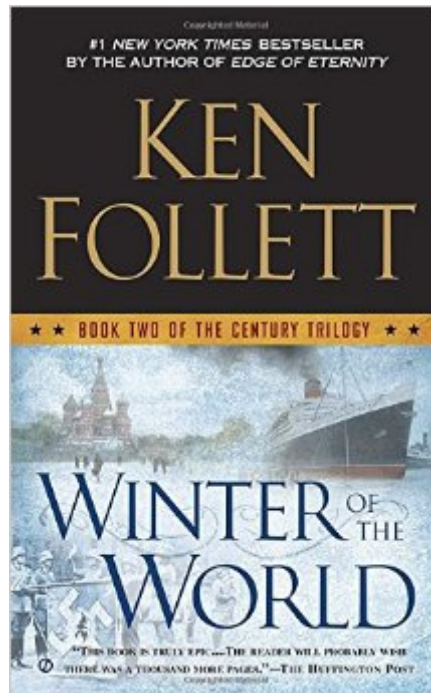


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Winter Of The World: Book Two Of The Century Trilogy



Synopsis

Picking up where *Fall of Giants*, the first novel in the extraordinary Century Trilogy, left off, *Winter of the World* follows its five interrelated families—American, German, Russian, English, and Welsh—through a time of enormous social, political, and economic turmoil, beginning with the rise of the Third Reich, through the great dramas of World War II, and into the beginning of the long Cold War. Carla von Ulrich, born of German and English parents, finds her life engulfed by the Nazi tide until daring to commit a deed of great courage and heartbreak American brothers Woody and Chuck Dewar, each with a secret, take separate paths to momentous events, one in Washington, the other in the bloody jungles of the Pacific English student Lloyd Williams discovers in the crucible of the Spanish Civil War that he must fight Communism just as hard as Fascism Daisy Peshkov, a driven social climber, cares only for popularity and the fast set until war transforms her life, while her cousin Volodya carves out a position in Soviet intelligence that will affect not only this war but also the war to come.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I'd like to begin by saying why I was able to read and write a review of a 925 page book on the day of its release. I preordered this book a couple of months ago, when the release date was Sep 11th. I was sent the book, received it on Sep 12th and spent a few days reading it. When I went to post my review, I found the release date had been moved back to Sep 18th and that I couldn't post my review. So, here it is now! I'm rather curious how many other readers also received their book a

week early? Anyway, my review... Ken Follett's new novel, "Winter of the World", is the second in the planned three volume set about the history of the 20th century. Beginning in 1933, Follett brings his huge cast of characters along from the years up to the end of the Great War. To talk about the plot of the new book is impossible. Way too many characters and too many plot points. BUT, Follett's such a good writer that he brings the reader up to date with ALL his characters. Follett gives most of his characters enough nuance that few seem like caricatures. The interesting thing about Follett's second book is the breadth of the coverage of the 1930's and 40's (and into the '50's). Everything from the burning of the Reichstag to the T4 Euthanasia program under the Nazis, to the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the battle of Midway to the development of the atomic bomb is covered. Now, in a regular novel, the reader would think, "oh yeah, how can one character or family of characters be present at all these historic events?" But Follett has developed so many characters that what happens is not unlikely. His characters seem to merge with each other and then separate much like the designs in a kaleidoscope. The American heiress from the Russian-emigre father goes to England in the mid-1930's and marries the son(s) of members the British/Welsh nobility. The German characters interact with both the British and the Russians. All these families had been introduced in Follett's first book and all interacted in Follett's second. Something else interesting I noticed from Follett's first book and his second is the fact that none of the major characters in the first book died. They had to survive to make the second book possible. Now in the second book, several of the main characters do die, which, given the war setting, is a bit more believable. However, many children are also born by book's end and these children will star in the third book in the Follett trilogy. Also, and this is important. Follett doesn't do a lot of reintroducing characters, their relationships, and plot points from the first book to the second. I guess he just assumes most readers have read the first book and so know the characters of the second. As a result, there's little awkwardness to his writing and the second book flows pretty naturally. A question a new reader might ask is if he should read the first book, "Fall of the Giants" before "Winter of the World"? This second book could be a stand-alone novel. Follett sets an ambitious course with his proposed three volume set. So far, with the first and second books, he's done quite well. I don't normally write such short reviews but there's no way to talk about the plot except to say Follett is a master. And if you don't like the book, you can always use it as a door stop. It is a large volume, containing a great story. Enjoy.

Follett is my favorite author and I have read all his books. I enjoyed the first installment in this trilogy, "The Fall of Giants" though it was not his best work. That book had a bad habit of following a

character leading up to great world events, then cutting to a different character only to return to the previous one sometime after those events. I realize this is ultimately a "character story" but it's also epic historic fiction and it seemed unnecessary. Still, I enjoyed most of the characters, felt I learned new things about the history of the period and was reasonably engrossed. I gave it 4 stars. "Winter of the World" repeats the same issue but has additional flaws. It picks up about a decade after the previous book. All the major characters that survived the end of the first book are still in this one, but they have been relegated to secondary characters. We never get the story from their first-person POV, like we did in "Giants." Instead, the POV's are now all from their various children. Which would be fine, except I felt these previous major characters had all been reduced to two dimensional archetypes. Fitz is a cliché British lord who you would have thought never had a moment of indiscretion or doubt in his life. Ethel is the wise and matronly Labor politician who seems incapable of mistakes or indiscretion. Maud is basically a straw man for the War's impact on German women, especially those who were not disposed to follow the Fascists. Grigori, who had one of the most interesting stories in the previous book, is now devoid of any interest. He's a whole-hearted functionary of Stalin, nothing more or less. The only character with any interesting backstory development is Lev, though I didn't find it quite credible. The new characters, the next generation, were inconsistent in quality. With the exception of Daisy, Lev's daughter, I didn't find most of their characters that complicated or interesting so much as the historical circumstances they were in the middle of. Ethel and Fitz's son Lloyd, for example, had one of the most interesting stories, but not because he was complicated. He was a decent man and hero from start to finish with very little personal development. But his adventures volunteering in the Spanish civil war before the full outbreak of WWII was interesting. Maud and Walter's daughter also had an interesting story, as did Grigori's son. But not much in the way of development, other than to sow the seeds for Grigori's son's doubts about communism. They were highly likeable, just not complicated. Ethel was complicated. Another short-coming of this sequel to "Giants" was that Follett didn't expand the universe of families and had already contrived for the ones established in the first book to all be reasonably prosperous and important. In "Giants" the Williams start out as dirt-poor miners in England and we get some great perspective on that life and what it was like to be a grunt for the Allies in WWI. Similarly, Lev and Grigori start out as peasants in Russia. Here we never get that perspective first-hand from any of the characters. The Williams are by now a Labor Party political dynasty. Grigori is a General in Stalin's Russia and Lev is would be Godfather-style gangster with an unconvincing twist (which I won't spoil). The only family in decline is Walter and Maud's in Germany, but still they are better off than most. Nor does Follett make any effort to give the reader

perspective from multiple sides this time. In "Giants" for example we had Germany's perspective from Walter and saw it not as a unilateral act of aggression but the inevitable results of aristocratic arrogance from all sides. Here the Nazi's and Stalin's communists are evil incarnate from day one. On the brief occasions we're in any of the heads of those supporting them it's always to see them doubting and troubled. I'm not suggesting the Fascists weren't evil, of course, but it just lent the story less depth and complexity. Germany, for example, had the better part of a decade where more and more people became supporters of the Nazi's because they did temporarily improve the quality of life and efficiency of government for those citizens they didn't persecute. This was true not just in Germany but beyond, where they were admired by many people in the West until they started invading their European neighbors. Here that admiration is portrayed almost exclusively as fueled by hatred and prejudice rather than the false allure of Fascist efficiency. Missed opportunity. Follett remains my favorite author and I still look forward to reading the third installment of this trilogy. It was okay, just not exceptional. Oh, and the \$20 Kindle price (US) is ridiculous. If you're not a die-hard fan or desperate for a new read, I would consider waiting until you can borrow a copy from the library. But I didn't factor that into my review or rating.

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