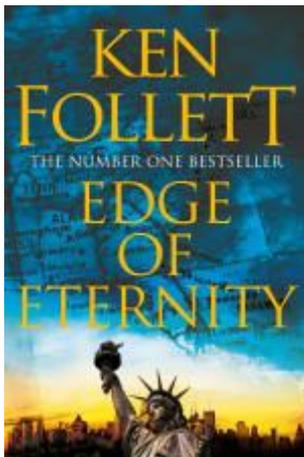


An A to Z of Ken Follett

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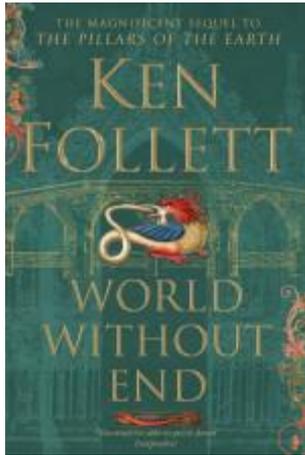
BY [JONATHAN PRITCHARD-BARRETT](#) ON 30/07/2015 [EBOOKS](#), [FICTION](#)



Ken Follett's [Edge of Eternity](#) is the remarkably pacy 1,000 page conclusion to his Century Trilogy that also includes [Fall of Giants](#) and [Winter of the World](#). The book, like all his work, is filled with ordinary, sympathetic characters caught up in the gears of history. Ken has written numerous books, many of which have become bestsellers. So, here we give a rundown of his work and life in A to Z form.

**A – Alpes-Maritimes:** After [Eye of the Needle](#) became his first bestseller, Ken moved to the town of Grasse in the French department of Alpes-Maritimes. It was his interest in politics influenced his move back to the UK after three years. As a Brit he felt unable to comment on French politics and as an ex-pat he felt he'd lost the right to comment on UK politics. The movies, theatre and "pleasures of London life" also proved a big pull.

**B – Tony Blair:** Ken has been involved in politics since university. His wife Barbara was a Labour Party MP for the Hertfordshire town of Stevenage. However, Ken has said how disappointed he is with Blair. It is believed that power-crazed Prior Godwyn and his

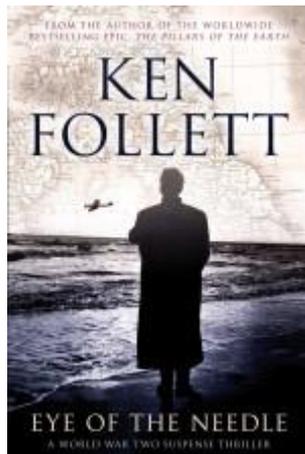


scheming sidekick Philemon in *World Without End* are based on Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson.

**C – Clogiron:** A guitarist and bass guitarist, Ken has two bands. Damn Right I Got The Blues plays Chicago blues and blues standards, as well as some contemporary numbers given a blues makeover. With Clogiron he plays English and Irish folk music.

**D – Drafts:** After the outline (see Outline), Ken writes his first draft. When this is finished he sends it out to his editor and publisher, but also to friends, family and experts. The editor checks grammar, punctuation and spelling as well as plotting errors, friends and family give their feedback as friendly but keen readers, and experts make sure all the details ring true. Then he rewrites it all in the second draft.

**E – Eleventh book:** *Eye of the Needle* was Ken’s breakthrough novel and the fruit of ten previous efforts. Published in 1978 as *Storm Island* in the UK and *Eye of the Needle* on the US, the first two editions sold over 10 million copies. It dealt with Allied efforts to deceive the Nazis as to the site of the D-Day landings. The addition of detail, which was missing from his earlier books, helped create a more atmospheric book.

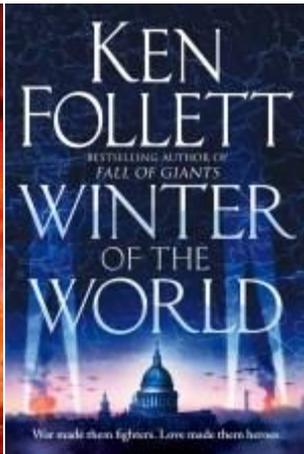
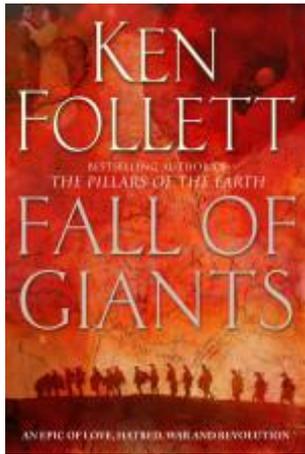


**F – Films:** *Eye of the Needle* was also the first of Ken’s books to get adapted as a Hollywood film, starring Donald Sutherland and Kate Nelligan. Since then a number of his books have been turned into movies and TV series including *The Key to Rebecca*, and *Lie Down with Lions*. Both *The Pillars of the Earth* and *World Without End* were turned into TV mini-series by Ridley Scott’s Scott Free films, and *Fall of Giants* TV series is currently in development by US network ABC.

**G – Gay icon:** According to The Daily Beast, Ken is “a slightly unlikely and certainly unsung gay icon”. This somewhat surprising statement is based on the fact that his books contain gay characters and even gay sex. He says, “These gay characters are there because this is the world I live in... and to leave them out would seem odd.” The battle for acceptance of sexuality is a key strand in *Edge of Eternity*.

**H – Heart:** One of Ken’s key tips for thriller writers is to engage readers’ hearts. He says that all the action and thrills in the world will seem stagey and dull if the reader isn’t emotionally engaged. A simple, but essential rule.

**I – Intelligencers:** Ken is currently working on a book set in the reign of Elizabeth I (see Kingsbridge), when there were many Catholic plots to overthrow the queen. To thwart them, Sir Francis Walsingham set up the country’s first secret service using agents known as ‘intelligencers’ – 400 years before *Eye of the Needle*.



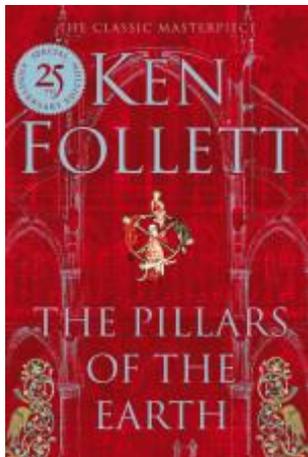
**J – Johnson:** Research for the Century Trilogy has led Ken to reconsider some of his preconceived opinions. He marched against Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) in the 1960s, but researching the US president for *Edge of Eternity* taught him that the man did a lot of good for Civil Rights and healthcare in the US. Likewise, he learned the generals in World War I weren't as stupid and out of touch we all assume now.

**K – Kingsbridge:** the fictional town where Ken's most popular book *Pillars of the Earth* and its sequel *World Without End* are set. It is also the setting for his next novel, set in Elizabethan England. The town is situated roughly at the site of Marlborough, Wilts.

**K – Kingsbridge:** the fictional town where

**L – Location:** Ken visits the locations of most his books. It was a visit to Peterborough Cathedral when still a journalist that piqued his interest in cathedrals. For *Edge of Eternity* he visited the [Stasi Museum](#) and Berlin Wall.

**M – Medieval:** *The Pillars of the Earth* was a gigantic change of direction for Ken from his previous novels set in the contemporary world or during World War II. He has said that he wanted to ask why people went to the huge amount of effort to build these gigantic cathedrals that they would never even see the completion of. He recommends two non-fiction books on the subject: *The Cathedral Builders* by Jean Gimpel and *The Gothic Enterprise* by Robert A. Scott.



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**N – (What Happens) Next:** Ken has said he wants, “to tell a story that makes the reader always want to see what will happen next.” He also aims for ‘transparent writing’ where the focus is on the story rather than the writing technique. Ideally readers should get so involved in the book that they feel slightly peeved when they have to put it down.

**O – Outline:** The first part of Ken's working process is research, which means lots of reading, talking to experts and visiting locations. Then he puts all this together to form the outline, this lays out everything that will happen in the final book. On his big books it's about 60-pages long. (See ‘Drafts’ and ‘Technology’)

**P – Plymouth Brethren:** Ken's parents were members of this strict Protestant sect, and forbade their son to watch TV or films. Luckily they didn't care what he read. By age 12, Ken was a bookworm and was devouring Bond books. He found the Victorian writer Edmund Gosse's biography [Father and Son](#) about leaving the Brethren helpful.

**Q – Quid:** Despite being a bookworm and working as a journalist, Ken first decided to write books because he needed the money. His car had broken down and a journalist colleague

had been paid £200 as the advance for a thriller he had written. This was just the right amount – the garage had told him his car would cost two hundred quid to mend.

**R – Research:** Ken likes his readers to learn something from his books, so undertakes a lot of research. As well as reading stacks of non-fiction and visiting locations, he uses a company called [Research for Writers](#) who digs out maps from the archives, out-of-print books, and even people for him to interview.

**S – Seven Years:** The length of time it took Ken to research, plan and write his Century Trilogy, the first book took three years and the final two took two years each. He tries to write six pages or 1,500 words a day.

**T – Technology:** Despite starting his career way before the advent of the personal computer, Ken is totally at home with a keyboard. He’s been using one for 50 years and says he likes it more than a pen. He also uses Excel to plot out the ages of his characters through the chapters. One concession to pre-digital technology is using index cards on the dining room table to map out family trees.

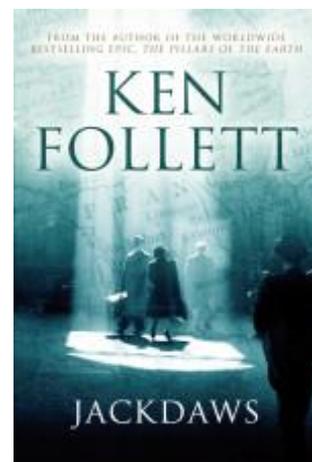
**U – University College London (UCL):** It was at UCL, later famous for producing Coldplay, that Ken studied philosophy which helped him argue away the stern Plymouth Brethren faith of his parents. His first child was born at this time and he worked on Pi, the student newspaper, under the editorship of Jonathan Dimpleby. This led to a role as a trainee journalist at the South Wales Echo.

**V – Victorian fiction:** Ken is a big fan of Victorian literature, including [Charles Dickens](#) and [Jane Austen](#), [Wilkie Collins](#) and [Anthony Trollope](#), but his favourite is, according to an interview in the Boston Globe, [Edith Wharton](#) and her books [The House of Mirth](#) and [The Reef](#). When he’s not reading the classics he loves Stephen King and Lee Child.

**W – Women:** Strong female characters are found throughout Ken’s books. *The Century Trilogy* follows the female characters just as closely as the male. [Jackdaws](#) focuses on a team of women agents parachuted into Occupied France. He has called the change in the role of women in society, the biggest change of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

**X – X-Rated:** While no one would call Ken’s books X-Rated, they do contain plenty of sex. If you thought the monks and priests of the medieval Roman Catholic Church were any different, you’d be wrong. There is sex aplenty in *The Pillars of the Earth*, although Ken has said that Prior Philip is the only happy celibate character he’s ever created. He has written that sex in his stories, “is usually a moral decision with consequences for people and families.”

**Y – Youth:** Unlike many thrillers where the action is the priority, Ken’s books also include families and relationships. Many of his characters are young people (especially in the Century Trilogy) facing extraordinary events. As he puts it, “Everybody can sympathize with a character who goes onto a



battlefield: A young man, and there's a war, and he goes onto the battlefield carrying a rifle."

**Z – Zachary Stone:** One of the pen names Ken used when writing his first 10 books in the 1970s (along with Martin Martinsen, Symon Myles and Bernard L. Ross). At the time he was working as a journalist for London's Evening News (a rival to the Evening Standard) and then for a small publishing company, Everest Books, after giving up journalism.

Read our [Book Club reviewer's thoughts on \*Edge of Eternity\*](#) here.

[Buy \*Edge of Eternity\* here.](#)

Research included: [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#) and a few more articles and interviews.