

Of the Ring of Earls

Juliet Dymoke

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Harold lies dead, William of Normandy stands victorious: it's 1066 and England is conquered.

For Waltheof of Huntington and his fellow survivors of the Battle of Hastings, there is a simple choice: submit to this new foreign king, or die at the gallows. Follow the heart; or follow the head.

As the country bows under the Norman yoke and Waltheof struggles to come to terms with his decision, a new Saxon hope emerges. A last challenge to the Norman might, a final chance for glory, a decisive test of old allegiances and new loyalties.

Of the Ring of Earls, the first in Juliet Dymoke's epic Conqueror Trilogy, charts the fate of Waltheof of Huntington: a knight whose true story embodies the turmoil that followed the last successful invasion of Britain.

Of the Ring of Earls Details

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From Reader Review Of the Ring of Earls for online ebook

Nola says

Outstanding

The strategy, the hope, the betrayal. This is a great telling of the time immediately following 1066 from the perspective of one of the great earls. Don't read the end right before bedtime or you will lay awake all night wondering, if for some small change in plan, what might it have been? Highly recommend.

Karen Hackett says

I loved this book! ! A great story!

Kerry says

I suppose that one can blame the history taught in schools for glossing over most of the relevant facts in any given situation and so I do. Those of us lucky enough to have had a history class which even mentions the date 1066 know the significance of that year in British history. William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, sailed across the English Channel and took what he saw as his rightful place on the throne of England. And then we jump to the next significant moment in history, ten, fifty, a hundred years later, leaving things just that William became king. Simple as that, but in reality it was far from simple.

In her book, *Of the Ring of Earls*, Juliet Dymoke explores the life of one of the earls who stood with Harold, the rightful king of England, against William. We see through the eyes of Earl Waltheof that it was not, in fact, a cut and dry situation that everyone simply changed their ways. For an entire year post winning, William kept the remaining English earls with him in Normandy where they were free, but not free. There, Waltheof befriends a young Norman whose life he'd spared on the battlefield that fateful day. There, too, he falls in love with William's niece, Judith. So hard does this young man fall in love that he refuses to even consider another that William has in mind for him. Much to his everlasting regret.

When William finally allows the English earls to return to England, there is an uprising almost immediately, involving Waltheof and the others. They invite the Danish King Sweyn to come take the crown as the men feel they are more Danish than any other. However, the king doesn't come himself and the results are disastrous. William generously allows Waltheof to retain his lands and even expands his earldom, for which Waltheof swears to never rise against William again.

In the end it is an Englishman's greatest weakness – wine – that brings Waltheof down. While attending a wedding party, Waltheof gets exceedingly drunk and is then confronted by the other earls of the North in an attempt to coerce him into joining yet another uprising. He resists, knowing that William would not forgive another breach of trust, but later he's unable to recall detail due to his drunkenness. Despite being innocent of rising against William yet again and despite being spiritually reconciled regarding the taking of an oath, there are many who hate Waltheof enough to stand against him. Waltheof becomes known to history as the only earl put to death by William the Conqueror, King William I of England.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading about this man, even though in the end he died at a relatively young age. I found myself sympathetic toward him and at times even frustrated with his naïveté. In the end, the man I felt sorriest for was one who ended his own life after Waltheof was put to death: his lifelong companion, essentially his man-servant Outy.

I will definitely read the books that follow.

Debbie says

An easy read with a likeable protagonist, although he is probably highly sanitized for modern sensibilities!

Nancy Hammons says

This book is about the life and death of Waltheof of Huntington. He was made Earl of Huntington by William of Normandy. I read this because he and his wife Judith were my 29th and 30th great grandparents. I sort of knew how Waltheof's life ended, but I sure didn't like that part. It was a very good book.

Kelly Bauer-Harshany says

Good story but the editing was terrible. Many errors of grammar, spelling, and punctuation. This was why my rating was a 3

Nicola says

loved it, brought me to tears in some parts.....very exciting book

Jenny Lou Orear says

A Book to Remember Always!

Surely freedom is important, more precious than food, air or even life itself. There is no life without freedom. Some would say I speak clichés. But have they ever truly been free? I have and am. This is what this book tell me when I read it. Judge for yourself. A truly amazing story of a man, close to God and the true meaning of freedom. Read.

jacqueline giddens says

Just loved it.

Mercedes Rochelle says

Waltheof of Northumbria was the last Anglo-Saxon Earl to be killed by William the Conqueror. I knew his story from the histories, though to the modern reader he is more of a footnote. Not so to his contemporaries! Waltheof was the youngest son of Earl Siward the Strong—best known for helping Malcolm III gain the throne of Scotland at the battle of Dunsinane. Siward was also one of the three great Earls under Edward the Confessor (along with Godwine of Wessex and Leofric of Mercia). But when he died, his last living heir was still a boy, and Waltheof was passed over, not to gain an earldom until just before Harold Godwineson became king. Juliet Dymoke picks up his story before the battle of Stamford Bridge, as the young Earl begins to discover his strength and prowess. He makes a name for himself but is wounded and unable to accompany King Harold to Hastings, to his everlasting regret.

This is the setting for a compelling story which gives us an intimate look at an honest young man, torn between loyalty to his countrymen and loyalty to his new master, the undefeatable William the Conqueror. There is no going back, though the Northumbrians are slow to accept this fact. At first, King William tries to rule with a light hand though he keeps the key players close at hand. The other earls, Edwin and Morcar, chafe at their easy confinement, but Waltheof falls under the spell of King William's niece Judith—a tie stronger than any oath of loyalty. But he cannot have her, and ultimately Waltheof falls in with the fractious earls as they launch their ill-fated rebellion leading to the Great Harrowing of the north. Luckily for Waltheof, William forgives his role and even allows Judith to marry him, though he warns the young earl that the next transgression would be his last.

I found this novel to be a compelling visit to post-conquest England. King William is not painted as a villain but there is no doubt that he is an uncompromising ruler. Our Waltheof is well-meaning but flawed, supported by good friends but blinded by passion for his long-awaited wife. We see two cultures attempting to live together, though the victors inevitably lord it over the conquered. It is not an easy time, and Waltheof inevitably gets trapped in a conflict not of his making. He is a very likeable character and I found myself wiping away a few tears at his untimely end. The author has done a good job tying all the loose ends together and giving us a sympathetic portrait of an ill-fated hero born in unhappy times.
