

Capturing Nazis

Ken Follett delivers another taut tale of WWII espionage

By MICHAEL GILTZ

The Nazis have been very good to best-selling author Ken Follett.

After struggling through 10 undistinguished thrillers, Follett hit pay dirt with "Eye of the Needle," a taut story of a vicious Nazi spy in England who stumbles onto the plans for D-Day. It sold 10 million copies worldwide and made Follett a household name.

His third best seller — and still one of Follett's best — also played off World War II. "The Key to Rebecca" told of a clever spy for Rommel in North Africa and the brave young woman who must stop him. With that book's success, said the 52-year-old author, he realized his writing career wasn't a fluke.

"Yeah, I can do this," Follett remembers thinking, a good thing since he'd already quit his day job.

Now Follett returns to the tense moments before D-Day with "Jackdaws," a suspenseful, gripping story about a team

of (mostly) women who parachute into France to sabotage a Nazi telecommunications site only days before the Allied invasion.

"I must say, if you'd asked me two or three years ago, I would have said I've written enough about World War II," said Follett from his home in Stevenage, England. (He

owns two other residences — one in London and one in Antigua — but since this one is located in the town where Follett's wife, Barbara, serves as a member of Parliament, it's considered home.)

"But then I came across this nugget of information that there were exactly 50 female agents sent into France during the war. I was quite surprised and interested by that, and it immediately struck me there ought to be a Ken Follett novel about this because it's exactly my territory."

In classic thriller fashion, Follett has two memorable opposing characters. Felicity "Flick" Clairret is a resourceful woman who's survived undercover longer than any other spy. Dieter, a Nazi officer, is determined to foil the

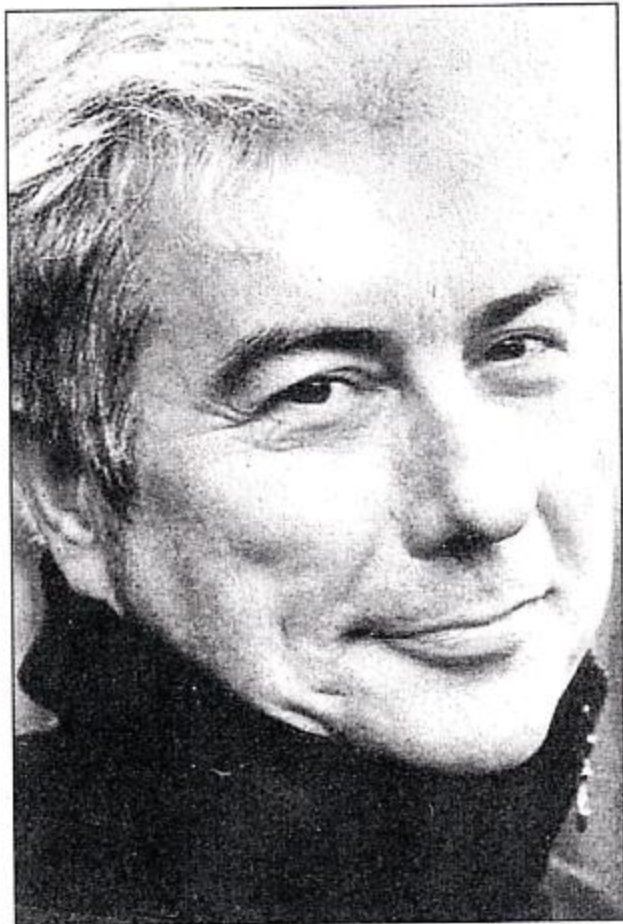
plans of the Resistance.

Both must depend on people working for them who are far less proficient than they. Flick has a motley team that includes a flighty aristocrat, a murderer and one woman who isn't a woman at all but a transvestite; Dieter

must contend with the petty interference of the Gestapo.

And both of them are having romantic troubles — Flick suspects her French husband is having an affair; Dieter has, unfortunately, fallen in love with his mistress.

Dieter is ruthless, of



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course, and a master interrogator. He knows all the ways to inflict pain, but his specialty is discovering the one psychological key to making his victims crack.

In "Jackdaws," Follett has devious fun showing Dieter break down Resistance fighters, most memorably a distinguished mature woman who gives up information after Dieter simply asks polite questions, gives her plenty to drink and then refuses to let her use the bathroom.

"I have read that it's a

innocent, virginal dupes. That's why he has just as many female fans as male.

The women in his personal life have been just as singular. Follett's second wife is a member of Parliament, of course. And his mother was key to developing Follett's singular intellect.

"I certainly get my imagination from my mother," said Follett. "She died almost four years ago, and she certainly was a strong personality. She told me stories when I was small and sang to me and taught me rhymes and that sort of thing.

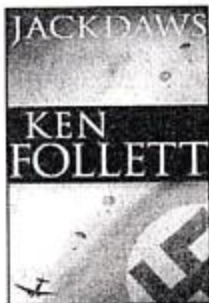
"I think my mother probably had potential to do an awful lot of things and was somewhat frustrated by the kind of restrictions society placed on women of that generation.

"When my mother did work, she was a kind of high-powered secretary, which in those days was about as high as women went in business. In later generations, she probably wouldn't have considered being a secretary. She would have been an executive. She might have been a Phyllis Grann."

Grann is the executive at Follett's publishing house who made headlines recently by leaving for Random House, stirring speculation that she might try to bring big-name authors like Follett and Tom Clancy along with her.

Grann line-edited his last two books, but Follett seemed sanguine about her departure.

"The sad thing is people come and go," he said. "An author signs a contract with a corporation, and people leave and new people come along. It's always happening."



"Jackdaws" by Ken Follett 384 pages, \$26.95