



Benevolence

Mark Flynn

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Emotionally charged with a definite delve into history and religion, Benevolence mixes hard-hitting action with curses and miracles.

In *Benevolence* by Mark Flynn—a historical thriller, legal drama, conspiracy theory, and religious mystery all rolled into one—the secrets kept by one small southern town are threatened when an eager young attorney starts making house calls.

Tasked with buying out the local country residents to make way for a highway bypass, Chad Hampton is determined to stay in the good graces of Eldridge, Fike, and Roystein Law Firm, even when his Christian ethics become conflicted. Standing in his way is William Lohman, a crusty World War II veteran whose story will end up changing the course of Chad's life forever.

From the setting in rural North Carolina in the mid-1990s, William's history goes even further back. Told from multiple perspectives, it begins with the storms and destruction of the Dust Bowl during the Depression era but soon travels across the world to the front battle lines of Algeria in 1942. With anthropologists racing the Nazis for hidden religious artifacts in the caves of Egypt, a distinctly Indiana Jones quality can be found amid the action and suspense.

War propaganda, politics, and religion are central themes, with a great deal of emphasis put on how the public perceives Christianity and its origins. Refreshingly, Chad, a staunch Catholic, and William, a self-professed atheist, seem to find middle ground, including the right to question beliefs: "It's human to wonder. It's human to want. It's human to need to know more."

The book of Judas or Judas Bible is also discussed at length, mixing the actual historical facts of its discovery in Egypt in the 1970s and its content and translation with William's own fictional involvement in what is described as the "world's greatest secret mission." While this seems like an overstatement at times, and the government's involvement is questionable, the speculation and religious ruminations are intriguing, balancing out the action with introspection.

Some minor but pervasive grammatical errors exist in addition to character inconsistencies, as when William's fellow soldiers predict in basic training that he will be "a good for nothing soldier, except for a big human shield when he was dead" yet later he is said to have "excelled in drills" and "garnered the respect" of those same men while there.

While William—a fascinating, multifaceted character dealing with the effects of grief, loss, and most likely posttraumatic stress disorder—slowly shares his past, parallels are made within Chad's own family, particularly as he struggles to relate to his brother, wife, and son, making *Benevolence* a complex, transformational character study as well.

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PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (February 4, 2017)

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