

Interview & Book Review

LONGINUS: BOOK I OF THE MERLIN FACTOR

A Novel by Steven Maines

Purple Haze Press

Religion, Mysticism & The Quest for Truth...

1. What inspired you to write Longinus?

At the outset, *Longinus: Book I Of The Merlin Factor* was not going to be about the Roman Centurion, per se (and in many ways it still isn't), or any one individual in particular. The work was simply going to be about ***the awakening to one's own inner potential or spiritual potential***, whatever you wish to call it, as represented by the wizard figure of Merlin the magician. In fact, the original title was simply going to be "The Merlin Factor". Yet, as I wrote the first draft, using a fictitious character, I found I wanted something more from my protagonist. He needed to be an 'everyman' if you will, but one that had a subtle event to catapult him into a quest of self discovery, even against his own apparent desires at the time.

I also found it to be much more appealing to have the event be one that most people are familiar with in an historical sense. That, coupled with my interest in ancient Roman history. . .well, let's just say that at one point, Longinus jumped up and picked me. Hence, *Longinus: Book I Of The Merlin Factor* was born.

2. What is factually known about Longinus?

During my research for Longinus, I found varying accounts of his life. None of them seemed to agree on very many points. One account had him remaining in the Roman military for many years after the crucifixion and leading an uneventful life. Another said that he fled Rome with the spear and became a staunch Christian, performing healings and other seemingly miraculous feats, even going on to be sainted. Still other accounts state that he had been Satan's pawn in the stabbing of Jesus, turned to the dark arts afterwards and was cursed by God to walk the earth forever, never to die, until earth is consumed.

But the two things that most of the accounts seem to agree on is that; one, it was a Centurion Longinus who pierced the side of Jesus while he was on the cross and, two, that he himself was crucified upside down some years later in Antioch.

3. *Is Longinus based on historical events or a true--though not well known -- story? Or is it strictly fiction?*

As I pointed out in my answer to the preceding question, I found several varying accounts of the life of Centurion Longinus. As such, my account is fiction. I'm sure there are scholars who will argue for one account or another of his life as being more accurate. For my purposes, Longinus is more a metaphor than a lesson in history. That being said, however, there are certain accurate historical elements, i.e. certain characters and events, in Longinus: Book I of The Merlin Factor.

4. *When I was reading Longinus it reminded me a bit of "The Mists of Avalon", Ethan Walker's "The Mystic Christ," and "Constantine's Sword". How do you feel Longinus fits into the scope of such books?*

You honor me/*Longinus* by saying that. The works you've pointed out are transformative in nature. Many years ago, when I first read "The Mists of Avalon", for example, I felt a mental, spiritual unfolding, understanding, awakening, take place within myself that was on a different level than what I had experienced in the past. "The Mists Of Avalon" was particularly intriguing because of the enlightening narrative storyline vis-à-vis, a portion of our own mythology and history and the common truths shown within our mythologized history, hence, within our own consciousness. Perhaps, if *Longinus* reminded you of those books, it is touching on the same mythos, if you will.

5. *Longinus is book 1 of The Merlin factor. How do books 2 and 3 tie into this first book?*

Books two and three will tie into the first book in several ways. First; it will follow the spear itself, as it travels through history and around the world, and affects the lives of those it touches, or rather, by how those who possess it believe it to affect them. Secondly, most of the characters or personalities that we became familiar with in Longinus will show up again in the subsequent books, reincarnated as new characters to continue their growth and learning. Thirdly, at least a couple of the main characters in the subsequent books are direct blood descendents of Longinus. For example, Book 2, tentatively titled; Father Myrriddin: Book II of The Merlin Factor, opens with a man named Merlin, or Myrriddin, as he prefers to be called, (who was the boy from the epilogue of Book I) and the spear, which he has transformed into somewhat of a wizard's staff. Myrriddin comes to discover that he has the soul of Longinus as well as the blood of the Centurion's line.

6. *In Longinus you dance with the concepts of mysticism and religion. I was intrigued that a Jewish Rabbi, Druids and Romans were all able to co-exist together. Tell me more about what inspired this approach?*

From my observations, it seems that most every religion and spiritual movement share some common truths, some common threads, that run through their teachings and are similar, or in some cases, even identical to each other. These similarities seem especially pronounced when we start talking about mysticism or the mystical experience, where one can experience Truth first hand, without an intermediary. In Longinus, I attempted to show this common ground as perhaps a starting point of spiritual co-existence.

7. There is one point in Longinus where even Druid magic and the powerful spear can't alter circumstances. To what end do you believe that we as humans can change our fate through magic or through religion?

There is an axiom, if you will, in Religious Science that states, "change your thinking, change your life." In other words, we all have the ability to change our life circumstances by changing how we think about those circumstances and then acting in accordance with that new way of thinking. That is the definition of magic to me, in the modern sense. I believe one can take that even farther by then turning to one's religion or God-source, so to speak. But, there are cycles too; cycles of seasons – literally and metaphorically: life, death, and so on that everyone is subject to.

8. If all religions are a path to god or a higher consciousness, then in your opinion, why all the chaos surrounding the different paths as illustrated in many of the conflicts in Longinus?

I do believe that all religions are, or at least can be, a path to God, to higher consciousness. But, the chaos surrounding the different paths in Longinus are reflective, to some degree, of the chaos surrounding the paths today. Namely, that perhaps there is a lack of understanding on meaningful levels of what one's path is truly about and, more probably, a feeling of disenfranchisement or socio-political marginalization by those creating the apparent chaos. The latter really has nothing to do with a religious belief but often seems to be cloaked in religion.

9. The dark versus light is constant in Longinus. Tell me more about this?

Both saints and sinners abide within us all. Some view this as a constant struggle. I don't know if it is so much of a struggle, which to me implies or is fraught with judgment, as it is simply part of the human condition. Humans are dynamic beings. The average person can be enlightened one day, and living at his or her baser level the next. Of course, as Longinus finds out, we have a choice as to where we would function from at any given moment; i.e. from the light or the darkness.

10. As a philosophy major, how have your studies shaped Longinus and the books to follow in the trilogy?

To be honest, my studies in philosophy are but a portion of what went into shaping Longinus, the trilogy, and indeed all my writings. Over the years, I've been intrigued by most of the world's religions and spiritual thought in general; from the simply sublime to the deeply mystical. The journey of discovery and learning is one I've been on for many, many years. This journey probably more than anything else, is what has shaped Longinus.

11. How would you like the reader to be transformed after reading Longinus?

This is an interesting question. To be honest, I think that any work that is transformative, or is labeled transformative, can only be so on the subjective level of the one reading it. Do I hope that readers will identify with the character of Longinus and his challenges, both inner and outer? Of course. Perhaps a reader will come away from Longinus feeling he or she has just had a good read and nothing more. That would be wonderful. On the other hand, do I believe that a reader can be "transformed", as you put it by Longinus in the sense of it encouraging self-inquiry or an inquiry into Self, for example? It's quite possible. Either way though, it's entirely subjective and up to the reader.

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Longinus: Book I of the Merlin Factor tells the story of Gaius Cassius Longinus, the battle-hardened centurion of Rome who is assigned to guard the crucified Jesus. But while watching Jesus, Longinus stabs him in the ribs with his spear, ensuring Jesus' death. It is a simple act, but one that changes his life forever and leads him through a sinuous series of experiences, including encounters with Mary Magdalene, Celts, Druids, a Jewish Rabbi and many other unforgettable characters.

Longinus: Book I Of The Merlin Factor follows the Centurion's life from his love for the prostitute Irena to his mystical studies with the Druids of Gaul. But it also reveals Longinus' profound spiritual awakening through his Druidic studies and the spear which speaks to him with the voice of Jesus.

Even readers who don't normally enjoy Religious or historical legends will love this engaging version. For more information or to contact Steven Maines see www.stevenmaines.com or www.purplehazepress.com.