creating a total portrait in very few words (I always think of the shepherd in EYE OF THE NEEDLE), and you did it here with Simone of the small "ungenerous eyes." But you seem to walk the Afghans through their parts without looking at them very much, or very hard. I don't know who or where but I'd love to see an Afghanistan like your shepherd somewhere in this book. Stop the action for a minute and let us know him -- or her. There's one thing about the Afghanistans I'd like to understand better. You've established them as

blood thirsty and relentless, yet they seem so pious too. It's a quality of Islam I've never understood.

Do you think Masud could be suspicious of Ellis? Not wanting the Americans there any more than the Russians, but very willing to use any help the Americans will give to drive them out? Or is that too trite? I would like to get into Masud a bit more. This story focuses too much on the three main players.

*heli, look at Masud from line n time.*

I loved when Jane wouldn't blow up the Russians because of their mothers, because of Chantal, because it would be murder. The woman has overcome the feminist. And thanks, thanks, for not including a child massacre scene!

Coming up to the finish: In all your other novels we look at the villain as much as the hero in the final climax. (Wolff and Vandam in the desert, Faber and his lover by the sea, Feliks and the burning house). But not here, and I think your readers will feel that lack. Jean-Pierre exits in a non-fatal fall, pushed by Jane. There's no final face-off, not really, and J-P's story seems to be left unfinished. Though your other villains are more lethal than J-P they are not more villainous. J-P is a traitor, and didn't Dante reserve the ninth circle of hell for traitors? *drag-ee*

*↑ PG in ngr, AC n wmy.*

What if J-P jumps out of the helicopter when it's too high to be nonfatal and tries to take Jane with him and to free herself Jane would have to kill him, push him out? Or what if Anatoly is disposed of (broken legs maybe?) and J-P has the radio and Ellis and Jane in the helicopter have got to get him or they'll be shot down by the Russians so they chase him? (Don't know what you'd do about the soldiers here though). What if Jane and Ellis just keep J-P on the helicopter to turn him over and he goes completely mad and escapes into one of those monologues of his? I don't really expect you to follow any of these "what ifs". I just don't like to point out a problem without making a stab at a solution. I think we need a better ending (and all that activity in the helicopter gets kind of confusing too), more focused between villain and heroes, more satisfying to readers.

On looking over what I've written I see I talk more about J-P than anything else. He is the weak point in the novel, the hole that needs to be filled. You give over the book too much to Jane, without an equally vivid adversary. (I'd also like Ellis to play a somewhat bigger role in Afghanistan, as that marvelous character you created in his chapter.) You need to give J-P a stronger conflict within himself to make him a real,

stronger person. In all your novels you've been able to bring the reader to the point of hating to love the villain. I'm afraid nobody could love J-P, let alone hate to. When you've solved the problem of J-P I'm certain there will be more suspense throughout the story and that utterly satisfying grand climax will take care of itself.

After that, it's just toning down Jane's feministic belligerence, and giving the novel a bit of breathing room by opening it up to the Afghanistans, and painting one or more marvelous portraits -- an easy task for you.

As I said at the beginning of the letter, this is your most polished first draft. So much of it delivers the goods in a perfect Follett fashion, that the gaps are less obvious than usual. The plot works, though I did find the last scene confusing. The book lacks its full quota of suspense and conflict however, and they have to be found in the characters, especially J-P.

You had World War I and II and Israel in your other thrillers to help along in the suspense. Afghanistan is a minor skirmish, not yet relegated to history, in comparison. So your people have to do it all.

I hope all this makes sense. "Fix up a major character" seems such a nonspecific request, the kind that would drive me mad if I were a writer. But I'm not, thank God, so it's over to you.

See you soon.

Love,



PG/ jw

cc: Al Zuckerman

Make the reader long for Jane & Ellis to get together.

At some point JP chooses not to have a life. (Anabli's life).

Anabli is a father-figure to Jean-Pierre.

Anabli is doing what JP's father wanted to do.

Anabli sees JP's "saving grace" (he is a healer).

Climax: Ellis defeats JP in a fight but chooses

not to kill him.