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Ken Follett
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Dear Ken,

Even though I'm used to it by now, I'm always amazed at the difference between your first and second draft. The book opens beautifully, all the contrived relationships of the first draft are now acceptable and natural. Ellis's spying on the terrorists and JP's almost inadvertent involvement with them are frightening and convincing. JP is real now -- you can understand him and even feel some sympathy for him at times. And Jane is a real woman, not a tensed up feminist, I liked her from the start and that liking grew till the very end. Actually you've given the book to Jane and that's as it should be. And that sex scene -- everybody's going to be talking about it! I don't know what Readers' Digest will do!

A minor thing: On page 106 Ellis tells his bitterness about Vietnam and America's role in it. Someone who feels that way considers immigrating; the last thing they'd do is join the CIA. Later on you deepen his reasons and they're acceptable. But here I think you do need something a little more -- perhaps joining Ellis's guilt with a love of his country. As it is now it jars. ? No.

Now for the bigger thing: From page 316 when Ellis and Jane pack up for the Butter trail, for the next hundred pages till Jane's scene with the Russians she doesn't blow up, the story goes somewhat flat. It loses pace and I think you spend a lot of time on things you needn't. These people are running for their lives and the reader should be asking on almost every page, "Will they make it?" I think you have to shorten and intensify, give us less explanation and more dramatic scenes. These pages should give off a sense

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of constant danger and they don't. Neither do they (as Al pointed out) have a sense of destination. We should always be aware of where they are headed, with a sense of their closing in on their goal as the odds against them get higher.

I think cutting will take care of a lot of it, and then maybe the creation of a few scenes (you tell us too much in these pages) will finish it. It's nice for Jane to feel elated on that first grassy plateau, if only as a contrast for what is to come. But you can cut out most of her musings on JP and Ellis and you can certainly cut out most of Chantal's feedings which seem to occur on every other page. There's an entire chapter -- 26 pages -- that I'd like to see go. The episode is highly contrived, a piece of suspense that doesn't come off as suspense. That's where JP meets with Abdullah -- the stealing of the native's clothes, the herding of the villagers into the mosque, the stealthy hiding of JP as he awaits Abdullah, all -- quite improbably -- to learn where Ellis and Jane have gone. In this chapter too you go into a lot of explaining and it's a big mish-mash. [Anatoly and JP could get this info in a much easier, believable, simpler way. The readers know the Butter trail is the only way out this time of year, therefore so do the Russians. You could take it from thereconfirmation could be from a Russian scout who saw three people where they shouldn't be.] JP could have exactly the same reaction..."I'll never see my daughter again," etc.

?
No.

Back to the trail: From the time Jane and Ellis leave you seem to do a lot of explaining, telling, without creating scenes for your reader to enter. Only two exciting dangerous things happen on that trip -- Jane is almost pushed off the cliff by the horse, and the horse falls into the gorge. What I would like to see are one or two good scenes with Jane and Ellis struggling against the wind, cold and icy rock, man against nature (like the exit from Shangri-La in *Lost Horizons* -- an old movie and a childhood memory of mine), and a sense that the pair are struggling against terrible odds for a destination that gets closer but not more attainable. What you need here is one scene like the shipwreck in Eye of the Needle -- something to make the reader shudder and remember!

You also need to build some minor scenes. You throw away the messenger from Masud because you tell it from an undramatic viewpoint. But I can see it another way -- a lone figure silhouetted against the night sky -- friend or foe -- sinister -- Ellis, quite nervy at this point, reaches for his gun -- what is Mohammed saying to him? The messenger has risked his life to bring Masud's warning -- they must leave at once etc. You can really make something of that!

Yes

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Another tidbit: Maybe somewhere on the climb they have to steal past someone or something -- a hostile village or a lone Russian outpost -- and maybe Chantal starts to cry. A giveaway! Then maybe Mohammed begins to imitate the cry of an animal to confuse the listener and it works. The foe relaxes -- it was a mountain lion after all, or whatever they have up there. Then Jane could give Chantal the old breast and that's where a feeding could really mean something! These examples are to suggest to you the sort of thing that would speed up the pace and involve the reader in the dangers of the escape.

No

In this part of the book Jane spends too much time trying to justify her new love for Ellis. I don't think that's needed. It's what they do together that counts.

In our phone conversation today I said I thought you could revise in a couple of days, but I guess I've asked for quite a bit. I think if you look at what can be cut you'll know what can take its place and where. It sounds like more than it is and anyway I'm counting on your genius. When you fix up the sag in those 100 or so pages the book will be perfect.

I love the ending now (it had to be Jane who killed Jean-Pierre) and the epilogue, where Jane and Ellis are going to live happily, but not necessarily peacefully, ever after.

Wait till you see the sketch for the cover -- you'll have no doubts about the title then!

Love,

Pat