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January 7, 1994

Mr. Ken Follett
BY FAX:

Dear Ken,

I read your new outline twice; and I feel you have dealt most ingeniously and creatively with most of the problems which existed in the prior version. It's not clear to me whether or not it's worth your doing yet another draft; since the changes I'm going to suggest aren't really major, but I'll lay them out for you, and then you can decide.

My big question is, how can we make James as interesting and compelling a character as, say, Feliks or Faber? As you now present him, he has no significant human attachment to anyone. Nor do you put him under the kind of pressure that would create some sympathy for him. Thinking about this, I came up with one idea which might be worth considering. What if his older brother was not in the West Indies but in Virginia and was in fact managing a substantial plantation quite successfully? And what if the only opportunity available to James was a great patch of wilderness, which, if he could acquire it, he would then have to clear, cultivate, build, fight off hostile Indians, and do all the other back-breaking and cruelly exhausting work of a pioneer? And what if his older brother sided with Washington and the revolutionaries, so that James, although a British officer, would feel at a disadvantage in dealing not only with his neighbors, but also with his own older brother, the one favored by his father to, as it were, take over the family fortune. Putting this brother into the action of the story could perhaps over-complicate the plot, but it would make things more difficult for James, his having to cope on the one hand with Mack and his rebellious wife, and on the other hand with his older brother. Whether you use this idea or some other one, I think it important that we make things really hard for him, frightening, even, and thus give him more of a psychological basis for his villainous acts.

Less important, but also worth a little further thought, is

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George. If he is a bastard just for the sake of being a bastard, then he's really not that interesting. I think that in his case too, he needs to be under pressure of some kind, pressure which could ruin him, disgrace him, humiliate him: financial weakness, a secret, a badly made deal, something which could undo him totally and which he must fight against with all his might. Maybe even a sexual peccadillo, an affair with a woman married to someone far more powerful than he.

Liz is always saving people, especially Mack, but also Red Squirrel and Peg. It might be good if Mack should on occasion save her. What if, for example, when methane gas leaks into the mine and it's about to explode, Mack saves her rather than the young boy? This would immediately set him up as a hero in her eyes; and it would also give James a good reason to hate Mack, ashamed as he would be of his own cowardice in fleeing the mine and leaving her there.

Mack dreams of being free, but free for what? In the early part of the book, I have the notion that perhaps what he longed to be was a peddler, since peddlers can come and go. But in the end, he becomes a farmer, a land-owner; it occurs to me that it would be good to connect the beginning of the book in this sense with the end, and to make his dream that of someone longing to own land, to grow his own food, to hunt his own lands, build and own his own home and out-buildings, etc.

Some lesser suggestions could be some of the following:

When Mack swims across the river and emerges naked, Liz might use her body heat to warm him and thus give us a semi-erotic episode.

Kobe becomes a very important character, and yet he doesn't appear until quite late in the story. One way to introduce him earlier might be to make him the slave of Lennox, who is the failed farmer, who then returns to England, and then of course comes back again later.

Peg, although only thirteen at the start of the novel, is somewhat older by the time she gets to Virginia; and it seems inevitable to me that she would fall in love with Mack and that you're going to have to deal with her jealousy, which could provide some interesting twists and turns in the story that are not now there.

On page nineteen we have George inquiring about all sorts of uprisings, i.e. the sailors, the hatters, the sawyers, etc. I think it would be better if we stick with only one group, the one which presents the biggest threat; and it's that group headed by a particular individual who is the one that George is after.

Later on that same page where we have George lying about turning over the Virginia property to James, it might be good to

get the sense that this is being done not simply out of the father's greed, but because he feels that James is actually incapable of taming this wilderness.

On page twenty-three, to keep things clean, when we learn that Esther is dead, why not also kill off Annie?

I was concerned to hear about Emanuele; and I hope he's a lot better now. Talk to you next week.

Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Al', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Al

P.S. The week before Christmas, Barnes & Noble sold 6,600 copies of FORTUNE, and 1,300 the week after, with the book retaining the same position on the list for both weeks.