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Mr. Ken Follett
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Dear Ken,

You now have a story, I'm happy to say, which hangs together; and I think it's going to grow into exactly the kind of thriller you want.

Tomorrow, you will get a marked up manuscript with all sorts of little notes and suggestions in the margins and between the lines dealing mostly with small points; and in this letter, I'll just hit on the big ones.

What you have written so far is essentially a one-character story. All your successful thrillers have had at least three points of view, and several have had four, not to mention books like **PILLARS** and **ON WINGS OF EAGLES**, which had maybe as many as a dozen. The obvious point I'm coming to is that I think your story needs to be broadened and enriched for it to have the kind of impact you're looking for. Berisford, it seems to me, is potentially a fascinating character, a world renowned geneticist, someone who has achieved great things and is at a point in his life where he's basking in his achievements, and he's faced with the possibility that everything he's ever done is about to turn to shit. His story, I believe, can be just as compelling as Jeannie's; and if we know what he is doing and trying to prevent, then I also think you're going to heighten the suspense enormously by letting the reader worry about what will or won't happen to Jeannie next. I see him as a guy who is in no way violent, and who would not do or condone anything violent; but he's involved with people who are more ruthless; so he's faced with the prospect of on the one hand stopping Jeannie, while on the other hand he has to rein in these more vicious types. It could be too that he has debts; and he's very dependent on this merger going through; so it's not only his reputation he's concerned about but also his financial well-being. And at risk could be more than just a house or a car. He might be maintaining a wife or a parent in a nursing home or an expensive mental hospital, or a child in a private therapeutic school.

I suggest too that you consider making Jeannie and Berisford lovers before and as the book begins. He may have been her mentor. She may have been swept off her feet by the great professor. He got her this wonderful appointment because she's brilliant, but he also adores her; and then they run into this terrible snag. With this history, everything that goes on between them after that would be overlaid with memories of devotion, respect, and love, which I think could add enormous poignancy to the conflicts between them all through the book. This would also raise the stakes for him with the bad guys with whom he has to deal.

Jeannie, I have the impression, is too isolated a character. For us to value her the way she needs to be valued as the heroine of this novel, she needs a confidante, someone who admires and respects her and stands by her through all her difficulties. That character could be Lisa, or it could be someone else whom you invent. Jeannie has lots of intriguing scenes in which she's alone; and I think she needs another character with whom to exchange thoughts and ideas, so that you don't end up with a novel that has too much interior monologue. Most likely she'd have some graduate students working with her on her project.

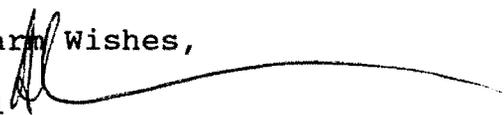
More, I feel, could be done with Stephen. Here is a nice young man (and maybe you could make him into more than just that) who discovers that he has an identical twin who is something of a psychopath. Also, if he's close to Jeannie, he fairly quickly discovers that he may be part of some weird scientific plot. But except for coaching Jeannie prior to her appearance before the university Senate and drawing up this proposed contract at the end, you don't give him anything to do. I think that if you get some sort of active plot going on the part of Berisford and his cohorts, you could then use Stephen more actively as someone helping Jeannie trying to foil these guys.

Your ending reminded me somewhat of the one you had in your final outline for **THE MAN FROM ST. PETERSBURG** which you threw out completely once you wrote the book. The opposing forces in this story are Jeannie on one side and Berisford on the other, with each having assorted allies; and your showdown scene needs most essentially to involve the two of them.

Since Cliff plays such an important role at the end, I wonder if, as in a Dean Koontz novel, you might not consider threading him through the book from his own point of view, so that the reader first of all feels him to be a threat, and second, can then take him seriously when his role at the finale becomes so crucial.

After you have digested this and my notes on the manuscript, do give me a call.

Warm Wishes,

Al 

P.S. Thanks for trying to reach me about Eileen. I'm going through a strange and difficult time.