



The Serpent King

Jeff Zentner

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Dillard Early, Jr., Travis Bohannon and Lydia Blankenship are three friends from different walks of life who have one thing in common: none of them seem to fit the mold in rural Tennessee's Forrestville High. Dill has always been branded as an outsider due to his family heritage as snake handlers and poison drinkers, an essential part of their Pentecostal faith. But after his father is sent to prison for sexual abuse of a young parishioner, Dill and his mother become real pariahs. His only two friends are Travis, a gentle giant who works at his family's lumberyard and is obsessed with a Game of Thrones-like fantasy series (much to his alcoholic father's chagrin); and Lydia, who runs a popular fashion blog that's part Tavi Gevinson and part Angela Chase, and is actively plotting her escape from Redneckville, Tennessee.

As the three friends begin their senior year, it becomes clear that they won't all be getting to start a promising new life after graduation. How they deal with their diverging paths could cause the end of their friendship. Until a shattering act of random violence forces Dill to wrestle with his dark legacy and find a way into the light of a future worth living.

The Serpent King Details

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From Reader Review The Serpent King for online ebook

Wendy Darling says

This felt very much like a debut, and unfortunately, none of the characters or story arcs surprised me or touched me nearly as much as they were supposed to. Best to sample this if you're curious, as I think you can tell fairly early on if the writing style suits you.

Apparently I'm the black sheep on this one, though. Baaaaa!

A review copy was provided by the publisher.

A Note to Those Who Think This Book is Amazing: This is one of those books that seems like a magnet for people who loved it to come on and tell everyone else how great it is. Please save yourself and me the time, and just move on or write your own review rather than talking around me or down to me. I'm glad you loved it, and that you have your own space on GoodReads to talk about it to your heart's desire. I deleted the last pointed comment because I've blocked that person after a long history and her long blog rant criticizing this very short, fairly even-tempered reaction to the book as well as the comments, but I will say that I will not be nearly as tolerant going forward. **Mind. Your. Own. Space.**

Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

“If you’re going to live, you might as well do painful, brave, and beautiful things.”

A week or so ago I claimed that it would be hard to top *Dark Matter* as my best read of 2016. Turns out I lied. It wasn't that hard at all. Once again Shelby (or more specifically, her NetGalley addiction) gets the credit for putting this one on my radar. She's a horrible old bitty like me and rarely gives out the 5 Stars so when she raved about *The Serpent King* (well, in all honesty it was when she posted a non giff-i-fied review) I knew I should take her seriously. I think she has emotions a little more often than I do, though, so I was **positive** my robot heart could make it through *The Serpent King* unscathed. After all . . .

But then I met Dill, a boy whose daddy was famous for being a snake-handling/strychnine drinking preacher, but has most recently become famous for activities most of us only see on Dateline. It was impossible not to immediately want to tuck Dill into a special corner of my heart . . .

“No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know peace. What if you know Jesus but have no peace?”

Dill introduced me to Lydia – a girl who marched to the beat of her own drum and somehow managed to be best friends with Dill although she didn't quite share his love for the Lord . . .

“Do you think that’s what Jesus really meant? Maybe he was like, ‘and theoretically, you could probably

'pick up snakes,' and Mark's over there writing and he's like, 'You should literally pick up snakes. Cool, Jesus, got it!' And Jesus is going, 'Well, calm down with the snake business. Don't be weird; just be a decent person. It's really more of a metaphor.' And Mark is writing, 'Definitely pick up actual literal snakes and drink actual real poison like rotten grape juice or other Bible-y poison.'"

(It probably goes without saying that Lydia was my people.)

Then the two kids introduced me to the final member of their trifecta – a boy named Travis who found what he believed in through a different sort of good book . . .

I can't remember the last time a book affected me this much or when I read a YA story with multiple narrators who had such distinct voices and personalities. I have placed *The Serpent King* on the "like-this-or-we-can't-be-friends" shelf. Normally that title is just for grins, but there's a good chance if you hate this one I will experience a severe case of the butthurt and not be able to speak to you anymore. (Have no fears, Ron 2.0, you get a pass for not liking **anything** that I do and all that jazz.) Everyone read this. It feeds my dark side to watch you all cry the ugly tears of a Kardashian, especially if I know you will be like me and look "**like your heart stepped on a Lego**" once you are finished. As for me, I'll be uhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh busy for awhile . . .

ARC provided by NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. Thank you, NetGalley!

Shelby *trains flying monkeys* says

This book just knocked a whole lot of books down on my favorites list and it's a young adult book. It's one of my top books ever and I'm terrified to review it because I'm so scared that I can't do it any justice and I want everyone to read this book.

People live quiet lives and that's okay. There's dignity in that, no matter what you may think.

Set in a rural Tennessee small town that was named after a big wig in the KKK the story takes place over one year. One year in the life of three teenagers that are in their last year of highschool.

Travis is a big guy that dresses all in black with a dragon necklace and his homemade staff. He wants to take that dang staff everywhere he goes. He is obsessed with a fantasy book series called Bloodfall and except for his two friends Dill and Lydia, he would rather live in his fantasy world and escape his abusive father.

"Rest, O Knight, proud in victory, proud in death. Let your name evermore be a light to those who loved you. Let white flowers grow upon this place that you rest. Yours was a life well lived, and now you dine in the halls of the Elders at their eternal feast."

"I had no idea those books meant that much to you Travis," Lydia murmured. "Now I fell all bad about making all those Bloodfall jokes."

"Does that mean you'll read them?"

"No."

Lydia is that free spirit. Her family is actually pretty well off and very supportive, but Lydia doesn't fit in with the small town Bible belt because she can't conform. She wears eclectic clothing and is sarcastic to almost being abrasive. She runs a blog on fashion advice called *Dollywould*. Lydia can not wait to get out of this hick town and take on the world.

Then you have Dill. Dill's preacher dad recently went to prison. Not for having his congregation handle copperheads and rattlesnakes or even for having them drink strychnine, but Dill's mom and of course his dad blame Dill for him ending up in prison. Dill hates life in the town and is teased and ridiculed because of who his father is. He and his mom swim in debt that his father left them and his Jesus freak mom can't wait for Dill to quit school and help her share some of the load of his father's bills. The only shining lights in Dill's life are his two friends and Lydia is leaving soon.

That is just a small peek at these characters. Because they all three are just so much more.

The author of this book writes this whole living in a small southern town to absolute perfection. The people, the setting, the smells in the air. Perfection. Then the whole having a dad in prison thing. My real life involved that and he completely wrapped me in this story. Even though my story was many years ago..I felt for this kid so much.

And depression. He describes that sinking cesspool of depression like I've never read before. If you haven't had a time in your life where you just could not get out of bed and make yourself function..this book puts you there.

But it's not just that. Don't think it's just a "head in the oven" book. It's a book about feeling trapped and moving on. Feeling you can't do what others say you can't and moving on. Standing up for yourself and moving on. It's about that light still shining.

"I read somewhere that a lot of the stars we see don't exist anymore. They've already died and it's taken millions of years for their light to reach Earth," Dill said.

"That wouldn't be a bad way to die," Lydia said. "Giving off light for million of years after you're gone."

I'm probably going to have to restrict myself from coming and looking at reviews for this book..because for the first time ever it's a book that I would want to troll someone for hating. I wouldn't do that because then I would be an asshole but I love this one just that much.

I was reading it last night and trying to keep from tears coming down my face and I looked and my husband had noticed. We are that weirdo family who make fun of each other for stuff like that...it's how we roll. He actually said he was surprised watching my face read this book. He said he had seen all my emotions go across my face. I couldn't even explain to him why I loved this book so much without sobbing. I think I am either menopausal or going crazy. I'm not a crier. I cried all through this dang book even though it's not entirely sad. The writing did that to me.

Jeff Zentner is a musician..who decided that he would write a book. It's hard for me to wrap my head around the fact that THIS book is his first book. I will rabidly pick up anything this guy puts out. He wants to write something on a napkin and throw it in the trash. I will dig in that trash and treasure that dirty napkin. Stop judging me.

Everybody just go read this book so that I'll shut up. I'm embarrassing my own damn self.

Netgalley in exchange for review

I love this review for this book so much. She gets this book.

Larry H says

Life is pretty tough for Dill Early. It wasn't always easy growing up as the son of a controversial Pentecostal minister who, along with members of his congregation, handled rattlesnakes and drank poison. But when his father runs afoul of the law and winds up in prison, life gets even harder for Dill. He must deal with the constant bullying of his high school classmates and the suspicion and cruel treatment of former church members and others in his small town of Forrestville, Tennessee.

The future looks bleak for Dill—he cannot even begin to consider college because he has to help his mother survive financially, given the mountain of debt they live with since his father's legal troubles occurred. But fortunately, his two best friends, Lydia and Travis—outcasts in their own right—are there to attempt to cheer him up and support him. Lydia, the creator of a fashion and culture blog, can't wait to get out of Forrestville and start a new life, hopefully as a student at NYU. Travis would rather spend time reading and re-reading his favorite series of fantasy books than focus on his own problems, which he has largely kept a secret from his friends.

As the end of their senior year in high school draws closer and closer, and Lydia gets more excited about leaving their town behind her, Dill gets more and more upset. He feels as if she'll be happy not only to get out of town, but to get rid of him and Travis, and that hurts him more and more, especially as Dill comes to realize just how strong his feelings are for her. Lydia tries to encourage Dill to think beyond the limits he and his mother have put on his future, tries to make him believe that college is an option. But Dill views her attempts to help as wanting to change him. And as events in their lives go from bad to worse, he's afraid to make himself even more vulnerable, and he doesn't want to jeopardize their relationship.

"Because we should do things we're afraid of. It makes it easier every time we do it."

The Serpent King is a beautiful and moving book, at times bleak and at times hopeful. It absolutely captured my heart and my mind. I loved these characters and their interactions with each other. These characters may be somewhat wise beyond their years but they act like real teenagers—you don't marvel at their dialogue at the same time you wonder whether teenagers really talk this way. I was utterly invested in this story from the very first page, and as much as I wanted to read the whole thing so quickly, I was really sad that it was over when I was finished.

This is a book about how we can't let our lives be dictated by our families or our heritage, and we can't let those around us limit our potential. But more than anything, this is a book about friendship and how it frees and changes us, and how we must find the courage to act on our desires and wishes before it's too late.

"And if you're going to live, you might as well do painful, brave, and beautiful things."

Jeff Zentner is such an assured writer; it's amazing to think this is his debut novel. I really loved this, and once again, I marvel at the amazing talent being demonstrated in the YA genre these days, although this isn't a book just for young adults by any means.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blogspot.com>....

Jeff Zentner says

I wrote this book, and I'm giving it five stars--not because I think it's a flawless book. Rather, because in it, I was able to say exactly what I wanted to say, tell the exact story I needed to tell, and because Dill, Lydia, and Travis were born into the world exactly as they came to me in my mind.

I'm giving it five stars because it has resulted in my meeting the most amazing people--readers, booksellers, teachers, librarians, bloggers, reviewers, other authors--and making some of the best friends I've ever had.

I'm giving it five stars because it allowed me to reach the audience I most wanted to reach: young people.

I'm giving it five stars because it changed my life permanently for the better in more ways than I can count.

Adam Silvera says

This book will punch you in the heart. In a good way. A punch to the heart isn't usually a good idea, but it is here. **THE SERPENT KING** is a literary knockout pulsing with faith, tragedy, and hope.

C.G. Drews says

THERE ARE NO WORDS TO DESCRIBE HOW FREAKING AMAZING THIS BOOK IS AND HOW MUCH I ADORE IT. Well, wait. I will use words. Psychotic words most likely BUT WORDS because *omg I loved this book so much*. It is gut-wrenching and precious and inspiring and hopeful and **balances darkness and hope using some of the best storytelling I've experienced in a long time**. There is not enough FLAILING in the world for how much I want to FLAIL RIGHT NOW.

Shout out to this book for existing! Shout out to it for smashing my *heart* and then being so inspiring I think I need to go eat a planet in celebration.

It's basically a story of survival and friendship in a backwards country town. It's narrated by three teens, **Dill, Lydia, and Travis** and usually I don't like that many POVs. bUt omg. Each person was *complex* and interesting and loveable and heartbreaking. I love love *loved* them all. **LIKE DON'T EVEN ASK ME TO CHOOSE A FAVOURITE.**

• **DILL:** he's the son of a preacher who's just been imprisoned for sexual charges and **EVERYBODY** knows Dill and is disgusted by him. Tiny town, remember? Country hicks = not very forgiving. His mother hates him, school is hell, he's got **NO FUTURE** because he's stuck in this town and his best friend Lydia is leaving for college and basically ajfdkaslfda **he was tragic and adorable and quiet and nearly broken** and I couldn't love him more. He DOES lash out irrationally with passive-aggressive arguments with Lydia. But I get it?!? When you face losing someone, sometimes you push them away first to help dull the pain. **BUT IT JUST MADE ME LOVE HIM MORE.** Plus he's musical!! Composes!! **BLESS THIS BOOK!!**

• **LYDIA:** she's a super famous fashion blogger and only 17 #NoImNotJealousHaHaHa. And she's

fashionable, super sassy, epically fabulous, definitely not skinny, and has a future of success paved out before her. Plus she has the mOST EPIC PARENT-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP EVER. The banter with the parents was so spot on!! Omg!! I love how she as flawed *and* flawless. Trust me, it works. She was a go-getter, but also a dreamer, and her two best-friends were dorks, which automatically means she's a glorious person. Also sorry not sorry but I 100% imagined her as Lydia from Teen Wolf.

• **TRAVIS:** He was the most adorable dork to ever dork in the universe. He's OBSESSED with fantasy, specifically this trilogy which he can't stop talking about. He's big and kind and unassuming and just downright *lovely*. Books about lovely boys need to be more of a thing. And he starts writing and just ajfdsakfd I LOVED TRAVIS AND HE WAS SO PRECIOUS AND PERFECT. He had the most horrible dad who abused him and it broke me. 3 He reminded me of Adam from The Raven Boys but no bitterness, just 100% gorgeous personality despite his horrible homelife.

HOW ARE THESE CHARACTERS ALL SO PRECIOUS???? I can't get over the fact that they felt so REAL. I didn't want to ever stop reading this book. And this is only the author's debut?? Sign me up to read anything by Jeff Zentner ever.

Did I mention the writing?!? Flawless. It was heavily dialogue centred and balanced the most HILARIOUS humour ever with purely poignant scenes with words I never want to stop thinking about. But seriously, I laughed out loud several times. HONKED, ACTUALLY. And my dog looked displeased. And **any story about three best friends** making the best out of bad situations is the kind of story I'm infinitely in love with. It described everything SO WELL. And the contrast?!? Like Lydia's rich family as opposed to Travis' cruel father as opposed to Dill's dying house of poison??? I CAN'T GET OVER HOW VISUALLY AMAZING IT WAS. And heartbreaking. Like, dude. Break my heart. Walk all over it. I don't even mind obviously.

There are religious tones in it too, which concerned me at first....but turned out okay. Like I just avoid religious books avidly. And I don't even know WHAT kind of "Christian" believes in handling snakes and drinking poison but...okay then. But like it didn't slam religion?? It slammed religion that damages people and it laid out how wrong it is to ruin people's lives because of your "religious beliefs". But I just really like how it was all handled. And Dill's father was totally insane. Just sayin'. Please don't touch snakes, kids. DO NOT.

Also it really tackles mental illness and it does so flawlessly. Like depression? This is the kind of book that gets depression 100% right. (view spoiler)

AND IT BROKE ME INTO A MILLION PIECES. As all the good books do, obviously. But seriously, one minute I was laughing and the next I HAD NO AIR.

ALL IN ALL: this books is incredible and everyone everywhere should read it. Immediately. Like gooooooo. This is one of the BEST BOOKS I'VE READ THIS YEAR. I'm not crying, you're crying. It totally stole a piece of my soul and I'm totally okay with that. **It was brutal and hopeful** which is a combination I want to see more in books. The writing = perfect. The characters = my new best friends. My heart = A MESS.

I LIKE THIS BOOK A LOT, CAN YOU TELL.

----- QUOTES -----

Lydia set down her phone and began typing a post about the road trip to Nashville, shopping at Attic, and some thoughts on the first day of school. She got stuck and began looking for ways to procrastinate.

#HellaRelatable

"And anyway, how is a coffee shop Christian?"

"It implies that normal coffee shops are satanic."

"Which they totally are. It's like, can I please just get a cup of coffee without having to kneel before Lucifer and pledge my eternal soul?"

"Here's your latte. Will that be cash, credit, or the blood of a virgin?"

"I had no idea those books meant *that* much to you, Travis," Lydia murmured. "Now I feel bad about making all those Bloodfall jokes."

"Does this mean you'll read them?"

"No."

"I mean, it's not like she doesn't like *anything*. It just has to be Christian. Really Christian," Dill said.

"Like the Bible barely makes the cut because Christ is only in the second half," Lydia said.

??? 2.? says

Some reviews—a pitiful few—seem to write themselves, while others require extensive time to collect my thoughts, or a knock-down drag-out battle with procrastination. But once in a blue moon, I stumble across a story like this one that's another animal altogether.

After finishing this book, rather than posting a timely review like a decent little goodreader, I instead teased out an absurd question, "Do I dare slap five stars on a silly little young adult story?" Well . . . now that my emotional scars have had sufficient time to heal, I think I'm finally ready to answer that question.

Absolutely! Any book that can put me through the wringer—twist me inside out—and run through the whole gamut of human emotions is well deserving of all the stars.

The Serpent King is the story of three friends—three social outcast—and their senior year of high school in the sleepy little backwater town of Forrestville, Tennessee. Travis is a Hodor sized Lord of the Rings type uber-nerd, fond of dressing like a wizard and carrying an oaken staff. Lydia is a straight-A student with a popular fashion blog, who's counting down the days until her real life can begin at NYU. But it's Dill

who's the heart and soul of the book. A fledgling musician caught between a rock and a hard place—living in two worlds, but a part of neither. On one side is his father's congregation, and on the other is the rest of the town that looks down their nose at their weird snake-handling faith. As the pastor's son, it would have been a challenge to fit into high school as it was, but to make matters worse his father's sent off to prison for peddling in kiddie porn, and it was his Dill's own testimony that was responsible for putting him away. Reviled by the flock for refusing to take the blame, when his father insisted that the computer photos were Dill's, and shunned by the community for his faith and family, Dill's only solace is the love and support of his best friends.

“He squinted to read the sign out of habit. ‘No Jesus, No Peace. Know Jesus, Know Peace.’ What if you know Jesus but have no peace? Does that mean the sign is wrong, or does that mean you don’t know Jesus quite as well as you think?”

Through a multiple point of view narrative we soon learn what remarkable friends they are, and the greater the outside pressure, teasing, and bullying—from classmates and parents—the stronger the bond becomes.

Dill's resigned to his fate though, completely closed off to the idea of ever escaping this awful place. With his dad in prison and his mom barely scraping by, it's up to Dill to pick up the slack, so his chance at college and creating a better life for himself is virtually nil. However, with the clock ticking down to the day when Lydia will walk out of his life forever, a tragedy strikes that shakes him to the very foundation of his being . . .

This book was an emotional roller-coaster. It wasn't the tragedy so much as the fallout that left such a lasting impression on me. **“Something broke loose inside Dill’s mind. Something that had been moored against the roaring tumult. It came untethered and crashed around with reckless abandon—burning, shattering, consuming. He stopped seeing color and all became a swirling, howling, leaden gray desolation. But the pain hadn’t arrived. The way the sea recedes before a tsunami, so every part of him receded. And then the pain struck.”** Watching as the characters attempt to cope in the aftermath is what separated the story from countless other young adult dramas, in my mind, and elevated the narrative into something truly special.

What's weird is that I tend to shy away from the young adult section of the library because most stories are riddled with one or more of the following: teen-angst, clichéd narratives, sparkly vampire love triangles, special snowflakes, dystopian savior complexes, or suicide glorification. Honestly, what self-respecting middle-aged man still reads that shit? However, I am a sucker for coming of age tales, and this one managed to snare me in its web rather quickly, with pitch-perfect dialog, discussions of music and mixtapes, and down-to-earth, relatable characters.

In the end, I suppose that's what it boils down with most stories: much of your love or hate is predetermined by how well you connect with the characters on an emotional level. And this one left me feeling like my **“heart had stepped on a Lego.”**

That's the power of a coming of age story when done right. And this terrific tale of love, loss, and friendship receives my highest recommendation. Five stars . . . full stop.

Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says

THIS. FREAKING. BOOK!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I loved it soooooooooooooo much. It broke my freaking heart and gave me joy and broke my heart some more. It's just so wonderful! And the feels in this book are beyond what I can say in my pitiful little review. All I know is if you have been meaning to read this book and have been putting it off, READ IT - you just might find it as wonderful as I did.

The main characters are, Dill, Travis and Lydia and I love them so much! They are some of the most awesome characters I have read in awhile. Dill is the son of the crazy, snake, preacher man. Travis is a fantasy book fanatic whom you can not help but love. He goes around with his dragon necklace and his staff and is constantly reading his favorite author's books. And Lydia is the one that has the money with a father as a dentist and I think her mom was in real estate. Either way, her parents are wonderful people, the boys parents, not so much.

Dill's preacher father ends up in jail for reasons. And Dill's mom doesn't even want Dill to finish his last year of high school or go to college, because of reasons.

Travis has a really sweet mom but a jerk for a father. He's a drunk and he's always calling Travis names etc.

Lydia runs a very popular blog (<--I wish I did) talking about any and everything. She's going to go to college and make something of herself. The boys, not so much, but they finally came up with their own plan. And poor Dill has a crush on Lydia but don't want to tell her. It all eventually comes out when other things happen. And Lydia made me laugh hysterically many times while reading this book! (thank you, Lydia, I needed that)

Dill is also a brilliant singer/songwriter/guitarist.

As much as I loved these characters and this book, there were some parts that just ripped my heart out and threw it on the floor.

I really have nothing else to say about it without giving out spoilers. I had all of this stuff I wanted to say while reading it and I should have written them all down. I would have liked to put my many feels in the book, but then again, I would have had to add spoilers and I don't like to do that unless they are mild. There is nothing much mild to this book.

I hope many more people love this book as much as I did and I cried a few times and laughed a few times. The perfect book, okay . . . not so much the crying because I'm tired of crying in books!

Fin ♥

MY BLOG: [Melissa Martin's Reading List](#)

Matthew says

Warning: This review will risk some controversy! Just remember if you read it that I approach everything with an open mind and that I know that my opinion does not match everyone's – meaning I know that we are all different and I would not argue with people on here to prove that my opinion is correct.

Overall, I thought this was a great book. It was very easy to read. The story was creative and the characters were interesting. At times, emotions ran high and it hit my feels in all the right places. I think that it is one of the better YA books that I have read recently.

Now . . . the controversy! Remember, in my profile I mention that I don't like to get into arguments over religion. I just think this is very relevant to this book and would not mind an open discussion about it. (Trolls need not apply!)

One of the things plaguing the world recently is stereotyping religions. On TV, on the internet, in comments sections, etc. people are made to feel bad because of their religion. Also, the few people who are doing religion wrong or crazy are ruining it for the rest of us! One thing I have seen is Christians depicted as intolerant and judgmental with crazy beliefs that they force on the whole world. As part of their daily activities, they mention God and finding Jesus to everyone they meet and look down severely on anyone who does not agree with them.

I am a Christian and none of this describes me. I enjoy the solace that my religion gives me, but I don't spend time judging others and telling people they are wrong because they are not like me. I believe in science and evolution. I feel like debates to prove whether religion is right or wrong are silly and only serve to perpetuate malice between people who have a difference of opinion. I think those of you who have known me on here for a while know that I read a variety of books, have a variety of friends, and I am kind to all. I get frustrated when I see everything blamed on Christians and worry that if people know I am a Christian they will think that I am part of the problem. But, I am not ashamed of what I am – Christianity should be about love and not hate and I try to live my life every day to make sure that describes me.

Okay . . . so the reason that I am ranting . . . this book leans really heavy on the side of Christians being intolerant nutjobs that are not very accepting of those not like them; that they are likely to do strange things in their church, molest children, refuse to let their kids be friends with non-Christians (or not be happy about it if they are), etc. I was hoping that maybe by the end of the book some middle ground would have been reached to show that not all Christianity is like that, but it doesn't really. It makes me a bit sad because this is a great book that I could see a lot of people reading and I don't want them to come out of it with that negative viewpoint!

Just remember – just like not all Muslims are terrorists, not all Christians are intolerant, hateful jerks!

Giselle (Book Nerd Canada) says

A finished copy was provided by the publisher for review.

Told in the point of views of three characters Dill, Travis and Lydia, we have a story that is memorable, deep and tragic. Dill has a reputation trashed by his father. Travis has an obsession with a book series that is

similar to "Game of Thrones" and Lydia is the smart sassy fashion blogger who wants nothing but to head out to college and leave the small Tennessee town behind.

I can't even begin to write this review because I'm all choked up with emotions. I am so glad I'm not the black sheep.. So I have this thing where I don't actually read what the descriptions are about (sometimes) and I did that with this book. I initially thought this would be some sort of rain forest fantasy adventure based on the cover. Granted I didn't see the silhouette of the kids on the bridge until later, so imagine to my surprise when I started reading it was a contemporary! Then I was hooked from the beginning. This rarely happens to me with realistic fiction so I pretty much gobbled it up in two sittings. It's a little about religion, a lot about friendship, family and love. Definitely a coming-of-age story that will keep you glued to its pages. I know I was.

The book contains: some disgusting Un-Christian-like behaviour. I couldn't help but cringe at times. There is swearing and even Homophobic slurs.. You will also have some of the most horrible parents as well as some of the best found in the book. Oh and I have to mention Lydia's present to Travis? Probably every book nerd's dream! I cried out of happiness when that part happened.

I can't sing enough praises. LOVED this book to pieces. Jeff Zentner made these characters so real to me. Made me care about each and every one of them. Cried twice (at two certain parts) and couldn't stop remembering all the emotions I felt while reading this. Highly recommended! One of my favourite and memorable reads of the year! Run and pick up your copy, I really hope you loved it as much as I did!

RATING 5/5

QUOTES

"You ask for plenty without ever actually asking for it." (3)

"Times are simpler when no one hates you because of your name and it doesn't occur to you to be ashamed of it." (64)

"Folks is afraid of grief. Think it's catching, like a disease." (71)

"You hate yourself for not being as brave as the people you love to read about. And you just want to be somewhere where no one makes you feel that way." (104)

"You don't need options in life. You need Jesus." (142)

"Because we should do things we're afraid of. It makes it easier every time we do it." (191)

"We need to take care of each other from now on. We need to be each other's family because ours are so messed up. We need to make better lives for ourselves. We gotta start doing stuff we're afraid to do." (233)

"I want you to be careful in this world. My heart is wrapped up in you." (270)

"I've made books my life because they let me escape this world of cruelty and savagery." (277)

"You won't be living in a shitty small town anymore, where people try to make themselves feel better by making other people feel smaller." (314)

Lori says

Another great coming of age story!

Warning contents may contain spoilers!

The religious beliefs are part of the background. I didn't get the impression that the author was anti-Christian, nor even especially opposed to snake handling as an expression of faith. There are communities where it is a demonstration of belief. Dill's life is in one. In a lot of ways, it's the least of his problems. His father is Pastor Early.

It had thoroughly scandalized Forestville, Tennessee when Pastor Early of the Church of Christ's Disciples with Signs of Belief went to the state penitentiary—and not for the reasons anyone expected. Everyone assumed he'd get in trouble someday for the twenty-seven or so rattlesnakes and copperheads his congregants passed around each Sunday. No one knew with certainty what law they were breaking, but it seemed unlawful somehow. And the Tennessee Department of Wildlife did take custody of the snakes after his arrest. Or people thought perhaps he'd run afoul of the law by inducing his flock to drink diluted battery acid and strychnine; another favored worship activity. But no, he went to Riverbend Prison for a different sort of poison: possession of more than one hundred images depicting a minor engaged in sexual activity.

A lot of the small-town rumor and speculation aimed at Dill. Guilt by association. Some people assume that he lied in court to protect himself. A man of God would never do something so wrong. Dill's mother would prefer to believe that it was his porn. Both of his parents blame Dill for his father's imprisonment. A minor would not have been prosecuted. If Dill had claimed the porn, then his father would not be in prison, and they wouldn't be in debt. His father rationalizes his imprisonment as being part of God's plan. I'm here because the Lord wanted me to minister to other inmates. Their emotional blackmail on this kid is relentless. While it's wrapped in scripture, I just thought that they're selfish and self-serving. Your child's best interest should come before your own. Expecting him to lie and perjure himself to protect his father's sin and crime is not an aspect of Christ mission fulfilled on earth. Ministry to the imprisoned is one of the Corporal Works of Mercy that Christians perform. I understand that the prison is distant, but that's why church groups organize bus trips for community outreach.

On the bright side, Dill has a couple of friends. Travis' story broke my heart. And, I liked Lydia and her parents. She's not completely likable, but a plausible enough character.

Annet says

And if you're going to live, you might as well do painful, brave and beautiful things...

Great book, heartbreaker & feelgood... review to follow. First, to work!

....Home from work! But tired...I'm not as young as the main character youngsters in this book :-) I'll tell this: the book was wonderful until about 60%, then I lost a bit of interest, and it picked up again in the end. Four stars! Story of three young friends final year in college, going to university and knowing they will go their different ways.... an extraordinary combination... Dill, son of imprisoned Pastor Dillard Early Sr., in prison

because of child porn.... handler of snakes in his church. Dill is a troubled kid due to this weird situation. Lydia, a mind of her own, successful blogger and fashionista, parents who are well off and love her, who give her space to live her life the way she wants it, and Travis, a big guy with passion for fantasy books & games, abused by his drunk father.... Dill, Lydia and Travis are true friends. The story is really beautiful, leading up to a tragic event about midway in the story.

I have to say, after that the story gets a bit mushy, a bit lovey dovey, without giving away too much details. Now that bored me a bit after a while, so the glimmering 4.5>5 stars went back to let's say 3.8 for me. The ending: strong. All in all, an emotional, well written story, grabs you by the heart and yes, ... I cried, lying in my bed reading.... had to stop at one point.

So, I've said it before and will say it again, a book that makes me cry must be a good book (unless it is from sheer frustration of course :-)). 4 stars& recommended. My first 'ponderings' about this book... Special.

Dill's lyrics:

Moonlight. Calm after thunderstorm.

Scarecrows. Dusty bibles. Abandoned houses.

Fireflies. Sunlight through dust. Fallen leaves.

Churchyard cemetery. Gray autumn sky.

River levee. Gravel Road. Wind chimes.

Wood smoke. Train whistle on winter night.

Kudzu on telephone pole. Hymnal falling apart.

White crosses by highway. Cicada hum.

Shadows. Sparrows. Rust. Railroad crossing

*lights through fog. Crickets. Dance of leaves
in wind. Decaying barn. Field after harvest.*

Clouds covering moon. Quiet dusk. Lightning.

Heartbeats.

Lola says

“The Serpent King” is absolutely captivating.

It's sad but it's also very inspiring. Jeff Zentner wrote a debut novel here worthy of your shelves, time and attention.

It's original in a way that is realistic. The characters—Dill, Lydia and Travis—have an authentic voice. They are quite different one from the other, yet they are as thick as thieves.

Dill is a musician, struggling daily with the effects of the sins of his father, literally. His father whom is now behind bars.

Travis's brother died, which changed his father enormously, so much that he became verbally and physically abusive.

And Lydia, well, she has no money problems, no family problems—in fact, she's got it pretty easy compared to everybody else, but she needs to learn to accept her friends as they are. She isn't done growing up, either.

It's a poignant coming-of-age novel that is reminiscent of “The Perks of Being a Wallflower.”

Unlike the title and perhaps cover may suggest, and unlike I first thought, there is no magical realism. Everything is very much realistic, unfortunately. No matter where you live—New York, Montréal, Budapest, a random small town no one knows of—you cannot escape life, meaning that bad things happen to everyone, all over the world.

But you can decide whether to get up or stay down.

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jessica says

'if you're going to live, you might as well do painful, brave, and beautiful things.'

if you asked me what i took away from this story, it would be the importance of living life with dignity and courage. the courage to be yourself. the courage to forge your own path. the courage to leave for better things. the courage to stand up for yourself and others. the courage to question what you believe. the courage to do what scares you. and most importantly, the courage to live life. we could all do better with a little more courage.

4 stars
