



The Evening and the Morning, by Ken Follett
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy

Prolific historical novelist Ken Follett perhaps is best known for writing *The Pillars of the Earth*, the first book in his Kingsbridge medieval trilogy. The engrossing multi-layered epic subsequently was adapted into two popular TV mini-series.

The Evening and the Morning, Ken Follett's newest installment to the Kingsbridge saga, is a prequel to *The Pillars of the Earth*. The 900-page tome moves backward in time to the Dark Ages. Its plot hinges on the parallel storylines of two characters: Edgar, an English boatbuilder, and Lady Ragna, a French Norman noblewoman.

The story begins in 997 with a ferocious Viking raid of the coastal British village of Combe. Eighteen-year-old Edgar was forced to flee with his widowed mother and brothers to a rural backwater known as Dreng's Ferry, a tiny settlement with "half a dozen houses and a church." Edgar endeavored to use his carpentry skills to construct sturdy new buildings and expand the hamlet.

Across the English Channel, meanwhile, Count Hubert of Cherbourg pressed his daughter Lady Ragna to marry an insipid Viscount from Reims. Proud and willful, Lady Ragna was determined to choose her own husband. She set her sights on Wilwulf, the lusty English alderman of Shiring, whom she met when he traveled to Cherbourg to do business with her father.

After their betrothal, Lady Ragna sailed to Shiring, a town near Dreng's Ferry, to marry Wilwulf. Upon her arrival, Lady Ragna was dismayed to discover how rustic and primitive Shiring was compared to her father's castle in Cherbourg: "On the top of the hill, dominating the town, was a stockaded compound, enclosed by a stout fence. It had no stone buildings; she would undoubtedly be a little less safe here."

Edgar forged a partnership with Aldred, a sensitive and intellectual monk. Together they strived to transform Dreng's Ferry into a bustling hub of commerce as well as a center of spiritual learning. Their efforts continually are thwarted, however, by the malicious, power-hungry Bishop Wynstan, a younger half-brother of Wilwulf. Despite the many obstacles they faced, Edgar and Aldred will build a bridge that will give the town renewed purpose and ultimately a new name.

The Evening and the Morning is replete with authentic period details, including vivid scenes depicting peasant life in lowly hovels and festive banquets in a lord's great hall. Many characters, however, are one-dimensional, and their dialogue at times is more akin with modern, rather than medieval, vernacular. Nevertheless, for Ken Follett's loyal fanbase, *The Evening and the Morning* would be a welcomed addition to the Kingsbridge canon.