



The Ranger

Ace Atkins

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After years of war, Army Ranger Quinn Colson returns home to the rugged, rough hill country of northeast Mississippi to find his native Tibbehah County overrun with corruption, decay, meth runners, and violence. His uncle, the longtime county sheriff, is dead. A suicide, he's told, but others—like tomboy deputy Lillie Virgil—whisper murder.

In the days that follow, it's up to Colson to discover the truth, not only about his uncle, but about his family, his friends, his town, and himself. And once it's discovered, there's no going back for this real hero of the Deep South.

The Ranger Details

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From Reader Review The Ranger for online ebook

Carol. says

All the classic ingredients are in place: a unique setting, a reluctant hero, a small town rife with corruption, a criminal element who are Really Bad Guys, a pregnant teen looking for the baby daddy who cooks meth. Well, maybe not the last one, although I think the pregnant teen was used in a Walt Longmire story as well as one with Dave Robicheaux. The Ranger doesn't bring anything new to the genre, excepting the ol' Miss setting, but it is a decent entry into the field.

Quinn Colson is on leave from the Rangers, returning home for the funeral of his uncle, sheriff of Jericho, Mississippi. He gives a ride into town of a young, hugely pregnant teen, providing an entry for her point of view. Lily, assistant deputy, thinks the uncle might have been murdered, but as Quinn starts asking questions and connecting with old acquaintances, he discovers the truth might be even less palatable than murder.

There's a definite old-fashioned Western feel to this, with an honest hero riding into a small town to save the populace from villains. Ethics are not particularly complicated. The story felt fast moving to me. Viewpoint switched between Quinn and the pregnant teen, with a couple other brief viewpoints thrown in, including that of Bad Guys 1 & 2. On the upside, it didn't make it feel disjointed. On the down side, I didn't much care about the other viewpoints, which only served to reinforce the Bad Guys were indeed sleazeballs. I'm not even certain they added to the tension.

Characterization might be one of the weaker areas of the story. Most of the character descriptions focus on what the person said or did, and there isn't a lot of descriptive shading to the action. It reminds me of medical or police reports: first this happened, then that. While it's kind of refreshing to read a story where the author unabashedly allows characters to say things (instead of 'drawled,' 'yelled,' or 'muttered'), there's not a lot of emotional connection built, as it is hard to tell how Quinn is really feeling. He might drink a cup of coffee and nod, and somehow this is supposed to stand in for building a man who is thinking and evaluating. I was most intrigued by the potential of Quinn's Ranger training and woodsmanship. Atkins uses it well in a tactical mission, but I can't help feeling like the potential for insight while Quinn strategizes ends up wasted.

The feel of rural Mississippi is decent. Quinn recalls growing up and racing down the roads as a teen and hunting in the woods with his uncle. He also gives a solid feel to the local truck stop and diner. I got a solid sense of the poverty of the area, an interesting choice that plays into the economics of crime. Occasionally a colloquial turn of phrase show up in the writing, but I'm not sure how well it comes off.

It's a giid book that provided a solid distraction during a time of poor reading attention. If that sounds like faint praise, it's only because my standards have gotten higher as I've aged. Honestly, in my current reading mood, three stars is worth quite a bit. I'll read the next couple of entries and see if Atkins can retain my interest.

Eric says

Ace Atkins' protagonist, Quinn Colson, is in the mold of Elmore Leonard's Raylan Givens, Lee Child's Jack Reacher, and Craig Johnson's Walt Longmire. If none of those literary references work for you, the plot of this novel is very reminiscent of this:

But this simplistic plot -- a soldier returning home to find his idyllic hometown corrupted while he was away -- is pushed to a new level by the author's ability to write realistic, interesting characters. Nothing about Colson, or the supporting cast around him, is one-dimensional. There are layers to each of the characters, both the protagonists and the antagonists, and moral shades of gray for both as well. This depth and shading made what I thought to be a simple page-turning action-revenge into something much more interesting and memorable.

The highest compliment I can give this book is that as soon as I finished it, I bought the second in the series, *The Lost Ones*, and started reading it that same night.

Dan Schwent says

When his uncle, the county sheriff, eats a gun, Quinn Colson comes home to Tibbehah County, Mississippi, for the funeral. Turns out his home town is a cesspool and the chief turds are Johnny Stagg, a county official, and Gowrie, a meth-dealing white supremacist. Will Colson be able to clean up his home town?

I've read a couple of Ace Atkins' Spenser books and liked them quite a bit. Some guy has been telling me for years how good they are. He was right yet again.

The words are different but the song sounds familiar. Guy comes back to his home town, finds out the shitbags have taken over, and runs the bad guys out of town. Ace Atkins takes a staple of the western genre and shapes it into something all his own. Fortunately, Atkins makes hay with it.

Quinn Colson comes home and finds himself out of the loop, an outsider in his own back yard. The bad guys have a foothold and most of the town is ready to roll over for them. Quinn and his trusted circle of allies have an uphill battle ahead of them in the form of crooked politicians, crooked judges, crooked cops, and meth dealing white supremacists.

For a book with all of those volatile ingredients simmering in the stew pot, *The Ranger* is a surprisingly slow burner. It takes a while for all the pins to get set up. While things are simmering, Atkins explores small town life in the south, painting a bleak picture of what things are like in small towns once the money starts drying up. Quinn deals with his mother, his sister, and his old flame.

The ending was everything I hoped it would be, a southern fried version of the fight at the OK Corral. While it stood well on its own, it left me wanting more of Quinn Colson dealing with shitheels in his home town. I don't really have anything bad to say about *The Ranger*. Quinn was capable without being a super hero and the supporting cast Atkins has crafted has a few books in it easily.

The Ranger was a fun thriller and a fascinating look at life in rural Mississippi. I guess I'm in for the whole series now. Four out of five stars.

Skip says

3.5 stars. This plot has been done again and again. Hellraiser from a dysfunctional Southern family, goes into the military, straightens out, comes back to find problems in his hometown that need to be cleaned up, calls

on old friends to help, takes some lumps, and survives chaos. Meth, gambling, prostitution, town development, corrupt judges and cops, questionable suicide, etc. That said, Atkins does it pretty well, develops some strong characters: protagonist Quinn Colson, his friend Boom, sleazy criminals, a young pregnant girl seeking the baby's father, a misguided boy who becomes her protector, a female sheriff. Will definitely continue the series.

Kemper says

I see them long hard times to come.

Wait a second. This isn't *Justified*. But there's enough similarity to excuse my temporary confusion.

In his younger days Quinn Colson was a small town hell-raiser in Mississippi, but he went on to become a US Army Ranger who has spent most of his twenties fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. About the only thing that could get him to return home is the funeral for the uncle who practically raised him, and Quinn has every intention of not staying a second longer than necessary.

However, Quinn learns that his uncle, who was also the county sheriff, died under suspicious circumstances and a slimy redneck wannabe-land-baron pops up claiming that the family land is now forfeit due to a debt his uncle owed. Quinn's refusal to sign over the land gets him tangled up with a bunch of meth dealing white supremacists.

The comparisons to Raylan Givens are fairly easy to see. You've got a government trained and certified bad ass reluctantly returning to his Southern hometown and having to deal with a variety of criminal rednecks as well as his own family issues. This also seems like the classic action hero set-up of a soldier returning home to find that his people have fallen prey to vicious thugs.

Despite the similarities to *Justified* or a story that is pretty familiar from several action movies, Ace Atkins makes Quinn a unique character and spins the plot off in unexpected directions so that it doesn't play out in the obvious ways. The Alabama born and Auburn educated Atkins lives in Mississippi now, and it's obvious that he's a guy who knows the ways of small town life, and he lays out a vividly realistic portrayal of what it's like in an area where the only growth industry is meth production.

Atkins also nails what it likes to return to the small town where you grew up. As a guy who left the Little Town for the Big City, I can testify that there's a weird dynamic at play when you have reason to return. You're not entirely an outsider, but you're not one of the locals anymore. It's kind of like watching a TV show for a few years, then skipping a couple of seasons and then seeing a new episode. You know most of the actors and the basics of the story, but you always feel like you're missing something.

I wouldn't say this fits the hick-lit or redneck noir styles of a Daniel Woodrell or Donald Ray Pollock, but it's a well crafted and entertaining crime story in a rural setting by a guy who knows that lifestyle well.

James Thane says

Quinn Colson is an Army Ranger who returns on leave to his home in Tibbehah County in northeastern

Mississippi, to attend the funeral of his uncle who had been the local sheriff. Upon arriving, he is shocked to learn that his uncle apparently committed suicide. He is even more upset when Lillie Virgil, a deputy sheriff, suggests that his uncle was actually murdered.

Quinn is also troubled by the fact that while he has been overseas defending his country, both his family and his home town have badly deteriorated. His father, a former movie stuntman, had abandoned the family years earlier. Now his sister, Caddy, has left home as well, tumbling into a sordid world of drugs and other vices. Caddy has left her small child with Quinn's mom, who is not coping with the world all that well herself. Meanwhile, Tibbehah County is sadly overrun with schemers, thugs, and corrupt local officials and is sinking under the tide of a meth epidemic.

Quinn's uncle has left his home and farm to Quinn, but then a local would-be wheeler-dealer named Johnny Stagg shows up, claiming that he has liens against the property and that he intends to take possession. Quinn has only a few days before he's due back at his Army post, and clearly he's got a lot of work to do before then to sort all of this out. As he probes more deeply into his uncle's death and the other problems of the county, he stirs up a proverbial hornets' nest and the blood begins to flow.

This is the first book in a new series and Ace Atkins has created here a very intriguing protagonist. He has also surrounded him with a great cast of characters both good and bad and set them in a very well-drawn world that is interesting in and of itself. The book is somewhat reminiscent of Ken Mercer's *Slow Fire*, which also portrays the way in which the scourge of meth can eat away at a small town and its inhabitants.

Ace Atkins has been much in the book news lately for taking over Robert B. Parker's Spenser series, and his first Spenser book, *Robert B. Parker's Lullaby*, has just been released. But Quinn Colson is at least as compelling a character as Spenser and I'm looking forward to the coming books in the series.

Chad Sayban says

More reviews at [The Story Within The Story](#)

When Army Ranger Quinn Colson journeys home to the small town of Jericho, Mississippi for the funeral of his uncle, the sheriff, he finds far more questions than answers waiting. His uncle's death is listed as a suicide, but some think it is murder. Corruption has seized the town as the greed of commercial development has allowed drug runners and swindlers to take over. Quinn becomes embroiled in a conflict to save his uncle's property and finds out he can trust almost nobody. It is time for the Ranger to take a stand.

The proof copy of *The Ranger* makes it clear that this is the beginning of a series built around the character of Quinn Colson. Atkins does a nice job of creating an environment and populating it with interesting characters. He paints a stark portrait of rural Mississippi that feels authentic. Atkins also creates some very engaging characters, but he seems so focused on Quinn that the other characters get left underdeveloped. The storytelling moves along at a good, clean pace, never slowing the story. However, the dialog seems to lurch along at times in an attempt to give it an 'authentic voice.' But these are small criticisms.

The herculean problem with *The Ranger* lies with its main character. Quinn Colson is set up as the tough as nails soldier with a heart of gold. Right from the start he goes out of his way to help a lost, broke, pregnant woman on the side of the road as reinforcement to this image. However, he contradicts himself throughout the rest of the story. There is little attempt to explain why Quinn would do the things that he does. Quinn

motivation for undertaking his unorthodox mission only makes sense as the retelling of every spaghetti western told since the days of black and white television - he is the good guy and he is fighting the bad guys. That's enough, right?

Quinn refuses an offer to buy his uncle's land because it has been in his family's name for generations, even though he has no intention of moving back to the town and he doesn't seem to like anyone in his family. His friends, family and even perfect strangers are never once in any kind of jeopardy until Quinn makes a point to put them there. Why? Because we can't have a hero if there isn't any conflict...even if he is the one creating it. But it gets worse. One moment Quinn is deep in thought about how as a platoon sergeant he had to show restraint and be a father figure to his men. To be a professional. The next moment he is gleefully wounding the bad guys with a compound bow. Yes, I said wounding! Yes, I said gleefully! I have family members who are both Army Rangers and law enforcement and I can tell you that is not something they are trained to do...or would ever do. And they certainly wouldn't do it like this:

“Two Cracking shots. A man yelled.

Quinn smiled. Boom was having a time, having found the right spot for the deer rifle, loaded, balanced and sighted right down the path...

Quinn took a breath and steadied himself, letting the string go and zipping an arrow right into Gowrie's shoulder blade, knocking him forward and then backwards to his knees, the AK chattering away up into the laced branches overhead.

Quinn smiled again and reached for another arrow.”

As if to emphasize the point, few moments later we get Quinn shooting a man in the groin. This might be the way somebody might dream of taking revenge on someone and attempting to scare them off, but it isn't the way a trained soldier operates, much less a veteran Army Ranger. Atkins also manages to paint everyone in law enforcement as inept or corrupt. We even get the quintessential Tombstone-esque scene with the big showdown in the middle of town where real law enforcement has run for cover and only Quinn and his buddies can come and save the day. The whole story becomes cliché and simply topples like a house of cards, complete with an unsatisfying ending.

The Ranger is built off of the grand storytelling history of the lone good guy vs. the corrupt town full of bad guys. It is a template that has provided many great stories. While the writing itself is good, the hero and his motivation are so unbelievable that the story simply falls apart.

Mike (the Paladin) says

Okay...this is not the kind of book I usually enjoy if I were placing it in a "preference category" based simply on the "story in general". The thing is it is simply written so well that I got interested and never lost interest. And as I'm now reading the 4th book in the Quinn Colson series I figure it's time to review the first 3 (though I may not get them all reviewed in this sitting).

Quinn Colson is a U.S. Army Ranger and has been for 10 years. He has just gotten word that his uncle is dead, the cause of death has been determined to be suicide. Quinn can't believe this and goes to the

hometown he hasn't seen since he enlisted. Quinn loved his uncle who was the closest thing he and his sister had to a dad after their father left.

The book is as I said very interesting and the characters are knowable. If there is a flaw it's the somewhat stereotypical redneck characters and some of the attitudes. That said the writer doesn't fall into any rut or predictability in the tale. From start to book's end the writing is consistently pleasing and for me it led right into the next volume.

I'd say try this one. It's a little unusual in some ways and I can recommend it.

Enjoy.

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

Nice to have finally read book one after having listened to book 3-7. Now I have only The Lost Ones left, and of course, The Sinners (book 8) that I'm going to listen to as soon as it's available.

It was great reading The Ranger, although yes, I knew some of the stuff, mostly concerning Quinn's uncle since I have read pretty much every book in the series. I like Quinn and I most definitely like Lillie Virgil, the deputy sheriff. She's a tough cookie and got a lot of chemistry with Quinn (who is still pining after his ex-girlfriend whether or not he will admit it). The plot is great, a small town with lots of corrupted men, which in the end will lead to a big confrontation between Quinn and the bad guys. Just the way I like it!

The Quinn Colson series is fabulous, and if you are a Longmire fan will you love this series.

Gayle says

I wasn't familiar with the author until I heard him on John Grisham's podcast. It sounded like he writes just the kind of fiction I like to read, and I selected this as my first Ace Atkins book to read. And I loved it. Fast enough paced that I didn't lose interest and detailed enough I could imagine the people and places. Plus an interesting story that wasn't a cookie-cutter mystery/action story. I've already purchased the next book in the Quinn Colson series and it's near the top of my TBR list.

Cynthia says

Would Bill Faulkner recognize these people?

Quinn Colson returns home for his Idealized uncle's funeral after six years absence and 10 years worth of Mid-East tours. He's an army Ranger aka a proven tough guy with wilderness skills. He can face almost anything....except maybe his high school sweetheart who dumped him and married his buddy while he was off fighting for his country. Oh and then there's his Elvis and Jesus obsessed mom and his drug addled younger sister. Other than that he's primed for a lovely home visit but as he travels from Fort Benning to the Oxford, Mississippi area he comes within inches of running down a pregnant teen who's dazedly wandering the back roads in search of her baby daddy. And our hero is still not home yet! He's not surprised that his

mom and sister have skipped the funeral but the town's leaders, the three wise men, are there. They have a few drinks, toast the dearly departed, and swap war stories.

Then the action really picks up. Supposedly his uncle who was the (drunken) Sheriff committed suicide. Quinn doesn't buy it. As he starts to investigate he reunites with various friends and enemies from his past (and it's not always clear who falls into which category) he finds a hornet's nest of political and financial rivalries, prostitution, racism, religion and downright orneriness. Atkins does a swell job of bringing these folks to life especially against the backdrop of an isolated southern town that could almost be a throwback to the 1800's. From the first conversation you can almost taste the south. My only issue with Mr. Atkins is that he never once mentions home time Oxfordian William Faulkner. This is a great first installment in what promises to be a fun series.

Lauren says

LOST LOCAL BOY FOUND

Kemper said this would help scratch the *Justified* itch and that, combined with how much I liked Atkins's Spenser reboot, made me go into this ready to have a good time. Those are the kinds of expectations so often disappointed, but Atkins unquestionably delivered.

Army Ranger Quinn Colson, twenty-nine and already too old, recently benched from "storming the castle" and assigned to teach instead, is brought back to his childhood home in Tibbehah County when his beloved uncle dies under circumstances that seem to keep popping back up as suspicious even after official explanations land reasonable punches. At first, he's told it's a heart attack; then he hears it's suicide. The wound is too messy, unless it's understandable given a certain degree of drunkenness. His uncle was massively in debt over--what is it, exactly? the equipment he'd rented? the money he'd borrowed to visit casinos? Quinn can't resist poking and prodding, trying to get answers that will satisfy him, and he's aided in that by the equally-skeptical Lillie Virgil, a hometown cop loyal to Quinn's uncle, the former sheriff. Together, they work to get to the bottom of at least some of the corruption and economic despair endemic to their region, complete with meth, white supremacy movements, and shady land deals.

It's a good plot with a lot of surprises and some great action sequences, but the real pleasure here is all the local color, from the food Quinn's mom makes in her Elvis-memorabilia-covered house to the Wal-Mart clothes to the former truck stop Bengal tigers Quinn remembers. There's poverty here, and a certain amount of sordidness, but that's not *all* there is, and you can see why Lillie would come back from Memphis to fight for the place. (view spoiler) However much the system is rigged, it's still full of goodhearted people and a sense of community. And it offers Quinn a sense of purpose that the Rangers no longer can--as he stalls more and more on returning to start his new job as a training instructor, Atkins makes you feel not only the strange allure home has for him but also the allure of purpose and hard struggle. Quinn wants to storm a castle? Tibbehah County has plenty.

This is the start of a series, and open-ended series live or die by their characters. Luckily, Atkins excels at great, unshowy characterization, especially with the stoic, low-key, and unsentimental Quinn, who isn't surprised by much but who also can never pass up a desperate teenage hitchhiker. One of his best moments is the small act of kindness that means treating a kicked-around informant and lifelong criminal with respect and dignity, and it feels as genuinely heroic as any shootout. There's complexity to him, too, as we gradually

see that Quinn is in some ways more generous and understanding towards, and more clear-sighted about, strangers than he is his friends and family. He's in a strange outsider-insider position, but he's still familiar enough to have his prejudices, good and bad, and while he gets disillusioned of a few of them over the course of the book, more remain, and suggest potential conflicts and possibilities for growth. There's plenty of good long-term set-up here outside of Quinn, too, from his vanished father to his two possible love interests (I am firmly Team Lillie) to his sister to oily good old boy and mover-and-shaker Johnny Stagg.

All in all, a great book and a great introduction to a series I'm looking forward to reading more of.

Glenna Pritchett says

My first instinct was to rate it 2 stars (it was ok) but that wouldn't be fair. The story is pretty good, I just don't care for the author's writing style. I found his way of structuring sentences confusing, and had to do a bit of backtracking a number of times.

Jane Stewart says

Not a good story for me. I did not smile during this book.

Most of the book has mean unlikeable characters doing things that are not interesting to watch. Most of the characters were poor and uneducated. Their thoughts and actions were not entertaining. No one intrigued me. There was no one to root for.

The two main good guys are Quinn and Lily. Quinn is an army ranger who came home for his uncle's funeral and is investigating his uncle's death. Lily is a sheriff's deputy. It was not fun or special watching them solve the mystery. There wasn't anything interesting about their relationship. Anna-Lee is supposedly a good character. Her husband is in danger so she begs Quinn to find him. Quinn risks his life to help the husband. Then Anna-Lee is rude and dismissive to Quinn. She doesn't even thank him. Her actions make her unlikeable, and she's one of the good guys.

There were two action scenes that were missing key parts. Quinn creates a diversion to enter the enemy compound and rescue hostages. He gets inside to the hostages and says lets go. Then the story skips to the next day. We don't see how they sneak off and run while the bad guys are shooting. Did any bad guys follow them?

The other scene: Two guys A and B are taking a long car drive. They end up in an ambush with bad guys surrounding them. All of a sudden two good guys C and D are hiding in the nearby woods and shoot the bad guys so A can get away. How did C and D know to be hiding in that place? Were they following A's car? I don't know.

I'm not sure how I feel about the narrator Jeff Woodman. I wonder if his interpretations made some characters more unlikeable than I would have made them if I were reading the physical book. All the characters are Mississippi locals so he speaks with southern and hillbilly accents - like sit-shee-aa tion (for situation). It was a little too much southern for me. But that may be personal preference.

DATA:

Narrative mode: 3rd person. Unabridged audiobook length: 8 hrs and 56 mins. Swearing language: a few strong words including religious swear words, but not often used. Sexual content: No specific sex scenes, but some were referred to as having happened. Setting: current day small town in rural Mississippi. Book copyright: 2011. Genre: crime mystery suspense

Shelby *trains flying monkeys* says

South Louisiana has Dave Robicheaux.

Minnesota has Lucas Davenport.

Los Angeles has Harry Bosch, Elvis Cole and Joe Pike.

Georgia has Rick Grimes. *high fives*

Now rural Mississippi has Quinn Colson.

Quinn Colson returns home from Afghanistan and his job as an Army Ranger when his uncle that raised him is found dead. Apparently from a self inflicted gunshot wound. Once home with the help of a local deputy and a former soldier he realizes that the town he left is not the same. His uncle's death begins to look suspicious when the local baron shows up to claim his uncle's land.

A gang of meth cookers have pretty much taken over the town and once you start reading this book you just know that Quinn is going to get pissed off and things are going to get ugly.

I love these kinds of books. They are pure guilty pleasure. I get to cheer for the somewhat good guy and well..shit gets blown up and shot all to heck.

Meth heads are becoming a current trend in the bad guy scenario and I'm not complaining at all. Because it's fun to see some of the stupid happen. They just seem to never be able to walk away from trouble.

Then we have the hero of our story. Quinn Colson.

I can't wait to get my hands on the next in this series.

Thanks to my friend Susan for giving me a heads up to these books.
