



## The Serpent Papers

**Jeff Schnader**

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Probing the consciences of people and a nation during a pivotal era, *The Serpent Papers* is a novel about the intricacies of decision-making and taking a stand when life itself is at risk.

Growing up in the 1960s, J-Bee, the son of an admiral in the US Navy, is caught up in the national conflict over the Vietnam War. Events demand a choice between his military family's expectations and his own revulsion for violence. Further complicating his decisions are his loyalty to his best friend, Gilly, who volunteered for duty and was sent to Vietnam, and his tormented memories of his act of vengeance, which stopped just short of murder, against the bullies who caused the death of his younger brother.

Rebelling against the violence of his heritage and his conflicted Catholic upbringing, J-Bee refuses to follow the military track after high school graduation. Instead, he attends Columbia University, a "hotbed of radicalism" and the home of "commie-pinko organizers." A battle brews inside of him—one that he feels will either lead to redemption, or to hellfire.

When J-Bee finds himself in the midst of a campus protest, confronted by phalanxes of New York Tactical Police in battle garb, he reflects on the logic of his anti-war girlfriend and the campus café readings of the mysterious "Serpent." With violence tattooed on his soul from birth, has he changed enough to stand with "an anti-war rabble" against his ingrained identity? His answer to that question sets him on a surprising course.

Raw and intimate, *The Serpent Papers* is a novel about the development of one's personal values, the costs of following one's conscience when it dictates conflict with "group think," and notions of what it means to be a man and a patriot.

KRISTINE MORRIS (January / February 2022)

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