

Hi, Ken –

WHITEOUT looks very promising, I think! My comments are mostly plot and pace-related.

It seems to me that we take a very long time to set up the true core of the book, which is the break-in and then the various hostage/conflict/suspense situations. Lots of exposition, character introductions (probably too many characters, a little hard to keep straight), etc., while I suspect the reader's going to be waiting for things to start happening. And we don't *really* start until the bottom of p. 7 of the outline.

So here's my idea: Why don't we *start* with the break-in, the fight, the gunplay, the blizzard. *Then* start flashing around to the other venues, the other character groups, filling in the exposition and backstory *as we go*, establishing the conflicts and tensions quickly, flashing to our criminals again in the snow as they try to escape through the blizzard, back to our groups – until it all comes together at Steepfall. Everything in the book happens on that one night. It's compressed, it's intense, it'll break quickly from the starting gate and never let up. It'll also provide a framework for the family tensions – the reader's knowing that this is all happening out there, and that the other characters' lives are about to be impacted by it, will provide a lot more resonance to what's going on in the house, then to have it all there just as lead-in. And I think you'll find that there's a lot of the situation/character set-up that simply isn't necessary if you approach it this way *in media res*.

One thing that would be helpful, too: once they're at the house, I wouldn't mind a real twist or two. There's good potential in the situation, but I'm not sure there's anything you could really call a surprise. There should be at least one or two plot things that'll make the reader say, "Whoa! I didn't see *that* coming!" So just turn that around in your mind.

Finally, the stolen virus idea is fine, but not particularly new. Instead of making it too big a thing in and of itself, you might want to consider it as basically the McGuffin – the thing that kick-starts the plot and gets everyone in a whirl. The true plot is the drama at the house, kind of a *Cape Fear/Petrified Forest* in the snow.

And that's about it for me! I wouldn't mind seeing Toni a little more central to the action – she seems to have more heroine potential than we're using – but I'll leave that to you. A good start, Ken! We'll talk later.

Neil