

letter to Ken Follett  
cc Al Zuckerman ✓

Feb. 5, 1979

Dear Ken:

Here are some thoughts re TRIPLE.

I thought the Prologue tended to be a bit sketchy, brief, and therefore with the rush of characters not to do its job quite of implanting the various main players in the reader's mind, give him enough to sustain him until we come back to them for connections in 1967 onward. It ~~occurred~~ occurred that you might start with Chapter 1, which to me is involving and tends to hook the reader ~~considerably~~ rather considerably more than the Prologue, with people only adumbrated. Here we're curious and drawn in; in the Prologue we can't really see much beyond the facade, and aren't really nourished especially by the tag line of Hassan getting it on some with ~~Mr~~ Ashford's wife. In NEEDLE the beginning was not only highly dramatic, it also began very effectively in terms of the drama and action to set the character of the main character. That's <sup>so much</sup> not the case here with Nat; for example. ~~Not to say~~ If you ~~start with the Prologue as now~~ start with Chapter 1, you could flashback to the relevant parts of the material in the Prologue as now as it becomes appropriate, and there would be less pressure on the Prologue to do more than perhaps it's able to do for the reader. If you do keep the Prologue, ~~the~~ the connections in Chapter 1 to it are needed, I felt, sooner, ~~and more effectively~~

The rest will be more or less in order of occurrence as I read:

Did you have to tell me? Yes, please Towfik. Did you have [illegible]. Yes [illegible] Towfik.  
P.42: I wasn't sure why the double-agent killed "~~Towfik~~." I gather because he was too easily compromised? This seems a bit presumptuous, doesn't it? Pls. clarify.  
P.73: "Diamante" spectacles is British, I guess. Too much for U.S. I <sup>in</sup> this connection, I might say generally that British usages tend to find their way into the mouths of Russians and even P.L.O. (Fedayeen) people in rather incongruous fashion. The dialogue of Cortone is also a bit strained ~~too~~ and needs work to come out sounding right. I can

The reason for

I suspect, help.

*The reason for*

P.81: I find it a bit hard to understand ~~the~~ the assumption of even the possibility that the Egyptians could build a bomb. And, it's not too clear just what Egyptians have disagree built so far and <sup>yes</sup> now. This needs to be more specific, I suspect, to be sufficiently credible.

P.83: Forgive me, but for an American reader, "Stone the crows, it's Yasif Hassan" is a bit too much.

*stagnant*

P.85: "Mottie"? Why is Nat "afraid of answers" except about Ashford's wife, whom we gather he wanted but never had? (And here, p.86 top, ~~xxxxxxx~~ you could flashback and begin to fill in some of 1946, as suggested above).

P.93: Needs some reworking re Jews at top. Could be misinterpreted? *Yes* Yes

P.99: I suggest that the line after asterisk re how Nat lost his tail, etc., is just a bit punsy, funsy, and this is an occasional lapse of this manuscript, I felt. In any case, it's distinctly gratuitous, I thought. The narrative can speak for itself. *Take it*

P.101: I suggest you don't make Nat feel all <sup>is</sup> so easy. It tends to diminish reader suspense.

P.104: Could have more of flashback here to 1947 as you pick up Rostov. *Yes* Yes

P.114: One wonders why the printouts aren't "secret" classification. And the man's coming out with I think you're planning to steal uranium is consistent with Nat's rather approach approach <sup>the approach</sup> the approach ~~the approach~~ *No dampen* unsubtle ~~approach~~ and hence an argument for making ~~it~~ more subtle. *No [illegible]*

P.114: Rostov on socialism and communism needs some reworking, I thought. Reads a bit stuck in. *don't use "truth"* don't use "truth"

P.122: Coloring books for a ~~thug~~ thug? I don't get it.

P.124: Why would Hassan think the queer who gave the ticket to Nat ~~still~~ would still be there? ✓

P.128: Again, things seem a bit too easy for Nat.

P.129: (It occurs: Why doesn't Borg tell Nat his cover is blown--which he sort of knows--and pull him off the case?). This really needs <sup>a</sup> ~~more~~ convincing explanation.)

P.140: We'd like to know sooner--at least now--why Nat is here at Ashford's; what info he needs to get. *flats* *disagree*

P.141: We still wonder why Borg hasn't told Nat his cover is blown, why he needs to find out for himself (because/<sup>Borg</sup> feels he can't risk field contact?).

P.151: When does this dream of Suza's begin for her? Why would it be of Nat except after he comes to see them? *fix it in time* fix it in time

P.154: Why would Rostov ask if Nat knew Ashford? He was there before when Nat was.

P.155: Business at top seems rather cut-and-dried, one, two, three sort of. X

P.160: Suza loves Nat? Seems pretty sudden.

P.164: <sup>&165;</sup> The sex business wfor Nat. It must be ~~shades~~, I felt, adjusted some, so that Nat isn't turned on by the perverse. It's Suza who makes him have the catharsis of reliving it honestly in memory that releases him <sup>from</sup> its bondage, but I strongly suggest you don't have him turned on by it. *He's released by it.*

*It's not the only way he can have sex.* not the only way he can have sex. *He's released by it.* *To criticize Russians?*

P.167: Rostov saying "bloody Russians" is at once British, and what's he, anyway? Also to criticize Russians

"patch" him through to me, etc. Also, I suggest you eliminate the "shits" and "fucks," which seems a bit ~~needless~~ *shit is a Russian*

P.174: Would Borg, the head of Assad, be recognized by a lower-level Russian tail? It doesn't seem likely on the surface, unless you explain. *Yes* Yes

P.175: Still feel you need to explain why Borg couldn't contact Nat (cause doesn't know where is x is and/pr too risky, I guess). (And p.175 and elsewhere: it strikes me that you tend to overwork the word "tail," which is so somehow old-hat pulp-slangy. And I also suggest that things are a bit too easy re losing these tails, etc., for Nat.)

~~At least let him see the picture~~  
P.176: Now that we get it, the rationale for not replacing Nat seems rather weak, now that his cover is blown. Please adjust.

P.177: I needed to be reminded who Robert is. *Take out* Take out

P.195: And still feel must justify better Borg not pulling Nat. "Still the best we've got" doesn't quite do it. Mention the other compelling reasons, ~~the~~

P.199: Too easy for tailx that Nat obliges by putting on the shirt with the bug-button; let the Russians put it on the top of his shirt pile, or something. (And the

*dep. any*

Buffalo cabbie dialogue needs editing). ✓

P.223: (It occurs that the coincidence of the spilled coffee earlier is rather conveneient. But ok, but why not go after Nat again to change more of his buttons? Need ~~to~~ to make clear they've lost his trail).

(Hassan is really a problem, I feel. I know he isn't supposed to be the most dominant character of this cast, but he is a main player, and for too long he seems pretty stupid, in fact a fool. The Trouble, is, to the extend he is this he also tends to lose his capacity for menacing our hero, Nat, etc. I think ~~you~~ you need to shade this, make him more substantive dangerous ~~even~~ though, and at the same time that, he's not over-bright or ~~effective~~ ambitious, etc.) Make him a threat Make him a threat

P.246: Please fix: "You poor bastard, I've got you now." ✓

P.249: It seems rather cryptic here re Abdel hoping he'd saved his country--which country? We're instantly not clear who he works for. Take out Take out

P.258: This new--to us--important role of Hssan gives him more substance, less the rather foolish passive sort he's seemed to now. Can we have hint of it via his viewpoint earlier?

P.259: I strongly ~~advise~~ against calling it a "publicity stunt"--I mean, the motivation for the P.L.O. re getting the ~~uranium~~ uranium. It's ~~not~~ altogether much too frivolous frivolous sounding. It needs to be carefully thought out and stated here. Yes Yes

PP260-64: The cadence, maybe on purpose, gets rather "iblical here, and I suggest too much so. And let Mahmoud tell more of why they're doing it, what effect he hopes for beyond a "publicity stunt." We do get it pp 275-76, but we need more or at least some of it here now.

P.265: Olga? Explain Explain

P.273: I find this a big hard to accept, this bringing Cohen, a total unknown, to the P.M. Why does he trust him? He really must trust him and have a good reason for that trust to do this. He would need, I suspect, to be tested somehow. I don't suggest the scene is bad; I suggest the plausibility of it needs working on.

"If you ever mention him I'll kill you."

"If you ever mention that I'll kill you."

Israel's security Israel's security [illegible].

P.282: Hassan seems to me to blurt out everything too fast to the professor. Why does he trust him with so much, even if he thinks the professor is sympathetic. The professor's sentiments better be even better known to Hassan somehow, but he still takes his time, gives hints to professor who picks them up and speculates, etc. And I suggest the professor too would be less committal, not so fast to take Hassan at his word. In short, more ~~subtle~~ careful and meaningful fencing between them, etc. *Put more way to Hassan, who is a too impressive a person.*

P.284: Let Suza be more sophisticated re her basis for blaming Israelis. And, indeed, it may be that at one time ~~she~~ she actually did cooperate with her father or somebody via him in some undercover work for the Arabs--when she was younger and more impressionable and still under the sway of father and mother, etc.

This also give more substance to the possibility that Nat, so far as the reader knows, may actually come to a point where he might have to kill ~~her~~ her as an enemy agent, etc., which we've ~~asked~~ been asked to believe possible. Otherwise it's a sort of paper-dragon. And, the coincidence of overhearing ~~key~~ key material at this "box hedge" is really--and always ~~struck~~ so struck me--rather gimmicky and set-up and not very convincing stuff. I urge you to find a better device for people learning ~~important~~ significant information.

P.286: Seems unlikely--though, I grant, convenient--that Ashford would remember an obscure G.I.'s name after 21 years. *Yes - Yes*

P.287-288: I suggest maybe let Hassan have seen Suza when he was here before and was struck again by her ~~striking~~ resemblance to her mother, etc. Suza's rationalization for being "mistaken" re hearing father plot to kill her lover is quite a reach. I suggest she can consider it, want to buy it but simply not be able to. But to the extent <sup>T</sup>that she does, let it be set up better...The words can be garbled, she can think she heard it but maybe the hedge does that <sup>to</sup> conversation (if you keep the hedge, which I hope you don't), and if it does, then ~~it~~ that needs to be planted earlier. I realize this is only for a moment, but it's important, even though

p.288 she knows it wasn't a mistake. She has to be credible at all times.

PP288-89: Again, it would make more sense for Hassan and her father to confide all this to Suza if her sympathies and even her work had been some with the Arabs when she was younger--even if at the time she did it mostly out of a desire to please her father, as any young girl might, etc. And their reasoning re why Cortone would believe Suza, trust her without checking Nat doesn't seem too convincing, really. I should think they would assume he definitely would try to check, and then once he does, if he can locate Nat, then they will have Nat located too, which is what they want, etc.

P.298: Why doesn't the house in Sicily have ~~apex~~ a phone. Very strange, very convenient. And <sup>you</sup> still, I feel, need more of Cortone convincing himself to take the chance and trust Suza. *Tumbledown have vacant for years* [Illegible] vacant for years.

P.299: Why does Cortone need to take Suza to warn Nat? Except, of course, for the exigencies ~~apex~~ of plot. He doesn't need her now, does he? Perhaps you might have it that he takes her to keep an eye on her.

P.302: Please, not "heist," too sort of jargony. I'm afraid ~~wex~~ aren't sufficiently convinced by Suza's argument with herself for not contacting the Israeli embassy in the first place, and especially wonder why she doesn't as a back-up once she's free of Hassan for a while in Buffalo. This really needs to be handled more convincingly.

P.305: Hassan dialogue here gets rather stilted ~~here~~ re Cortone. Suza, it strikes us, should have expected what happened from Hassan.

306: Suza just jumps right in Hassan's car? Doesn't even try to resist?

P.307: Finally Suza realizes she should phone the Israeli embassy. See above.

P.310: Suza's plans seem pretty vague. All right, but let her realize it as we do, and also that she's made a mistake all along in leading Hassan to Cortone, to Nat, to Sicily. And she now realizes she did it because she rationalized away her better

judgement out of her overwhelming, damn near crazy desire to see Nat--and <sup>must</sup> make that degree of unhinging desire convincing, please, via a scene from ~~her~~ her viewpoint in which we see this so we can believe it, just as we got one via Nat re his feelings for her (the letter, etc.). I think this is a good solution, ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ and hope you concur. It's tricky to keep her making some sort of sense earlier and then the self-revelation of the rationalization comes later.

P.315: Last line a bit over-drawn? 2

P.348, 354 and perhaps elsewhere: "Gotcha." Please, no. This is just plain anachronistic and jars. ~~Yes~~ Yes

P.354: "Stone the bloody crows" again. I don't question it's ~~xxxxxx~~ authenticity, but it is rather parochial, I hope you'll agree. No No

P.358: Please don't have Nat not caring whether he lives or dies. If he doesn't care, why should we. ~~He will care about other things~~

P.368: I'd almost forgotten Hassan was aboard. He perhaps should appear again before this. As it is, he pops up rather abruptly.

(And I must suggest that the ship battle tends to get a bit confused, and to go on rather too long. Somehow all these new characters are hard to get with or care enough about; we've just been introduced to so many of them; ~~and even~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ Nat didn't know most of them before. You need to shape and pinpoint and mould this action so that it builds more and not have quite so many shifts of viewpoint to so many people that we can barely keep straight.

P.389: It seems too easy for Nat ~~re~~ the man on the deck ~~holding~~ out his hand!

P.400: We last heard of "Towfik" some 360 pages ago. I suggest that the reader <sup>(maybe via Nat's viewpoint)</sup> will need some reminding earlier, in-between, about him to have this line and reference have the crucial impact you intend for it.

I realize you consider this a draft, but for all its ingenuity and ingenious premise, etc., ~~xxxxxx~~ and fine characters--especially Nat and Suza--it does

have some rather basic, it seemed to me, problems that needed to be aired and hopefully adjusted. ~~But~~ I hope I've been of help. I look forward to your thoughts and, of course, the ~~final~~ revision. ~~Wishes~~

Best,



When each person comes up  
give him flashbacks to polymer