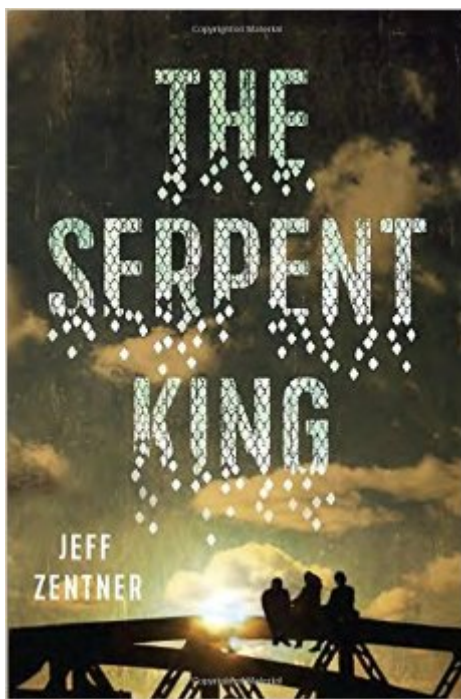


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The Serpent King



Synopsis

"Move over, John Green; Zentner is coming for you." • "The New York Public Library" Will fill the infinite space that was left in your chest after you finished *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. • "BookRiot.com" "A brutally honest portrayal of teen life . . . [and] a love letter to the South from a man who really understands it." • "Mashable.com" "I adored all three of these characters and the way they talked to and loved one another." • "New York Times" Named one of the Most Anticipated YA Books of 2016 by *Paste Magazine* and *Popcrush.com* Dill has had to wrestle with vipers his whole life "at home, as the only son of a Pentecostal minister who urges him to handle poisonous rattlesnakes, and at school, where he faces down bullies who target him for his father's extreme faith and very public fall from grace. The only antidote to all this venom is his friendship with fellow outcasts Travis and Lydia. But as they are starting their senior year, Dill feels the coils of his future tightening around him. Dill's only escapes are his music and his secret feelings for Lydia "neither of which he is brave enough to share. Graduation feels more like an ending to Dill than a beginning. But even before then, he must cope with another ending "one that will rock his life to the core. Debut novelist Jeff Zentner provides an unblinking and at times comic view of the hard realities of growing up in the Bible belt, and an intimate look at the struggles to find one's true self in the wreckage of the past. A story about friendship, family and forgiveness, it's as funny and witty as it is utterly heartbreaking." • "PasteMagazine.com

Book Information

Hardcover: 384 pages

Publisher: Crown Books for Young Readers (March 8, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 055352402X

ISBN-13: 978-0553524024

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars • See all reviews (217 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #13,169 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #10 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Physical & Emotional Abuse #55 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Friendship

Customer Reviews

I feel like I need to mention something before I delve into my thoughts on this book. I am not a

religious person. I won't go into just how much I do or don't believe, but I truly despise anyone or anything preaching to me about God, Jesus, etc. So, yes, I was worried about *The Serpent King* quite a bit. However, I was worried for almost no reason at all. While there are religious themes present, they aren't projected at the reader in a preachy way. If anything, it shows the struggle some have with blind faith — especially on the heels of a life-altering event. This story is a remarkable portrayal — and truth — of small town life and how it can shape, make, or break its community. It is told from three different points of view, a trio of friends: Dill, Lydia, and Travis. Each of their lives are different from the other two; some are sadder and more desolate as well. These three are outcasts in their town and at school, but they try to rise above. Dill's preacher father is in prison for a crime that stunned me and he's most likely going to be stuck post-graduation, paying "family" debts. Lydia is a popular fashion blogger looking to get out of her oppressive town. Travis prefers a life of fantasy novels to his real one. Apart, it probably seems as though their friendship shouldn't work. Together, nothing else makes sense; they are right.... If you're going to live, you might as well do painful, brave, and beautiful things. I'm not going to lie. It took me up until about 10 - 15% before I really got sucked into the story. But mainly I think that was my issue. I was so worried about the possibility of this book preaching to me that I forgot to just sit back and read.

Dillard "Dill" Early is the only son of a disgraced former Bible Belt preacher who is currently serving prison time for downloading child pornography. He and his mother exist on a shoestring budget (although Dill does have a working cell phone), and she wants him to leave school early so that he can work full-time. She's also convinced that he was the one who downloaded the porn in the first place, so things are chilly between them. At school, he's a target of ridicule, and has only two friends: Lydia, who authors an insanely popular fashion blog, and Travis, who is obsessed with a literary fantasy world and whose dad may be physically abusing him. Travis also has no prospects beyond graduation, although Lydia is headed to college out of state, possibly in New York. In true young adult novel tradition, Dill also has a longtime crush on Lydia, which is unrequited because he's too shy to say anything and because their futures look so different. Dill is haunted by the memory of his grandfather, nicknamed *The Serpent King*, and fears he may one day become as unbalanced as the other men in his family. The topics of child molestation, homophobia, bullying, brainwashing and snake handling are addressed, as we get to know Dill and his friends. Wow. That's a lot of angst! Fortunately, it's handled well. "*The Serpent King*" offers three well-developed main characters with whom the reader is able to sympathize, which isn't necessarily the case in YA books today. The book does an excellent job of portraying the isolation and inertia a teenager in that

situation might feel. The parents in the book, except for Lydia's, are not likeable, but their perspective does offer a look at how Christianity can be twisted to suit one's own agenda.

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