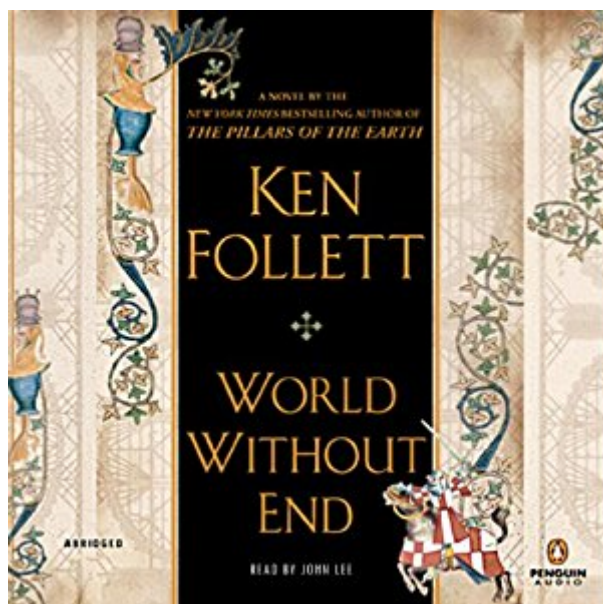


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World Without End



Synopsis

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Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I am a big fan of Ken Follett, and admire that he moves in a seemingly effortless manner between genres. However, his best work is found in the "great historical novel", and he has delivered handsomely with this latest effort. This is being touted as a sequel to "The Pillars of the Earth" which is true enough, but it is also a little misleading, as it is set 200 years after the tales told in that magnificent novel, and as such can definitely be read as a stand alone novel. Having said that though, if you haven't read "Pillars of the Earth" - do - it is magnificent! Knowledge of this wonderful earlier work will be helpful, as there is reference to characters from that time and being familiar with their adventures certainly gives you some insight into what is happening at the time, but if you are new to Follett's work, please don't let this put you off. He mentions enough of the earlier characters (without being boring to those readers who know the book SO well) for any new reader to have an

idea of what has happened before. The tale seems simple enough - 4 very different young people witness a fight in the forest which leads to death and the hiding of a great secret, and this reverberates through their lives for years to come. What is not simple enough is the detail that goes in to these character's lives - they are all wonderful in their own different ways, and we can all feel that we can see the world they live in, taste their food, smell the odours of their environment and rejoice and mourn as they do. Follett is also the master of understanding how humans think; how they plot and scheme, and how the whims of fate can change a life that seems completely planned and organised.

The only reason I finished this book was that the time period fascinates me and I was curious to see if I could figure out why everything in Follett's novel was so uninspiring. Here are the major problems: 1. Follett has obviously done his research on the period, other than the language, but he lets it take center stage, to the detriment of his characters. It feels like he created a list of stock items from the middle ages and checked them off as he went along -- horny bishop: check; power-hungry priest: check; lesbian nun: check; lord of the manor who thinks his serfs don't matter as humans: check; black death: check; etc., etc., etc. He even brings in the flagellants, for no apparent reason, even though they really didn't exist to any significant degree in England. Most of it doesn't advance or have anything to do with the story -- it's just there so that he can get in everything having to do with the 14th century. 2. The characters don't feel like real people. It is possible to set a book in this time period and put characters in it that seem to live and breathe and make you care about them. Connie Willis' *The Doomsday Book* does this really well. When her characters die, you cry. Follett's main characters all miraculously survive the horrors of the century, and it's only the peripheral characters who die. Yet you don't feel their pain or their triumphs or anything much. They just don't seem real. 3. Follett attributes a 21st century sensibility to the characters that is out of keeping for even the most progressive people in the 14th century. I love the idea of a woman who wants to break out of the servitude and inferiority of women in the middle ages, but Caris, the lead female character, is an outright feminist.

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