

Ken Follett: Farewell to Kingsbridge [C1]

Con “Le armi della luce”, l'autore gallese torna per la quinta e forse ultima volta a Kingsbridge, la cittadina immaginaria dove il suo talento per la ricostruzione storica si intreccia con una moltitudine di personaggi eloquenti e coinvolgenti.



Best-selling British author Ken Follett has just published *The Armour of Light*, the fifth and possibly the last in his series of novels known as the Kingsbridge series. The series began in 1989 with *The Pillars of the Earth* and [spans](#) around one thousand years of British history. Each novel is centred on the fictional town of Kingsbridge in a different time period and [features](#) characters from different generations. Themes of architecture, power [struggles](#), and societal change serve as [backdrops](#) to the stories. The series is [renowned](#) for its meticulous historical research and vivid storytelling, revealing the complexities of life during these eras. Follett has written thirty-six books that have sold around 180 million copies worldwide translated into forty languages. For this latest novel, he focuses on the late 18th and early 19th centuries, in particular on the start of the Industrial Revolution and the wars between Britain and France. To find out more, Speak Up attended a press conference given by the novelist. As Follett explained, he

builds each book from the foundation of history. **Ken Follett (British accent):** In my stories, I like the dramas to come out of history. So in *The Armour of Light*, is in the middle of the Industrial Revolution, when people's lives were turned upside down by the new machines. Of course the stories are about the characters and their lives — their loves, their fears, their hopes, but everything comes from the history which I feel makes the story more real. I talk about the history, but the stories are all about the characters and the problems that they face, and the things they worry about, and the things they are hoping for, and the people they fall in love with. Sometimes they fall in love with the right person and sometimes they fall in love with the wrong person. And that's life. So that's the story.

CHARACTERS

While all his characters receive a lot of attention, Follett does confess to having favourites. **Ken Follett:** The first character who you'll meet in this novel is called Sal, and at the beginning of the story, she is a spinner. That means that she takes a lump of cotton, raw cotton or wool, and she has a big wheel, and she turns the wheel and she makes thread and then the thread can be used for weaving. So this is her job. She's a spinner. And she discovers early in the story that this spinning wheel is now obsolete. Now there's a machine that will spin eight threads at a time. So it will do the work of eight women, and then soon sixteen. So that's a problem for Sal. But quickly she gets a job in a factory, minding a machine, taking care of the machine. So here's a down and an up for Sal. In Kingsbridge, where the factory is, she becomes an agitator with the trade union. This was a big issue in the late 18th century. The government banned trade unions and people formed trade unions against the law and a terrific conflict was formed. And I use this word 'conflict' because of course without a conflict there's no story.

MODERN RELEVANCE

While the book has a historical setting, it is relevant to today's world. The threat of artificial intelligence, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the cost-

of-living crisis are all alluded to in the novel. **Ken Follett:**There are three parallels between my book and the present day. One is a technical revolution. One is a terrible war in Europe. And one is rising prices that make life very hard for ordinary people. Now we know what happened in history: there were very bitter conflicts, men smashed the machines, which they blamed for unemployment. And in *The Armour of Light*, many of the characters from Kingsbridge go to Belgium and take part in the Battle of Waterloo. So the difference is that we know how it worked out in the 18th century, we know what happened: trade unions became legal, the war came to an end, finally the price of bread dropped to a reasonable level. But I don't know what's going to happen in today's crisis. I can't tell the future. I know an awful lot about what happened in the past and I know nothing about the future.

KEEPING UP

As a writer, you must keep up with the times, says Follett. Inclusivity is key. **Ken Follett:**When I started writing fifty years ago, it didn't occur to me to be diverse. My stories were all about white people, usually white men. And then, I was signing books in a bookstore in Fifth Avenue in New York, the Doubleday bookstore, Fifth Avenue in New York. I was signing books, and two African American women came in. And they were full of fun. I think they had been out to lunch and maybe had a glass of wine, and they were very amusing and charming, and they said to me, "We love your books. Oh yes, we love your books." And then one of them said, "But you should have more colour. You need more colour in your books." And I thought, "Yeah, I don't usually have people of colour. Why do I just write about white people? The world is not made of white people, the world I live in is not all white people. Yeah, I should have people of colour." And so I started to write about a more diverse set of characters. And then finally in this novel for the first time I've written a gay love story.

THE LAST BATTLE

And it is [likely](#) that The Armour of Light will be his last novel set in the fictional city of Kingsbridge. **Ken Follett:** I've written five Kingsbridge novels, and I've got a feeling that this is enough. I believe that you have to stop doing something before people get bored with it, not after. And so I think this is the end. But I haven't taken a vow. Maybe in ten years' time, I'll think of another Kingsbridge story. But right now, for the moment, I think Kingsbridge is finished. It's been great, by the way. I love Kingsbridge. Readers love Kingsbridge. But I think enough is enough.

Glossary

- **blamed** = accusare
- **weaving** = tessere
- **at a time** = alla volta
- **minding** = occuparsi di
- **down and an up** = una cosa brutta e una buona
- **amusing** = divertenti
- **likely** = probabile
- **keep up** = stare al passo
- **renowned** = famosa
- **lump** = bozzolo
- **threat** = minaccia
- **awful lot** = moltissimo
- **spinner** = filatrice
- **spinning wheel** = filatoio
- **trade union** = sindacato
- **wool** = lana
- **a big issue** = grande problema
- **bitter** = amari
- **worked out** = andare a finire
- **spans** = comprendere
- **features** = includere
- **foundation** = fondamenta
- **struggles** = lotte
- **thread** = filo
- **smashed** = distruggere
- **charming** = affascinanti
- **backdrops** = sfondo, contesto
- **turned upside down** = ribaltare
- **raw** = grezzo
- **banned** = vietare
- **full of fun** = piene di allegria