



Viking Fire

Justin Hill

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In 1035, a young fifteen year old Viking is dragged wounded from the battle. Left for dead, for the next twenty years his adventures lead him over mountains, down the length of Russia and ultimately to Constantinople and the Holy City of Jerusalem.

Drawn into political intrigue he will be the lover of Empresses, the murderer of an emperor; he will hold the balance of power in the Byzantine Empire in his hands, and then give it all up for a Russian princess and the chance to return home and lead his own people, where he must fight the demons of his past, his family and his countrymen in a long and bitter war for revenge and power.

Told in his own voice, this is the astonishing true story of the most famous warrior in all Christendom: Harald Hardrada, the last Viking.

Viking Fire Details

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Author : Justin Hill

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From Reader Review Viking Fire for online ebook

Robin Carter says

Review

Its been 5 years since Shieldwall, the immensely impressive first book in the Conquest Trilogy. I personally have been waiting for this book with bated breath (and i may have nagged him a few times), Justin Hill is a hugely talented writer, so when my advance copy landed i dived right in.

This book follows the life of Harald Hardrada, aka King Haraldr Sigurðarson given the epithet Hardrada (harðráði, roughly translated as “stern counsel” or “hard ruler”. Justin Hill takes his life story from the boy in his fathers house, the hero worship of his brother (King Olaf, later St Olaf), through his battles and growth to manhood, his battle with enemies and elements, his journey across the known world to the wonders of Miklagard (Constantinople) the heart of the Byzantine Empire. The main part of the book concentrates on Haralds rise in the center of the worlds power and his gaining of wealth, wealth enough to return home to lay his claim to the title King of Norway, and aspired to do the same with Denmark. He brought home some of the civilization of Greeks to the nordic world, a sense of permanence to their history. Ultimately we know the ending, a step to far, a kingdom beyond reach, England.

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<https://parmenionbooks.wordpress.com/...>

Stephen says

Enjoyed this book portraying the last viking who died at stamford bridge in 1066 and his life in norway and the middle east

Deborah Pickstone says

6 stars

I had been waiting for this for a long time.....well, it seemed a long time! Finally, last night I had it in one hot little hand but.....in the other was my Budgeting Course homework and there's just no competition, is there? What burgeoning Budget Advisory Person is going to pass up writing a cash flow for a mere novel? Well, I was always the most unlikely Budget Advisor anyone could ever have imagined (for so very many reasons!) so I chose the novel.

Justin Hill writes the story, the very colourful, epic and mythical-level story of Harold Hardrada. A heroic and legendary figure; an immortal, almost. By the end of it, you will be so convinced of his superhuman ability that you would conceive of him as indomitable, unconquerable. (view spoiler)

Justin Hill writes in the exactly right cadence for his time and period. His writing is more poetry than prose. He is not merely storytelling; I would say he is primarily a listener and a see-er who absorbs what goes on around him and is absorbed by it and then listens to the thoughts in his head and the rhythms of them and

only then writes. There are passages that brought Dylan Thomas and Edith Pargeter to mind, both of whom write with a rhythm singular to themselves. I am not saying JH's writing is *like* either of these writers' work but his ability to construct his own voice is.

For me, he is one of the most visual novelists I have read - he appears to have a complete multi-sensory picture of whatever scene he is writing and can convey it to the reader in almost minimalist writing. I rarely 'see' the scene so vividly on the author's terms; usually, my very vivid imagination provides most of the pictures and the colours. In this book I just had to sit back and enjoy the ride.

I also get the impression that JH trusts his reader. It is amazing how many writers do not do so and attempt to control the reader's experience for fear s/he will fail to perceive - or perhaps to agree with - the writer's own pet points of view. Viking Fire is magnificently unconcerned with my viewpoint. There is no wasting my time (or his own) by explaining what I could work out for myself, nor was I instructed via contrived dialogue in background information or historical details that may show off his own knowledge. (A particularly irritating habit of some HF writers). Anyone who wants to create anything has to recognise at some point that they cannot control how their work is seen; either they can suffer over this (one's own work is very much one's child, I think) or they can send that work out into the world to develop as it will, in trust.

Finally, my one complaint: there is no Author's note, which is the very place for telling me interesting stuff and the writer's thought processes about why and how and what his theories were etc. Tsk! I love a good Author's note - I often read them several times in the course of a book.

I wish yet again that I did not read so fast. However, I will re-read this and its predecessor Shieldwall which was the delightful surprise of the year for me. These two books - plus The White Cross - are my top 3 for this year and I will be very surprised if anything else intervenes in the remainder of 2016.

Matthew Harffy says

Justin Hill is a terrific writer. His prose oozes poetry and a real sense of the time and place of his novels. In Harald Hardrada's saga, Viking Fire, Hill gives us a flawed and likable character, told in the Norwegian warrior-king's own words (as recounted to a priest in Britain before his death). This is the second of Hill's novels set during the build up of the Battle of Hastings. The first is Shieldwall, which is told from multiple viewpoints in third person. In Viking Fire, Hill has decided to tell the story from the perspective of the protagonist, which lends it an added immediacy and intimacy.

The first half of Viking Fire, that focuses on Harald's youth and his formative years, is the highlight of the book for me. The great warrior's character leaps from the page and Hill manages to make him deep and wholly believable. If there was one thing that disappointed me about Viking Fire, it is that it glosses over years of campaigns and exciting adventures when Harald was building up his power and great wealth in the service of the Emperors and Empresses of Constantinople. There are several wonderful chapters set during this period, but I couldn't help feeling there were dozens of stories hinted at, but not shown. I would have happily read more of Harald's escapades.

It is a real pity that the historical note was omitted from the hardback version I read. I recommend anyone who reads Viking Fire book to check it out on Justin Hill's website: <http://justinhillauthor.blogspot.co.uk>... It really added a lot for me to see why Hill had taken some of the decisions, and focused on some things more than others.

I loved Justin Hill's first 11th century novel, *Shieldwall*, and had been awaiting the sequel for years. *Viking Fire* was worth the wait. Hill brings to life the icy vastness of Nordic mountain ranges and fjords, the freezing, often deadly wastes of the Baltic, the bejeweled and heady riches of Constantinople, the ancient temples of the Holy Land, and the savage intrigues, alliances and huge battles of great nations, all in the life-saga of one truly magnificent man. A man whose name Justin Hill will not allow to be forgotten: Harald Sigurdson, known as Hardrada, King of the North, the Last Viking.

Ian Langham says

Finally got around finishing this simply brilliant book.

Not being the biggest fan of the first person narrative as there is no real sense of peril, this is surprisingly different. As it starts off with the acknowledgement that Harald Hardrada is dead. So that sets the tone for the book, that all the following adventures will be leading up to that point.

So with that stumbling block out of the way Justin Hill uses his considerable talents to tell an engrossing tale of the last great (and arguably the greatest) Viking Harald Hardrada. He who lost the other battle of 1066. Starting with Harald's early life and moving to his introduction of battle at the Battle Of Stiklestad, where his brother is killed. Being forced to flee as a fugitive. Over time Harald gathers men to his banner and seeks service in the courts of the Rus (Russian rulers) notably in Keiv. Before travelling onward towards the Byzantine Empire and finding employment as a (not so simple) mercenary in the Varangian guard. I personally think this is the best part of the book as while it is known the vikings went as far as what was known as Byzantium/Constantinople. After many years and adventures the call of his home beckons and he returns to Norway a much richer and wiser man than the youth who fled for his life so long ago. Then one last voyage to either win everlasting fame and glory or for a more simple reason, treasure. Which ends at the encounter at Stamford Bridge.. Who knows had he won that battle, maybe I would be writing this in Norwegian, As on a personal note I think if Harald Hardrada had fought William rather than Harold Godwinson. The result would of been very different.

In short a stunning book that just needs to be read...

Edoardo Albert says

When I read *Shieldwall* I suspected it. Now, having finished *Viking Fire*, the second in Justin Hill's *Conquest* trilogy, I know it: he's the best of us. Darn it. In *Viking Fire*, it's not just that he reveals a complete mastery of narrative devices (*Shieldwall* is third person with multiple points of view), for *Viking Fire* is, mostly, told in the first-person of Harald Hardrada, nor that he tells an extraordinarily rich and involving story (Harald's life is such that it would require incompetence on the level of genius to make it uninteresting). No, the key facet of Hill's writing that sets him over and above the usual hack-n-slash merchant of Dark Age historical fiction is his mastery of language. I took four months over the reading of this story not because it was uninvolved and uninteresting, but because I wanted to linger over it.

Shieldwall, set in England during the reign of Aethelred the Unready, is written with the beat of Old English poetry running through its rhythms: the lines lengthening and shortening in keeping with the pace of the story, but all held together by the alliterative beat and the four-stress pattern of Old English verse. Not only that, but the word choice is careful and precise, eschewing later imported loan words for those words in modern English that can be traced back to Old English. So, unlike most historical fiction, the language Hill used in *Shieldwall* underscores, underlies and deepens the story, rather than being, albeit unconsciously, at odds with it (as often happens with writers less sensitive to these linguistic echoes).

Now, with Viking Fire, Hill's hero is a Viking, a Norwegian, whose life takes him from the fjords of the north, through Rus, to the great city, Constantinople, and the warm sea at the world's heart. In keeping with the protagonist and the time and places in which he lives, the language Hill uses has changed: the rhythm is different, matching that of the prose sagas that have come down to us from the northlands, and with echoes of the hugely complex, percussive rhythms of the skalds, the court poets and PR men of the Viking kingdoms. But when Harald takes employment under the Emperors and sails, with his crew of Northmen, the Mediterranean, then there enters the story hints of the rhythmic phrasing of Homer and even, in the more languorous passages where these northern warriors settle down under the southern sun with wine and good food and women, something of the ease and flow of Ovid. There's not many writers who can manage this precision of language, and no one else working in this genre today.

Darn it, he really is the best of us.

Rebecca says

Harald Hardrada is one of my FAVOURITE Viking Kings EVER! I have read both fictional & non-fiction books on his epic journey from zero to hero but I will confess Justin Hill's 2nd novel which focuses on this giant of Norse history, is the first that has made me fall deeply in love with him. Almost as much as I fell in love with King Cnut in Helen Hollick's Hollow Crown.

Harald's is a story that involves him facing and overcoming challenge after challenge and shaping him to be the great Norwegian King, as great as the tales tell him to be.

My favourite part of the entire book has to be when Harald reaches Miklagard, the Great City, Constantinople (Istanbul) - the city, society, landscapes, people and of course the very treacherous politics was superbly captured and brought alive on the page. There is one particular and relatively minor conflict Harald gets embroiled in as he serves amongst the Emperor's armies, involving one of the men of the many crews he now commands, and the choices he makes in that event is the strongest indicator of the kind of leader and ultimately King Harald will mature to be. I won't give away too much detail about the situation but it is a clear & firm demonstration that Harald is a man worthy of following and more evidence of why so many did.

There are of course lots of more everyday scenes involving Harald that better define his character and personality, be it with his crew, his mistress or wives, with his children or even when he is talking to a General or an Emperor. Each of these scenes is distinctive and sometimes emotionally touching. I have laughed with Harald, cried with Harald, cheered with Harald, even yelled in anger or shock with Harald. You really do get under the skin, into the blood and dive in his soul as you read each chapter.

Within each chapter I found there was at least 1 line I read that would stick in my head for hours after I had put the book down (which was only ever when I was working I must admit). I found so many literary gems amongst the prose that I started adding them to my own personal list of favourites and it grew and grew as I read the book. I won't list them all as they might hint at spoilers for new readers but I will mention the first line that I was struck by. It was when Harald was with his brother, King Olaf's army, waiting to face the rebellion forces. Harald remarked to himself that Death is like going to sleep, it's living that hurts. If you hurt you know you are alive. Or something like that, to that affect at least. Having recently, in the past year, encountered death through my father, and having had morbid thoughts about what dying is actually like, this one line made a lot of sense to me and I could see how that would bring some comfort & strength to a young warrior facing his first fierce battle. It also showed that this was a Viking who due to his Christian upbringing at least, was considering more than just what kind of afterlife he might have in heaven, he was actually contemplating how he transforms from earth to heaven through death. It is a small yet significant way of reminding the reader that at the end of the day, despite his momentous life & impact on history forever, Harald was still a human being, like ourselves, who will consider his own existence and the sad and often scary fact that we all die in the end. Albeit in Harald's time death & dying was more common and more

visible than it is in the 21st century.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and it's beautiful and masterful telling of Harald's life. Highly recommend to fans of Vikings, 1066, or just Historical Fiction in general.

Kate says

Thoroughly entertaining saga of the last great Viking, perhaps the greatest of them all, Harald Hardrada.

GBL says

Viking Fire tells the story of Harald Hardrada - often described as The Last Viking - from his childhood in Norway to his death on the battlefield at Stamford Bridge in 1066, in a last attempt to restore the Vikings as a force in England.

Justin Hill succeeds in creating a believable character in Harald and has connected the historical dots of Harald's life with the story of how he developed from the child to the man.

Saved from death, fighting with his brother Olaf, Harald eventually makes his through Sweden and then Russia to Constantinople. He then becomes part of the Byzantine fighting machine and involved in court politics before gathering enough gold to return to Norway to claim the throne his brother had lost. He is a good ruler bringing peace and prosperity to Norway, but then is tempted to throw the dice for the final time and attack England, in the hope of defeating Harold and bringing the country back into a Scandinavian empire.

His defeat at Stamford Bridge is a victory for Harold who has then to return south to met the new challenger - William of Normandy... And the rest is history.

Andy Wormald says

Following on from Shieldwall, this books centres on the life of Harold Hardrada and follows the story of a young boy who turns into a king and who ultimately ends his life at the battle of Stamford Bridge, yes we all know the ending but the story leading up to this is both fascinating and informative for me the height of great historical fiction, the writing is rich in descriptive passages of hard times, harsh landscapes and bloody battles, the characters brought beautifully to life on the pages, credit to the author as you feel and live the life of Harold. You may not necessarily read works of historical fiction, however that shouldn't stop you from reading and appreciating what is a first class novel, more than just a book about battles this is a story of a man and his journey through life. Historical fiction at its best

Dean Haywood says

Brilliant a must read book of anyone who loves historical fiction.on par with Cornwell,Scarrow,and Kane.

Speesh says

It seems to be a truth pretty much universally accepted, that the death of Harald Hardrada at the Battle of Stamford Bridge, brought an end both to his attempted invasion of England and the Viking Age. And his life.

He is also pretty much universally acclaimed as if not the greatest Viking, then certainly the last great Viking. He has, in my reading experience, despite the above accolades, missed out somewhat in terms of fame amongst the general reading public. His battles of Fulford (which he won) and then at Stamford Bridge (which he lost and lost his life), are -in my experience, remember - often sidelined almost as hiccups in the English history of 1066, on the way to Hastings and William The Conqueror. As if this Viking with the strange name, pops up out of nowhere all opportunistically like, gets beaten and is never heard of again. That Harald has a back story and an incredible one at that, does come as a bit of a surprise to me, as I only knew the absolute bare bones of it prior to reading *Viking Fire*.

What I really didn't expect, even after having read Justin Hill's previous foray into all things 1066, *Shieldwall*, was to be so completely bowled over by this magnificent retelling of (what subsequent poking about here and there has revealed) what is known of Harald's story. No one leaving this book, can fail to be impressed both by Harald's life, and Justin's incredibly evocative re-telling of it.

It is so superbly well written, that most of the time, you don't so much read it, as absorb it. It seeps in, gathers you up, carries you along, takes you back, puts you either at Harald's side, or inside his thoughts. We are with Harald from his first memories as a child and a teenager in Norway, to his exile in the east, in Kievan Rus and later roaming round the Mediterranean in the service of Byzantium Empire, as leader of the famed Varangian Guard. Character changes as he moves through his life. From wide-eyed youth struggling to survive and find his way, but showing sparks of his later character, to amassing experience and wealth in the east, to '*did I really do all that?*' in older age. The progression and development of his character by Justin, is, perhaps only really noticeable when you think back on the book, because it is so beautifully and naturally written.

Under way, I was reminded of the incredible *The Sea Road*. Justin, like Margaret Elphinstone, has captured a feeling of that longing for a time gone, of their youth, that is surely not just that of their character's, but ours' as well. Me, anyway. The past has gone but something might be found to take its place. As with Paul Watkins' *Thunder God*, it could be a commentary on the creep of Christianity into Viking territory that has been brought to use by many writers in the field. But, as here, Justin has Harald as being, if not totally Christian, at least 'well disposed' towards Christianity. To be honest, I didn't realise that Harald might have been so Christian, throughout his life. I'd thought maybe, as in G. K. Holloway's *1066 What Fates Impose*, that "*The old Viking warrior never felt comfortable in churches unless he was robbing them.*"

In *Viking Fire*, he is portrayed as being religiously pragmatic, he is a Viking through and through, but takes the best from both sides. As I feel a lot of Vikings were at least willing to do when they first met Christianity. They couldn't see why anyone should unquestioningly worship what to them was a weak god, but they were prepared to allow that some might want to. It was Christianity that decided there should/could be no living side by side, and Viking leaders, looking to the future and the need for political alliances, took on Christianity as a way of gaining what they wanted. Then the old ways faded withered and died from neglect. Maybe not quite, as there is still a following here in Scandinavia, but it was never seen as a 'threat' again.

Harald's dream while travelling in something of a self-imposed exile, was always to return to Norway with enough money and men, and if not, with enough money to get enough men - and seek vengeance. It seemed that when he did return, he was a giant amongst little Norwegians. Not just in stature (sagas have him as being six or even seven foot tall), but in presence and thinking. He becomes king, settles down, builds

churches and while at that point, his life is already saga worthy, with his background, you know it's not enough to contain him.

Vikings seem always to have been concerned about reputation they leave behind. Hardrada is no difference. He has all he wanted, a place at the high table in Valhalla is assured, but when tempted by Tostig Godwinsson and English emissaries trying to enlist Harald's help to regain the English throne from Harold Godwinsson, he finds he just can't resist one last Viking adventure. He knows he shouldn't, but in keeping with the rest of his life, when did that mean he wouldn't? So, for one last moment in the limelight, the old Viking can't say no. And when his end comes, he dies, I felt, if not happy, then satisfied. That he had done his absolute best, done what he could with his life, and seen where it could take him. We should all be so content on our last day.

These later chapters - especially around the death of his wife - affected me very much indeed. They were reminiscent of the feelings that very nearly overwhelmed me reading the end of Angus Donald's *The Death of Robin Hood*. Justin brings a grizzled old Viking semi-Pagan out of the Saga pages and history, and into fully rounded, living breathing, loving, hoping, dreaming life. Still deserving of the Hardrada name, but maybe with some more nuanced chamfered edges. I guarantee you'll look out of your window and the scene will be very slightly misted.

'The Last Viking' epithet applied to Harald says a lot. They didn't know it at the time, so there may well have been people who went a-Viking after 1066, but to our modern eyes, the ideal and the age ended with him. The Norse were more politically expedient after that. Might be the last, but in many ways he is the finest, the peak, the culmination and embodiment - the most Viking of Vikings. He is looking down on us from the mead benches in Vallhalla, that's certain, and he couldn't have wished for a more sublime, subtle, powerful and fitting tribute than Justin Hill's *Viking Fire*.

**By the way, I'm going with the 'Hard Counsel' explanation of his name. As Hård-Råd' would be the Danish equivalent now.*

My book blog: Speesh Reads
Promise to send me an arc, and I'll read your book.

Laurence says

The second in the series is possibly even better than his 2011 effort, *Sheildwall*, which already rose the bar high. Fast paced, fully fleshed out characters, well placed broad strokes.

Only complaint, and so minor it's barely worth mentioning, is the title and the cover. The Mjolnir on the cover, why? Deference to the gods of his heathen forefathers? Didn't seem to gel with the book which shows him consistently as a devout Christian warrior. Also, I'd expect a tale this good to have a better title, perhaps something as simple as 'Hardrada', or maybe, 'The Hard Ruler'.

Reggie Kray says

'A book of the year.' - The Times
That's not just a fancy sales pitch on the wonderful cover.

You better fucking believe it! 5+

Christine Hancock says

Viking Fire is the second in the Conquest Series about the events leading up to the battles of 1066. In this book the focus is on Harald Hardrada, who won the first battle, at Fulford. He was then defeated, by Harold Godwinson, at Stanford Bridge. I must admit that I knew little more than that he was King of Norway. Why was he involved in this conflict?

Harald Sigurdson (Hardrada was a later nickname) had a long life - and what a life. The story starts, after a brief chapter at Fulford, when Harald is a boy. He idolizes his brother, King Olaf and when he is fifteen is allowed to stand beside him in battle. Unfortunately Olaf is killed and Harald is badly injured. He vows revenge on those responsible for his brother's death - King Cnut, who takes the throne and his family. Harald must flee, grow strong enough to challenge for the throne.

Still recovering from his injuries, he has to navigate the mountains, in winter. Some offer help, others are enemies. When he reaches the coast, he must make a decision - catch a ship, but where? He heads east, into the frozen lands of the Rus. After years of fighting and trading in furs, he arrives in the Black Sea, captain of his own ship, to deliver a cargo of furs to the Emperor of the Greeks at Mickleward (Byzantium). He joins the Varangian Guard and rises to become one of their leaders, fighting battles at sea and in Greece and Sicily. He visits Jerusalem and becomes friendly with the Empress.

Having accumulated great riches he decides to return to the North to claim the throne of Norway. Not for the power, but for the good he can do, for Harald is an intelligent man. He sees the benefits that civilisation can bring to his homeland. He returns and briefly shares the throne with his nephew, Magnus, Olaf's son. Magnus dies before they have time to come to blows, and Harald rules Norway for twenty years, building churches, founding Oslo, having children. By 1066 he is just over 50, growing old, why should he want to invade England? This book suggests one answer.

How is this long and exciting life packed into one average length book? Mainly because the author uses Harald himself to tell the story. Looking back on his life, he remembers the highlights, covering the journeys with a throwaway "I was with Jarl Eilief two years" or "Time and days seemed to merge into one long dream. I would wake to see thunderheads over Olympus or lookout towers over the burnt ruins of a pirate camp, and a few times dolphins raced the boat..." and their breath reminds him of an incident in Norway.

But when time stops, for a battle, the perils of the snow, an ordinary day on a Norwegian farm or the first walk through the streets of Byzantium, the writing is so clear that you are there, living Harald's life with him, seeing each tiny detail; the heat, the taste of the wine, the excitement of the shieldwall and the pain of losing friends.

The book is full of "what ifs": Harald could have stayed in Norway, become a farmer. He might have become Emperor of Byzantium. Or he might have beaten Harold Godwinson, and then William of Normandy, and changed history.

I loved the book, and look forward to reading more of the series.

I recently read King Hereafter by Dorothy Dunnett. I said that it was the best book I had ever read. Viking Fire by Justin Hill runs a close second.

