



Unreliable

Lee Irby

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Riotous and riveting, this is the story of a charming college professor who most definitely did not but maybe did kill his ex-wife. Or someone else. Or no one. Irby plays with the thriller trope in unimaginably clever ways.

Edwin Stith, a failed novelist and college writing instructor in upstate New York, is returning home for the weekend to Richmond, Virginia, to celebrate his mother's wedding to a much younger man. Edwin has a peculiar relationship with the truth. He is a liar who is brutally honest. He may or may not be sleeping with his students, he may or may not be getting fired, and he may or may not have killed his ex-wife, a lover, and his brand-new stepsister.

Stith's dysfunctional homecoming leads him deep into a morass of long-gestating secrets and dangers, of old-flames still burning strong and new passions ready to consume everything he holds dear. But family dysfunction is only eclipsed by Edwin's own, leading to profound suspense and utter hilarity. Lee Irby has crafted a sizzling modern classic of dark urges, lies, and secrets that harks back to the unsettling obsessions of Edgar Allan Poe with a masterful ending that will have you thinking for days."

Unreliable Details

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Author : Lee Irby

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From Reader Review Unreliable for online ebook

Gayle says

Clever and unique, Unreliable isn't your typical 'who done it' thriller, but rather a 'did what' Yes, definitely a great, big mystery of did what???

I highly recommend this unusual read. I wasn't trying to guess throughout the story as the author veers the reader away from the big reveal with a storyline that unfolds as we get to know our protagonist and narrator.

The ending...didn't see that coming! Bravo!

I won this book in a giveaway from Penguin Random House LLC prior to its lay-down date. All ratings and reviews are my own.

Catharine says

I was fortunate enough to read an advanced copy of Unreliable and was pleasantly riveted and kept in suspense from the beginning. The way the main character's trains of thought are written is almost too realistic, you can completely understand how his brain would work that way.

At first it reminded me of a James Patterson book but not long after getting through the first chapter did I realize that this goes beyond his style of stories. It focuses more on the characters' emotional states and has a less obvious, yet omnipresent, sense of suspense. I can't wait to buy an official copy and if you want a different type of mystery book I highly suggest you buy it as well when it is published in April!

Bam says

This is a wild and crazy story, told by an unreliable narrator, as the title warns the reader. Edwin Stith is a professor at a college in Ithaca, NY, who drives down to Richmond, VA, for his mother's second wedding. The reader is privy to his dark thoughts, which are often about women he may or may not have murdered, including his ex-wife--though we are advised not to believe anything he says.

Edwin claims he may lose his position at the college because he has been carrying on an affair with a college student, who frequently sends him texts with photos of her sexual activities. While in Richmond, he decides to end it with her and she resolves to come down to talk to him.

In the meantime, Edwin is dealing with his rather wacky, soon-to-be step-family. And he begins seeing an old high school girlfriend, who seems to have some problems of her own.

What to believe, what to believe. This story keeps the reader guessing right up to the end--which I, for one, never saw coming.

Sara Mack says

This is an awesome mystery novel packed with likable, well-developed characters and a premise that is sometimes eery, and at other times, totally normal. That's the best thing about this book: as a reader, it's hard to put your finger on really anything. The main character, Edwin, is wildly intriguing and complex. It could be that Edwin is a normal guy who ends up in bad situations. As the story pans out, the reader gets the sense that Edwin probably isn't a bad guy and we might feel bad for him. Or is he a bad guy? Hard to tell. Just when you think you understand what's happening, there's a shocking twist that will leave you thinking over and over what you just read. The setting of the novel does a great job at establishing the mood, while the writing is witty, and maybe even funny, during times of uncertainty. And it works. It definitely works.

♥ Sandi ♥ says

3.5 stars - Thank you to Turning Pages and Doubleday for providing this book for a truthful review.

If a person was ever unsure of what an unreliable author was, in this book you have just met the Master. The ability to say one thing and make you believe another, or lead you in one direction, that is completely wrong, and you in all gullibility follow right along. Usually an unreliable author is more protective of his waywardness or deceit, often not revealing the real truth until the end, Irby tells you not to believe him right in his first few sentences - that he intends to mislead you.

This is the story of a disgraceful professor, Edwin, headed home to attend the second wedding of his mother. That is about all that is truthful in this book.

In the beginning I enjoyed the game - what to believe and what not to believe - and once brought back to light, do I change my mind on what I believe? However as the book went on it became a bit frustrating for me - the blatant unreliability. I needed something solid in the book and was not finding anything other than the fact I did not like Edwin and could not believe anything he said or said he did. I needed a constant to hang on to and it wasn't there. As another reader said "Edwin was a total mixture of truth and lies, at the very end we still don't know which of his thoughts were actually truth and which were actually lies. I think the biggest lies were lies to himself."

Jack Davis says

I read the draft, during a busy time, and the book drew me right in. Witty and lyrical writing. Wonderful characters. Some of whom I wanted to meet in person.

Sonia Reppe says

So fun I couldn't put it down!

On the surface, Eddie is a college English professor/inspiring writer who travels back home to Richmond, Virginia for his mom's wedding. He hints that a crime will be revealed--either it's happened or he's planning

it to happen (or both--more than one crime?). There is some mystery surrounding a student with whom he had an amorous relationship, and maybe some drama from an ex-wife.

Although the description says this "plays with the thriller trope," this doesn't feel like a thriller. There is definitely suspense, but this feels more like a screwball quest (evade the cops and be there for his mom on her big day) with indignities and set-backs being thrown at him along the way.

I love this description from Library Journal (credit Lindsay Morton): *"In a first-person narrative that is at times coy, discursive, pompous, and frenetic, Eddie drags readers through two jam-packed days in the aftermath of a crime that has driven him over the edge."*

His adventures include run-ins with an old high school girlfriend plus her angry brother and his posse, and getting pulled along on side missions by his soon-to-be step sister and brother. How bad is this crime that he is guilty of? Is he just making it up because he likes to imagine what would happen if he were in a novel (being the writer that he is)? He shifts between warning the reader not to trust him, and spinning himself in a sympathetic light (he is a son who cares about his mother). Yet he keeps insisting there was a crime and something's going to go down. He is definitely intriguing and entertaining, and capable of smart, wry observations, but ultimately unreliable.

Jessica Arriola says

I really enjoyed this!! It was such a great mystery novel! I immediately started asking questions and trying to figure out what went on, but I couldn't always guess it because, Edwin, the main character is really complex, yet interesting. The whole book seems to mirror pretty close to human emotions and good and bad qualities, which keeps a reader's interest from the beginning to end.

Joey says

Irby's latest swan song will resonate for quite some time. His no holds barred prose is a kamikazee shot one part vitriol, one part comedy, and garnished with mystique.

This book to literary pundits should be in the same vane as Kanye West's Dark Twisted Fantasy to hip hop junkies. Unreliable takes the self-published Van, douses it in descriptive gasoline and violently throws a dramatic Molotov cocktail of reality just to watch it all explode into something beautiful dripping in fear and loathing.

The allusions to Poe's work should be closely examined. As if Poe's often cryptic writing had the ability to predict future events (ala Richard Parker), Irby's latest should be put under the dusty and cobwebbed magnifying glass.

The reference to the book's title is finally introduced on page 222 (the magic number). "You're unreliable. In an endearing way."

Bonus points awarded for sampling Bright Eyes, The Replacements, and "The Only Band That Matters."

I am wicked proud of my professor and his vigilant ending. Let us celebrate our Independence Day.

A+

Debbie says

A claustrophobic story that puts you entirely in the head of an early middle aged college professor as he arrives from Ithaca to Richmond, Virginia for his mother's re-marriage to a much younger man with dubious connections and two insufferable college age children. Eddie Stith is the very model of the inappropriate college professor who may or may not have been having an affair with one of his students. He may or may not have murdered someone, perhaps his ex-wife, or perhaps her new lover. Eddie is coy about what is and what is not true, and maybe he does not know himself. Eddie, and everyone in the story with the exception of his long suffering mother, is unreliable and self deluded. Running through the narrative are references to Edgar Allen Poe and Richmond's Confederate past and current standing of its Confederate statues. Delusion seems to be running through the entire book, including his mother's blindness to her fiance's shortcomings. It all adds up to an overly long Hitchcockian Psycho-drama. But still, often amusing and with many clever turns of phrase.

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

The central premise at the heart of Lee Irby's *Unreliable* is a fascinating one, and led me to believe that this would be one of the few crime thrillers I would actually like, a genre I usually find intolerably formulaic; namely, a failed mystery author and current college professor announces to us on page one that he recently killed his ex-wife, but then immediately follows that up with the confession that he might actually be kidding, promising a metafictional meditation on the act of genre writing and the nature of unreliable narrators, a taut psychological thriller in which we never know whether this guy is messing with us or not until the very end. Unfortunately, though, Irby pulls a pretty big switcheroo as the book continues; for the more we read, the more we realize that this "did he or didn't he kill her" shtick is simply a cheap gimmick designed to draw readers in, but that the story itself is nothing more than a character-based literary dramedy about a deeply flawed middle-aged son visiting his family and old hometown, and all the wacky foibles that happen within such a milieu, having nothing to do with murder whatsoever.

That unto itself is not necessarily a terrible thing -- once you get past the premise, the rest reads much like a smart and witty Richard Russo or Michael Chabon tale, benefiting from its deep look at the town of Richmond, Virginia right at a point when it is internally debating the future of the Dixiecrat-era Confederate statues still dotting the city -- but when you were expecting a serious and dramatic crime thriller that doubles as a Postmodernist statement on the act of writing crime thrillers, as its dust jacket unambiguously promises ("Irby plays with the thriller trope in unimaginably clever ways"), the bait-and-switch on display here can't help but to be a big disappointment, not the fault of the author but a problem clearly resting on the shoulders of the Doubleday marketing staff. Now that you know the situation, you'll be able to approach this book with the right mindset and enjoy it a lot more than I did; but do yourself a favor and shed any assumptions you might have about this being an actual crime novel.

Out of 10: **6.0**, but **8.0** if you ignore the dust jacket

Denny says

I read *Unreliable* after seeing it advertised & lauded on Goodreads. From the beginning, I did not much like it and almost gave up on it at least 3 times in the first 100 pages. The plethora of glowing reviews and back cover blurbs convinced me to hang in, though. I wish I hadn't.

There is not a single likable or sympathetic character in the book. None of the red herrings or plot twists are satisfactorily resolved. And the "shocking surprise ending" just isn't.

I can offer one compliment. Irby boldly proclaims that the 1st-person narrator, protagonist Eddie Stith, is unreliable. Throughout the book, failed novelist Stith protests too much that he is not a bad writer. If Irby's goal was to write a book that was convincingly written by a bad writer, he succeeded spectacularly.

Beth says

I received an advance copy of this book and I didn't think I had time to read it. I read the first few chapters and I was intrigued - did the narrator do it - or not? His backstory was fascinating. I found myself thinking about the book during the day and when I was on a flight for work (where I was supposed to be doing other things) I found myself reaching for the book. Of course I did not put the book down - and I will not spoil the ending, but I will say that it was worth not getting any work done! The ending was both satisfying and intriguing. I like the historically setting, I got some of the Poe references, but it is a contemporary novel and I could see myself in some of the characters.

Steve Wiggins says

This is a smart, fun read. Since I dabble in the area of fiction between humor and horror, this novel appealed to me innately. A professor down on his luck (believe me, I understand!), is drawn into several simultaneous trials: his mother is remarrying, a student with whom he had an affair is following him, a former girlfriend in his hometown is marrying against her will, there's weapons trafficking going on in his childhood home. What more could go wrong?

Not only Poe, as the cover suggests, but several writers influence this highly literate tale of things gone wrong. Irby may have produced the most unreliable narrator ever. From the beginning Edwin Stith tells you directly not to believe what he's writing. Even at the end the truth isn't clear, but the power of description along the way is compelling. There were parts where I wanted to stand up and applaud (hard to do when reading on a plane) because the scenes were so well drawn. There's a lot of fun and a lot of seriousness wrapped up here together and it's unclear what is really going on. In other words, it's a lot like real life.

I blogged about this book as well (Sects and Violence in the Ancient World), since although it doesn't deal with religion, it does touch on many ethical issues and it's just plain enjoyable to read.

Mary says

Oh, Eddie! You ARE unreliable...and unpredictable, aren't you? Still, I quickly fell for your charming personality. (Maybe it was the trucker hat. I'm fond of hats, too.) Loved the Edgar Allen Poe comparisons! I was a major fan of Poe in high school, sitting at attention in English class, both fascinated and horrified. Edward Stith could be a modern day Poe, mixed in with Nabokov's Humbert Humbert. He could also be a kinder version of Ted Bundy. Or...maybe Eddie has a vivid imagination and is researching the novel he longs to write. I mean, c'mon. Eddie is so considerate and such a dutiful son. He's an everyday hero, coming to the rescue of all the miscreants that have wormed their way into his life. And that sense of humor! So witty. Besides, Stith is a college professor and everyone knows that college professors are trustworthy and reliable.

Unreliable was a delicious read, filled with marvelous mayhem. Loved it!

*Thanks to Doubleday and Keep Turning Pages Goodreads group. I won a copy through the group giveaway. Opinions are my own. No arm twists involved.
