

The Benevolent Lords of Sometimes Island

Scott Semegran

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It's 1986 in Texas, and a war is being conducted by two groups of boys who find themselves stranded on an island with a battle raging between them.

The Benevolent Lords of Sometimes Island could serve as the poster child for a psychology class in group dynamics. Scott Semegran's story, narrated in the first person by young suburbanite William Flynn, adopts a sense of slow horror reminiscent of the approach of Stephen King. All appears frighteningly normal at first, but evolves into a dangerous situation cemented by adversity and isolation in a dangerous pairing of events.

The groups of middle school kids in question already harbor relationships 'as thick as thieves', as the young narrator observes. This lends to the dilemma as this close-knit band of buddies confronts something dangerously beyond their middle-America experience. Semegran's choice of voice for this narration is compelling, setting the story's unique feeling and atmosphere from the start: "Earlier, I said that middle school was the time in my life when I first experienced real danger, but I failed to recall a time in my life during elementary school when, in fact, I also experienced something quite dangerous. Sorry I didn't mention it earlier, but that's how it goes with memories sometimes. They can appear and disappear in your mind like fireflies dancing across your front lawn on a warm spring night."

Remember: this is a slow-building horror story. It takes the proper time to build moments of levity, play, and unsuspecting encounters into its percolating plot about dangerous changes and situations. This is one of the outstanding features that makes William's story feel compellingly realistic.

As events unfold and challenges evolve beyond the usual childhood conflicts, readers are treated to a crazy adventure involving the threat of the Thousand Oaks Gang, the added impact of a setting that encourages deadly truths to emerge, and the changing perspective of a middle grade boy well on his way to becoming an adult.

Semegran's cultivation of a first-person voice that is evocative and compelling drives the story line and makes for an absorbing read fueled by William's very real reactions to his changed life: "Here's the thing about adulation for an introvert: it's kryptonite. After about an hour of stares from strange students and congratulatory handshakes from grinning teachers, I was ready to cover myself in the sheet of anonymity that a ghostly wallflower like me enjoyed so much. Being

anonymous is only truly appreciated after it's gone. I guess if I learned anything that day, it was this: I didn't want to be famous."

Middle grade leisure readers are in for a treat. Adult teachers and literary readers should also consider using some of the ideas in this story for classroom discussion, debate, and education, much as *Lord of the Flies* was used as an iconic literary representation of group dynamics.

It's a highly recommended, superb example of psychological twists and interpersonal encounters gone awry.

—D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer, *Midwest Book Review*