

Ken Follett

From: Emily Kischell [EKischell@WritersHouse.com]
Sent: 06 May 2003 22:03
To: kenprivate@ken-follett.com
Subject: New Outline

Dear Ken,

I think you have on the whole now succeeded in making WHITEOUT work; but I do have a few suggestions which have two general purposes. The first will be to try and enlarge the scope and resonance of the story. And the second will be to try to link more tightly the family problems with the main actions of the plot.

For the lethal nature of this virus to have a powerful impact on the reader, it's not enough that it is only talked about. So I propose that someone must die an awful death and that you make this happen early in the book, and I'll suggest particulars when I go through the outline with you scene by scene. ①

You give us background on all the important characters except Stanley; but in terms of the importance and deadly nature of the virus, he is the most crucial. You might consider him to be a former academic, a biologist of some kind who was perhaps instrumental in finding a cure for the AIDS virus. That presumably lead venture capitalists to his door who set him up in business and who may have been instrumental with his linking up with the US Department of Defense, or the Department of Defense might have sent the venture capitalists to him. He may have won a Nobel Prize or some other important honor. For the purposes of our story, I suggest that he have a personal contact in the Department of Defense either in Washington or possibly in London who is closely on top of what happens at his company because the work they do there is so crucial.

The clue as to how to expand the link between the family and the main action came to me with the call which Kit gets from his sister who I think should be Miranda. We could then see her as the older sister who has always doted on her kid brother and who wants desperately to reconcile him with their father and to bring back some harmony into the family. I will try to show how this will play out as I go through the story. ②

1) We start with Toni in Stanley's office. She wants his okay to double security. He wants to know if she's heard back from her FBI or Scotland Yard pal. The company's line of credit is almost gone, and he's reluctant to take on extra expenses. He may question the value of going ahead with the press conference, but she feels they have no choice. Their dialogue should, I feel, reflect deep feeling for each other, mutual respect, and even intimacy. I think it's a mistake for her issue to be, will he or won't he marry me? First, it weakens her; and she is after all, our protagonist. And second, it's repetitive of Miranda's situation. Her issue I think should be, do I want to marry a man with so messy a family situation? She knows, for example, that he wishes to reconcile with Kit whom she despises. Or that he may one day wish to reconcile with Kit. She knows that Miranda is very tight with Kit; and the prospect of becoming part of this somewhat dysfunctional family is giving her pause. Stanley knows about her concerns, and he is inviting her to the house for the very purpose of trying to warm her up to his family and his family to her. No.

In passing, you talk about the company's lab assistants and also about their public relations officer; and what if these two young women have taken a fancy to a particular rabbit. As far as they know, this rabbit

is uncontaminated; and they have been sneaking it tidbits, playing with it, cuddling it, and behaving generally like adolescent girls who love animals. It could be too that one of them is now in mourning for an animal (or this rabbit) on whom experiments have been completed and who has just been incinerated.

Stanley you say is confident of his project's success provided he can pursue it to its conclusion. I suggest that he also have some doubts. And what if instead of a phone call from Washington, his Department of Defense contact arrives on the scene, possibly to attend the press conference or possibly simply for a personal progress report. Maybe he's come as a surprise, worried stiff about this potential interference from these animal rights people. And what if Washington is planning some kind of military initiative, the nature of which this defense guy cannot disclose, but which requires that this vaccine be ready by a certain date?

No. Why issue

After the press conference, the principal characters return to their offices to discover a lab assistant having convulsions caused by the virus. No one dares go near her. Toni puts on a space suit and administers the special serum which has never before been used on a human. It works. Quick relief. Big fight about whether or not they should call an ambulance, since they don't want word of this illness to get out. But the girl's recovery is rapid. But then in an adjacent office they find the PR girl already dead.

No. After this, the virus would no longer be a threat.

Stanley must then don the space suit and put her in the incinerator, which has to be videotaped to account for her death and disappearance. I realize that this may seem to be a distraction from your main story, but it serves the same purpose, I feel, as the early deaths in Michael Crichton's PREY.

2) Kit needs to be set up as a rogue geek. We need to invest his loft with electronics which do strange and unusual things and which of course also set up his skills. For example, he may already be bugging his father's office or home.

The essence of the call from Miranda is to plead with him to try to reconcile with their father and be sure to come for Christmas, or is this Christmas Eve? (I know we are on the verge of a holiday, but it's not clear exactly how close we are.) Miranda sees the problem as originating with her father, and she wants Kit to forgive and forget.

I like the scene between Harry and Nigel, but you seem to present it as taking place off stage because it's in the past; and I think it needs to be onstage in the form of a flashback. Then in the course of that scene, Kit might come up with the main elements of his ingenious plan. As to Kit's assuming that Animals Are Free is the customer, why leave it at that? Why not have Kit inquire about this and let Nigel tell him that Animals Are Free is the customer? But then Kit might raise the issue of the infectiousness of these animals. Never mind the general public, how are they, the thieves, gonna protect themselves? Nigel or Harry will have to have some answer for this.

3) If you haven't noticed, this scene as written appears to be all background. What if Kit calls and wants Miranda to cover for him because he knows he's going to have to skip out of the house as soon as he finds the plastic key? And what if Ned dislikes Kit and for that reason doesn't really want to go? Miranda is terribly worried about Kit, especially once he lets drop that he may be leaving the country. Either on the phone or perhaps later at Steep Fall, she should argue that if he reforms, the business could be his. He of course would like very much to follow her advice but is in too precarious a position.

I think we want to give Miranda a bit more spine, so I suggest that she not feel humiliated when Jennifer orders her out of the house. She might, for example, question why Jennifer hasn't helped Sophie with

her packing. Or Ned could do that.

4) Given the death and near death at the plant, Toni should arrive at Steep Fall having bad vibes and rush to the phone.

I suggest keeping Hugo off stage and focusing for now on the two kids. You don't want three new characters all at once.

Toni is a stronger character if she knows Stanley wants her, but now the decision is hers. Does she really want the complications of having to deal with his children and grandchildren? What if Carl Osbourne is a fairly attractive alternative, and he is totally smitten with her? And he's less encumbered. And she could also fear the complications of being the boss's wife and working there. Does she feel any sexual tension around Stanley, or is she too old for that?

Perhaps between chapters four and five you might have the Kit-Miranda scene in which he drops hints which worry her. Or she might corner him in the master suite while he's going through his father's pockets.

6) We'll need to establish earlier that the time for the break in has been set for this evening. And what does Craig make of his uncle's searching his grandfather's clothes? What if anything does he do? Is he tempted to tell someone, and then decides not to?

7) How long a Christmas holiday is the plant going to take? And we know about security, but what staff is on duty to look after the animals? And how far is the plant from Harbourmouth? Might one or more of the guards be a woman?

8) After the rough treatment which Kit has endured at Daisy's hands, It'll be good to set up some tension between the two of them as they go about the robbery.

9) Again to build up Miranda, I would suggest that she not worry terribly about having her past affair with Hugo revealed. She would be a more interesting and a more powerful woman if she thought of it as, just one of those things. She loves Ned and wants him, but I think her main thrust should be to plead with Stanley to forgive Kit and take him back into the firm. And she's terribly worried about what Kit may be up to. And then there's the question of who will inherit the business? X ✓

10) You let this phone call to a security guard from his wife go through, but there are no consequences from this. Shouldn't there be some?

11) Again, let's make Osbourne an at least somewhat attractive suitor.

12) I suggest that this scene needs some pre-sexual bi-play. And it could be here that Craig explains to Sophie a few facts about Stanley's dangerous work and about the death at the plant. All with a view to impressing her about himself.

13) It's unclear how dangerous the isolation lab is and whether Kit would enter it with impunity. And would putting a guard into an empty monkey cage mean the guard's death, or does Kit know that this cage was used by an animal who was not infected? And where is Daisy?

14) Before rushing to the fort, I imagine that Toni would call for backup; but it could be of course that she can't get any.

15) This might be more interesting if there are chimpanzees in the cage with Steve and the guards. But again we need to ascertain whether this space is or isn't infected or likely to be infected. Steve

should also tell the thieves probably surreptitiously, about the recent death and near death which might somewhat panic Daisy and Nigel.

16) Miranda here could try to enlist Olga in her campaign for Kit's reinstatement, but Olga, I imagine, has no use for Kit.

17) The plan for the theft as Kit imagines it in this scene could perhaps actually be what Nigel proposed when they first hatched the plan with Kit. But is it clear which animals are healthy and which are not? And would the healthy ones be in the isolation lab? And would Kit readily believe that Animals Are Free would pay 300,000 pounds and presumably more to cover the costs for Daisy, Nigel etc for these healthy animals?

How would Nigel know which viruses are which? Or would they need Kit to identify them, and would he have this capability? And now that Kit sees how ruthless they are, would he not now fear for his own life?

18) When and how have the telephones been put back into working order? I would imagine that on leaving the plant, Kit would have screwed them up totally. And given the nature of this disaster, Toni would need to do far more, I think, than simply call the local police. This ought to warrant calls to Scotland Yard, the FBI, and the British equivalent of the Center for Disease Control.

19) Instead of a discussion about the ownership of a small apartment building, this might be the place for an argument about the future of the business. Perhaps his children question Stanley. What are his intentions? And if he marries Tony? And what does he propose for Kit?

20) What happens to the virus if the thieves miss their rendezvous? What does Kit fear as a worst case scenario? One thing we'll need to work on is some kind of ongoing drama between these four bad guys. And when Kit cuts the phone lines, make sure that he's careful not to cut the power lines. And they'll all have to worry about how many cell phones may be in the house.

21) Why would Tony depend on her FBI friend to call Scotland Yard as opposed to calling Scotland Yard herself? Or is this FBI friend stationed at Scotland Yard? If not, then she is on US time and probably off for the holiday.

22) I like this bottle of vodka, but I think you might introduce Sophie as a cut-up when she first arrives. She could immediately be on the prowl for cigarettes, booze, novels with sexy passages etc. When Miranda comes in, she's worrying primarily about Kit. And what if Ned is with her? And what if at this point he proposes?

23) It's not clear to me why Kit wants to wait until morning to go for the Jeep. Why not now? Is there some obstacle I don't know about? We should at all times be kept aware of the location of the virus and the terrible concerns Kit and his companions have about it.

25) When you write this, you'll need of course to spell out what it is that Sophie sexually does or doesn't do. It would be good to know too what she thinks of Miranda, Ned, and what Craig thinks of his parents.

26) Miranda also should doubt Kit's story, but of course she does not want to embarrass him or ruin his chances with Stanley.

27) Why would Frank even want to go into the isolation lab? And would Toni have the key?

28) How would Miranda know about the robbery ahead of Stanley?

Wouldn't he already have told everyone; or did he not, fearing it might depress the holiday mood?

29) Why does George burst into the room? Is he chasing Miranda?

32) Once Toni tells Steve that she is about to stop off at Steep Fall, would he then try to warn the gang? Is one of them carrying a cell phone that he could reach?

34) Ah, I see he does that. But what is Kit hoping to accomplish as he goes out to meet Toni?

35) Where are the other bad guys at this point?

37) Instead of longing to go somewhere else, let's give Kit a specific destination and a specific fantasy about life at that destination. Ned has been largely absent through most of this. Has he been alone working to meet a deadline?

And that's it. Let's talk after you've had a chance to consider all this. And if you think it would be worthwhile, I'll be happy to come over and join you in Stevenage for a day or two.

Warmly,
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