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8/18/78

Dear Ken and Al:

I always find it a little difficult to respond to synopses, and especially so in Ken's case, I think, in a fashion than does more than show general feeling---as I did very strongly, you'll recall in the case of previous very short proposals submitted. This is a longer one, but I suspect that makes it harder to react to meaningfully than a brief statement of the plot situation and major characters and basic interactions. The reason I say this may be ~~unparticular~~ especially so in Ken's case is based on what I've learned about him and his strengths and what I think are his ~~unparticular~~ relative loves and labors by working with him on NEEDLE. Ken is a writer, which may seem gratuitous, but isn't. A lot of guys can give you a complete plot and what you get there is what you get, pretty much, in the finished work. They are plotters, contrivers, and ~~bliss~~ them all, but they aren't really writers, which is to say that in Ken's case the writing creates surprises and qualities on its own, as we had in NEEDLE, say, in the 1940 section, the scene setting, the boarding house, and other touches along the way that couldn't every be caught in synopsis or chapter-by-chapter outline. As I said to Ken then, I suspect he sometimes becomes impatient with the demands of plotting ~~unparticular~~ and exigencies of action and prefers character and atmosphere and setting, which he is so wonderfully damn good at, and which, au fond, are not only the pluses of NEEDLE but also lie close to the heart of its success, I ~~unparticular~~ would guess.

Saying all that I will still try to react best I can to this outline, as well as some of Al's comments, though I can't help feeling that much of what's here and questions that arise from what's here, or not here, may be answered later in the writing or adjustments Ken will make as he goes.

I'm concerned with a story set ~~some~~ only some ten years ago, which is a dated  
time for the very-much-in-mind current state of the middle-east, ~~xxxxxxx~~ and I say dated  
rather than historical, as in the case of the long perspective in NEEDLE to WWII.  
I hope my meaning is clear here, because I think it's an important consideration.  
Right now Egypt and Russia~~xx~~ are apparently on the outs, whereas 10 years ago they  
weren't when Nasser was riding around whipping up the froth and playing with  
the Bear. And it being so relatively close to now, we get our chronology and  
facts confused with today, ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ As I suggested to Al when he asked what I  
thought of his suggestions, this might be put in the near-future, though it's  
true the man would be in at least their/<sup>early</sup>fifties, I guess, or maybe it could be  
after WWII when they first met. In any case, this would leave the way open for  
some extrapolation from the ~~xxxx~~ present known of international affairs. Egypt  
still seems to be broken with Russia, but it could be that in fact Sadat or  
whoever is is playing footsie secretly--I wouldn't doubt it either--with the  
Russians at same time he's paling it with U.S., and talking peace with Israel. So  
he would in this guise, secretly, of course, let them give him nuclear capacity.  
The Russians, not trusting anybody, as is their wont, and in particular not trusting  
Egypt to not completely and for real to break with and turn on them, is ~~xxxxxx~~  
~~xxxx~~ hedging their bets by at the same time working with PLO Assan to give him and  
them precisely the same thing as they give Egyptians.

Can Egypt build a nuclear? Or do the Russians help? Or both! Where  
does Egypt get uranium?

Can Egypt build a [unintelligible]? Or do Russians help? Or both? Where does  
Egypt get uranium?