



★ **Cathedral**

Ben Hopkins

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Ben Hopkins's epic historical novel, *Cathedral*, is the riveting story of the lives and motivations of cathedral builders: of humble serfs turned quarry workers; of visionary artists; of those who collected the harsh taxes and arranged the bequests that funded cathedral-building efforts; and of kings, emperors, and popes, each with their own motivations and purposes for building, which often had little to do with honoring the divine.

Cinematic in color and scope, the tale begins in 1229, in the Rhineland town of Hagenburg, where a young serf determines to use his carving skills, and money from Jewish lenders, to purchase his freedom. That decision that leads to years of rigorous training to become a master carver whose works might grace the town's cathedral.

Covering a half century, the gripping narrative unveils a "network of barterings, promises, investments, and gambles" that twist and shape the lives of the young carver and fifteen others. Their dreams, motivations, and passions are revealed as wars rage; Jewish people are scapegoated; holy books, buildings, and bodies burn; and the bitter lives of the poor are made more bitter, all to keep an endless stream of gold flowing into the project.

Standing at the bases of Europe's majestic Gothic cathedrals and looking skyward to their dizzying spires, people wonder: who conceived of the plans for such edifices? Who cut, carried, and carved the stones and the wood? Who funded such colossal enterprises, and why? Rich, moving, and unforgettable, the historical novel *Cathedral* has the answers. It exposes the vanity inherent in trying to make a mark on history and exalts the power of love, creativity, and truth to leave a meaningful trace on this ephemeral world.

KRISTINE MORRIS (January / February 2021)

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