

"NEVERLAND": Not Just For Disney Fans Anymore

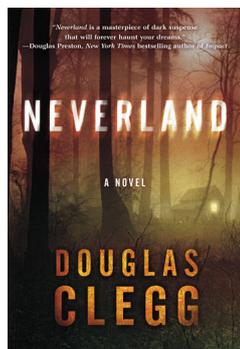
Written by Nick Masercola
Friday, 16 April 2010 14:32



When it comes to reviews, most books can at least drag a “pretty good” or “not bad” from the mouths of critics. But when the words “masterpiece” and “unforgettable” are thrown around, one can’t help but wonder what all the fuss is about. NEVERLAND, the new novel by author Douglas Clegg (ISIS, AFTERLIFE, THE PRIEST OF BLOOD, etc.) from Vanguard Press, has been lauded by Publisher’s Weekly as a “haunting story redolent with the influence of Arthur Machen, H.P. Lovecraft, and other classic horror writers.” If you’re craving a southern Gothic horror tale that isn’t about Rednecks in overalls “not taking kindly” to some city folk, that slowly builds dread as opposed to cheap, gory descriptions, NEVERLAND may be for you.

The novel’s plot revolves around a group of young children living in the South during the ‘60s. Brought together by pain and hardship, the children find refuge from their daily lives in a shack in the woods they call Neverland. In PETER PAN, Neverland was a place where kids never had to grow old, where they could stay young and remain untainted by adults forever. The Neverland of Clegg’s novel, however, is of a far more sinister nature. While things start innocently enough, soon the children begin to worship a God they believe lives in the shack called “Lucy,” and when their imagination and reality start to intersect, things take an ugly turn...

“I grew up mostly in Virginia,” says Clegg when discussing the book’s tone, “and was very influenced by southern writers like Flannery O’Connor and Carson McCullers and William Styron and others as I got older. I love the rich texture of the southern experience—the smells, the tastes, the warmth of the people, the harsh contradictions, the vanquished history.”



While much of NEVERLAND’S strength lies in its fertile atmosphere, it’s the characters that

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have been getting the most attention from critics, heralded for being extremely accurate and well-rounded portrayals of southern adolescence. "I think most of us forget what childhood was really like by the time we're about 20 or so. We've reinvented or recreated ourselves to close doors on the dark part of that journey. There is such a crossroads of innocence and terror when we're young, and of course the mysteries of family—and its secrets and taboos—are powerful forces in life. While NEVERLAND is not autobiographical, I did draw memories of specific incidents from observations I had as a kid, or places I visited. I have a very strong memory of childhood and how it felt. So that helped in writing NEVERLAND."

But great prose and characterizations are not the only things in store for those who pick up Clegg's book. In an uncommon addition to adult fiction, NEVERLAND actually contains many illustrations sprinkled throughout the story. When asked about his partnership with artist Glenn Chadbourne (STEPHEN KING'S SECRETARY OF DREAMS), Clegg says, "I love great illustrations in novels. I think there should be more of them in books. Glenn created unique and classic pen-and-ink illustrations for my book ISIS. It seemed natural for him to approach NEVERLAND, too. He created a perfect moody atmosphere in these particular illustrations, very different from his work in ISIS."

Due to the overwhelmingly positive response to NEVERLAND, one cannot help but wonder what's next for the author. "I have a couple of novels I've worked on over the past few years that are moving forward swiftly," Clegg says. "The first is a tale of murder and madness in a family at a summer place in New England, where young men are back from college and begin to edge toward criminal behavior. But it's about a bit more than that and definitely goes deep into horror territory."

Not only an inventive writer, Clegg has been a pioneer in online advertising, creating book trailers and flash games to promote his work. "A while back I saw a relatively new medium," he says, "for bringing books and stories to readers, and I pursued it full-throttle. Now, a lot of writers are doing that, but back in early 1999, not so many. The internet has changed the game...more authors and publishers should look for new ways to use technology to reach readers."

When asked if he has any dreams of NEVERLAND going Hollywood, Clegg says, "I'm very much hoping that NEVERLAND gets picked up; it would make a great movie. There's been some movie interest with my recent book, ISIS, but nothing definite to report at this moment. Several of my books have been optioned, one made into a not-so-great horror movie called BAD KARMA. But the upside to BAD KARMA was that the lead actress, Patsy Kensit, gave a great performance. I just feel bad for her that the movie around her was not up to her

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performance.”

NEVERLAND is on store shelves now. To find out more about CLEGG and his work, visit his website at douglasclegg.com.