

THE GOSPEL OF MIRIAM

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a brown headscarf and a heavy brown cloak, stands in a landscape. She is looking towards the camera. The background shows a body of water, hills, and a clear blue sky.

A fiction short novel by

Michel Poulin

Cover illustration by Elsinä Schepers

WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS

THIS FICTION NOVEL CONTAINS CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECT MATTERS OF RELIGIOUS NATURE THAT MAY OFFEND SOME PERSONS. WHILE THIS NOVEL DEPICTS MANY HISTORICAL PERSONS AND EVENTS FROM THE PAST, THIS IS A WORK OF PURE FICTION AND WORDS OR DEEDS ATTRIBUTED IN IT TO PERSONS WHO EXISTED DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT HISTORICAL REALITY. ALSO, THE CONTENT OF THIS NOVEL DOES NOT REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF THE AUTHOR ABOUT RELIGION.

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ABOUT THIS NOVEL

This fiction novel is a complementary part to a collection of novels which depict the adventures through time of Nancy Laplante, a female Canadian war correspondent and reserve army officer from the year 2012, and of Ingrid Weiss, a German teenager orphaned by war in 1940 and adopted by Nancy Laplante. This particular novel centers on a historically famous person, Miriam of Magdala, better known to Christians as Saint Mary Magdalene. In the second novel of my collection, ADVENTURES THROUGH TIME, Miriam was transported through time by Nancy Laplante in order to ensure her safety and that of her unborn baby at the request of Yeshua, better known as Jesus Christ, just before his death, and thus disappeared from known history. Miriam then lived at the secret base of the Time Patrol, situated in the distant past, visiting from time to time the future of alternate timelines. The letter which follows the year dates in this novel denotes in which timeline the action takes place. Timeline 'A' is the original timeline where we all live, while Timeline 'B' is a modified history which split from the main timeline in 1940, following the involuntary travel back in time of Nancy Laplante 'A' from 2012 to 1940.

OTHER BOOKS BY THIS AUTHOR

(All available free online at Free-Ebooks.net, or can be ordered direct via email to the author at natai@videotron.ca.)

Nancy Laplante Series

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A MARS ODYSSEY

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CHAPTER 1 – TWISTED WORDS

10:28 (London Time)

Sunday, May 11, 1952 ‘B’

Saint-Paul’s Cathedral

London, England



Miriam of Magdala, accompanied by her twelve-year-old son **David**, hesitated for a moment before starting to climb the wide steps leading to the West entrance of Saint-Paul’s Cathedral. As a Jewish woman she was not coming here to worship but rather to observe. During the eleven years she had been living at the secret base of the Time Patrol, hidden in the distant past, she had ample time to hear and read about the Christian religion, or rather religions, and its claims about Yeshua of Nazareth, better known in this time period as Jesus Christ. While not a devout or orthodox Jew, Miriam had been shocked more than once when seeing how the words of her former lover, husband and spiritual guide had been twisted. This visit, coming on the heels of Queen Margaret’s coronation yesterday, which Miriam had attended with David as guests, was however the first time she would enter a Christian place of worship. Acutely conscious of the controversy she and David were raising among Christians because of the redefinition of Yeshua’s nature presented by the Time Patrol, Miriam had dressed in a contemporary European dress and shoes instead of her customary antique Jewish robe. David was similarly dressed in contemporary fashion, wearing a boy’s suit.



Entering the huge cathedral along with a few people intent on attending Sunday mass, Miriam tried not to look too much around the magnificent interior, not wanting to attract attention on her. David however, as a bright and curious boy, could not help crane his neck and look around him, awed by the decoration and architecture. Urging him in a low voice to be more discreet, Miriam led her son to one of the rear rows of pews and took place there, sitting behind the other persons present in the nave. The worshippers were not very numerous for such a huge church, and for reasons Miriam knew too well. Ten years ago, after appearing in this century and putting a quick end to World War Two, the Time Patrol and its leader, Nancy Laplante, had put in question the

very foundations of Christianity. For one, Nancy Laplante had personally conducted a lengthy mission in the past in order to document the life and death of Yeshua and had found him to be a man, and not the Son of God, as claimed by the Church. As if that had not been enough, Nancy had also transported Miriam and her unborn son out of the First Century, on the request of Yeshua as he was dying on his cross, in order to insure her safety and that of her unborn son. The notion that Miriam was the lover of Yeshua and had a baby from him had infuriated churchmen and devout Christians alike, who believed firmly the Bible's notion that Miriam had been simply a prostitute exorcised many times by Yeshua before becoming one of his disciples. To make matters worst, Nancy Laplante, who held a number of fantastic powers given to her by the supreme spiritual being called 'The One', had become the ruler of Palestine, which was now known as 'The Holy Land of Palestine', after having given control of it by the grateful British government for having put a stop to World War 2 and having defeated both the Nazis and Imperial Japan. There, every day in Jerusalem, Nancy had been conducting public mass healings for the benefit of anyone who showed up in Jerusalem while sick, wounded or handicapped. Such a repetition of miracles, performed for free, had quickly made many past devout Christians doubt the words of their respective churches, which kept promising help from God to its members while collecting their donations, but could not deliver on those promises. That, and the doubts raised about the supposed divinity of Jesus Christ, had gradually emptied the Christian churches of much of their past believers. The resulting cuts to its revenues had hit the various churches hard, prompting in return vicious reactions against what the Pope in Rome called 'blasphemers' and 'heretics', while Nancy Laplante had been branded as a liar and a witch bent on destroying Christianity. As for Miriam of Magdala, the Church had quickly enough accused her of being a fraud, invented by the Time Patrol in order to help discredit Jesus Christ. That accusation had particularly hurt Miriam, who believed more than ever that the words and teachings of her past lover, husband and guide were still well worth listening to.

Miriam, thinking about all this, was returned to reality a few minutes later by the arrival of the bishop who was to perform the mass. The bishop, flanked by two choir boys, knelt and made the sign of the cross in front of the altar, then faced his congregation and started the mass by reciting a prayer. Acting as if she was praying in response, Miriam lowered her head and imitated the other persons in the cathedral while

paying attention to what the bishop actually said. Much of it was standard prayers and recitation of psalms from the Christian Bible, a book Miriam knew to be deeply flawed because of poor translation work over the ages and from outright rewrites and censorship made by the early Christian Church to the original texts. Even the original texts themselves had been flawed from the start in her mind. They had been written well after Yeshua's death by people who had not met him and who had relied on oral accounts passed through at least a couple of generations. Also, they had reflected what their authors had believed would attract most new converts, rather than recounting the true words and actions of Yeshua.

Things came to a head when the bishop went to his pulpit and started his day's sermon. Miriam nearly rose up in protest when the man launched on a vitriolic attack on Nancy Laplante, whom he called 'the Witch of Jerusalem', warning his parishioners that listening to her would send their souls straight to Hell. He even warned them that the public healings in Jerusalem were actually meant to bind their souls to the Devil, healing hopeful ones in exchange of a spiritual debt to be later paid at the calling of the Prince of Darkness. Miriam saw genuine fear and indignation go through the parishioners at those words. In contrast, her son David looked up at her, both confused and surprised. While he spoke in a low voice, he used Aramaic, the native language of Miriam and the one they used commonly between them.

"Why is the man telling those lies about Nancy, Mother?"

"To discourage others from following her, David." answered Miriam, whispering while bending down her head. "Now, keep silent or someone will grow suspicious of us." One of the nearest parishioners, a thin man in his fifties, actually turned his head briefly to look at Miriam and David, but soon returned his attention to the bishop, who was now blasting away at the books and documentaries produced by the Time Patrol, calling them 'atheist propaganda' and reminding his flock that they were still blacklisted by the Church and banned by the British government.

After a bit over one hour of mass, Miriam had heard and seen enough. Leaving her bench with David before the basket for donations was passed around, she walked out of the cathedral. Once out of the building, she couldn't refrain from spitting out her frustration in a few Aramaic words.

“God, what a pack of lies! And they are supposed to follow the words of Yeshua? Where is the tolerance and the compassion that Yeshua wanted his followers to show?”

Miriam actually knew the answer to that as soon as she asked herself that question. In truth, only a few of Yeshua’s first disciples had been truly tolerant, since they had been Jews of the First Century, who typically had a strong xenophobic streak. Miriam knew for a fact that the man who had taken control of Yeshua’s disciples after his master’s death on the cross, the disciple known to Miriam as Shimon but commonly known to Christians as Saint Peter, had been in truth an obdurate, misogynistic and rather slow-witted fisherman with no education. She had been ignored or demeaned many times by him while following Yeshua on his spiritual journey, with Shimon doing his best to try to convince Yeshua to stop listening to her. Miriam shook her head in disbelief at the thought that such a man could have been the founder of the Christian church. David, who had been looking up at her as they stood outside of the cathedral’s entrance, pulled gently on her left sleeve to attract her attention.

“Mother, could we go somewhere to eat? I am hungry.”

Forgetting her anger, Miriam smiled down tenderly to her son, a handsome boy with the same dark skin and dark brown hair of his father.

“Of course, David. Let’s walk back towards Buckingham Palace: we will certainly find a place to eat on the way.”

Going down the steps of the cathedral, they carefully crossed the busy street and started walking down Ludgate Hill Street, looking at the façades on both sides. It however became quickly evident to Miriam that all the restaurants and pubs wouldn’t open until noon, still fifteen minutes away. As for the other types of commerce, they were all closed on Sundays. She thus decided to slow down her pace and take the time to browse through the windows of the shops they were passing in front of, in order to kill time until noon. With David growing more impatient by the minute, noon finally came, by which time they were crossing the wide roundabout of Ludgate Circus. Once on the other side and walking along Fleet Street, they stumbled upon the façade of an old pub with a warm look to it called ‘The Punch Tavern’. Seeing that the pub advertised a good list of menus for lunch, Miriam led David inside and was at once pleased by the interior, with its exquisite tiles, etched mirrors and solid marble bar counter top. Despite having just opened, the pub was already filling with customers, thus proving its popularity. The

men present in the main bar room all looked at Miriam when she entered with David, with many openly admiring her. While in reality 36 years old, Miriam had benefited like all members of the Time Patrol community from the anti-aging genetic treatment common in the 34th Century society of the Global Council, which the Time Patrol was a government agency of. Miriam thus appeared to be still in her late twenties. She was also a true Semitic beauty, with long black hair, deeply tanned skin and smooth, oval face. Followed by the eyes of many men, Miriam proceeded to a free table with David and sat, their backs to a large wall mirror. A middle aged waiter with a large mustache quickly came to their table, a menu and notepad in hand, and gave a welcoming smile to Miriam and David.

“Welcome to the Punch Tavern, miss. What may we serve you?”

“We came to have lunch and will look at your menu, mister.” answered Miriam, smiling back. “Could I have a glass of milk for my son and a glass of red wine for myself while we make our choices?”

“Of course, miss! We have a good French Bordeaux as our house red wine that I would recommend to you, miss.”

“That will do fine, mister.”

The waiter bowed his head and gave her and David menus before hurrying back to the counter. While eyeing her menu, Miriam listened discreetly to the conversations between the other customers. A pair of men in suits conversing at a nearby table while reading newspapers and drinking beers quickly attracted her attention, as they were obviously commenting yesterday’s royal coronation.

“...and the way Laplante opened up the sky and chased away the rain clouds. Nobody before believed that she was this powerful.” said the young red-haired man facing a bearded man in his forties. Before the bearded man could reply to that, another man drinking alone at a neighboring table jumped in their conversation, speaking with contempt in his voice.

“Of course she is powerful, man: she’s a witch!”

“Would you mind keeping to your business, mister?” replied the red-haired man, obviously annoyed by the unsolicited comment, before looking back at the bearded man. “By the way, did anyone take pictures of that man who appeared out of nowhere and healed that old amputee?”

“Yes! In fact, there is a picture right here, in the Sunday Times.”

Both men examined the grainy, black and white picture for a moment, then read the text below it.

“Could he really be Jesus Christ, as Laplante claimed later?” wondered the bearded man.

“Who else could make an amputated leg grow back and make a chain-link fence disappear and then reappear again? Do they say why he then went to hug that woman and boy that stood besides Laplante?”

“Uh, let me read...”

Miriam felt blood rush to her head when she realized that the men were talking about her and David, but kept quiet and motioned to David not to speak. The bearded man soon spoke again to his companion across their table.

“According to a diplomat who stood nearby, that woman was Saint Mary Magdalene and her son from Jesus, David.”

That sentence was enough to make the thin man sitting alone four feet away become agitated.

“BOLLOCKS! JESUS WAS NOT MARRIED AND WAS NOT A SIMPLE MAN!”

That outburst earned him a warning from the pub owner, who was rinsing glasses from behind the bar.

“Mister, if you can’t keep quiet and can’t let others converse in peace, then you will have to go drink elsewhere.”

The thin man gave a black look at the pub owner.

“How the hell am I supposed to keep quiet when such nonsense about Jesus Christ is repeated around?”

The pub owner, sensing how intense the man’s emotions were, took no chances of this getting out of hand and pointed at the door.

“Mister, this is a free country, with people entitled to their opinions. Finish your beer and then get out!”

Clearly pissed, the thin man took a last pull from his mug, then put it down and left after dropping money on his table. The red-haired man shook his head while watching him walk out.

“That was one closed mind for you, John.”

“Damn right! Too bad that there are so many of them around.”

“Returning to my last question, do they show a picture of this Saint Mary Magdalene?”

“Uh, there is one of Laplante and her group. I believe that she can be seen on it but it is a distant shot.”

Both men examined closely that picture for long seconds but saw only the outlines of the woman’s face. The red-haired man sighed with frustration.

“If the government had not banned the distribution and sale of the books and documentaries made by the Time Patrol, we would have been able to see a good picture of Saint Mary Magdalene by now.”

“Well, they are on open sale in France.” replied the bearded man. “Next time I go to Paris I will buy the whole collection.”

That made his companion smile to him.

“Hey, why didn’t I think of that before? Thanks for the idea.”

Miriam was deep in thoughts about that conversation when the waiter returned with a glass of milk and a glass of red wine, putting both on her table and smiling to her.

“Have you made your choice, miss?”

“Uh, yes! I will have the chicken breast. David, did you make your mind up?”

“Could I take the steak with fried potatoes, Mother?”

“Of course, David! My son will have the T-bone steak, medium done, mister.”

“One chicken breast and one T-bone steak, medium, coming up, miss!” said the waiter, writing on his notepad, before leaving towards the kitchen. Miriam took a sip of her wine, her mind still in turmoil. Because she had been living most of the time at the secret main base of the Time Patrol, situated in New Zealand and 5,000 years in the past, she had never realized until now how intense the emotions were in this time period concerning the true nature of Yeshua. Finding out that she was herself a subject of heated controversy was also coming as a shock to her. By the time her food arrived, she had resolved herself to study more carefully that whole question from now on.

CHAPTER 2 – IN SEARCH OF A PURPOSE

12:03 (New York Time)

Friday, May 19, 2006 'A'

AMC Empire 25 Cinema, 42nd Street, Manhattan

New York City, United States

“DO NOT GO LISTEN TO LIES. BELIEVE THE GOOD BOOK, WHICH CONTAINS THE ONLY TRUTH.”

That message, shouted repeatedly at the long line of prospective movie viewers by a small but vociferous group of Christian fundamentalists holding large signs and bibles, finally attracted a reply from a young, solidly built man sporting a brush haircut.

“HEY, BOZOS, THIS IS A DEMOCRACY. I WILL GO SEE WHAT I WANT AND, IF YOU DON'T LIKE THAT, THEN YOU CAN GO FUCK YOURSELVES. IN FACT, THAT WOULD DO SOME GOOD TO YOUR CONSTIPATED LOT.”

Many in the lineup laughed loudly at that fighting reply, while the dozen or so fundamentalists reddened with indignation before shouting again.

“YOU WILL ALL BURN IN HELL FOR DOUBTING THE WORD OF THE LORD.”

“THIS MOVIE IS PURE BLASPHEMY.”

“HOW COULD A PROSTITUTE BEAR A CHILD FROM JESUS?”

Forward in the lineup, just outside the main doors of the cinema complex in downtown New York City, Miriam of Magdala's eyes bulged with indignation on hearing that last sentence. She would have shouted something back if not for **Nancy Laplante 'A'**, who was using the physical form of Sarai of Ur for this visit to New York in order to go around more discretely. The power of changing shape at will between her original body and that of



one of her most famous past incarnations had been given to Nancy by The One, or rather by Sarai's old husband, Abraham, two years ago. It had happened in Hebron, at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, when Abraham, now an angel of The One, had appeared to Nancy for a moment and had borrowed her physical body, so that he could be with his beloved Sarai one last time by temporarily placing Sarai's soul in Nancy's body. The gift made to Nancy's by Abraham in return for that had been the old golden family ring Sarai

had worn all those years. That ring, bearing cuneiform markings, had conferred to Nancy the power of shape-shifting at will into Sarai's form and back. That had proved most useful to Nancy many times already, allowing her to go around in public without touching off some strong reactions to her presence. This present occasion was another one when looking like a young Semitic woman of great beauty was of use to her, as it had permitted her to escort Miriam and David to this premiere of the movie 'Da Vinci Code'. When she had been told that a movie had been made featuring herself, Miriam had insisted on being able to see it in its original release setting, so that she could gauge the popular reactions to it. Up to now, she certainly had seen and heard enough to convince her that her hypothetical fate after the crucifixion of Yeshua was a matter of great controversy indeed in this time period.

"Let these fanatics shout all they want, Miriam: they are not worth your time...or mine." said calmly Nancy, putting a hand on Miriam's shoulder.

Miriam, her hands still covering the ears of David in order to prevent him from listening to the obscenities being exchanged between the fundamentalists and waiting patrons, looked at Nancy, still fired up.

"But, you heard what they called me?" she said in Aramaic. That only brought a tolerant smile on Nancy's, or rather on Sarai's face.

"Some of Yeshua's male disciples were not much more polite or charitable with you, Miriam. Remember?"

Miriam sighed at those words.

"True! Shimon 'The Rock' was one that could be rather crude himself."

"Rather crude? How about downright insulting? If he could have chased you away he would have done it. Yeshua however would never have let him do that, and Shimon knew it. Shimon also knew that he would have eaten my walking staff for that." Picturing that in her mind made Miriam giggle: most of the male disciples of Yeshua had indeed treated her shabbily a number of times, so jealous were they of her influence on their spiritual master.

With the lineup advancing steadily and with a number of policemen preventing the protesting fundamentalists from entering the entrance lobby of the cinema, Miriam, David and Sarai were soon able to buy their tickets and to go take place in the inner lineup waiting at the entrance of one of the projection theaters reserved for the viewing

of 'Da Vinci Code'. Sarai made a quick trip to one of the snacks service counter and returned with a large bag of popcorn and a Coca-Cola for David.

"No cinema experience is complete without the overpriced junk food, right?" she said with a smirk to Miriam while giving the popcorn and Coca-Cola to the boy.

"If you say so, Sarai." replied Miriam, who was not overly strict about following Mosaic Laws concerning Jewish diet. They soon were entering the projection room with a few hundred eager patrons and took seats in the center. The three of them waited patiently, with David munching on his popcorn, until the pre-show commercials and trailers started being projected on the giant screen. Miriam was however a bit nervous as the movie finally started. She had read the book on which the movie was based and, while it was clearly a work of fiction with much of it made up in order to provide drama, the starting premise of it, basically that she had a baby from Yeshua, was certainly correct enough. That massacres and other horrible crimes had been committed in the past in order to enforce the views of the Catholic church concerning her role in history made Miriam most uncomfortable, if not distraught. The part of the movie about the past slaughter of tens of thousands of women accused by the Church of being witches hit her particularly hard, bringing tears of rage and frustration to her. Yeshua had meant women to be full members of his ministry, yet the Christian churches had branded women as born sinners, with the more conservative branches refusing them any meaningful role except as subservient nuns. Even now, such an exceptional woman as Nancy Laplante was being branded as a witch by the Christian churches of Timeline 'B', for her stated beliefs about the true nature of Jesus Christ and for her powers, even though she had always used those powers for the good of all.

Miriam was in tears as the final scene was shown, with the camera panning over the hidden sarcophagus supposedly containing her remains in a hidden basement room of the Louvre Museum. As the other spectators around them were getting up from their seats to leave, Miriam looked at Nancy/Sarai and spoke in Aramaic while keeping her voice low.

"Sarai, I know that I can't even try to influence this timeline, but I would like to do something to bring the true words and teachings of Yeshua to Timeline 'B', where the existence of the Time Patrol is public knowledge. I have lived hidden away in comfort for too long while the Christian churches have been distorting Yeshua's doctrine. Would you help me do that?"

Sarai was thoughtful for a moment, then nodded her head once.

“It would please me to do so, Miriam. Be prepared to face many frustrations, though: the Church is still most inflexible about its doctrine.”

“I realize that, Sarai. I however truly want to spread the truth about Yeshua. Thank you in advance for your help.”

“You’re welcome, my friend. How about leaving now and going to a nearby coffee shop, so that we can listen to some of the spectators who have just seen this movie. On this premiere day, it should be a common subject of conversation.”

“That sounds like a good idea, Sarai.” replied Miriam, smiling. The three of them then got up from their seats and left the cinema complex. Since the complex was right in Downtown Manhattan, they had no trouble finding a coffee shop less than fifty feet from it. Letting Sarai order for them, Miriam smelled with delight the cup of espresso coffee she brought to her: despite coffee having been unknown to the Israel of the First Century, Miriam had quickly developed a liking to it while living with the Time Patrol, where she was working as a hairdresser. David was also quick in starting to sip on the hot chocolate brought to him by Sarai. In many ways the various small comforts of modern life made it often much nicer than Miriam’s original life in Galilee. A news flash on the television set of the coffee shop, tuned to the CNN News channel, then reminded her of other aspects of modern life less to her liking. With the voice of a news correspondent commenting, pictures of pandemonium and destruction were shown from Tel Aviv.

“...The suicide bomber detonated his explosives in a popular market of a middle class district in Tel Aviv, killing at least three shoppers and wounding dozens more, some critically. The Palestinian faction ‘Islamic Jihad’ has claimed responsibility for the bombing. This terrorist attack, the first in Israel since December of 2003, is sending a shockwave through both Israel proper and the Palestinian Territories, where people are afraid that the fragile peace between the two people could be shattered by the return of terrorism.”

Sarai’s face hardened as she listened to the news report. She then looked gravely at Miriam and David.

“It seems that some will never learn. I am truly despairing to see a lasting peace ever come to that part of the World.”

Those words made Miriam take a decision she had been weighing for a while already.

“Sarai, I believe that it is time for me to do my part in bringing some peace and tolerance to this World, at least in Timeline ‘B’. I firmly intend to write down a book on the life of Yeshua and I hope that publishing it in Timeline ‘B’ will help spread the truth about him and his message of tolerance.”

In turn, Sarai looked soberly at her for a moment before speaking.

“Then, be careful how you proceed, Miriam. Many could become violent in order to shut you up.”

“Yeshua died while trying to bring some good to his time period. I will gladly risk myself in order to pass his message, Sarai.”

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