



Leavin' Trunk Blues

Ace Atkins

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It's been a year since Nick Traver's search for the lost recording of blues phantom Robert Johnson in Crossroad Blues. He has grown comfortable playing his harp at JoJo's in the French Quarter and teaching blues history at Tulane. A difficult case was the last thing on the blues tracker's mind.

When new details on the mysterious death of a blues record producer surface from a legendary guitarist over a bottle of Crown Royal, Nick becomes intrigued. In 1959, Billy Lyons' body was found stabbed with an ice pick and floating in Lake Michigan. His lover, a blues singer named Ruby Walker, was sentenced to life in prison for the murder. But even after Ruby was sentenced, rumors emerged of a gambling debt to the black mafia or a possible hit called by Lyons' partner, Moses Jordan, who moved on to immortality with another label.

After arriving at Chicago's Union Station, Travers learns there are still those who'd like Billy Lyons' murder to remain unsolved. He soon has fresh blood splattered on his boots and he's running in the blackened snow from a rogues gallery of killers that include a 6-foot-5, 300 pound breathing ball of hate named Stagger Lee Jordan and a beautiful pair of sociopaths--Butcher Knife-Totin' Annie and Fast-Lovin' Fannie--two women with respective talents for love and death.

His quest for Lyons' killer retraces the route of the Delta greats during the Great Migration of blacks after World War II. From the historic Maxwell Street Market to the South Side's Checkerboard Lounge, take a hint from Robert Johnson when he sang, *"C'mon. Baby don't you want to go. Back to that same old place--My Sweet Home Chicago."*

Leavin' Trunk Blues Details

Date : Published October 14th 2001 by Minotaur Books (first published 2000)

ISBN : 9780312977184

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Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Thriller, Mystery Thriller, Crime, Music

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From Reader Review Leavin' Trunk Blues for online ebook

Leo Alessi says

You can feel Atkins' ability progress in each book.

Chris says

Obviously I am still on an Ace Atkins binge, or exploration. I do like this series better than the Ranger guy series: it's better written, the characters real, the places evoked. And they are good. BUT, Atkins always tries, finally, too hard, the plot goes on a little too long. Perhaps only a ruthless editor is needed. Please, Ace, stop with the beloved and the hair across the face. Behind the ear. Hiding the eyes. I too want to be another James Lee Burke, but there is only one. There is so much to learn from him, but keep your own. Voice. Like me: Atkins tries to fit the whole world in a grain of sand cuz he thinks he should. Sometimes it's just a grain of sand. I am talking to myself.

False says

Set in Chicago. Another blues story, the second published work. I enjoyed it, but I like his more current works more.

Bruce Snell says

Book Two in the Nick Travers series by Ace Atkins - 3.5 stars. It is the week before Christmas, and Nick is in Chicago, interviewing Ms. Walker and any of her friends and associates he can find in an effort to solve the 1959 murder of famous blues record produce, Billy Lyons. Nick's biggest problem is that Ruby has been in prison for 40 years after being convicted of that murder and it does not appear that anyone wants to see her freed. In the course of his investigation Nick run afoul of a local hood known as Stagger Lee who tries to kill him.

Although the mystery is fairly conventional, the blues setting is sufficient to set this book apart from the rest of "the pack." The blues permeates the entire story with actual historical characters mentioned among the fictional characters that populate the story. In the end, I was left with a desire to know more about this most American of musical genres.

The first book in the series was more compelling, but this one fleshes out Nick's history more, and adds dimension to his story. I am looking forward to reading the next in the series.

Clare O'Beara says

I had not read the first book *Crossroad Blues* but this one caused a lot of interest from musicians when I showed it around.

A blues historian is looking for elderly people to interview who can tell him about the past blues and jazz scene in Chicago. People doing farm work in the southern states could earn much greater wages by moving to work in Chicago and they brought their music with them. But some were exploited by music managers and signed contracts that were not in their favour, so they ended up poorly off.

Amid his interviews the historian unearths a 'cold case' murder and his investigations take a more sinister turn as people today are endangered by what they might reveal.

I did enjoy it although it is a very gritty tale, not for those who only read cosies. The story is well told and the characters feel very real.

Tony Sannicandro says

I really like the books by Ace. As his story unfolds he weaves his love of the blues and not just the music but the people who brought it to us. Thank you Ace for the great story and thank you for keeping the flame alive!

Shomeret says

Leavin' Trunk Blues is the second mystery in which the detective is blues historian Nick Travers. I absolutely loved the first, *Crossroad Blues*, in which Travers investigates the death of musical prodigy Robert Johnson.

In this book, there is a character known as Stagger Lee. Nick Travers doubts his existence because Stagger Lee is an urban legend. Neither Travers nor the author, Ace Atkins, reveals how or why Stagger Lee became a legend, or what role the legend plays in African American culture.

What he does give us seemed to me a fairly disappointing standard sort of mystery. Travers investigates on behalf of a blues performer who has spent forty years in prison for a crime she hadn't committed. It's a sleazy case involving predictable motivations. If it weren't for that tantalizing reference to Stagger Lee as a legend, I wouldn't have cared about any of it. Stagger Lee is the only mystery that I wanted this book to solve.

For the complete review including research about the legend of Stagger Lee, see my post "Who Is Stagger Lee?" on my blog at:

<http://www.maskedpersona.blogspot.com>

Booknblues says

Oh, baby don't you want to go
Back to the land of California, to my sweet home Chicago

It seemed like everyone in the Mississippi delta country could hear that sweet song that Robert Johnson sang calling them north to Chicago. It fell on their ears like a sweet lullaby, a promise of a better life to the north. Young Ruby Walker was no exception. As a teenager she haunted the roadhouses and blues joints hoping that one day she could sing the blues in the sweet home up north "Chicago."

Well, Ruby did make it north and for a while it was a good and sweet home. Ruby hit the big time and became known for her song Leavin' Trunk Blues. But it seemed predestined that Ruby was to live a life of the blues. One morning she woke up soaked in the blood of her manager and lover, Billy Lyons and before she knew it she was serving life in the big house for his murder.

That was in 1959 and as the years pass slowly by, Ruby steadfastly maintained that she is innocent. She begins to write to professor and blues historian Nick Travers. Nick agrees to research the circumstances surrounding the murder, because he hopes to do research on Ruby, her life and the people she knew at the time. Nick feels that historians are missing the opportunity to record living history by forgetting the people who participated in the great migration and focusing on the 1930's and the delta.

Ace Atkins has created a tasty mystery with Leavin' Trunk Blues, the second of his Nick Travers series. It is nicely atmospheric taking place in Chicago with Nick visiting blues clubs as well as Chicago's seedy underbelly to dig up information. Fast paced with action and adventure to spare, it draws the reader quickly into Nick's world.

Nick is an unlikely sleuth. A former football player who fell in love with the blues and became a blues historian from Tulane University. We find out that he can get down and dirty with the best of them and there are times in Leavin' Trunk Blues that he has to.

For a fan of mysteries or a fan of the blues, Leavin' Trunk Blues is a great read. If you are both it is even better.

Janis says

I personally prefer Ace Atkins's Quinn Colson series to the Nick Travers series. I am not a blues fan, but I did enjoy the history of the blues music scene in Chicago in the 30's and 40's. The actual mystery was a little flat.

Keith Bell says

If you are a Blues fan, this is a must! Delves into the Chicago music scene with a nostalgic look backwards in a contemporary Chicago setting.

Atkins blends fictional Blues characters alongside their own historical Blues icon influence. Fast paced and showing polish when compared to his debut book, Crossroad Blues.

Lee says

Second in the series, our ex-NFL player/now blues historian professor, Nick Travers is off to Chicago. To interview Ruby Walker, whom they called Sweet Black Angel in the 50's, and has spent 40 years in prison for killing her lover. Nick and the reader, see the gritty/slums/under belly side of Chicago...the South Side. With a monstrous drug dealer after Nick to keep him from digging up the past, to him finding some of the names of blues past. As in his first novel, Atkins research of blues artists, icons from the 30's, makes this a unique mystery series.

judy says

Heaven for Delta and Chicago blues fans. The action takes place in the present but the mystery to be solved takes place in 1959. As a result, you get a dissertation on The Great Migration to Chicago and the evolution of the blues. The author is clearly biased in favor of the first generation bluesmen like Muddy Waters and not so keen on the newer generations i.e. Buddy Guy. Atkins did a wonderful job of recreating the atmosphere of South Side then and through the last days of the infamous Robert Taylor Homes. I'm not sure how this book would play with non-blues fans and those who don't really know Chicago. As for me, I disappeared into the book and lived in its settings for the duration.

D. says

This book is a big improvement over the previous one in the series, CROSSROAD BLUES. While I enjoyed the first one, I found this one to be much more engaging, and the characters more realistic and well-rounded.

This time, Nick Travers heads to Chicago to investigate the 1959 murder of a blues producer. A famous female blues singer has been in jail since she was convicted for his death, but now she claims to be wrongly imprisoned. Nick, as a student of the blues and a sucker for a hard-luck story, decides to try and set things right.

Things get complicated as Nick reconnects with a past lover, and it turns out that there's more to the story of what happened the night of the murder.

Unfortunately, Atkins continues his trend of having unnecessarily quirky "hit men" populate the novel (although in this case they're women), which is the only reason I knocked a star off of my rating.

Moody, intriguing, and engaging, I found this one to be a quick, entertaining read.

The next book in the series is DARK END OF THE STREET.

Blackarcher says

Okay I admit it....I'm a sucker for any book that with the blues, Chicago and a tough guy like Nick Travers that's got brains and heart to match his brawn. Once I started reading i couldn't but the book down. It has

some flaws - dragging a bit in spots, uneven transitions between story lines - but the characters, the turn of phrase, and plot more than made up for them.

Carol Jean says

I've committed myself to finishing the series, though this second book is much less about the music and much more a traditional mystery, technically a "closed case," but one that generates considerable murder and mayhem. Nick Travers moves from the Delta to Chicago for this case, and I really would have liked to have heard more about the life of the Blues singer whose trail he is following.

Besides pretty much losing track of this character whose unlawful conviction for murder has resulted in 20 years of jail time, Atkins, alas, loses his writing ability. I particularly liked the man who pulls an unlit cigar out of his jacket pocket and gave the 'most fascinating facial feature of the week' award to the following: "Her face was flat as a skillet with wide-set eyes, smallish ears, and an ass the size of Texas."

On to the Dark End of the Street. Let's hope Atkins has his ducks in a row for that one.
