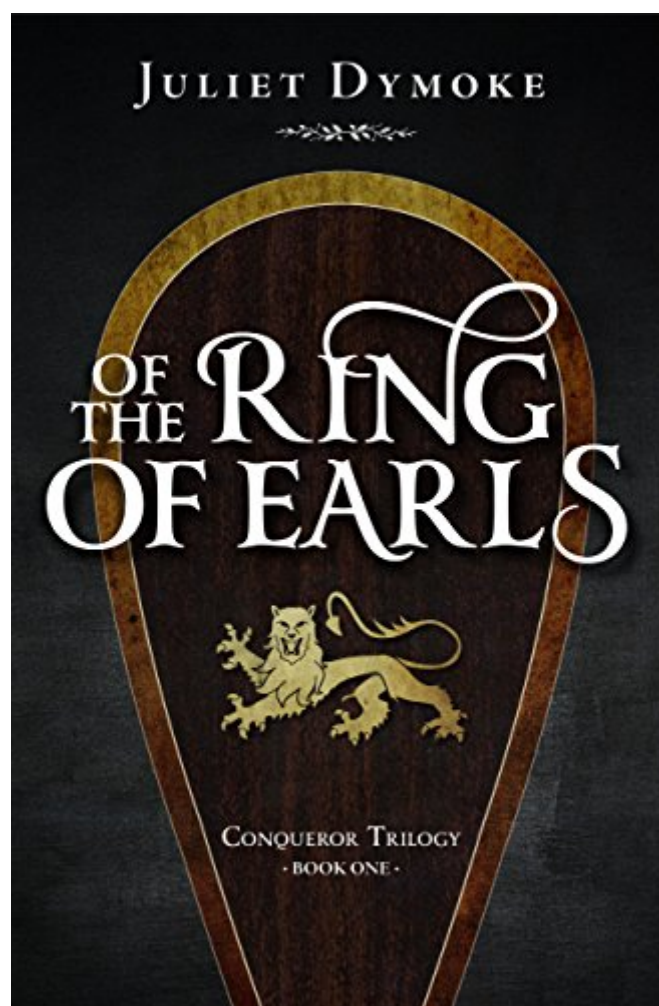




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Of The Ring Of Earls: An Epic Chronicle Of Love And Loyalty During The Norman Invasion (Conqueror Trilogy Book 1)



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

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 Godwinson 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.

Most of the historical fiction I have read dealing with the Norman Conquest usually ends with the heart-breaking Battle of Hastings with King Harold ripped to pieces among his fallen housecarls and William the Bastard's Norman invaders plundering Saxon England. I always want to read about what happens next, what happened to the few remaining English nobles who survived? This novel is about the most famous remaining English Earl, Waltheof of Northumbria. This book tells his story and is very helpful in giving a picture of William of Normandy after he won the English crown. It likewise depicts the struggle for power and control between Norman and Saxon lords as they strike up friendships and create enmities, sometimes with the same persons. Dymoke is a competent writer and easily intermingles historical fact with fictional embellishment. Her characters actually do show personality development as the story progresses to go beyond cardboard cutouts too often portrayed when events trump people for plotlines in works of HF. I was very moved in some places

by the author's beautiful descriptions of countryside and balladry and appreciated her restraint in describing the love lives of her characters. If a work of HF is good, I always want to find out more factual background about the people and events. That was definitely the case after reading this one. Recommended.

This is a novel about a man in history so it was predictable in some ways because it followed the actual story of his life, with the necessity to fill in unknown details. Since I know quite a bit about one of the secondary characters in the book, Gospatrick the cousin of the Earl, there were some ideas presented that didn't make sense. I generally enjoyed the book and felt that the author captured the nature of the Earl, his physical characteristics, his nature and the complexity of his painful death. I would recommend it to anyone who is particularly interested in the period of William the Conqueror. It does make that time come alive.

If you've read Elizabeth Chadwick's *The Winter Mantle*, you'll know what this novel is about: Waltheof of Huntingdon, the English Earl who nonetheless managed to keep his lands after the invasion of the Normans in 1066. He led a rebellion against the King, who nevertheless managed to forgive him; and later, Waltheof married Judith, William's niece. It's a very, very good, story, one that I suspect not many people know about. Comparisons with Elizabeth Chadwick's very good novel are inevitable. They obviously tell the same story, but in completely different ways. Waltheof here is a bit more romanticized, and Judith doesn't have quite the amount of presence that she does in Chadwick's book. Dymoke just doesn't give her reader enough time to understand Judith's motives for betraying her husband in the major way she does. So Judith comes across in this novel as an angry, bitter, wronged wife, whereas in real life I feel she was a lot more complicated than that. Other than Judith, however, I felt that there was good character development overall in this novel, taking place as it does between the years of 1055-1076. Waltheof made a lot of major mistakes in his life, none the more so at the end, when he made the mistake that cost him his life. The story of Waltheof's life is a very touching one, especially since Dymoke tells his story very sympathetically; so that at the end, you really feel badly about our hero's fate. Those of you who have read *The Winter Mantle* will be interested to note that the famous mantle makes an appearance here, though Juliet Dymoke doesn't attach the same kind of significance to it that Elizabeth Chadwick does. I've only recently discovered the relatively unknown novels of Juliet Dymoke, and I've made it a point to hunt many of them down. *Henry of the High Rock* and *Lion's Legacy* are loosely connected to this one, and cover the stories of Henry I and the wars between Steven and Matilda, respectively.

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