

Writers House

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By Fax to 268-462-7866

Mr. Ken Follett

Antigua

Dear Ken,

I have now read JACKDAWS twice; and I think you are off to an excellent start. I had a good feeling about the basic thrust of your story, the nicely worked out sense of place, the historical background and also your good mix of characters. But as I am sure you must recognize there are also problems.

As I see it, this is essentially a duel of sorts between Dieter and Flick. But for you

to optimize the drama of their ongoing conflict, two major elements are necessary both of which have yet to be worked in. First, we need a personal dimension. We get virtually no emotional resonance in a battle between two total strangers. One way to approach this may be by using the model we developed in TRIPLE, i.e. that Dieter, Flick and even Michel were students together in Paris before the war. What if they all were at the Sorbonne studying art history? And what if Flick and Dieter were lovers, and she dropped him for Michel?

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So much for background, but I'll expand on this when I speak about each of the characters. Now on to the plot.

In virtually all of your best thrillers, antagonist and protagonist square off against each other in one way or another by about one-third into the story and never later than half way. By then, it's clear to each who the other is, what sort of an opponent he or she is, and then we have an intense cat and mouse back-and-forth between the two. In this outline, Dieter doesn't recognize that he's up against Flick until about two-thirds of the way through, and Flick appears never to be aware of Dieter.

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What I suggest, then, is that we start the action virtually as your main assault is about to begin, and consider the first third or so of your current outline as back story. A little of it may be worked into the novel, but most probably could be dropped. For example, as you have it now, we learn about the various participants on the team while they are being recruited and then again while they are being trained. But we would get

this same information in a much more exciting way, if we were to experience the idiosyncrasies and characteristics of these people while they were under the enormous pressure of sneaking through the French countryside and encountering Germans or Vichyites.

For organizational purposes, it might help you to think of the main plot in three movements, one in which Flick and her team prevail (but just barely) in secondary assault. Then a second movement in which the Germans prevail but Flick and a few of her people nonetheless survive. And finally, of course, Flick's success at what would be in effect a "mission impossible."

With respect to character, I think you can do some wonderful things with Dieter and Baecker. What if earlier in the war, they had both served with Rommel in Africa? And what if Baecker through some bad luck or misadventure had been wounded and blamed for some minor defeat, and when he recovered, he either transferred to the Gestapo or was stationed by the Army to this French village. Dieter, on the other hand, was an aide to Rommel in Africa, maybe his chief intelligence officer; and now that Rommel is charged by Hitler with defending the French coast and Rommel is terribly concerned about his lines of communication with Berlin, he has sent Dieter on a special mission to make sure that St. Cecile remains safe. Baecker is insanely jealous of Dieter perhaps holding him responsible or partially responsible for his setback in Africa and his being dropped from Rommel's entourage. And Baecker wants nothing more than to regain what he perceives as his glory and then be readmitted to Rommel's inner circle.

So, Baecker does everything he can to make life difficult for Dieter to make sure that when the French resistors are brought down, he gets the credit. Dieter in the end may prevail in most situations, but this would have the effect of keeping him under constant pressure. When he's not bent out of shape because of the Resistance he has constant difficulties with Baecker who is in the good graces of the German general in Reims in charge of the whole area. Treating Baecker this way, will make him, I think, more interesting and less the stereotypical Nazi. And it is he, I think, who should have a French whore as a mistress, but one who secretly is also helping the Resistance.

Dieter, I suggest, should be a Francophile. Like many Germans he thinks that France is a heavenly place as compared to Germany. Sure, the French are sloppy, dirty, disorganized, but they do know how to enjoy the best food, wine, sensual pleasures, etc, and that ultimately is what he wants for his own life. Once the New Order is permanently established all over Europe he aspires to remain in France as a high official, and perhaps an art dealer. My thought is that he, Flick, and Michel were all working for doctorates in the history of art. I imagine Dieter as a great lover of the French classical painter David. His works, if you know them, are full of portrayals of scenes of ancient Rome, the Bible, mythology, all in exquisite but stiff poses. In fact, what if they were all doing 19th century French art, and Flick's main subject was Delacroix, the great Romantic artist. And Michel, the Cartesian Frenchman, was doing his work on Cezanne.

To enhance their military stature, you'll need to create major past exploits for both Dieter and for Flick. What if there were three main communication centers in

Eastern France, not just one, and Flick and her team, or Flick with a team of French resistors has already taken out the other two? Other underground types have been trying to do this for years and they all failed, and only she managed to mastermind these success. Similarly Rommel credits Dieter and his superb intelligence work with one or two of the major successes he had in Africa before in the end he was defeated there. (As an aside, Ken, when the Allies invaded Normandy and Rommel first learned of it, he tried to telephone Hitler to authorize release of the Panzer Divisions being held in the rear, and Hitler's aides refused to wake Hitler from his sleep because they thought that would upset him. For the purposes of this story, I'd love to have at the end that it was because of the destruction of this communication center, the telephone call from Rommel could not get through to Berlin.)

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call.*

Coming back to character, I see this as being written from four points of view: Dieter, Flick, Baecker, and Paul. I see Paul as a motion picture director, a young one who had made perhaps one or two films and is an aide either to Donovan or possibly even to Eisenhower. He ought to have participated with Flick in one of her earlier missions, and he is madly in love with her, but he keeps from being obvious about this because as a gentleman he doesn't wish to intrude on her relationship with Michel who is also a friend or at least a professional colleague. I suggest that we eliminate Thwaite and Standall. I think you'll have enough on the Allied side with Fortescu and Paul. By the way, to heighten the crucial nature of this mission, I suggest giving cameos to Rommel on the German side and either Churchill or Eisenhower on the Allied side much as you did briefly and wonderfully in EYE OF THE NEEDLE.

The communications center itself needs to be more of a “character.” As you have it, it appears to be no more than an elegant home with a lot of wiring. But what if the Germans had set it under ground and surrounded it with heavy concrete. What if in fact the Allies had bombed it, but because it was so well fortified, even though on top the place looked wrecked, underneath it still functioned? This way, we would create a much larger obstacle for Flick and her team. And by the way, it might be interesting if you were to introduce some male chauvinism. Maybe there are some French resisters working in the area who cannot abide the fact that they must take orders from a woman or that this mission is being led by a woman, and this despite the successes that Flick has had.

Coming back to Dieter, I think he would be more interesting if he had a serious relationship with a really admirable French woman and not a whore. In fact what if this woman was a sophisticated Jewess or half-Jewess? And he has provided her with false papers to prevent her deportation. Before the war, she could have been a clothes designer, a journalist, or maybe even a junior curator at the Louvre. And what if Baecker suspects something about her, but has no proof.

I like your giving Flick a mother, but I think we could do more with this relationship. What if Ma has some illness, cancer, leukemia, or maybe tuberculosis; and Flick feels tremendous pressure to stay with her or at least to get back and be with her before she dies. What if Flick gets chewed out by headquarters for sending coded messages to her mother?

One episode which I had difficulty following in your outline was the substitution of one Mademoiselle Lemas for another. Wouldn't the real one have been known to the French participants? I didn't see how the Germans could hope to get away with this.

To sum up, the main work is to enhance the characters of Flick and Dieter and even more importantly, to keep each of them at the center of the story. Much as we did with Priest and Judy in THE HAMMER OF EDEN.

And one final thought. To set what's going on in this novel in a larger context, you might also very occasionally bring in news from the Russian front, the war in the Pacific, enough to place all this within a broad historical context.

And when you come over to New York, let's plan to spend an hour or so talking about all this perhaps either before or after the Writers House lunch.

Warm Wishes,

(sent electronically)

Al Zuckerman