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Mr. Ken Follett



Dear Ken:

The book is good, very good even, but it's not yet sensational. I think that you can make it sensational, and here are my thoughts which I hope you'll find helpful.

The markings on the manuscript break ^{into} more or less four general categories. One is just ordinary editing, cutting a phrase or a few lines, adding a few words which I think are clear (or more to the point) or more expressive of what I imagine is really what you want to say, adding a bit more punch to a given moment, or rearranging words for better emphasis, or removing an adjective or adverb which defuses the punch of something else of greater importance in a phrase or sentence. All this stuff obviously is meant only as a suggestion, and you can decide in every instance whether or not what I've done is or is not in your mind an improvement. Second, and I think a lot more important are questions I have inserted, usually about something that isn't there or isn't there as fully as it could be, a request for more information or for more clear information or more descriptive information. You'll have to go over these questions page by page, and decide which ones are worth pursuing, and then probably take them up with the people in Texas. A third category, and one which I'm separating out because it occurs again and again, has to do specifically with helping the reader "see the action." In this draft, the book is much stronger visually than it was in your preceding one, but there are many many pages which don't have anything really visual on them, and this wants further attention, I think, especially in the places I've so marked. And the fourth category has to do with emotions and emotional reactions. Again this draft is far superior in this respect, but many times you give us an event; and yet for the reader the really important thing happening is not the event itself, but the emotional reaction of the key participant. You'll find that I've marked many such points.

More general points, some of which we discussed together on the phone and which I would urge you to consider are the following:

1. I think it would be great if a bit more of the book could be written from Dadgar's point of view. One possibility might be to see if you could get him on the phone. Or maybe if he had a superior. Or maybe Rashid, who seems to be so good at ^{psych}ology, could try to approximate for you some of what he might imagine was in Dadgar's mind at the time. I know that you don't much care for Collins and LaPierre, but my recollection is that one of the ways they created suspense in their panoramic non-fiction books was to switch back and forth in point of view to both sides, i.e. the Nazis and the French in IS PARIS BURNING?

2. As you know, we now control the film rights, and I'm hopeful that now with your writing a book in which the major characters are Americans, we may have more solid crack at a big film deal than we've had in the recent past. Perot and Simons are well drawn and fairly clear as characters; but in the book at the moment the man who most continually is in the center of the action is Coburn, and I for one would like to have a much richer sense of him than I now do. I think too that if he becomes more richly drawn, that part might become more attractive to a major star. I think that there are three areas in which he could be fleshed out more, his thoughts and feelings about Simons, Perot, and something in his personal life--perhaps his wife, or it could be a child, a mother, something, someone at home on whom his mind could focus from time to time and give us some further insight into his feelings.

3. We get some fairly good descriptions of the major members of the team when we first meet them; but these don't stick, I'm afraid, in the mind of this particular reader. The result is that later on in the book we have scenes with such characters as Poche, Sculley, Taylor, and even Paul and Bill at the center of these scenes, we the readers don't "see" very much. I think that as the book proceeds and as we have scenes with these guys at the core of these scenes, you need to reintroduce some key descriptive and/or characteristic detail. Plainly, I don't want a full description each time, but if one of them has an unruly shock of hair, a prominent scar, an odd way of moving, something to point them out, identify them, the reader who has by now forgotten what they look like can see them or at least imagine that he sees them. With some of these guys, you could use a favorite item of clothing that they might perhaps wear at all times, or some particular type of eyeglasses, or brand of cigarettes or cigars--any distinctive characteristic detail to remember them by over and above their names and what they have to say.

4. Huge amounts of money were spent to accomplish this mission, and I think that the expenditure in toto and in detail is of considerable interest, i.e. the chartering of airplanes on short notice, the renting of busses, the purchase of all sorts of military hardware and ammunition, etc. Probably it would be boring and a nuisance to include a dollar amount for every single expenditure; but here and there when something grand is done like the chartering of the flying warehouse and the repair work which was necessary to make it operational, there I think a dollar amount ought to be included. Also, I think the reader would like to know how much the whole mission cost and who paid for it. Was it Perot or was it EDS?

5. The various reunions at the end moved me almost to tears, and I feel you handled them rather beautifully. But I want to emphasize and repeat the point I made above that there are a fair number of important scenes throughout the novel where the emotional impact is either omitted altogether or passed over much too quickly. I think you will find that I have tried to mark all of these. Ken, I feel that you yourself are now so immersed in the reliving of some of these events that you feel these emotions, and therefore you see no need to write them out. But for the reader (and 99.9% of your readers are going to read this book only once) these major points, highlights of the story really, get missed if you don't underline them. Particularly with a character like Ross you very often have him move on to the next statement, the next bit of action, and skip over the emotional reaction he might have felt before he went ahead with his next speech. I believe that I have marked a fair number of these and it might be worth spending your time and discussing with him what actually he felt before he spoke in some of these more intense scenes.

6. There are some loose ends, some more obvious than others, which it would be nice but not essential if you could tie down. For example, I for one

would like to know specifically what Kissinger did and why he failed. I also would be fascinated to know whether or not such American officials as Ambassador Sullivan or Henry Precht thought that the EDS guys were innocent or guilty. And in fact, it might be interesting to find out (if anyone in Washington will tell you) what they really think of a company like EDS and of Ross Perot in particular. Sure, he'll probably get nothing but praise from the military; but in their heart of hearts, what really did American officials think and feel about a company like EDS and the way it operated in Iran. Along the same vein, I think we need more background (just a little bit more), not a hell of a lot, about the prior history of the company's dealings with the Iranians. If we (and you) knew more of this stuff, we might also gain a richer sense of what it was the Iranians might really have wanted from EDS, from the taking of these hostages, etc. The way the book now is written, it almost appears as if EDS had these troubles completely out of the blue with no prior history of difficulty of any kind, and I find that hard to swallow. Sure, the difficulty could have been merely to offend some minor bureaucrat in some obscure way that no one at EDS at the time ever even noticed; but my guess is that there had to be some higher level of friction in various areas, and even if this doesn't connect up directly with the hostage taking, it probably would be worth mentioning.

Finally, the title. It does have sort of a ring to it, but it also strikes me as inappropriate. The Peacock would refer to the Peacock Throne, and neither the Shah or his throne really play roles in the book. I prefer HOTFOOT or OPERATION HOTFOOT. Those are both so distinctively American, and this whole story is also uniquely American--or at least it seems to me to be. Another thought you might play with stems from "the cavalry to the rescue." In the western movies time and time again, the hero or heroine is about to be shot, hanged, raped by the Indians, etc, and at the very last moment the cavalry comes roaring in for a rescue. If somehow this notion could be used as the title, in some way which I haven't figured out, it would strike me as quite appropriate.

And , there you have it.

Love,



P.S. I congratulate you on ending the book where you have chosen to, much better than the last time; and in fact, the whole arrangement of scenes which you've created with all the intercutting back and forth, I think is just brilliant.

AZ/rm