



A Column of Fire

Ken Follett

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In 1558, the ancient stones of Kingsbridge Cathedral look down on a city torn apart by religious conflict. As power in England shifts precariously between Catholics and Protestants, royalty and commoners clash, testing friendship, loyalty, and love.

Ned Willard wants nothing more than to marry Margery Fitzgerald. But when the lovers find themselves on opposing sides of the religious conflict dividing the country, Ned goes to work for Princess Elizabeth. When she becomes queen, all Europe turns against England. The shrewd, determined young monarch sets up the country's first secret service to give her early warning of assassination plots, rebellions, and invasion plans. Over a turbulent half-century, the love between Ned and Margery seems doomed as extremism sparks violence from Edinburgh to Geneva. Elizabeth clings to her throne and her principles, protected by a small, dedicated group of resourceful spies and courageous secret agents.

The real enemies, then as now, are not the rival religions. The true battle pitches those who believe in tolerance and compromise against the tyrants who would impose their ideas on everyone else—no matter what the cost.

A Column of Fire Details

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Author : Ken Follett

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From Reader Review A Column of Fire for online ebook

Pauline says

'A Column of Fire' by Ken Follett. I loved 'Pillars of the Earth' and 'World Without End' so I had high hopes for this book but I think I was put off by the fact that I had read a lot of historical books about this period so it was rather boring to me. I did engage with a couple of the characters and found parts of the book interesting.

Amy says

I'm a huge fan of Pillars of the Earth and World Without End. After only two chapters of this book I am hugely disappointed. It is difficult to believe that Ken Follet wrote this book. The language is juvenile and the vernacular is very modern and western. I'll continue reading and hope for some improvement.

Diane S ? says

I was very familiar with this time period, the religious wars in France and England, the Spanish Inquisition. So much bloodshed, killing in the name of the Lord. A huge cast of characters, no character list provided, took quite a while to remember who was who, this is a very lengthy tome. A fantastic portraying of the history of this time period. Yet, for me frustrating as well. In his effort to cover so much ground, in different areas, he sacrificed character development, and made the various threads difficult to smoothly follow. I would get involved in one story, and then switched away to another. By the time we return to the other thread, it was hard to once again engage

Yes, he can write. Some graphic scenes of the violence and horror of this time.. So many schemed for power, conspiracies, spies, it all here. So read it for the history, and though I always had a few favored characters, they were not really fully fleshed, it was hard to actually get z handle on their personalities. In the end, for me, it was just okay.

Melissa says

OM@%*+?!G!!!!!! Okay, please don't hate me for doing this in the review box, but just found out there's a third book in the "TPOTE" series and I'M DYING!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Book one was and still is such a love/hate for so many and I'm most definitely one of the diehard lovers of the first book, have the second and can't wait to read it and now A THIRD BOOK?!?!?!?! Just a little excited :-O I'm being a total book nerd and about to jump out of my skin!! Must get my hands on this ASAP!!!! I can't wait need it now book! Time to read "World Without End"! OM*G so excited, lolol. Book nerd moments are so embarrassing xD

Nikoleta says

Αρκετ? ωρα?ο αλλ? δεν ε?ναι σαν τα δ?ο προηγ?μενα. Προσπ?θησε πολ? χωρ?ς να του βγα?νει

αβ?αστα...

Matt says

Ken Follett again took a lengthy hiatus before penning this third novel in the series, which is reflected in the writing and shall be discussed below. Kingsbridge, with its cathedral and mighty bridge, again proves to be the initial backdrop of this thoroughly researched tome, set in the 16th century. The great community emerges in the opening pages of the novel, where the reader encounters Ned Willard, returning after a period away. As the snow falls, causing the great Cathedral to disappear, the symbolism of quick changes becomes apparent. However, there is more brewing in Kingsbridge and England as a whole, which pushes the narrative into a fiery discussion soon enough. Queen Mary Tudor is on the throne and has turned the country back to its Catholic foundation, which is causing some concerns amongst her subjects. Forced to flee Catholicism under Henry VIII, people took up with the new Church of England and sought to pave the way for Protestantism in the country. Kingsbridge monastery, so important in the first two novels, lost its firmament under the King and the monks were dispersed. However, as Queen Mary appears to be terminally ill, there is talk of the succession. Two camps emerge: those wanting continued Catholicism turn to Mary, Queen of Scots (and France); and those who seek to lessen the constraints of religious conformity turn to Princess Elizabeth Tudor, half-sister to the current queen. The battle lines are drawn and the choice turns the country against itself. Ned finds himself in an odd position as he witnesses this and takes up a post with the Elizabethan camp, only to become one of her most trusted advisors. Plots to kill Elizabeth emerge alongside attempts to get Scottish Mary to return to the land of her birth to claim what some feel will rightfully be hers. When the Queen dies, it is left to Parliament to make the choice, which Follett illustrates as being highly controversial and problematic, but Elizabeth soon ascends reigns as the first of her name. The new Queen riles up everyone by seeking tolerance and acceptance of any form of Christianity in England, choosing not to side with either Protestants or Catholics wholeheartedly. What follows is a collection of stories that emerge throughout Europe, using a handful of characters who illustrate the religious persecution of both Protestants and Catholics, using the Pope and various monarchs to play Christian chess with their subjects as they shed blood to see their branch of the religion succeed. Ned is placed in a position to not only try to win back the love of his life, but to accept fate and try to reinvent himself, while England is being torn apart. Follett illustrates this battle over decades, while the characters evolve but still have time to prove as scandalous as ever (what would a Kingsbridge novel be without some drama?!). By the end, Follett has shown that religious intolerance is by no means a new thing in the world, but that it can be traced back centuries, where 'soldiers' were blinded to acceptance and sought to outmanoeuvre their labelled enemies. A sensational addition to the Kingsbridge series, though it does not entirely fit with the other two novels. Fans of historical fiction will surely love this tome, alongside the most open-minded and 'tolerant' Kingsbridge series fans. Patience is a must before tackling this novel, so be wary if you seek a quick story and easy to decipher characters.

When I read the preface to Pillars of the Earth, I learned that Follett was not entirely comfortable with the subject matter when he first wrote that book. He knew little of the religious nuances of the Church, but has shown that age and dedication to research have changed his abilities. While I have some issues with this book, I cannot deny that the research and thoroughly intricate cast of characters make this one a must read for dedicated readers and fans of history. Follett is again forced to use scores of characters to flesh out the story, some pulled from the history books and others completely of his own imagination. As with the previous two books, occupations are varied, as are the social standings of those who grace the pages of this book. However, the characters from history dominate and thereby lead the story, forcing the 'nobody' characters to fall into line. There is still a thread of love, romance, rape, and deception, but it proves to be a garnish in a larger story that speaks of intolerance at a time when religion in Europe was (d)evolving. The dedicated reader will surely find a few characters onto whom they can latch and find some solace, though

there are an equal number who can be hated for their actions. The story of this novel is well developed and presented in a methodical way, such that the reader can see not only the issue at the core of the story, but its fermentation over the decades. This leads me to my primary issue with the book, which is that it does not fit nicely into how Pillars and World Without End places Kingsbridge at the centre. There is action in Kingsbridge and the Cathedral does bear mention on occasion, but a great deal of the story takes place elsewhere, which lessens the impact of the community that readers have come to love. For Follett fans, the influence of his recently completed Century series is blunt in this narrative and plot development. Follett develops mini-stories throughout Europe, presenting characters who exemplify the religious issues in Spain and France, as well as in England, the attentive reader will remember such 'branch-offs' over the aforementioned trilogy. The reader learns of these struggles and waits to see how the numerous spheres will come together and eventually meld into a single storyline. While I am not a professional author, I might suggest that Kingsbridge have remained the central focus of the story and Follett show how this continental war and numerous assassination attempts on the country's monarch affected the locals. Alas, that was lost and Ned Willard, a Kingsbridgean, is the major glue that binds the story to being a part of this other trilogy. With numerous monarchs who flex their muscle throughout to show how Catholicism is the only way, I can easily find justification to have this work for my reading challenge and I can only hope that others will find the thread of my argument and agree. While I found this to be the weakest of the three novels in the series, I still enjoyed it a great deal. I would recommend it to those who have made their way through the others two, in hopes that they will find as much enjoyment in the historical references as I did.

Kudos, Mr. Follett, for such a stellar piece of historical fiction. Some of those threads you left blowing in the wind might make for an interesting fourth novel, though I am not pushing for another round, unless you're eager to return to Kingsbridge proper.

This book fulfills Equinox I (A Book for All Seasons) Book Challenge for Topic #3: A Book About Royalty

Love/hate the review? An ever-growing collection of others appears at:
<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com/>

A Book for All Seasons, a different sort of Book Challenge: <https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/...>

Bookdragon Sean says

I didn't want to write this review, I've been weighing it up for a few days, but this book is so far removed from the previous two books that a negative review is unavoidable. *A Column of Fire* is way too short and way too predictable, which is a sort of odd comment to make about a book over 750 pages long with a huge cast of characters. But let me explain.

Ken Follet is at his best when he writes massive historical yarns. He mixes the political and social issues of the age with the lives of some very real people, people who could have existed within the eras in which he writes. And he did that here, at least, in part. The Willards and The Fitzgeralds fortunes rose and fell with the Catholic and Protestant rivalry, which came to a climax when Elizabeth I took England's throne. Though I think this book's greatest downfall is its sheer lack of depth and sense of crisis throughout.

I just didn't care about the citizens of Kingsbridge this time round.

Let's rewind and compare it to *The Pillars of the Earth*. After every major section of the novel, something big happened. The Kingsbridge market was attacked by William Hamleigh (twice) the church roof collapsed, Tom Builder had to abandon his child and Prior Phillip found himself at the King's mercy in France. The

same sense of crisis was also apparent in *The World Without End*. With this book there was no real sense of danger for anyone (that I was made to feel for.) So it lacked the drama that made the previous two instalments so damn exciting.

I found myself not caring at all about most of these characters or their lives for that matter. I didn't know enough about them and when the story started moving they were never really built upon. Rollo Fitzgerald was awkwardly absent for large parts of the novel after initially being set up as a very important character. There were large transition periods between the characters' lives that we seemed to miss and the story never fully came together as it needed to. Moreover, and most significantly, there was no sense of Kingsbridge community spirit. So that meant when danger did hit Kingsbridge, I yawned.

The romance was weak

Follet's books are always driven by romance, and this one was no different. But, again, this was a let-down. In this case the initial few chapters on it were perfectly fine; it was set-up as you'd expect it to be. However, the aftermath was somewhat tepid. Where was the longing? Where was the heart wrenching emptiness when the lovers were separated? Sure, it was touched upon; though I think much more was needed to cement the mutual feelings. If this was Jack and Aliana or Merthin and Carris, then all parties concerned would have been beside themselves in agony. Ned and Margery seemed to suck it up and get on with their lives all too easily. And their ending was far too predictable at this stage. I needed so much more for this to work.

Do I think *A Column of Fire* could have been a good novel? Most certainly. It needed more editing. It needed to be padded out and certain sections expanded upon and revised. All in all, what I think *A Column of Fire* needed most of all was time, time to grow and become the story it ought to have been. I feel like I've just read an early draft of a potentially great novel, most dissapointing indeed.

Jane says

I was asked to review this by Nudge and was thrilled 28 years ago I read the first book - Pillars of the Earth on holiday and was blown away. 18 years later saw the author then bring out the long awaited World without End and 10 years later I am sitting here with the third instalment. The book although a long time coming is worth the wait. I was given one of a limited edition numbered book proof of 1240.

This is a spy story with Elizabeth the first reigning in the sixteenth century. As ever Ken Follett's attention to detail in his writing and historical research is second to none. This author is meticulous and this adds to the readers enjoyment of another epic novel.

In this period we are still in Kingsbridge and moved on from the black death and the hundred years war, the descendants are still living dramatic and harrowing lives. This time in the Elizabethan age religion, espionage and love on differing sides. We get entangled with the characters Ned and Margery love and being on differing sides of religion. Readers who know their history will know as the story progresses Mary Queen of Scots with her supporters trying to rid Elizabeth from her throne and ultimately the demise of Mary. What Ken Follett does effortlessly is weave a wonderful story in and around with fact and fiction. This is the author's gift.

The story is as brutal as it is historical with characters the reader will recognise and some they will not, facts they will know and others they will not.

The book is divided into four parts which breaks this into manageable sections - it is a huge read of over 750

pages, but certainly worth the wait.

As the book ends the reader wonders whether there could be another book, on two continents.

I thank the author and Macmillan publishing for allowing me to review this book.

Simona Bartolotta says

4.5

“Sometimes Ned felt he lived in a rotten world.”

I haven't read *World Without End* yet, but according what I've gathered from the reviews I've seen and my experience with the wonderful *The Pillars of the Earth*, *A Column of Fire* seems to be **significantly different from both its predecessors**. The most heard complaints are, as far as I know, the **weakness of the romance** and the **lack of depth when it comes to the characters**, most likely due to *A Column of Fire* having a much wider scope than the first installments in the *Kingsbridge* series.

I believe both complaints to be incontrovertibly well-grounded. I challenge anyone to say Ned and Margery's story is as epic as *Aliena* and Jack's, or as dreamy, or as beautiful... or as *unrealistic*.

I'm not completely cold-hearted: I have cheered for Jack and *Aliena* them just like you all did. I even like them more than I like Ned and Margery, but only because I didn't connect with Margery as a character; if I must consider the romance alone, then I loved them both equally. Because *Aliena* and Jack make you dream, but Margery and Ned represent what would most likely happen, which means that they make it even easier for the reader to empathize with them. **So I don't believe that in *A Column of Fire* the romance is actually weaker: I believe it is simply shaped on a different vision of love.** And different doesn't necessarily means worse. Whether readers will be able to like it as much depends on what they're looking for and what they expect from a Follett book. I'm just saying it shouldn't be considered as an objective flaw just on principle.

As regards the wider scope, again, I completely agree, and again, it really depends on what you want from the book. **The world depicted in *A Column of Fire* is much, much wider than the one of the first two books**, more complex, more dangerous, and obviously, the focus must shift to accommodate this. In coming to terms with this change, I believe I was helped by my indestructible love for the other Follett historical series, *The Century Trilogy*, which I still like better than anything else I have read by him. The XX century is a terribly complex, composite period, and only true genius could make sense of it in such a fluid, gripping way of such a variety of people, countries, ideas, movements, conquests and atrocities; but Follett did it.

This is why I believe much of the experience of the writing of that trilogy went into the writing of *A Column of Fire* as well, and I also think **this broader approach came into play in the *Kingsbridge* series just at the right time**, as it probably (and very effectively, in my opinion) reflects the change that must have occurred in people's world view with the rediscovery and colonization of the Americas. It is true that in that trilogy, Follett generally does a better work with his characters than in *A Column of Fire*, but ultimately not so much as to annoy me; in fact, personally, I have no complaints at all.

Moreover, *A Column of Fire* roughly spans the year of the Europeans wars of religion, by which I am deeply and equally fascinated and repulsed. So it was kind of an easy win with me.

Long story short, you must be aware that you won't get from *A Column of Fire* what you got from *The*

Pillars of the Earth and *World Without End*, because a lot of things happened in the years between the end of the latter and the beginning of *A Column of Fire*, and **Ken Follett**, according to my interpretation of the whole thing, **chose to represent these changes with a narrative strategy he deemed fit. I am more than happy with his choice, which I find clever, thought-provoking and careful.** The only thing I can suggest is, **be unprejudiced and go for it.**

Marialyce says

I did it, or should I say Ken Follett did it? He managed to in nine hundred and six pages, to continue the story he started two books ago with *The Pillars of the Earth* and *World Without End*. Amazing to me is that Mr Follett not only wrote this many pages, but also so aptly filled those pages with a story that was hard to put down. If you loved the first two books in this series, you are going to be in love once again.

In this novel, the year is 1558 and religious strife is tearing the country, its people, and its ruler apart. The antagonism between Catholics and Protestants is at a fevered pitch as Queen Mary, also known as Bloody Mary, tortures and kills those who want to take Christianity in a different direction that of being less ostentatious, less mercurial, and more dedicated to the simplicity of worshiping God. Elimination of priests, bishops, and clergy living off the poor, of statues, of the richness of the trappings within the Catholic Church is the goal of this new faith.

A new queen is about to assume control. Princess Elizabeth, daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn is to become queen. She is a Protestant who will try to balance the faiths that seems to pit neighbor against neighbor, family against family, and encourages so many secrets, lies, and deaths. The ultra Catholics despise Elizabeth and will try over her years of reign to do away with her and reestablish the Catholic faith as the faith of England with an overwhelming desire to place a Catholic monarch on the throne.

Ned Willard and Margery Fitzgerald are two of the main characters who love one another and wish to marry. However, their opposing views on faith splits them apart. Ned decides to work for Princess Elizabeth and when she ascends the throne, Ned takes on the role as her protector and does so as a kind of agent tracking down plots, assassins, and those who wish Elizabeth harm and death. Ned and Margery drift apart and even though they are desperately in love, that love is doomed. Ned becomes more embroiled in the plots against Elizabeth while Margery marries another forced to give up Ned. As the times and the story continue many characters both real and imagined by Mr Follett create a wonderful telling of the Elizabethan Age. He interweaves the happenings of the times into the story line and makes this novel a true work of fiction seem quite real.

Along the way in this sprawling novel, we meet many characters both good and evil who want to impose their beliefs on all and who do not believe in the word tolerance. They will have their way no matter how many lives are lost not caring about the cost and toll their intolerance will bring upon the people. It was a turbulent time and the fact that it was caused by religion seems unimaginable. Yet, does it really judging even today by the intolerance we oftentimes see by religious fanatics who, just like in these Elizabethan times, murder, plunder, and kill in the name of their God.

This is Ken Follett at his best tying all the characters together both those that were historically real with those of his imagination. I was super excited to read this book in the Kingsbridge series and so very happy to say that I was not disappointed at all.

Jen says

My love affair with Follett goes as far back as 13 years, when I was first enraptured by Eye of the Needle.

Since then, you've tucked me into bed several nights with your fabulous stories of espionage, romance, historical fiction, and oh so much more.

This series makes me sigh as it wraps around me much like a caterpillar in a cocoon. It is fabulously rich in character and plot development and leaves me longing for the next big book you write -especially during the 16th century.

I loved The Pillars of the Earth and World Without End. This one is just as magical.

I won't say much about the storyline - just know if you want to be hypnotized and mesmerized by some wicked historical fiction, Follett is the man. He is a master at crafting a story with all of its elements of characters, love, relationships, politics, religion/heretics and packaging it up in an epic sized story that will light you up like a A Column of Fire.

And so my love affair continues as I wipe off my drool from having just kissed this book with a whole lot of ♥?

Jason says

It seems the consensus among Kingsbridge fans is that **A Column of Fire** is their least favourite. I agree.

Forgive my corniness, but A Column of Fire just didn't have the *flame* the previous two books in the series had.

Ken Follett, one of the best-selling authors in history, has never been considered as a spectacular writer. This holds true again in this latest novel. Follett writes quick-paced scenes. His sentences remain as stilted as ever. His words are rigid, and perhaps this even gives a certain flavour to the historical novels. But for me, it makes it a bit of a tough slog to get through some 1000 pages or so. Of the three Kingsbridge novels, I had the hardest time getting through this one; as you may notice, I took me nearly a month and a half to complete it.

Why? There are two main reasons this book didn't hold up to the previous two novels.

1. Kingsbridge itself. The city, made famous by its cathedral, is largely absent in this book. One of the things that made the previous two books spectacular was the way Follett weaved his knowledge on cathedral building into the books. In this book, the cathedral itself is only really mentioned a couple of times. To Follett's credit, he does effortlessly weave historical knowledge into this book, but it has more to do with the power dynamics of the world at the time.

2. Character. Unlike the previous books, I really didn't *care* that much about these characters. In particular, the Ned-Margery arch didn't really work for me. I didn't feel that these two people cared enough to be together; I also didn't feel that they cared enough when they couldn't be with one another. Further, I didn't despise some of the "bad guys" like I did in the other novels. Perhaps the main antagonist in the novel is Pierre, but I just didn't loathe him like I wanted to. One of the things that made *Pillars* and *Without End* work were the dramatic conflicts between the good and bad. *Column* struggled with that.

I found myself wanting to see more of the Barney and Rollo story-lines, but found they were lacking. I think the book could have drawn more on those story-lines to increase the tension and conflict throughout the narrative. But, since we didn't see a lot of Barney and Rollo, their two story-lines felt almost arbitrary and random. Part of me thinks we only saw Barney go to the "New World" because it is setting us up for a book or series where Follett takes us to the New World with a whole new cast. *Column of Fire* might have needed another thousand pages to do it justice.

Column jumped too quickly in spots. There would be chapters upon chapters where the narration is well-paced. Then, all of a sudden, we jump ahead a year (or in some places ten years) and certain characters are dead and married to new people. I found it hard to get on board with accepting the rationale of this at times. Also, people fall in love just too damn fast in this novel (ie Ned and Sylvie). It's a bit unrealistic.

Largely, this major fault of the book was its scope. It was too expansive, too spread out over a large geographical area, for the reader to really get involved in the characters. It ventured too far outside of Kingsbridge, which is where the heart of this series is.

Perhaps it's time to retire Kingsbridge. Perhaps it's time to sail across the ocean to the New World.

See this review, and others on my blog. You can also read my short stories there.
<https://jasonramstad.wixsite.com/mysite>

Emily May says

I've had a whole month and 900+ pages to think about it-- and I just didn't enjoy *A Column of Fire* as much as *The Pillars of the Earth* and *World Without End*.

I think I know why, and I'll get to that in a second, but I'd first like to say that this isn't a bad book. I happily read right through to the end without feeling like it was a chore to finish. Some of Follett's tried and tested formula is present here - namely, **a central starcrossed romance and despicable villains** - which keeps the pages turning, but I think this book overall is a move away from a style I really enjoyed in the previous books.

This book didn't focus in-depth on the lives of the Kingsbridge citizens. Instead, I felt like it was hardly about Kingsbridge at all, but rather about the entire world at this time, and the wider struggles between Catholics and Protestants. Perhaps it is because, by this time, sea travel and exploration was much more common, but the effect was that I cared less about the individual characters; I felt less pulled into the nitty gritty of their everyday lives.

A Column of Fire operates on a bigger scale and with a wider scope than its predecessors. Larger political and religious battles dominate the narrative at the expense of characterisation. **More scope, less depth.**

At times, it felt almost like an overview of history at this point and it's a history lesson that every British schoolchild learns early. Where *The Pillars of the Earth* and *World Without End* focused on chapters of the Middle Ages that were foreign to me, I can quickly name every single Tudor monarch, every wife of Henry VIII, and tell you about the religious struggles, even details such as what happened to Margaret Clitherow. And the gunpowder plot? We still light bonfires and fireworks and eat toffee apples every fifth of November in remembrance.

In order for this book to work better on such an oft-explored area of history, it needed to go deeper into

Kingsbridge and the characters' lives. The romance needed to be more exciting, more tragic, more like that of Aliena and Jack or Caris and Merthin. **Ned and Margery lacked passion.** I didn't get a sense that they were fighting to be together, or that they were particularly disheartened when circumstances tore them apart.

This series has always seemed, to me, to be first and foremost about the characters. Their, lives, loves, tragedies and heartbreak. The politics happening in the background offered the stage on which the character drama played out, but it was not what the books were *about*. Here, it was. And I simply didn't love/hate the characters I was supposed to love/hate as much as I was supposed to love/hate them.

Oh, and for some reason, there was also a **strange use of modern terminology** in this book that I never noticed in *The Pillars of the Earth* and *World Without End*. I read them both fairly recently so I don't think I'm just forgetting. Things like the use of "creepy" (I checked and this is used roughly 200 years too soon) and Ned uses the very modern phrase "hell yes". There were other examples I didn't note down. Perhaps this book just needed a few more rounds of editing.

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James says

I've reviewed ~575 books in the last few years and don't often give out 5 stars. I can be a bit stingy as I want the book to just completely knock me over. Ken Follett is one of few authors who consistently impress, excite, and satisfy this thirst. *The Pillars of the Earth* came very close. *World Without End* hit the mark and is one of my top 5 all-time favorite books. In the third book in the Kingsbridge series, *A Column of Fire*, I am again thoroughly exhilarated and awarding 5 stars. I do think *World Without End* is slightly better, but this was superb on so many levels. I'm doubly blessed as I won this book through a Goodreads Giveaway and my blog followers selected it as my April 2018 Book Bucket List read. It was also a buddy read with a wonderful friend.

At the outset, this is a book covering the impact on several families and towns throughout Europe during the religious wars in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. From Spain to Europe, Scotland to England, and even parts of Africa and the Caribbean, this book tracks the various changing of the guard under Henry VIII's daughters, Mary and Elizabeth, as well as other claimants to the throne, Mary of Scots and James I. Some are Catholic. Some are Protestant. Who will win? History knows, and many readers familiar with these facts know. But it doesn't spoil the beauty of this absolutely stunning series of novels by Follett. He's crafted an amazing set of towns, families, bonds and rivalries over a period of 60 years in this particular third novel where the tides turn every 5 to 10 years, or every 100 to 200 pages (yes, it's nearly 1000 pages long). Your heart breaks. Your eyes bulge. People could be horrible. They could be kind. Persecution in the name of religion truly happened, and while some find this book taking advantage of history to present drama... my response is basically -- Umm... yeah, it's historical fiction and that's the point. If you want a 100% accurate book, go read a non-fiction account.

With a tome of this length, my review could go on forever. I plan to keep it shorter than that. Ned Willard is the protagonist, and the novel follows his life from a teenager to a 70-year-old man through which time he has many lovers, wives, friends, and family. He is one of the most respectable characters I've ever met in a book, and while he certainly does a few things that I'd consider wrong by today's standards, he was a visionary nearly 500 years ago. His treatment of others despite their beliefs, gender, race, or status were fantastic. He acted the act when he needed to but always to achieve a goal to ultimately help people. And he suffered... more than any man should.

If you've never read Follett before, you are truly missing out. If you've not read this 3-book series, you are missing out. It's nearly 3,000 pages in total, but you don't have to read all 3. You can choose just one and read them out of order. They're set about 100 years apart, so you may miss a few details and connections, but nothing to throw you off. I'm going to be in a book daze for weeks. And maybe years since I don't expect him to write another one in the series, but if he does, it will be at least 5 years based on the last few. This makes me sad. But I can always re-read them. And I will. They are that good. Seriously... who chooses to re-read 3000 pages again?

Huge amounts of plot and drama. Sometimes you'll think "that's just too much" but truly.... much of this ACTUALLY happened. It may have been different characters or a slightly different order. But people were cruel back then. They killed for no reason. Religion was a mega prompt for doing bad things. (Hey, wait, that happens today, too...). So in theory, this is such a statement about people and life and the lessons we fail to learn century after century. But for the most part, I look at this as a way to step into a different world, one that fascinates me. I forget any true facts I know about the life of these monarchs and pretend it's all new to me. It makes me smile. I rush to the book each night to devour more pages. And I gush... because this was a buddy read with my friend Noriko in Japan. I can't wait to catch up with her about this again!

I'll end here not because I am out of things to say, but because I have so many more books to read. And I'd rather chat about it than extend my review. So if you've read it, message me. Would love to discuss Follett with ya!

Dana Ilie says

Yet again another masterpiece.....

Ken Follett follows *The Pillars of the Earth* and *World Without End* with a tale of espionage, political intrigue and extreme faith during a time of never-ending religious conflict. Full of adventure and suspense, *A Column of Fire* is an inspiring and thrilling portrait of one of Europe's most perilous times in history.

It is a journey not only through place but also through a dazzling number of key historical events. Beginning in 1558 and continuing through to 1606, with a nod to 1620 in the epilogue, the novel includes the death of Mary Tudor and the accession of Elizabeth I, the Bartholomew Day massacre, Mary Queen of Scots' execution, the Spanish Armada and the Gunpowder plot as well as the personal fortunes of a huge cast of characters, both real and imagined. Follett's research is meticulous, as his readers would expect. Follett is a master of historical fiction, with meticulous research, adept storytelling and an ability to capture the reader's interest with colorful, smooth language. As captured in his previous books in the Kingsbridge series, Follett's characters are lively, full of emotion and relatable, making the book's length of no great concern for old fans or new readers alike.

A Column of Fire is a cold winter's night, big pot of tea and bar of chocolate comfort book and there's plenty of space in the world for that. Just one health warning: don't try and read it when you're sleepy. With the paperback review copy weighing in at over a kilo (I couldn't resist), this is not a novel for dropping on your nose.
