



Safe from the Neighbors

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Luke May teaches local history—his lifelong obsession—at his old high school in Loring, Mississippi. Having been mentored by his hometown newspaper’s publisher, a survivor of the civil rights turmoil, he now passes these stories along to students far too young to have experienced or, in some cases, even heard about them.

But when a long-lost friend suddenly returns to Loring, where years ago her family had been shattered by an act of spectacular violence, Luke begins to realize that his connection with her runs deeper, both personally and politically, than he ever imagined. Just children in 1962, they had no sense of what was happening when James Meredith’s enrollment at Ole Miss provoked a bloody new battle in the old Civil War, much less its impact on their fathers’ ambiguous friendship.

Once his daughters leave for Ole Miss, and with his marriage at an impasse, Luke’s investigation of this decades-old trauma soon spills over into his own life. With his parents unwilling, or unable, to help him unlock secrets whose existence he’d never suspected, this amateur historian is soon entirely consumed by an obscure past he can neither explain nor control—a gripping reminder that the past isn’t dead, or even past.

Once again Steve Yarbrough powerfully evokes—as David Guterson put it—“not only historical grief but the grief of our own time.”

Safe from the Neighbors Details

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From Reader Review Safe from the Neighbors for online ebook

Kat says

This book has all the ingredients to make it great: old crime, lots of history, racial tensions, really good writing. Except it disintegrates about 2/3 of the way in. I loved it at the beginning and even thought I found a new favourite author, but then the problems started. (spoiler) The narrator's affair is somehow sad, weird (he had a crush on her mother as a child) and shabby, which perhaps is what the author intended, but it takes the focus away from the mystery and makes the book unattractive and a slog to get to the pay-off which never comes. (I still don't know what exactly happened in 1962.) I do have to say that there were some truly excellent bits: the last section which tries to explain the hero's complex father is v. good. As is the title and its implications. But what a disappointment after such an excellent beginning. I might try another book by this author, though, because he does write v.well.

Jana says

My first book by Steve Yarbrough and he is fabulous! Interesting subject about which, sadly, I am learning how much I do not know: Civil rights. Specifically an incident that occurred in 1962 on the campus at Oxford, Mississippi. I never knew about the drama that erupted there over a boy trying to enroll in college. The story goes back & forth from current to the 1960s and includes racial violence as well as family drama/marriages in crisis. All told from the point of view of Luke May, a high school history teacher.

I have at least two more Steve Yarbrough books queued. I'm looking forward to meeting him in person this spring!

Carol says

Most of my GR Friends gave Steve Yarbrough's *Safe From the Neighbors* 4 stars. Why not 5? 4 or 5, 5 or 4. Perhaps this has a bit to do with the text that goes along with the ratings. 4 = *I really liked it* 5 *it was amazing*. If I give this book 5 stars does that mean nothing else can touch it? Once again I'm conflicted by the use of stars but for me Mr. Yarbrough (I'm a new fan) deserves my 5.

I heard Steve Yarbrough speak at Booktopia Vermont 2013. At first he reminded more or a rock musician and if you go to his website you'll see him playing the guitar...or perhaps a football player. Never would I have guessed author. I kept hearing his name all weekend and everywhere I went people kept asking if I had read any of his books. I hadn't. After I heard Steve's talk I knew he'd be on my list.

Safe From the Neighbors is a slow building, and excellently crafted story. It is satisfying on so many levels. Luke May, is a history teacher, in present day Loring, Mississippi. When a girl from his past shows up to teach at the same high school as Luke, this spirals him backward in time where he re-examines his growing up years and secrets left buried in the past. What he thought he knew turns out to be something else entirely and changes the landscape of his life. Like a dust storm, clouding the picture, the boy Luke knows little of the struggle that black student James Meredith endures to register at Ole' Miss. Luke's a kid and Civil Rights is not paramount in his mind but it is for the adults around him.

Safe From the Neighbors has questions to be answered, a murder and more. Though James Meredith is

important to the story, there is so much more. While it is a story of family, the father/son relationship is explored beautifully in this story. While it is a story about relationships, marriage is put under the microscope. While it is a story of love, love is explored on many levels. It's moody, intimate, and thought provoking.

My friends did not want to reveal too much and neither do I. 4 or 5 stars really don't matter. Just read *Safe From the Neighbors*. I don't think you'll be disappointed.

Chris says

When books have reviews by acclaimed authors like Richard Russo, John Grisham, Jill McCorkle, and Tom Perrotta, I always begin with a wary and careful eye. Is it *really* going to be that good? In this case, a resounding YES. Yarbrough seems to be an undiscovered gem in our group of US southern writers. Perhaps not, but I had never heard of him before.

This book has a well developed story, almost mystery, and carefully drawn characters. And the dialogue is amazing. I won't say anything else, discover it for yourself and enjoy the journey.

Tony says

Yarbrough, Steve. *SAFE FROM THE NEIGHBORS*. (2010). *****. Yarbrough can really write. I've been reading his books for years now and each one gets better and better. In this novel he tells the story of Luke May, a high school history teacher at his old high school in Loring, Mississippi. As a young man growing up, he was mentored by Loring's newspaper publisher, a survivor of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. He knew first hand about those events, and passed them on to Luke. Luke, in turn, passes these stories along to his students, most of whom are far too young to have experienced or, more likely, even heard about the events. Luke is married to a woman who is a practising poet and a part-time teacher at a local university. They have two teen-aged daughters who are getting ready to go off to the University. Things are looking good for Luke until a childhood friend returns to Loring and takes the job as French teacher at the high school. Luke hasn't seen Maggie since they were children, but a deep attachment occurs that is both sexual and political. Maggie left town after tragedy struck her family: her father killed her mother – though it was ruled as self-defense. The killing was set during the time of James Meredith's enrollment at Ole Miss and all the bloody battles that were going on at the time. Lots of the townspeople have secrets about those times that they don't want to resurface. Luke's affair with Maggie soon spills over into his regular life and puts it all at risk. The story moves on to uncover some of the mystery surrounding her mother's death and the relationships that existed between Luke's parents and Maggie's parents. This is a fascinating story superbly told. Highly recommended.

Kat Leache says

Looking over my Goodreads reviews the other day I realized I was a little too generous with my stars. I will go ahead and put it out there that I am not a person who forces herself to slog through a book she hates. So anything that makes it to a status of "Read" is good enough for me to finish, but that's not the same thing as really thinking it's a good book. I read Yarbrough's new book in one night--which I guess says something. But it's probably the least favorite of his that I've read, and the more I thought about it, the less I liked it. The

only aspect I really enjoyed was the fact that it took place in Mississippi and made me a little homesick.

From now on:

Five stars--I loved it, might reread it one day, and would recommend it to anyone more or less without reservations.

Four stars--I liked it a lot. It might be that it's the kind of book I particularly enjoy, but don't think are that great as works of art. A compelling but non-literary mystery maybe. Would only recommend it to people who I know like books of the same type.

Three stars--probably wouldn't recommend it to anyone unless I knew they liked the author. Good enough to finish, but either forgettable, or aggravatingly sloppy or badly constructed.

One or two stars--these will not be used in general, since I don't finish or rate books I don't like. But maybe if it was a book club selection or otherwise required, it would get one or two.

Terri Colangelo says

Rated 7.5 out of 10

Christine says

Really good until the end. The vague ending was a disappointment.

John Pappas says

Yarbrough's novel depicts the intersection of public and private histories - the things we struggle to forget and can't help but remember from our personal and collective past - in his story of a history teacher who attempts to excavate his own troubled family's involvement in the brutal events of the civil rights era in Mississippi while succumbing to the siren-song of childhood love and nostalgia. An excellent novel.

Sherry Howland says

Luke May is a likable high school history teacher leading an unremarkable life in Loring, Mississippi, a small town with a dubious history. Luke's marriage is at a dead end and his parents' health is deteriorating, but his own love of local history and his realistic compassion and understanding for the townspeople keep him going. Into this inertia steps Maggie Sorrentino, a glamorous French teacher with a mysterious and tragic past, which Luke eventually learns is closely tied to his own family's history. His attempts to learn more and unravel the events of a long-past night lead Luke & Maggie into an affair, which...as these things will...eventually enmeshes far more than just the two lovers.

Publishers Weekly notes that Safe From the Neighbors is "...hobbled by the ordinariness of its characters and

the situations they find themselves in." I disagree with the use of "hobbled." The characters' very ordinariness is what makes the story resonate. No one is a hero, no one is entirely a villain. The bombastic barbershop proprietor, the redneck members of Loring's Citizens' Council, the overbearing, dismissive banker are all recognizable to anyone who has lived in a small farming town, particularly in the southern reaches of the US. Luke's attempts to learn more about his father...a man far more complex than his son ever suspected...also ring clear and true.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and highly recommend it as a thoughtful, considered read.

Linda says

I liked this book, but what kept me from giving it a higher rating was that it just sort of ended abruptly. I was enjoying the story and the main characters, and then it just sort of ended. It was well written but left me with questions.

Lisa says

I want to read/listen to more from Steve Yarbrough. Thank you BOTNS for introducing me to a new author. I look forward to meeting Steve in April 2013 at Booktopia Vermont. Having lived there, I love stories set in Mississippi. Now to listen Prisoners of War

nancy says

So happy I've been introduced to Steve Yarbrough. His characters and plot are deep and thought provoking...and the writing is sublime. I listened to this and the reader, T. Ryder Smith, totally inhabited the narrator and all of the other characters (male and female) that he portrayed. This book was a pleasure and I'm so anxious to meet the author at Booktopia Vermont.

Sherri says

Sadly I am on a bad book streak. I hated the main character in this book. He was a whining jerk. The story seemed like it had some mystery - a teacher tries to unravel a murder in the 1960s and a family that his dad doesn't want to talk about. The mystery was slowly revealed, but it was not a mystery that was very interesting. Just really hated this book - wish that I had stopped wasting my time reading it. But I am an optimist and kept hoping it would get better.

Vanessa says

This is a very character driven novel with a minimal plot, which definitely breaks the usual mold of what I typically read and enjoy.

But this book has some important things to say on relationships, racism, family history, attitudes in the south and loyalty. Specifically on the topic of racism, there are some really ignorant, bigoted people out there which is unfortunate... but does that mean their entire lives are loathsome? That they aren't multi-dimensional human beings, capable of compassion and sacrifice? I don't think so.

As Steve Yarbrough said this weekend when I heard him speak, "I think if a person is 51% good, they're doin' alright." Just like the main character of this novel, Yarbrough is soft spoken yet eloquent. Even though this book isn't plot heavy, it runs deep.

Definitely recommend. Especially on audio.... I just love that professorial southern drawl. <3
