

Ken Follett_Private ✓

From: NeilSN@aol.com
Sent: 24 December 2003 15:36
To: Ken Follett_Private
Cc: neil.nyren@us.penguingroup.com
Subject: WHITEOUT

Dear Ken,

Merry Christmas! As you may have figured by now, we're actually all on Xmas break and the office is closed. However, I'm home until Saturday before heading off to Charleston, and we just recently were given the ability (finally!!) to access all our office email by remote, so I fired up my printer, downloaded the manuscript (not without some complaints from my printer, which is not what you'd call industrial size) and spent yesterday reading it.

I think it's excellent. Through all the various discussions and outline revisions, it's gelled into a fast-moving story with a good balance between sympathetic and unsympathetic characters and a lot of credible plot twists. And the whole section once the bad guys' identities are revealed and the family is taken hostage is just terrific. Congratulations!

I don't know what the others in the Follett Support Group will give you, but I've got a handful of notes, none of them which I'd consider major. Here they are:

P. 75, the press conference: Stanley's answer that "one person can infect another very quickly" seems to me *would* be the quote that would come out of the news conference. Even if the lab was convinced that Ross had seen noone else -- which they aren't -- the fact that this is rapidly contagious among humans is the sure-fire news scare line (it certainly would be here!), and nothing Toni says afterward could possibly minimize it. Is there any way for Stanley not to give out such alarming information, or to obscure it in such a way that it doesn't sound so alarming?

P. 107: Craig says to Sophie that a girl at a party said he was a good kisser and can he show her. I think it's too soon for this. Would he be that rash, just when he thinks he has finally gotten her to talk to him in a non-surlly way? It's a big leap! She's sent out no signals. And the result is exactly what you'd expect: she holds up her hand to repel his advances. So maybe he doesn't say it? Or, at the least, realizes immediately what an impetuous idiot he's just been, blurting this out (stupid! stupid! stupid!) and kicks himself for it after he gets the brushoff.

P. 234: The reader wonders what happened to the SUV? It was there when Craig parked the dented Ferrari and we haven't seen it moved. For about 10 pages, we wonder if the author has made a mistake, until it's suggested that maybe Stanley let Luke and Lori take it. I'm wondering if we shouldn't see Stanley earlier telling them to take it because of the weather. Or at least saying something like, "Oh, you'll never make it home in your (whatever kind of car they have). I've got an idea," and stopping it there. Then you won't actually have said they're taking the SUV, but we can make the connection easily when we hear it's gone.

PP. 264-270: It's hard to understand just why Frank is being so obstructionist. Yes, he has bad blood with Toni, but he can't be that thick, not with a major biohazard attack. Besides, Odette told Toni that Frank had just been reamed out by her boss at the Yard. If nothing else, isn't he afraid of the personal consequences to him if he's uncooperative and things go bad? (A much serious situation than the Farmer Kirk case) His bloody-mindedness just doesn't seem that credible, given all the circumstances. And since Toni knows about the reaming, why doesn't she remind him of that if she has to -- remind him that she knows the Yard's been on his back, so that even if he's loath to cooperate with her, and even if the consequences of this disaster haven't somehow sunk in, he should at least consider he could be committing professional suicide?

P. 321: After Toni's "blackmail" phone call to Frank with Carl beside her -- doesn't Carl ask what that was all about? The "I'll tell Carl everything"?

P. 390: Would Kit really try to commit suicide? He's had guilt pangs, but nothing to indicate this. You might want to give him a couple of agonized moments here as the realization that he's trapped comes upon him and he casts about for what to do. Even so -- isn't he enough of a coward that he would try just giving up and hoping for the best rather than jumping off a cliff?

Other than these things, Ken, I think we're in pretty good shape. I'm sure others will catch other things. A very nice job!!

Neil