

Michael Levin
www.Writer2Author.com
www.businessghost.com
4199 Campus Dr. Suite 550
Irvine, CA 92612
310 497 8547

25 May 2007
Dear XXX:

Thank you so much for letting me read the new draft of the novel. I am in great admiration of your ability to write so well—and write so much. My main sense about your writing is that you are a much better novelist than you give yourself credit for. You know how to tell a story, and you know how to tell an extremely complex story with many moving parts and a large cast, with complete control. I really have an enormous amount of respect for what you've accomplished, and even though this letter will be long, it's not about criticism. Rather, it's about taking what you've already accomplished and bringing it to the next level.

I'd like to begin by saying that I was a little bit concerned, this summer, when you laid out the plot, simply because it seemed so complex. It seemed like a very tall order to take such a plot, which had the potential to become so unruly, and turn it into a novel with a sure sense of flow and direction. And yet you did it, and you made it look easy. I congratulate you for that. The story truly works. There is no doubt about that in my mind, and I think you describe the courtroom and courtroom

procedure, as well as any author published today. At the same time, you have come up with extremely convincing characters, and very interesting conflicts among them. So the purpose of this letter is to offer you thoughts on what worked extremely well in this draft, and what might require additional attention as you go forward.

The first issue I'd like to discuss has to do with the question of who is the main character. The two main contenders for that title, of course—Randall and Rob. These are two very different sorts of courtroom champions. They come from extremely different backgrounds, carry themselves completely differently, and have extremely different approaches to life, relationships, self-image, ethics, and just about anything you can think of. That's really beautiful. You've got two lawyers on opposites of a very powerful and emotionally upsetting case who are both alpha males—and therefore would naturally be in conflict every time they meet. This is one of the great pluses of the novel. My concern is that the two men face off in or out of court only a few times over the course of the entire draft. Certainly there might be other scenes that I have not yet seen or that have not yet been written in which they have at each other. But by and large, except for the confrontation in the judge's chambers, the reader does not really have the pleasure of seeing ongoing strife between these two polar opposites, these two extremely powerful individuals. So I would urge you to ask yourself where in the manuscript you can layer in additional combat between the two men. That. Of course, is what is going to cement the reader's attention, because the spectacle is so powerful. You've got two superhero-

level lawyers, so let them have at each other in unrestrained combat as often as possible.

Along those lines, you set up another fascinating possibility for conflict when Richard is brought in and gets the first chair, displacing Rob. Richard and Rob are both eight hundred pound gorillas, and so the reader is expecting to see them jostle for position and power. And yet there is virtually not a single moment in the entire manuscript where the potential conflict between these two monumental egos is played out. So I would urge you with all my heart to have them in combat as well. Conflict displays character, and shows who people really are. So you've got a chance to have Rob in conflict with Richard, and in conflict with Randall.

You might also note that all three of these men have a first name beginning with the letter R. It may be that you want to change one or more of those, just for the sake of convenience, but that's not really necessary. The main thing is that these guys are constantly duking it out over legal matters—Randall versus Rob in the run-up to the case and in the courtroom, and Rob versus Richard in the plaintiff's preparation.

The next concern I have relates to the judge and Leigh. While I think it's a very funny piece of combat, I think far too much attention is given to it, especially at the expense of the potential conflicts among the three male lawyers just mentioned. It's a great side story, it just simply gets too much attention, as I will indicate throughout the draft later in this letter. So I'm going to offer you some places where

you can tone down the battle between those two, since it really is a side issue in this story.

Another thing to consider, as long as we are turning to the question of women, is the fact that Rob sleeps with Randall's wife—but nothing ever happens as a result of that. Randall never mentions it again. He never tries to pay Rob back in any way. He doesn't even sleep with Lisa, who is ready, willing, and able, and completely in love with Randall. I think the Lisa character is a wonderful character, and I would like to see Randall and Lisa finish what they started. It sure seems to be headed that way, and I think the reader would forgive Randall for his adultery, after having been pushed past the limit by seeing Randall and his wife totally unapologetic for having sex—in his home, and even in his presence. How can Randall just stand for that, and how could that possibly just go away? The reader will be expecting some sort of huge payoff to that along the way. We cannot let the reader down in that regard—there has to be some sort of payoff to that cuckolding.

Another issue to discuss moves away from the characters and has to do with the organization of the story. Right now, the story really doesn't begin until the pre-trial phase. Until then, we have a great deal of flashbacks, often back to back to back. While it's essential, of course, for readers to get to know the characters, I'm wondering if the way things are currently arranged in the first half of the manuscript deserve a little more attention. We first have to decide where the novel should begin. Randall sitting at his desk and thinking is just not a dramatic enough opening, especially when people are so conditioned to expect drama in the first paragraph. I'm

wondering if you would rather start with something more dramatic—like the deaths of the mother and children. That’s the drama that kicks the novel off. So why not start there? Then you can take us to Washington, and then we can start getting to know the various figures in the story. But the main thing is to have drama and conflict happening from the very beginning, so that the reader comes upon the flashbacks only when the reader is already locked into the story. There’s a sense that we sometimes have as writers that until the reader has all the information about all the characters, nothing makes sense. The opposite is true. The less you feed the reader, the hungrier the reader is—it’s a Zen thing. So tease us by giving us drama and conflict. The death of the children, Sarah in Washington, the funeral. The fatal accident that kills the driver. And so on. And only once we need lawyers do you want to start bringing them in. Break up the two Randall flashbacks (as I will indicate later) into separate scenes. Take the scene of Randall meeting his wife and move that to the moment when she first appears in the story as a present day, real-time character. By moving these pieces around, you will open up the story for a real sense of conflict and drama, and once that’s happening, the reader will be much more interested in knowing who your minor characters are, where they come from, and how they got to be who they are.

The next issue I’d like to share with you has to do with the concept of the arc. In a novel, everything has to have an arc—the main story, the main characters, even some of the minor characters. An arc simply means that there is movement within each relationship as the story goes forward. For example, Leigh and the judge start

off on really bad terms—and it only gets worse. So their “arc” together starts off on a low point—and heads even lower. The relationship between Randall and his wife has to start fairly high and it will travel downward over the course of the novel. It’s got to get much lower than it currently does, though. How does Randall cope with or handle the infidelity? How does she deal with it? What’s it like for Randall to face Rob knowing he has slept with Randall’s wife? These questions have to influence the way Randall and his wife interact throughout the story. For example, there are two scenes fairly close together both ending with Randall’s wife in tears. In both of those places, since the result is the same, there is no real movement. Movement consists of tears in one scene and a suicide attempt in the next. Or tears in one scene and doing some other drastic action in the next scene. There always has to be movement and change within each of the threads of the novel. This is what I mean when I say that each of the situations has to have its own arc.

Let’s take a look at the arc of the relationship between Stone and Randall. I love the fact that Stone has it in for Randall. That’s fantastic—I like the fact that Randall has a real uphill fight. But at some point, Stone has to lose this battle, because Randall is the better man. At some point, Stone has to stop fighting Randall constantly, and stop being unfair, and start treating him with grudging decency, if not respect. He cannot always be based on the calculation of whether an action will be overturned on appeal. Rather, Stone actually has to change in his regard to Randall.

So you want to pay attention to the arcs of all the various relationships, and we’ll talk more about that in the remainder of this letter.

I want to come back to the question of who the main character is. I've got to think it's Randall. Randall, ultimately, is the one who is defending the winning side. Rob is not going to be respected by the reader after he sleeps with his opponent's wife. The reader just is not going to buy that. If Rob wants to screw around with other women on his own time, he is a single man and that's his prerogative. But sleeping with Randall's wife just simply will not go over with the reader. So Randall really ought to be the person we are rooting for. Since we are going to root for him, I would tone down some of the harshness he displays toward his wife. His crime should not be aggressiveness but neglect. He means well, but he keeps falling down, because he puts his work first too often, and because he does not have the "advanced relationship skills" you refer to in such a humorous way. Randall is a complex and flawed individual, and we are rooting for him to win, not just the case but also in his love life. Whether that means leaving his wife for Lisa is your decision, but we do have to have some sort of closure in his emotional life. Does he stay with his wife or does he go off with his associate and marry or just simply be involved with her? There has to be some resolution of this extremely important issue.

I'd like to address another issue that has to do with making Randall more important in the novel than he currently is. Right now, the criminal investigation is handled by the district attorney, which makes sense from a legal point of view. From a story point of view, it's problematic. Rob and Randall suddenly get edged off the stage, because the whole civil trial becomes practically irrelevant compared to the criminal issues involved. Here's what I suggest. Have Randall talking to the D.A.

earlier in the novel about the possibility of a criminal investigation, if there is some way he can do that without betraying the interests of his clients. Randall ought to be saying to the district attorney, “We didn’t do it. Somebody else did. Go find him.” And the D.A.’s attitude is that this is purely a civil matter, that there is no evidence of a crime, so forget about it—don’t expect us to do your work for you. Instead of the D.A. later in the novel getting proactive and taking on this investigation, Randall himself ought to organize it and make it happen, using *his own people* to perhaps break into the homes and offices of the bad guys, stealing their stuff, and getting enough of a case together so that the D.A. has to go forward. In other words, I am suggesting that Randall skate the ethical line and actually conduct his own quasi-criminal investigation, thus providing enough evidence to the D.A. that the D.A.’s hand would be forced and then the D.A. would thus have to start the investigation, all in Randall’s behalf. The D.A. cannot be a character who moves of his own volition. That would make him too strong and too dominant. Randall is the one who has to force him to act. Obviously there is the question of evidence that is the fruit of the poisoned tree, but I’m sure you can figure out a way to handle that. Just let Randall get a few things, and then the D.A. can get everything else. But make Randall the moving force behind the criminal investigation, or else he will appear too minor and weak. When the story goes from civil case to criminal case to terrorist case, Randall and Rob alike both face the threat of becoming obscure in the novel drama, since the drama has moved on past their roles as counsel in a civil action. So there has to be some way to

preserve Randall's importance, and I think that the easiest and simplest way to do that is to have Randall be the prime mover on the criminal case.

Let's turn now from the issue of plot to a couple of points about the writing. By and large, I love your writing and I have many places coming up in this letter where I commend you for the beautiful things, the funny things, the wonderful things that you did. I do want to suggest two things right now though. First, some of the speeches go on a little bit too long, and sometimes we need to dial back some of the emotion in the narrator's voice as well. I'll indicate those places where I would like to see things a little shorter, or a little more to the point. Second, the basic rule of thumb is that we always want to play out scenes that are dramatic and summarize those scenes that are not. Sometimes the reverse is true in the present draft. For example, Sarah is handed a very important secret document in the meeting. But nothing is really mentioned about that. That's drama. Everything else ought to be summarized, and that ought to be played out. We are told again in the same example that Sarah is extremely important to the president. But let's see how that happens. Let's see a moment where she is acting in a way that takes care of the president's needs and concerns. Throughout the novel, I will indicate those places that ought to be shorter, and the first concern that I just mentioned or that ought to be played out, because they are dramatic, as in this second point. I think that the examples that I will provide for you, and I think I touch every single one in the manuscript, will equip you from here on in to make accurate judgments about what to dramatize and what

to summarize. We can discuss this if you want to, but I think it's pretty clear from the letter.

The final point I'd like to make before we get into the manuscript page by page regards time. I'd like you to have a very clear sense of when each event in happening in time order, so that the reader has a sense of tension and frustration, almost, waiting for things to happen. Second, I'd like you to omit all references to years and to September 11, so that the novel does not feel dated. I would omit the 1980s reference to Randall's courtship, and I would omit anything that says 2001, 2002, 2003, or whatever. Those years will give the reader a sense that the novel is past history. If you just simply say "On January eleventh of this year" you achieve what you need to achieve, without making the novel feel dated.

That's all I have in the way of major comments. I truly find this to be a compelling and well-written novel, again, so don't let the length of this letter fool you! I'm just here as the equivalent of a swing coach on the golf course, just to take a few more strokes off your handicap, if you will. Let's now go into the manuscript page by page and I can illustrate some of the points that I made in this earlier part of this letter and then bring in some other things for your consideration. Capital letters in the margins of the pages refer to the comments I am making in this letter.

1A. Is this chapter necessary? Do we need it here? There's not an enormous amount of drama in it--it's just simply Randall finding out about the lawsuit.

1B. Whatever the opening of the novel is, we want the first sentence to have more drama than a man sitting behind a desk and his assistant opening the door.

1C. This is drama—play this out. I'd rather have Jim and Randall meeting, with Jim still in a panic. We always ask ourselves, where is the drama? And that's what we play out.

2A. He seems a little hostile here, a little hard to like. A bit too gruff. Remember that the reader wants to be rooting for him.

3A. You want to take this sort of information out of dialogue and put it in the text. Have this as something that Randall would think to himself, but not say out loud. Dialogue is only for conveying conflict and character, not for transmitting information to the reader.

3B. Ditto.

4A. Whenever a character says something like “you know,” that's a fairly clear indication that we are looking at exposition in this dialogue. Exposition means exposing facts or information to the reader. In fact, it's not one character talking naturally to another. It's one character talking past the other character to the reader. As long as we use as the test for dialogue this question—is conflict or character being conveyed, or am I just transmitting information past the other character to the reader—everything will be all right.

5A. Excellent. This shows him being a smart lawyer, and everybody wants to have a smart lawyer!

5B. This is a little bit too much. Just simply say that he paused, and looked pensive. This is an example of a place where we need to ease back a little bit on the description.

- 6A. I like this April 1st thing. I wish you would play it out more throughout the manuscript.
- 6B. We need a hook—an unanswered question that drives us forward into the next scene.
- 7A. When does this scene take place with regard to the previous scene? As I mentioned earlier, I'm not sure that these scenes are the best ways to begin the novel.
- 7B. We don't want to date the novel to 2001. We don't want the novel to seem dated by its references to September 11.
- 7C. Here's the drama—a top secret message is delivered. That should be played out, because it is dramatic, and everything else should be summarized.
- 8A. Unequally yoked—well put, but tell us or show us how.
- 8B. Great. We like the fact that she is so important.
- 9A. The sentence structure here is a bit awkward.
- 9B. Show us that she is indispensable instead of telling us.
- 10A. Come up with something new, because this is something that relates to past history. Come up with a new slant on terrorism.
- 10B. Again, a bit less would be better here.
- 11A. Great.
- 11B. This should be two sentences.
- 11C. What happens to the meeting?
- 11D. Getting her arms around the fact—a fairly male metaphor for this situation, and I'm wondering if you have a different one you could use.

- 13A. We cannot have “her” referring to two different antecedents.
- 13B. This should be two sentences.
- 13C. Great—beautiful.
- 13D. Excellent.
- 14A. We want to avoid for the most part starting sentences in novels with however.
It’s too lawyerly.
- 14B. We need to be more specific. Also, in prose, spell out all numbers under a thousand.
- 14C. Excellent.
- 14D. I would omit this—we get it.
- 14E. --That’s beautiful, because it’s emotion.
- 14F. Play out the talking. That’s dramatic.
- 15A. How did she arrive at this conclusion? Intuition? Evidence? Most readers would just think that a terrible thing happened, but not that foul play was involved.
How does she get to this idea?
- 15B. Burn any bridges—what is she worried about?
- 15C. We need a hook.
- 16A. We need to see his face immediately. How does Dr. James react to their visit?
- 16B. What’s the tone here? Throughout this scene, I would like to see shorter dialogue. Generally, less is more when it comes to dialogue.

17A. Whenever you have more than two people in a room, you want to identify every single speaker of every line of dialogue, so we are not confused as to who might be speaking. This is true even if it is virtually one hundred percent clear.

17B. What's the tone here?

17C. If you cannot make this shorter, then at least break up the paragraphs so that it's easier on the eye.

18A. Whose line? What's the tone?

18B. Everybody knows what an I.V. is.

18C. Make this two sentences.

18D. Make it more—how about two thousand?

18E. Identify the speaker and the tone.

18F. What's his reaction to the question?

19A. Excellent.

19B. People react not just to words but to non verbal stimuli such as emotion and body language. This is an extremely important point, and I would like to ask you to tell us his reaction, his body language, whatever, right here. If there is a stressor, there needs to be a response—it's just like physics. We need to see reactions every time there are powerful emotions or powerful body language occurring.

19C. I would omit this. We understand.

20A. We have shifted point of view from Sarah and Barry to Dr. James. We don't want to do that. We don't want to shift point of view mid-scene.

20B. This is the end of a scene, so we need a hook here. Where do they go from here?

20C. Move the sentence at the bottom of the page that begins “The discussion” up to the set up phase of the next scene. The sentence I’m referring to is at 20D.

21A. I don’t think we need these three twin descriptions—one word at a time is enough.

21B. This is another scene, so end it with a resolution and hook.

21C. Let’s not start sentences or especially paragraphs with however.

21D. I think Barry had planted a seed is enough. I would omit the rest of the sentence.

22A. Emotional roller coaster is something of a cliché. Tell us exactly what is happening, instead of using a phrase that belongs to others. The readers want to know how you see things.

22B. This comes a little too quickly. How could she get that much peace that soon? Some people might think she doesn’t care.

22C. Did they see Ginger Saturday afternoon, as above, or evening, as here?

23A. Let’s see this speech in dialogue, ridden with conflict, instead of just a lot of information all at once.

24A. Beautiful.

24B. We need a reaction here.

24C. Spell out twenty—again, we spell out all numbers under a thousand in prose. Most of us are conditioned by newspapers only to spell out numbers under ten, but prose is different.

25A. Perfect.

25B. Omit the however or move it later in the sentence.

26A. There's no conflict in this dialogue. There has to be conflict all the time. If there's no conflict in a conversation, then summarize it. Dialogue is only for conflict, not for showing confluence—people agreeing.

28A. Nice.

28B. How should she be careful?

28C. Barry scowled at 19C as well. Let's see a different reaction.

28D. Start with the dialogue, and then tell us the tone:

“I would like to know why my daughter died, Dr. Baluch,” Sarah said. Her tone was firm but not unfriendly and her manner was direct and businesslike. “I have talked with Dr. James...”

28E. What's his reaction to the question?

29A. Good.

29B. This is great. Just make it as if instead of like.

29C. Again, have him react to the question. He's got to pause, compose himself, and deal with his own emotions. He knows that he is a murderer, but the reader doesn't. How do murderers handle these situations?

30A. Explain what she means by this. What is she getting at?

31A. Ouch—hog on her way to market—that’s a little rough. We don’t want the reader to love Dr. Baluch, but the combination of the beady eyes, the hog on her way to market reference, and the how stupid can you be question at 31B combines to put him a little over the top. I would bring it back a little bit.

31C. Let’s go a bit easier on the description here. Any one of these things would suffice. The cumulative effect is a bit too much.

32A. I would omit right now, because there is an implication that she will be implying something later!

32B. Wherever you came from—again, overly harsh. I think if you make him a little nicer, the reader will be even more shocked to discover that he is the murderer. Right now, he is coming across as a bully and conceivably a murderer. If he came across as conciliatory and friendly, although perhaps hiding something, the reader will be even more shocked at trial.

33A. Great line.

33B. So what? Why should it matter that the office is empty?

33C. Ditto—why should she notice this? Who among us notices how many cars there are in parking lots?

34A. Excellent.

35A. Excellent expression.

35B. How much time passed until help arrived?

35C. Great hook. Beautifully handled.

36A. This is exactly right.

36B. I'm not in love with the way Rob is initially described. Action hero, central casting, and JFK Jr. are all clichés.

36C. Tall dark and handsome, as the narrator accurately surmises, is a cliché. We don't want clichés.

37A. Any conflict here? If the purpose of the scene is just to dazzle the reader with Rob, then we need to see some sort of conflict. I don't think Sarah is the sort of person who would be overwhelmed by good looks. She is a woman, yes, but she's also a good judge of character. If she sees any flaws in Rob, a little too showy, perhaps, I think she would note them, at least to herself. We do need to see some ambivalence, or else it's too much of a slam-dunk. Slam-dunks mean no conflict, and no conflict is not as interesting as scenes with conflict.

37B. This is great, and I remember enjoying it the last time around, but I would put it later. We don't want to interrupt a scene with such a long flashback.

38A. I'm not sure that this word would be used today.

41A. Great.

41B. Explain what it means to "take" the verdict.

42A. Here we go with a separate flashback. I would put this somewhere else in the novel, so we don't have flashbacks back to back.

43A. I don't think people really say things like this.

44A. This sounds a little condescending.

44B. Excellent. Also, checkbooks is one word.

45A. Great line. Make clear that this is like a sports rally.

- 45B. I really have a hard time seeing secretaries high-fiving. In my experience, secretaries are not quite as vocal about their enthusiasm, if they have any, about a given case.
- 46A. Great line.
- 47A. Yes.
- 47B. Omit the quotation marks around the thought. The convention is that anything that is thought is recorded without quotation marks or in italics, according to the choice of the author. Anything that is one decibel or higher, from whispers to shouts, needs to be in quotation marks.
- 47C. Same comment.
- 47D. Very funny! I wonder what that would be? Quite a man!
- 48A. Great.
- 48B. How would Rob know about Jackie Gleason? Isn't he too young?
- 48C. Where's the conflict?
- 49A. He conquers her too easily. She's a no bs person who has to analyze a lot of data very quickly. I think she would see through him a little bit.
- 49B. This last comment of hers makes her seem like a bit of a lightweight, which she is not.
- 50A. I would omit the word selected because of its redundancy.
- 50B. I would make this two sentences.
- 51A. Great ending—great hook.
- 51B. Again, this is a scene that needs to be placed in time order. Why is it here?

- 52A. Why did the autopsy report take so long to be produced?
- 52B. Great line.
- 52C. Have her say something even funnier. This would be a great place for rueful humor.
- 53A. Good. That's exactly what we're hoping for—language the reader can understand.
- 53B. Excellent. Now the reader has reason to wonder whether something happened intentionally.
- 54A. Not to mention the lawsuits.
- 54B. Great ending.
- 55A. I love this—this is beautiful.
- 55B. Shorter paragraphs are easier on the reader's eye.
- 56A. I'm wondering if haunted her every waking hour is a bit too much. I would back down a little bit.
- 57B. This flashback comes way out of the blue. In addition, there's an enormous amount of set up here—every thing from page fifty seven to page sixty two.
- 57B. I'm wondering whether you might want to summarize every thing in the next five pages into a single paragraph, summarizing their blue blood backgrounds, and taking us straight to the confrontation scene, which is terrific.
- 57C. Agreed—I lived there and I feel very much the same way.
- 57D. Omit all years from the book, so that the reader can read it at any time in the next ten or fifteen years and feel as though it is happening essentially in the present

moment. We don't want the reader to be thinking that there is a thirty or forty year window between when they met and where we are now. Especially since Kathryn has to be so sexually attracted to Rob.

57E. Capitalize Ivy League.

57F. This is terrific information—I like it a lot. If you leave it in, make it two sentences.

58A. What kind of touch of warm skin and firm muscle? Are they holding each other?

58B. A hang out of mine in my Boston days.

58C. I felt I needed some broadening experiences—that's a little bit on the nose. A little stiff or wooden. An editor of mine at Simon and Schuster once told me to read an entire draft of my manuscript into a tape recorder. That would indicate the lines of dialogue that felt a bit awkward or stiff.

60A. I love that line.

62A. Finally the conflict.

63A. This is terrific—but it's just a little bit too much. Let's have him take it easy.

64A. Mine, too! But that's okay. If every thing were fine, we wouldn't need a novel.

65A. I would omit all of this information, for several reasons. First, it dates the novel. Second, her dialogue at 65B sounds a little bit stiff. I know she's uncomfortable, but try saying the words out loud, pretending to play her part, and you'll see what I mean.

66A. Excellent.

66B. Shangri-la.

66C. Beautiful.

67A. Where is this? In Quincy? That's further down the red line than I tended to go. Tell us more about how they would end up down there.

67B. Nice.

67C. This should be two sentences.

67D. Wow! Nice.

68A. I love the description of Howard Stone, but I would not put it right here. That's because we just had a flashback involving Randall, and we want to interrupt our flashbacks with present day drama, so that the story keeps moving forward.

68B. Excessive from whose point of view? Surely not the plaintiffs or their attorneys!

68C. Nice expression—I like it.

69A. This is great writing. I love the way you write about the law.

70A. Such as what? What sort of plan did she make?

71A. That's great.

73A. Fantasized.

75A. Beautiful. A perfect hook.

76A. This flashback feels very much out of time order here. And again, we now have a series of flashbacks. We want to intersperse the flashbacks among the current day events, or else the novel will feel like a long set up with the conflict way in the distance.

- 76A. I have the breasts of a twenty year old.
- 76B. Oops! That's funny actually. He should try to be funny more often, because he is funny.
- 77A. I feel a bit culturally deprived, because I don't recognize this name.
- 77D. That's great. The only problem is that Clinton is yesterday's news, and it might date the novel in a way we don't want.
- 78A. Look at you, knowing about Manolo Blahnik strappy sandals! Props to you!
- 79A. Break this up with reactions.
- 80A. Yes.
- 81A. Wow—excellent.
- 82A. Omit ambivalent—we get it already.
- 82B. Make this two sentences.
- 83A. Nice.
- 83B. Wow—that's great.
- 84A. Omit the.
- 85A. Sixty pound dumbbells as.
- 85B. Sensual—meaning what? I want you to be more specific, and not use the word “sensual” as a catch phrase for whatever is really going on. Be specific. The inquiring reader's mind wants to know.
- 86A. I'm not sure that it makes sense to show Randall's thinking here. Let's just see the argument, and let's see both of their emotional states played out in terms of facial

expressions and body language. Actually, you do that. So just omit the two sentences in parentheses.

86C. This is a little too much. She is none of these things. We already see that Randall is having an immature reaction, so this is piling on. Remember also that the reader is supposed to be rooting for Randall or is the reader supposed to be rooting for Rob?

88A. This is perfect.

89A. How did Randall figure this out so quickly? On what evidence did he move forward?

90A. You need to make sure we understand what case they're talking about from the beginning of the scene.

91A. Whenever these two men are together, it's dramatic, so play it out.

92A. Would Rob really resort to such a cheap trick? Wouldn't he send someone in his place?

93A. Good. But make it sound more like the way regular people talk. This one lady—I think her name is Mrs. Williams—she stood up at one point, pounded the table and started shouting, and so on.

93B. How would he identify this Dick?

94A. Yes—right.

95A. Great.

96A. Reverse the words here so that it's clear that one by one refers to members of the bar and not to the grievance: as the grievance languaged, members of the bar, one by one, and so on.

97A. This is just plain mean. Can't he just be a little more neglectful instead of being outright cruel? Otherwise, the reader is going to be very confused about who to root for.

99A. Is she surprised? What's her reaction?

100A. Omit the last name.

101A. Good.

101B. I'm not sure that stomach and swallow so close together work.

101C. We need a hook.

102A. Where are they assembled? What's the atmosphere of the room? How does everybody feel?

102B. How does he feel as he says this? Is there a catch or some sort of verbal giveaway or physical tic that indicates that he doesn't exactly feel good about it?

103A. Just the word silence is enough. After all, who would criticize him?

105A. This is great.

105B. Excellent. Everybody knows!

106A. This is an exciting scene—I love the team field.

107A. The sentence structure here is a little awkward.

107B. This is great—I love the way you put it. Just for the sake of grammatical accuracy, when a number starts a sentence, it needs to be spelled out, not matter how big or small. So it would be: One hundred million dollars.

108A. What’s the tone? What’s the reaction? Throughout the scene, we want to do several things—we want to shorten the speeches so that it’s more like conversation and less like speech making. And then we also want to indicate the reactions to the statements, which are occasionally quite provocative, and also indicate the tone in which these statements are made.

108B. Reaction?

108C. Very funny.

109A. Excellent.

110A. This is dramatic, so show it. Let’s see a scene where this happens. Your challenge will be to keep the reader rooting for Randall, who has all these negative traits. So you have to amp up his good qualities as well.

110B. Reaction here?

111A. Who wouldn’t call it that? Isn’t it? I think you might have him say something like, “Forgive me if you already know this,” because that way the reader won’t be asking the question, “Don’t these people know this already?”

111B. Don’t be afraid of using contractions in dialogue.

112A. Instead of having him telling us that he’s going to tell us about stuff later, have him explain it right at that moment. I would omit things like before I explain or which I will explain in a minute.

114A. Why don't they already know this? These are sophisticated people.

115A. Capitalize Nurse.

115B. How did it pass? Unanimously? Any holdouts? If there are holdouts, we have drama, and that's a good thing.

115A. Obviously. I think Jim would be a little annoyed at the question, so let's see his emotional reaction.

116A. I love the way he puts this.

116B. This needs to be taken out of dialogue. I'm sure everybody else remembers this story, so have him refer to it with a few words, and then have the narrator (outside of dialogue) explain what it all means.

117A. What exactly is a complete verdict? Please explain in more detail to the reader that you don't need unanimity in a civil case in Texas.

117B. Wait to allow everybody to have this sink in.

118A. Nice.

118B. What's the reaction to all this?

119A. Why would he say this? It's very intemperate, and you can count on the fact that word will get out. Someone will tell someone.

120A. Who asked this?

120B. Who is this? We never want to have people who are not clearly identified as speakers.

121A. Great line.

121B. Stepped forward—why would he need to? Isn't he already in front of him?

122A. Great.

122B. I would back off a little bit on the description here. It's a little bit over the top.

123A. Nice.

123B. I would take longer to think this through. Also, make sure we know who is saying this. I assume it is Randall.

124A. The pace of the questions picked up. There's an implication here that until this moment, the pace of the scene was somewhat slow, simply because Randall is lecturing them. Why not personalize the board members to a greater degree, have them ask pointed questions, and have Randall field them, instead of making speeches. Also, I hardly think that Randall would have to explain the discovery process on the next page. Again, these people have been around the block before.

126A. Again, this scene is just way too long, and contains way too much law.

126B. We need new paragraphs after every single speaker.

128A. There's an implication here that he's not speaking incidentally. The reader (and I) would like to know what you are driving at.

130A. Nice.

130B. Excellent description.

130C. Fuse.

131A. How about Kobe Bryant? Something a little more up to date.

132A. Great line.

132B. Funny.

132C. From whose point of view was this mistake number two?

We need to see her physical description the first time we see her. We never want to let the reader think that we added anything as an afterthought.

133A. Very funny, but let's see this the first time he sees her.

133B. Omit over.

133C. Funny.

134A. Omit the year.

135A. The hospital lawyer—a wonderfully cruel characterization. Beautiful.

135B. Capitalize Herculean.

135C. How does she respond to this bait before she speaks? What's her body language or facial expression?

135D. Very funny.

135E. Explain who this man is. We're not sure who he is.

136A. That's really funny!

137A. Great.

137B. Wow—excellent.

138A. Funny.

138B. Great summary—this is exactly what I am talking about when I ask you to take information out of dialogue and put it into a brief summary. You see how quickly it keeps the scene moving.

139A. My concern about this battle between the judge and the woman attorney is that the people in this case have much bigger fish to fry. I'm afraid that this minor

issue is getting far too much attention. So I would continue the scene a little bit longer with a discussion of the real case—the plaintiffs against the hospital.

140A. I don't think taking us to Leigh's office is the best choice for the next scene after the court scene. We ought to be going to Rob's office or Randall's office.

Going to Leigh's office overemphasizes her role in the case, at the expense of what the case is really about.

140B. Very Funny.

140C. I would omit this line.

141A. Move the identification of the speaker to the beginning of the paragraph. We don't want to have to go ten lines of dialogue before we find out who is speaking.

Also, this is far too much information for dialogue. Again, dialogue is simply for the conveyance of conflict or character. It is not for passing information along to the reader. That's why the dialogue here is sometimes too long—because it is teaching the reader about law, instead of showing conflict or character. It's the narrator's job to keep the reader conversant with legal issues that are discussed in the book.

141B. We need less here.

142A. Wasn't this issue already addressed at the hospital? We already know that Randall doesn't dare seek recusal, for the same reason.

143A. Very funny.

143B. Nice—smiling through the phone. I love it. I want to point out my concern here—right now, Leigh is the dominant character in the story, making motions, making phone calls, and getting responses from the other men. In other words, she

is active and they are passive. This does not befit her role as a relatively minor character in the story, and confuses the reader into thinking that maybe this isn't really a battle between Randall and Rob. It's just a question of giving her a slightly smaller role, and not putting her in a position of the parent authority over the two men.

144A. Funny.

144B. Great.

145A. Fantastic. I love the way you describe him. Clearly you are having a great time writing about the judge, and everybody will have a great time reading about him for that reason.

146A. Exercised a measure of self-restraint. I would add those words.

146B. Why? Explain please.

147A. Play this out—it's dramatic.

147B. Great. But I would omit the line that begins fortunately. We can assume that that's the case.

148A. I love it.

149A. If you don't want to tell us who spoke the line, at least tell us from where in the courtroom it was spoken.

151A. How is she doing at this moment? I'd be pretty shaken up!

152A. Wow!

152B. What's the tone here? There are a lot of different ways to say that expression.

154A. How does everyone react?

154B. How quickly does Andrews rise? Is she leaping to her feet? Taking her time?

We need to know.

154C. Excellent.

155A. That's pretty wild.

155B. I like this.

156A. Indent. I'm wondering if you might consider ending the scene as indicated and omitting everything starting at "There is a person on the way over." Let the reader wonder what this is all about.

157A. I think it's a little too much—Stone is just a little too evil, and again, it places too much of a focus on a side issue.

157B. Terrific.

158A. I like the fact that he is preaching, but I would omit most of this page and instead start where he is wiping his face at 159A. That's the good stuff. The rest is almost like throat clearing on the way to the real drama.

161A. Give us a hint of what happened inside.

162A. Again, look how much attention we are spending on Lazbee and the judge, at the expense of Rob and Randall.

162B. Finally, the two men we really want to see in the same room—two alpha males. Whenever they are to get together, it is highly dramatic, so this scene ought to reflect the intense jealousy and competition between the two men. Or at least Rob feels jealousy and competition—maybe Richard feels so above Rob that he doesn't even notice Rob's enmity. The thing is that you want to play this out in much greater

detail in the next draft, because you've set up this wonderful conflict between these two men, and the reader is counting on you to pay it off.

163A. The reader would probably want a little more information here about the relationship between civil and criminal actions.

164A. Great line.

164B. Great dialogue—use contractions or she will sound a bit stiff.

165A. I have the same question! What did make him so more attentive too her? There has to be some sort of trigger.

165B. Great line.

166A. I'm not sure that breadbasket is the appropriate word for a woman. I'm wondering if you can find a more delicate way to say the same thing.

167A. I think it's enough that they met—I think their eyes locking gives too much away. Let the reader wonder whether they are going to have some excitement together. Don't give it all away.

167B. Great. Unfinished glass of wine—that is absolute perfection. This is why I believe you are a much better writer than you give yourself credit for!

167C. Great line.

169A. What does all the accreditation stuff mean? The reader wants to know.

169B. Moving or leaving is redundant—I would pick one. Or be more specific about what he means by leaving.

170A. Great.

171A. Nice.

171B. Fantastic.

171C. Very well thought out. I'm wondering if at some point they will pay it off by having sex. I think the reader is expecting that they will. This would be especially likely after Randall sleeps with his wife.

173A. All flags flying! Fantastic.

174A. Brilliant description. Capitalize I for Insatiable. Is Kristin okay with the fact that Rock slept with her a few times and isn't pursuing the relationship? Or is that ongoing?

175A. She's been gone for so long. How has she been? How is her recovery coming along?

175B. First tell us that it's a briefcase and then tell us that it is a talisman, or the reader might think that he brought some unusual ritual object with him.

176A. What observers are these? And again, we cannot have unidentified speakers.

176B. This expression "during the week that followed" takes us out of the present moment and out of the scene. I would omit. I'm not sure that all that much is gained from the paragraph, so you might even want to take out the whole thing.

177A. Great description. Fantastic observation. But what does it all mean to her? Have her analyze this. Does she think that Rob can beat this guy? How does she feel about her chances?

180A. How do the others react?

181A. Distance how?

182A. Nice ending.

183A. When you say the incident twice, there is an implication that something specific happened—an event between Randall and another driver. Maybe they mixed it up—actually got out of their cars. Right now, the “incident” is just Randall yelling at the other drivers, which is common enough male behavior that I’m not sure it actually rises to the level of “incident.”

185A. He sounds a little bit on the nose here, not to mention mean. Wouldn’t he just say something a little simpler like can’t she drive? Woman driver, or something along those lines.

185B. You got that one right, my friend! I can’t stand driving here!

185C. He just doesn’t sound like a human being right here. He’s a little too sure of himself, a little too proud of himself, just not someone anybody could warm up to.

186A. Again, this phrase good grief repeated—I think this scene goes on for a little too long, and instead of having near misses with a few drivers, he ought to have a real, live out-of-the-car incident with another driver.

187A. This is just too much.

188A. The reader is going to wonder what you’re referring to.

188B. Great.

188C. No later than once a week—that doesn’t really make sense. No less often than once a week or no later than Friday, if you see what I mean.

189A. Great.

190A. Let’s have a much shorter time frame. The more the time is compressed, the more dramatic a story is.

191A. Let's get some contractions into the mix.

192A. Broken promises—I'm wondering if you could rephrase this, because the reader could potentially be confused by the syntax.

192B. Nice. Omit the quotation marks, though.

192C. Fantastic. Also, the correct way to use hopefully, which always gladdens a writing coach's heart.

193A. Very funny. Laugh out loud funny.

195A. I'm.

195B. Her reaction.

196A. As.

196B. This is perfect.

197A. twelve.

197B. Who has no strategy here? What exactly would an exit strategy look like if he had one?

197C. Great expression.

198A. All bars are smoky—tell us something that makes this bar unique.

198B. Good.

198C. I would omit this summary phrase and just show us the range of emotions instead of telling us that he has such a big one.

199A. Make this whole paragraph much shorter. We get the point—he is distraught.

201A. Nice.

201B. That's beautiful. But we've got to pay it off. It really looks as though Randall is going to end up with Lisa here. You're setting up an expectation in the reader's mind, and it really does have to be paid off.

202A. Let's back down a little bit from here. Let's go a little easier here.

203A. Nice—but why is he bringing up this particular issue now? There's no real conflict in this. Either summarize this speech in a paragraph attached to another scene, or just omit it all together. No friction, no fiction—that's my rule.

205A. I think this is only the second time that Randall and Rob have been in the same room in a scene. Keep in mind that for the reader, the real focus of the novel at this point is Rob versus Randall, not the judge versus Leigh. Obviously later on we will open up into the terrorism aspect, but for now, this is a battle between two powerful but flawed men. Remember that the reader always wants to know who to be rooting for. So as you place both of these men in the same room, what exactly do you want the reader to feel? Who is the reader rooting for? And let's see the sparks fly! Also, you've got this wonderful side conflict of Rob and Richard. How does that play out with regard to Randall? Is Randall fighting a two headed monster? Or can he divide and conquer? These are thoughts that could only be addressed in a second draft. So don't be concerned about not having handled all of these concepts in the first draft—that's just not how it works! Nobody gets everything into the first draft, and the nice thing about having somebody like me on board is that the next draft gets to be much more complex, and complexity sells novels.

205B. What about the nurses? They were sued as well. That issue seems to go by the boards throughout the rest of the novel.

206A. How does he overrule? What's his tone?

206B. We don't want to shift the point of view to the insides of the jurors' heads. So if you add the words it appeared to most of the jurors then we still have the omniscient, all-seeing narrator telling the story.

206C. Why is she so incompetent? What is gained by that choice?

208A. Great.

208B. A slightly legalistic term. I would dumb it down a little bit.

208C. Great expression.

209A. Excellent.

210A. Funny.

210B. What exactly does this mean motioning his client's eyes to the jury? I'm not sure I get that.

212A. Beautiful. Beautiful use of a pause.

213A. Omit the sentence in parentheses. We see that she is wrestling; we don't want to have overkill.

213B. Explain exactly what this means for the lay reader.

215A. What do you mean at the time? If you are taking us out of the present moment, I would omit.

215B. Lisa? Who is she here?

216A. This scene needs to continue.

219A. Very funny.

219B. Easily.

220A. I would back off a little bit on this. I think we've already established her credentials.

220B. A little bit on the nose—do people really say “You are indeed fortunate” ?

221A. Nice.

222A. This is all the direct testimony we get from her after all that wind up?

223A. Spell out twenty.

224A. Very funny. Where has Randall been this whole time? It's seemed like Rob against Leigh in this scene.

224B. Funny.

224C. Again, where's the conflict? The actual question is who's on first—who's got first chair, and how does that play out in the trial? We really want to see that subtle difference.

225A. Great line.

226A. We need a hook here.

227A. It gets a little too screenplay-like at times such as now. We need more than dialogue—we need texture. We need to know the emotional responses, the physical body language, the facial expressions that accompany this highly dramatic testimony.

227B. Spell out fourteen.

227C. Tone?

228A. What is the reaction of the jury in the courtroom to this embarrassing revelation?

229A. Could you remind those of us who graduated from law school about eighteen years ago exactly what that doctrine was? Not to mention your non-lawyer readers!

230A. Only three dots for an ellipsis, which does in fact indicate a voice trailing off. We do use a dash to indicate a character interrupting another character's speech.

231A. Very funny.

231B. Excellent.

232B. Great.

232C. Show the disgust on their faces or the reader is going to wonder how we knew that.

233A. Great.

234A. We need a hook.

235A. Explain what damage evidence is.

235B. Very funny.

236. Okay.

238A. Tell us more about the shadow jury.

238B. Spell out the number.

239A. "You'll remember" tells us that we are about to see some exposition. Take it out of dialogue and have the narrator tell us.

239B. Read this line out loud to yourself, and I think you will agree with me that it's a little bit on the nose. Isn't there a Texas expression that puts the whole thing a little more succinctly and humorously?

239C. We need a reaction here.

239D. Hole.

240A. Spell out fivestar.

240B. Omit this line—we know.

241A. Great.

241B. Excellent.

242A. When did they separate?

242B. Swankiest is sort of a sleazy word not in keeping with the intellectual tone of this manuscript. I would find a nicer way to put it.

242C. What was he expecting when he went in there? We'd like to know.

242C. We started the scene from his point of view, and now we are in her brain.

Readers don't take well to changes of point of view in mid scene.

243A. We need his reaction to all of this. Does he feel bad about it?

244A. On the nose dialogue.

244B. Any remorse?

245A. How does she start reading? Angrily? Resigned?

245B. Omit the three sentences in parentheses. And Time Out.

246A. How much does she love him if she is having sex with Rob?

247A. Omit emotionally fragile—we know that already.

247B. Beautiful scene.

248A. Can you choose a different word here?

248B. Omit the word Starbucks, less readers think you are compensated for product placement.

248C. Does it bother her to be pouring coffee? She's a high powered attorney, too!

248D. The word however is pretty legalistic as we've discussed earlier.

248E. Randall knew that already. He is only asking the doctor for the sake of the reader. That's exposition, so put it out of dialogue and into narrative.

249A. Should be but we have plans today. Just reads a little smoother.

249B. This could be a one paragraph summary unless there is going to be real conflict in the scene.

250A. Madge—I haven't seen a Magde in a long time.

250B. It's more like a Hail Mary. If he has something that could truly break the case wide open, there's no more drama. But if he's reaching for something like a Hail Mary pass, then he has our empathy and we are rooting for him. And we get the sense that it may or may not work. We don't want a slam dunk here.

250C. Very funny, but spell out the numbers.

250D. When did he say this?

251A. I would omit the words in parentheses—let's go a little easy.

251B. The last time we saw her, she was in tears. We don't want to see people in the same emotional state in two consecutive scenes. Rather, we want to see some more

of an arc to her emotional life. Before, she was getting upset. Now, she is probably thinking about getting even.

252A. How's Judge Stone? Where is he on his arc?

252B. How does he react to the presence of Morgan?

252C. Why is this happening now?

252D. What other kind of suit is there? What makes a suit a power suit?

253A. His reaction to the request?

253B. Great.

253C. Does he sound regretful? Is he sincere?

254A. Let's have more resistance—it's always great when characters have a hard time getting information, finding people—make Randall really work for it instead of having it sort of put into his lap.

255A. A little too much. I would back down and have fewer sentences.

256A. This whole thing goes on for a little too long. I like the fact that he stuck it to his nemesis—but this scene doesn't really deserve quite as much airtime as it gets.

256B. Omit this sentence—we're there. We understand.

256C. Same thing. It's a little too much.

256D. Explain for the lay reader what an offer of proof is.

257A. Excellent.

257B. What's his tone?

258A. Of this year—again, this way, the novel will never feel dated.

258B. Ditto.

261A. These groups look very different—Asians and Mediterraneans. I'm not sure that makes sense, unless the implication that he is of a Mongol race that could have lived in either place. If that's even the case.

262A. This cries out for a reaction.

262B. Less here.

262C. Really? He could lose his momentum. Ultimately, he could lose his verdict. He has a lot to lose here, and I'm not sure he would agree so readily.

263A. Less here.

264A. This is dramatic, so let's play it out—and let's see the jury's reaction.

265A. We need more here. This is very dramatic.

265B. Explain the rule to the reader.

265C. Very nice.

267A. We need a reaction here both from the courtroom as a whole and also from the jury.

267B. It's too much judge versus Leigh.

268. Ditto—it's too much of a side issue.

269A. Emmitt is very nice. I would embellish his character even further. What does he wear? How does he keep his hair? He could be wonderful comic relief to punctuate the drama.

269B. It looks like she is the star of the story if she is the focus of the hook.

271A. Very funny! Start a new paragraph after the close quotation mark.

271B. I love Howard Cosell and I even had the privilege of being interviewed by him on his radio show for half an hour. But many people will not know who he is today, alas.

272A. Great.

272B. Omit the words in parentheses in both sentences.

272D. He never explained—this takes us out of the realm of the present moment and into the future. Throughout the next pages, we need more reaction from the courtroom, the jury, the judge, the lawyers—everyone. Otherwise it feels too much like a screenplay.

275A. Great.

275B. Where was Rob this whole time?

277A. Is Stone unhappy about this?

277B. I would omit the second and third stops.

277C. I would omit searching eyes—that sentence.

277D. That's an amazing ending—I love it! But let's see a gasp and shock in the courtroom and Judge Stone slamming down the gavel.

278A. Show this earlier—in the scene where it happens.

279A. Have him stutter a bit here. This should not be a complete sentence—how could he even have a complete thought under these circumstances?

280A. Here we have some playing out of the earlier statement from the judge about illness. But it doesn't really get played out in the novel, at least in the chapters I see.

What difference does it really make? Why is it happening?

282B. I like the idea that foul play is happening to Jo. That's great. But she gets out of it too quickly.

282B. I like the fact that her cel phone won't help. We need a bigger hook. Just something that eludes to her worry.

284A. I just don't buy the idea that he could forget about leaving someone in a room. That doesn't make any sense. Instead, have him distracted long enough that he cannot get to her, as much as he wants to.

284B. You got her into jeopardy in a beautiful way—but you got her out of jeopardy all too easily and quickly. Let's see some pain and suffering.

285A. Wall covering—such as what—

285B. Wealthy than all of the rest of Lubbock County combined?

285C. Take a look at the last names in this paragraph and at the top of page 286.

Essentially, the last names are all first names or variations of first names. That's a typical thing that we want to avoid—give them real last names, and not simply men's first names. When a character has a first name for a last name, it makes him sound like a character in a story and not like a real person.

286A & B. This should be summarized. We know all this information. You might simply say, Arthur summarized the events to date.

287A. Excellent—I love the way you show us who it is.

288A. Randall has to react here. This is his client, his social equivalent, maybe even his friend. Doesn't he experience some shock here?

288B. Arthur is somewhat on the nose with his response.

289A. He sounds stiff—I have looked, it is broad, I am concerned. Let's have him talk a little more like a good ol' boy.

289B. The feds and local cops always get along poorly, at least in movies. What's happening here?

289C. This could be shorter. This is more of a speech.

290A. Mousy really isn't fair. Remember that the reader is not just going to be Jo, the reader is actually going to experience being her. So the reader does not want to be called a derogative name.

291A. Discourage what?

291B. Is she okay with just memories? If she has been "humped and dumped," wouldn't she hold that against Rob? Or how fresh *are* these memories?

291C. Great expression, but it is a cliché, and we just don't want to use anybody else's words when we can use our own.

291D. He's acting guilty. It would be better if he could be a cool character and add some doubt to this.

292A. Emmitt can add to the tension here.

293A. Pandemonium erupt has to happen before Randall makes a statement for the record. In time order, that's how it would be.

293B. Good—I like the fact that he is remaining calm. That's what a good terrorist would do.

294A. How does he feel? What's the hook? How is Rob handling this crisis?

297A. We need less here.

297B. Rob would be the alpha male—so why would he let the district attorney speak first?

297C. Let's tame this sentence structure.

298A. Omit the word dishonest—what other kind of subterfuge is there?

298B. Omit—it's too much.

299A. Great.

299B. I would omit this line. How do we know this? Also, it takes us out of the present moment.

300A. Excellent.

301A. A cliché.

301B. Beautiful. Beautiful

301C. I would start a new chapter here at before Judge Stone...because this gives us a really powerful moment that has just occurred.

302A. What does this mean here? King's X?

303A. Why pick on her now? I think her role in the novel would be pretty much over by now. Right now, the story has transcended the judge—Leigh squabbling and has moved onto something much more important.

304A. What does this mean, and how does everyone react?

305A. Explain it.

305B. I'm not sure the three sentences beginning "All" work nicely. Better yet: Evap...evaporated on the spot, and with it all hope for fair treatment by the judge.

305C. I would just omit this sentence.

307A. Game over! Once the computer is taken out, the reader will assume that evidence will be found on it. So how can you give the sense that the story is not really over? There are at least another fifty or a hundred pages to go.

308A. I would omit all the summaries of what is already transpired and just give us the new scenes and new information.

308B. Jurassic Park—I love it.

308C. Hole.

308D. Funny.

309A. I like the combination of images of Charles Atlas and holding the world, which the real Atlas did. Or I should say the Atlas of Mythology. But will your reader know who Charles Atlas is? And maybe Chares Atlas could have done it! I'm just afraid that the metaphor has passed its expiration date, alas!

309B. Omit the word trained. What other kind would he use?

310A. I would consider him the ultimate flight risk. Why is his assurance that he will not leave worth anything?

311A. What happened to the trial while all this investigation is going on?

314A. Except a laptop computer—what more do you need? This isn't the marijuana bust a laptop would be everything.

316A. I'm not sure reinvoked is a word used outside of the courtroom, if there. I just don't know.

316A. It's not just about mistreating Randall or not favoring him. It's about burying him, destroying him. I think Stone would be much more anguished about this whole thing.

317A. Again, what happened to the trial all this time during the investigation?

318A. Less here. Or even summarize it, since there's nothing really dramatic in it no surprises.

319A. Explain what a jury charge is and why there would be disagreement.

319B. We need a hook.

320A. I understand the metaphor, but I'm not sure the reader will get it quickly. We never want to have the reader spending a lot of time staring at our writing. I might go with a different metaphor.

320B. By now, Randall and Rob, the two big dogs of the story, have completely ceded all importance and authority to Maxwell and the D.A.'s investigation. I hope that you'll consider the thoughts I offered earlier in this letter about handling this differently.

321A. Where was the shadow jury this whole time?

321B. Why wouldn't the hospital look better now? I would explain that.

322A. How about a shorter question here?

324A. Known to whom as a terrorist address?

328A. Why didn't he flee?

328B. How about a funnier name?

329C. Is this a juror? Could you make us clear about that?

332A. Funny.

332B. Now back off—we understand this. I would omit as he smiled inwardly, smug from his overt jab at her lifestyle.

332C. Omit the sentence.

333A. Great.

334A. Excellent.

335A. Make this shorter.

337A. Perfect. Very dramatic.

337B. Beautiful. But play it out—it's so dramatic. We really want to see this testimony.

339A. Feels like a screenplay again. We need the tone of all the statements, especially how Khan is handling his time on the stand. Also, his name isn't all that different. Why not give him a more scary terrorist type and sounding name?

339B. I would definitely have his lawyer object here. It's inflammatory.

340A. How does he show that? Don't just tell us—show us.

340B. Omit the year.

340C. Hid behind implies a judgment on the part of the narrator. Let's give Kahn his due. Instead, let's see him take the fifth again and again, and let's see the effect of that in the courtroom. That way, you will hammer home a very important side point—that terrorists have the full benefit of the U.S. legal system even though they are trying to destroy our country. That's an intriguing irony that you could be pointing out.

341A. Define this more clearly.

342A. Great.

343A. This is good. I'm glad he's renewing his objection—but explain why. I liked it because it shows him being active.

346A. Let's see some reactions here.

347A. What's the tone here? This is a great statement, by the way.

348A. Spell out the number.

348B. Omit the year.

349A. Spell out the number.

350A. One.

352A. Well after ten—I think they would party a little longer into the night.

353A. --I'm just not on board with the indecency thing. Stone is bad enough without having to put this on him. I'm not sure anything is really gained by condemning him in this way. I do look forward to seeing how you wrap up the novel for all of the characters, nonetheless.

Ok, that's all I've got. I hope you find these comments useful. I certainly look forward to discussing them with you at your convenience. Again, as I said at the beginning, I think you are a much better writer than you give yourself credit for, and the sorts of issues that we are talking about in this letter relate not to the question of talent but simply have to do with tools and skills. So the purpose of this letter has been to give you more skills and tools that you can use, and I certainly can't wait to see where this novel goes from here. It's absolutely a great pleasure and a privilege to

work with you, and I wish you and your family very happy holidays, and I look forward to our next conversation!

Sincerely,

Michael Levin

