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Dear Ken,

I've put down some thoughts after going through the outline for THE RUSSIAN PRINCE several times.

I've asked a lot of questions that I think the outline leaves unanswered, but don't be dismayed at the number of them. This is stage one, only. The outline for REBECCA wasn't so hot either, and looked what happened to that!

Yesterday Larry Hughes and I met with Elaine Koster, Bob Diforio, and Diana Levine, and I've spoken with Phyllis Skolnik. Without going into details of any kind, we've agreed generally on what the basic problems are. You'll be talking with them and getting their thoughts on paper later in the week. Meanwhile I'm sending NAL a copy of these notes, and Al also.

I'm sending this along to you at your hotel so you can look over the notes before we meet on Monday. Then we can fight, argue, agree, and start walloping into shape another one of your fabulous bestsellers.

Love,

PG;nvc

THE RUSSIAN PRINCE

PACE:

Your other books open fast. This one opens slowly. No sense of danger, suspense or mystery that grabs you by the throat. The prologue and epilogue should be changed.

There is very little sense of risk or even action. Two thirds of the way into the outline no one is periled, except maybe Oblomov, whom we don't know and don't care about.

Too much prelude. First we have a prologue, then background history on Lydia, Walden and Feliks. We should start with 1914 and Charlotte. It should be all her story, not shared with Lydia. I can't accept the contrivance of mother and daughter having had the same lover, and a most improbable one at that, for those two women.

The reader gets too many history lessons, though I understand the problem of trying to give these facts in an outline. I think in the ms it would not appear so disproportionate in the amount of space it's given here.

There are no personal confrontations, no sense of two adversaries facing each other in a fight to the death conflict. Oblomov is the only one who is personally threatened, and he is a shadowy figure in this outline. (This was a problem in the outline for THE KEY TO REBECCA also, yet you solved it very successfully in the book.)

As for adversaries, the problem in THE RUSSIAN PRINCE is to figure out who they are. Walden and Hartmann? Walden and Feliks? Oblomov and Feliks? What is the danger? Whose life is at stake? What terrible consequences will there be if the good guy loses? Who are we pulling for, other than England?

There is tension and conflict between Charlotte and Feliks, but that is more of a misbegotten romance than thriller stuff.

We come to the end of the outline without a sense of buildup. Hearts pound only at the very end, when the bomb is about to go off.

PLOT:

The attempt of the Allies and Germany to bring Russia in on their side--or at least to keep it from going to the other side--is a situation full of great possibilities for a superb thriller. This is your specialty--replaying history with a "what if?" What if a single event had gone the other way?--then history would have taken a different course. If Hitler had got the message about the Allied invasion (Needle), if Vandam had not broken the code and sent Rommel the false message (Rebecca), things might have turned out differently. We know the outcome, but you make us feel the suspense anyway. THE RUSSIAN PRINCE has these same possibilities.

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However, you have not brought these possibilities into the outline. Events are shadowy and at a remove. Walden, the real protagonist for England, and Hartmann, the plotter for Germany, are in the background, with Hartmann making an appearance only a couple of times. Feliks, the novel's main character, is an anarchist. He has his own reasons, which have nothing to do with England or Germany, and he is used by Hartmann, without fully knowing or caring about Hartmann's motives.

The problem in THE RUSSIAN PRINCE is that the two main characters, Charlotte and Feliks, the passionate idealist and the unscrupulous anarchist, are not really connected to the main, crucial, course of events. Their consciousness is someplace else.

The plotted assassination, successful or unsuccessful, doesn't seem to matter much one way or the other, as far as its effect on the course of WWI and history. A sense of catastrophe, crisis, urgency must be built around the assassination. (Much as you did with Vandam, knowing something, yet not quite what, but knowing he's got to stop it.)

We have to have more menace, tension, conflict in the plot. You have always orchestrated your novels--tempo increasing to a great crescendo. We have to have more of the plot--more of a sense of great forces moving to the extreme peril of the characters we come to know.

CHARACTERS:

Feliks takes the book, as the villains do in your novels. But in this outline Feliks is simply a greasy scoundrel. It's hard to see how Charlotte, let alone Lydia, can love him. He has no redeeming ways at all, and one feels only repulsion for him, not a reluctant attraction, which we should feel if we are going to understand how Charlotte could get in his clutches. Feliks, as presented in the outline, is not the sort of man who would fall on an exploding bomb to save his unborn child.

Charlotte is not a strong heroine, and she is diluted by Lydia. I would like Lydia out of the book, and the Feliks/woman relationship to be all Charlotte's. Charlotte appears too shallow and naive, she does not interest me very much.

Oblomov is hardly ever there in the outline. Yet he is crucial to the plot. He is almost a bystander, and if that is the role you intend for him I'm sure you can portray this successfully in the ms, but it doesn't work for the outline. Oblomov is a character that misses here.

Walden and Hartmann. Reading between the lines of the outline, I suspect that Walden will emerge a full-blooded character, but even so, he should be more involved in direct action and risk. Walden is the force for good in this novel, yet I have no sense of his actions

on stage. He's behind the scenes, plotting, never engaged in personal risk, danger, or confrontation with a deadly adversary. He should go after someone, (like Vandam did Wolff, even before he knew who he was), but who should he pursue? Feliks? Hartmann? The spy in the Russian Embassy? Your good guy needs a definite, specific bad guy to fight. Hartmann, as the only manipulator for the wrong side, needs more action too.

Lydia I feel should be eliminated entirely. The Lydia/Feliks affair bothers me a lot.

SUGGESTIONS

The opening scene; I see that your purpose is to start in the present and end in the present. But unless you can make that present ominous and mysterious, forget it. The first scene has to be a grabber.

Instead of Charlotte's story, why don't you do something with that unborn child? Have him open the story, in a tense situation (WWII spy?) and finish it in the epilogue, where all will be clear. This would have nothing to do with the real story, but it would add that extra twist that your readers expect of you.

Start the main story in 1914. All that stuff about Lydia, Feliks, Walden is merely a prologue to the main action. To have Lydia Feliks's lover as well as Charlotte is a contrivance, something that never shows in your novels. As I've said, I would like to cut Lydia from this story, except perhaps as Charlotte's mother. Also, I feel you dilute Charlotte's character by making her repeat her mother's actions.

Feliks: he is your main character. When you first spoke about this book, you said you wanted to write about a character "bigger than life." Feliks is big only in his repulsiveness. The Feliks I would like to see would be a gargantuan personality; full of Russian wrath and passion, boisterous humor; greedy for life, complex and contradictory--the kind of man who can sing a baby to sleep with a tender lullaby, while planning a Cossack program. The kind of man Charlotte can fall in love with.

It will be necessary to involve Feliks more closely in the real crisis--keeping Russia on the right side and off the wrong side. Maybe Feliks deals with both sides, while keeping his own secret aim in mind all the time.

Charlotte should be intelligent, individualistic, very innocent, with an idealism that takes her where she shouldn't go. She too should be involved in center action, making things happen, a do-good revolutionary playing with fire. She must be a vivid character, instead of a silly girl, used by Feliks, passive. She is hard to care about in the outline. What about Charlotte working actively against Feliks? When she finds out what Feliks is really plotting and what his philo-

sophy really is, she sees him as an enemy. Her head tells her to hate him (her heart still loves him) and so she pretends to go along with him, to trap him. There is possibility for drama and suspense in that situation.

To tie 1914 closer to the present and give readers a sense of identity with it, how about using real people as you did in Rebecca? Walden, for instance, could have a meeting with the young Churchill, or we could see the young Mountbatten just back from the Crimea or wherever he was. These names are still alive today.

To sum up, what this book needs is:

A smash opening;
Strong, vivid characters, especially a strong, complex villain;
A strong force for good, hence two strong adversaries involved in personal confrontation and conflict;
A sense of peril involving the characters right from the start;
An urgent importance to the plot, one that readers can identify with (if this thing happens all will be doomed!);
And, if possible, a mystery of some sort, an extra twist, Follett style.

I like the fact that the novel is set in pre-WWI time. It gives you a chance to recreate a world, just before the world changed forever. We all feel a hint of nostalgia for that upstairs-downstairs kind of life, with its privileged eccentrics, the stalwarts of the Empire just before it fell. I can see your bringing this vividly to life, especially through characters like Walden and Charlotte. No doubt this will add depth to their portraits too.

I do think that if the problems of the outline are solved, this can be another great Follett novel, with all the shocks and surprises your readers expect of you.