



Sample Reader Report

Opening Comments

This is a fantastically paced thriller, and you demonstrate some excellent prose. There is still a little work to be done to make this an irresistible prospect though, and that's what I'll focus on in this report. You can take it as read that the areas I don't mention are already working well.

As you have already been through a number of revisions on this novel, I thought it might help to ease this set for me to deal with my central concerns first, and then to list the points I'd like you to consider in the order in which they occur in the novel.

Novel's Beginning

I'm afraid I didn't feel the scene setting is as sharp as it needs to be at the very beginning of the novel. I would also still like to get a better sense of Carlos as a character. I wonder whether, taking the same structure and incorporating elements of what you already have, you may need to try a fresh re-write of chapter one and two. See my comments in the chapter-by-chapter outline at the end of this report.

I also had a problem with chapter 6, where everything felt far too convenient. We gather a great deal of information in a short space of time, including the names of the individuals involved in the central plot. I wonder if you can



change the dynamic here a little, so it doesn't feel so terribly staged? I found Kurt's revelation to his son that he's not Swiss but German was dealt with too quickly, and this made it seem a little clichéd / crass. You need to take a little longer to set this up, especially as it is so key to the novel.

In the early sections, I sometimes struggled with the switch between action, and Hayden musing on Jo's death. Often these switches felt a little too quick to be truly convincing. Slowing the pace slightly would help to weave these in. E.g. p. 51:

The son, Kurt Reinhard. He snatched up the file from the bed. Just over six feet, dark hair. This wasn't going to be easy. But it was time to make use of some of the hotel's other amenities. He'd always wanted to take Jo shopping downtown in a fancy limo. But that wasn't going to happen. From now on, he was on his own. He'd better get used to it.

For me, just an extra sentence or two on Hayden's life with Jo would prevent the emotional thread feeling too rushed. Watch out for the repetition of 'but' here too. You fairly often repeat connectives through the manuscript, which can make your prose feel a little bland.

I made a note around page 130, that all the 'that's what Jo used to say' sections could work well if they were more effectively set up from the beginning, and the reader was fully let into the relationship before she dies. Whilst I realise you need a fast pace to push the action forward, there's room for a little more time to be taken in making sure the emotional heart of the



novel is allowed to develop fully. After all, this is what gives all that exciting action its true resonance and meaning.

Novel's Ending

I'll begin with a bold statement and say that to bring the ending up a notch, I believe you may need to sacrifice Zac. This would prevent the feeling that the plot is doing anything to wind to a successful and safe ending for the 'good' characters. A death like this, with someone the reader has been onside with through the novel, makes the other characters' escape from harm much more poignant than if they all end up equally safe and happy.

After killing off Zac, I'd show the others are saved, give the family reunion, and bring the novel to a close relatively quickly. At the moment, the unravelling of your ending feels pretty slow to me.

Another area you need to pay some attention to is the unravelling of family ties at the end of the novel. In this draft, it felt a little tacked on that Jonny had to end up being the lost son. I wonder whether it needs to be revealed earlier – perhaps in the scene in which Jonny rescues the money from the safe. So Grieve gets to explain how he had been entrusted with Jack's safety, and Jonny has to take some time to digest this, having the upper hand when he sees Hayden. This allows a large plot revelation to the reader at a good point in the novel, with a potential extra emotional twist in the climactic exchange scene. You would be able to play around with the reader's perception in the scene in which Jonny saves Charlotte – perhaps Jonny



doesn't initially look like he's going to save Hayden too (is he angry at him – could he blame him for the loss of his mother, for the messed up situation he's found himself in), but – as in this version, ultimately he hands over the documents to save the day.

In any case, it is important to show a little more of the contradictory emotions Jonny will be feeling after learning his whole world (and identity) have changed in such a short space of time.

Other Points on Plot

For a good portion of the novel, you had me completely gripped. However, there were still a number of places where things felt a little forced / too convenient. You may need to muddy these up a little, or consider alternatives.

I wanted to know more about Hayden's broken relationship with his wife early in the novel, and to get a true sense that he was hoping for reconciliation. It could seem rather stale that they're simply an estranged couple. Could you perhaps move the breakdown of the relationship closer to the beginning of the novel? Maybe Hayden's broken some promise because he puts his career first, and for the first time his marriage truly seems to be in jeopardy. Except Hayden believes if he can just finish the job and get home everything will be okay. This belief will make her subsequent death even more poignant... (You could also increase the poignancy of her death by



showing some degree of tenderness in their final conversation.) We certainly need to be let into their fall-out a little more.

The first meeting with Sergeant Bonsergeant seems a little shoehorned.

I felt you needed a punchier ending to part one.

The opening to part two feels a little forced. Does Charlotte have to be asking about Hayden and Jo at the beginning? Could you spend a fraction longer showing us the domestic set-up – the relationship between father and daughter, then go into Charlotte picking Jonny to follow (must be room for a retrospective point about Grieve keeping him on the radar), perhaps Grieve nervous about this but thinking no harm can come of it, then Hayden exploding back into their lives...OR it's made explicit that Grieve asked Charlotte to observe Jonny for reasons of his own (and this would be fine if it weren't foreshadowed by Charlotte's own investigations into Hayden and Jo, and Grieve's contradictory stance on this). You would need to follow through with this and have Grieve explain his motivations at the end of the novel.

I'd like to see a little more of Hayden's ingenuity in the second part of the novel, even if it needs to be thwarted. We still need a sense of him as a hero in the second part, even whilst we see he has aged whilst rotting in the French prison. He pulls off so many tricks in part one, and in part two it's a little disappointing that there's so little of this. Even if he only has the ideas, but can't act on them, it would feel more consistent with the character you have established in part one.



Characterisation and Motivation

Your action scenes are by far the best section of the novel, but of course the action needs to be fully grounded in your characters and their motivations. There are a number of areas where I felt the motivation needed to be stronger, and that the emotional heart of the novel needed to be further developed – without becoming too saccharine. Rather than stripping it all away, this material needs to be there, and I believe you are capable of getting the tone right if you pay close attention to your use of language. (More on this later)

I felt Jonny's character isn't quite convincingly formed yet. At the end of the novel, his cosy remarks about parents being 'all the same' seem premature, without a hint of the emotional turmoil I'd assume would accompany his situation. I wasn't sure about his blushing either – is 'coloured' a better word here? [Both p.346] His job in tele-communications seems awfully convenient, and repetitive of Carlos' knowledge of how to tap a phone-line at the beginning of the novel. (And the repetition is particularly conspicuous as it bookends the novel.)

You do better with Charlotte, but I felt there was room to learn a little more about her before we reach the crisis point of her in danger on page 277.

I feel you've got the budding romance between the pair just about right in this draft. It might make for a nice bit of foreshadowing to linger on a scene of the pair as toddlers in part one.



I could do with a little more help in visualising the different characters. We get some good visual descriptions of Hayden later in the novel (e.g. p.178) but I feel we might need more of this earlier, and for more of the other characters.

I'm not sure you yet achieve a clear enough difference between Hayden's age in the two parts. For me, it doesn't feel exactly clear how old he is in the first part. For example, I wondered how much older he is than Reinhard's son? You may need to emphasise Hayden's youth more in part one. Perhaps because he's so competent, I think I may have been imagining him to be older than you intend.

There's a good number of 'baddies' in the novel, and you need to work a little harder at distinguishing them for the reader. By the end of part 2, I wasn't sure I cared enough about what was going to happen to Gabrielle, for example, and reading about Reinhard senior's death on page 118 I felt that it would mean more to the reader if we had a bit more of a handle on his character from earlier scenes (even if this is just to intensify our dislike of him).

This is the end of this sample reader report extract (copyright Claire Wingfield). Drop me an email at contact@clairewingfield.co.uk if you'd like to read the full report, request a sample report for a manuscript of a different genre, or discuss how I can help you with your own novel.