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Allan Massie

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Reconstruction of the lost memoirs of Emperor Augustus; an account from the killing of Caesar to his own death.

After Caesar and Antony, the third volume of this series of historical novels about the Roman Empire. The remarkable recovery of the drama and glory of a unique historic character.

Augustus Details

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Author : Allan Massie

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From Reader Review Augustus for online ebook

Tom says

A vivid, readable memoir of Augustus. Interesting form Massie chose. The first half being reasonably conventional novelistic memoir of the first years of Octavian from the Ides of March to the defeat of Anthony. Of course, Augustus lived a very long time after that, and going over the details of that would be ... well, not so exciting. Instead, Massie has Augustus write thoughts down for his grandchildren who were slated to be his successor, but who unfortunately didn't make it.

Fun book. Interesting study of the disappointment of great power, and outliving those you thought would carry your legacy.

Considering how disappointing Tiberius came out, being emperor for a long time is not a formula for personal, or state, success.

Karl says

Quintilius Varus, give me back my Legions!

Jeroen Van de Crommenacker says

I thought this would be similar to I, Claudius, but unfortunately I can't hold a candle to that book. This is pretty turgid and boring. I never could get inspired by it. Was Augustus reign really that boring?

Carlos Rodriguez says

This is one of the books you really want to like once you read the preface. But I think it falls short on the writing style. The quotes you can get from the book are great and full of good advice, unfortunately for me it was a little boring on some parts so it is easy to lose interest and by the end I was really begging to finish the book. Nevertheless any book about Caesars is interesting.

Sarah says

Massie's Augustus is a decent novel in fake-autobiographical form about Augustus, and that's really all I have to say about it. There are a number of things I enjoy about it- such as the overall attention to detail- and a number of things that I really don't- mostly the portrayals of the other people in Augustus's life. Massie's prose is generally alright, but nothing spectacular, and it often doesn't make up for some of the more annoying aspects of the book, such as Maecenas being played as a gay stereotype and Livia's strained relationship with Augustus. All that being said, though, it's a decent read and one that I've enjoyed well

enough despite its faults.

Brian says

When asked what he most feared in politics, the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan replied, 'Events, dear boy, events.' In Allan Massie's fictional account of the life of Augustus there is a similar awareness of the way that political life is all about reacting to unpredictable realities.

Massie succeeds admirably in bringing to life the architect of Imperial Rome and the society that surrounded him. He does so far more effectively than all the hefty volumes of toga-lit with their obsessive detailing of military hardware. That's because his focus is on character and psychology, rather than blood on the floor of the arena.

He shows how the need to respond to inconvenient events shaped Augustus as much as it shaped his politics, constraining and hardening him until he became trapped within the political carapace he had created. He ends his life eaten up with regret, fearful for the security of the empire he has built and unable to communicate with those he loves most.

The decisions over which Augustus deliberated so long and hard resonated down through the centuries. Massie's achievement is to illuminate the forces behind those decisions. The result is a compelling study of the man, of the world that he was born into and of the way he transformed it.

Nick says

I really liked this piece of historical fiction ... well written and entertaining.

Gumble's Yard says

Unlike Caesar an autobiographical account by the subject of the book and much less tightly written.

Augustus's character emerges from the book in a deep way.

He is presented as a driven individual who: seizes his own destiny; is perhaps unaware how his ambition and drive appears to others; is ultimately sure of the importance of securing Rome's internal and external peace (even if this means sacrificing some of the liberty of its subjects); believes in constitutional niceties but is willing to indulge in the horrors (to him) of the prescriptions even though the death of Cicero haunts him; is at best respectful of Caesar and in many ways horrified by his bloodthirstiness, war crimes in Gaul and desire to be King; has a deep relationship with Antony – stained by Antony's rape/seduction of him, by the reminder when he deals with Antony of their joint participation in the prescriptions, by jealousy at the devotion Antony (like Caesar) can inspire and their sheer charisma; has a deep relationship with his three advisors Virgil, Agrippa and ex-lover Maecenas; has almost blindness to the failings of Julia until way too late; is devoted to his three grandchildren and intended heirs all of whom die; is quietly in awe of Livia – happy to override her deepest wishes but at the same time with his own deepest wish to gain her approval; is

sad as he enters old age at (a little like the author of Ecclesiastes) the futility in the face of the death of him and his loved ones of much of what he has achieved (while at the same time publically and privately listing time and time again those same achievements); fascinated by Greek and other religions (his musings here and stories of some of his meditations and visits to shrines are the most confusing and worst parts of the book).

Fanna Casat says

Honestly...see my review for its sequel, "Tiberius." My same complaints about the sometimes too-flowery prose, and the readers who criticize authors for using modern colloquialisms in historical fiction, remain. Eye-roll-worthy moments: Massie often features the characters enjoying modern Italian delicacies, which is...wrong. Ancient Roman food was pretty gross.

But all-in-all, a good read. I appreciated the humor. Entertaining, and an insightful character study, with some insightful musings on life-in-general that sometimes approach beautiful writing. I think I like Massie's books better than Graves' "I, Claudius," honestly. Better analyses of these characters, more vivid and readable...

Joy says

Massie places us inside the head of Caesar Augustus as Massie sees him. It is brilliantly done, especially Augustus's struggle to accept a doubled morality: his reconciliation between personal goodness and governmental expedience. Through Augustus's relationships between family and friends, Massie gradually unfolds the wrappings that protect Augustus from his world.

Who knows how close this comes to the real Augustus? But Massie has grounded him in what historical knowledge we have of this man who lived his theater, and the result is as human as one could imagine. Don't expect any of Robert Graves's characters, btw.

Why did I give it only 3 stars? Augustus's disillusionment lives as piercingly as any of the rest of this incisive life.

Robert Hepple says

Published in 1986, Augustus is a novel covering the life of Augustus from the death of Caesar onwards. Split into two parts, the first covers the more dynamic phase with internal civil wars in the aftermath of Caesar's murder, followed by a war with Egypt. The second part is darker and far more political, as the elderly Augustus comes to terms with the consequences of his actions. The body count is quite high, although this means a lot of sudden deaths in the first part followed by a lot of age related deaths in part two. Brilliant.

Thomas Brooke says

If you really like your Roman Imperial history, or would like to learn more, this is a great place to start. Alan Massie's novel on Augustus is both detailed and engaging, an excellent commentary on the man who probably did more to shape the Roman Empire than any other – high praise when you consider Julius Caesar is on that list.

Augustus is largely accepted as Rome's first Emperor (Julius Caesar was dictator for life) and although Augustus preferred to go by the term 'princeps' or first citizen, he completely reformed Rome's old Republic into an imperial super-power capable of controlling the vast lands and provinces that stretched through Europe, Asia, and Northern Africa.

Alan Massie's novel is a fictional memoir from Augustus, as he recounts his life. It is divided into two parts. The first is recounted by a middle aged Emperor in a triumphant tone as he retells the period of the civil wars which followed the assassination of his uncle, Julius Caesar. He tells of his ascension to power as, with the help of his general Agrippa, and his one-time ally Mark Anthony, they defeat the forces of his uncle's assassins. He doesn't shy away from the dark period afterwards for Rome's elite, when he and Mark Anthony oversee the proscriptions, as the two of them put black marks against the names of those who had opposed them and strip them of all they own before condemning them to death or banishment.

In the second part of the novel, we join Augustus much later in life, when he decides to continue his recollection. I normally don't like it when a book is divided up in this way as it spoils the immersion in the story, but as Augustus ruled for so long, it is difficult to see how Massie could have done it in any other way. The intervening decades of prosperity for Rome might not have been thrilling reading. In any case, Massie does it brilliantly, the tone changes as the aging Emperor reaches his later years, being sombre and sad after he is greatly affected by the deaths of his heirs and two grandsons Gaius and Lucius Caesar. The second part teaches us all of Augustus' startling achievements over his long reign, how he transformed virtually every aspect of the great Empire and set up the foundations that would see it dominate the world for the best part of four to five hundred years – quite a legacy. We then hear the aging Emperor's hopes and fears for his succession, as the thoughts of his family and those around him, turn towards life after his death.

This is a fascinating book, full of well researched historical detail – for anyone interested in Roman history, this surely has to be a must read.

Laura Leilani says

I read to page 57 and I just can't waste time reading any more of this. This book is all made up. The dialog is made up, the personalities, all fake. Maybe Massie was trying to imitate Robert Graves? Graves wrote a fake autobio of Claudius. In this book Massie tried to write a fake autobio for Augustus. It's a good idea, but what made Graves' so good is that he stuck to facts. Even the quotes were verified as having been spoken. Massie just makes things up. It is not in the least like reading a diary. It's like reading a made up story written by a high school kid.

If you want really good writing, and want to feel confident about getting the real story, as much as can be known anyway, then stick to Robert Graves, Michael Grant or Suetonius. They are pretty good about clarifying what is gossip, propaganda or slander as opposed to facts and they are all entertaining.

Chris Perley says

This is not a book for plot and battle scenes but for the insights of the age and what Augustus may have been thinking throughout. It's set against the loss of the Republican ideal, which I confess I had sympathy with before reading this book. But one of the themes is the concentration and abuse of power during that era, and the point that Augustus actually tempered the power of the elite (the landed patrician senators - read for the current age the corporate elite - both plutocracies). Things were falling to bits with governors exploiting for wealth and glory, lands concentrating into the hands of the slave-owning few, with it the loss of Virgil's ideals of husbandry in the Georgics and Eclogues, as well as the effective reduction into a form of wage or self-employed slavery by the agrarian classes, the loss through indebtedness and unfair competition of these plebs to the city and the corn dole. The enemies of Augustus are either motivated by their own position in power or by the desire for the return of the patrician plutocracy all wrapped up in the rhetoric of 'the Republic' and 'freedom' (to exploit). Think corporate agribusiness today and our own political trends. Augustus knows he is no saint - a gangster effectively - but he claims a gangster that held the interests of Rome above self gain. Was he the ultimate benevolent dictator, or just another man on the rise? Less egomaniac than Julius. Much more flexible and considered than the stiff and bloody Tiberius. Look to this age for a window on our own.

Adele says

great book. well written
