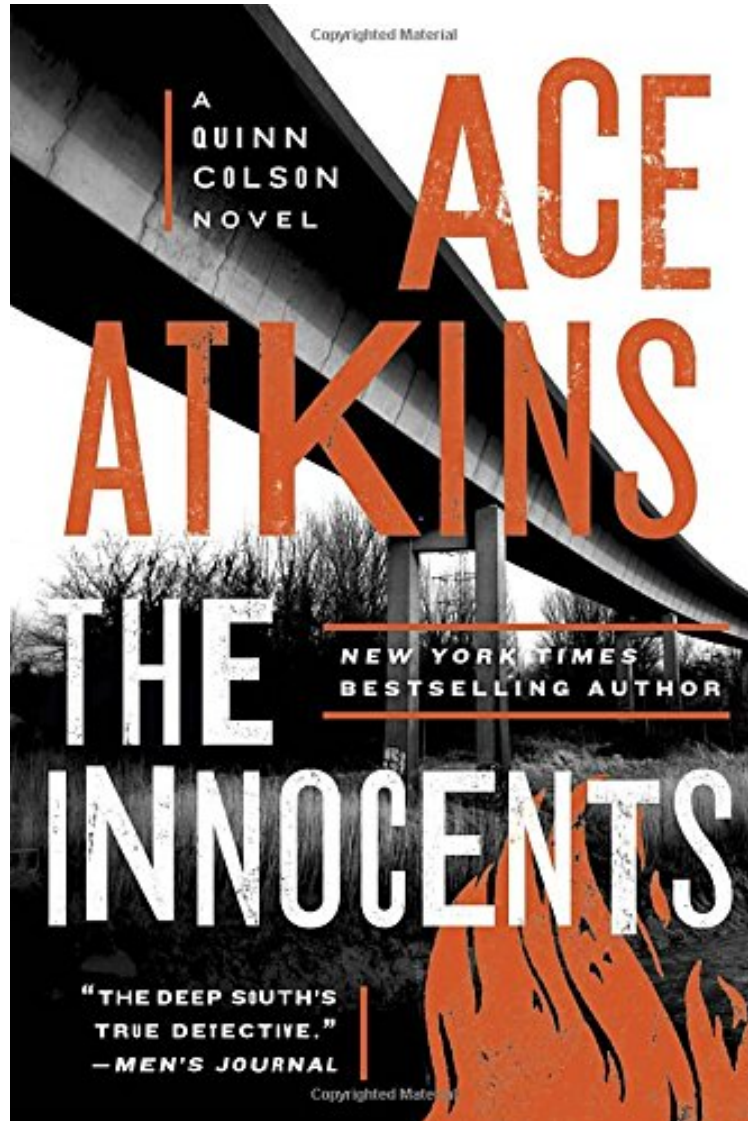


(Download) The Innocents (A Quinn Colson Novel)

The Innocents (A Quinn Colson Novel)

Ace Atkins

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Ace Atkins : The Innocents (A Quinn Colson Novel) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Innocents (A Quinn Colson Novel):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A shocking killing exposes yet more corruption in Quinn Colson's Jericho By Dan Berger When a former cheerleader is horrifically murdered, Quinn Colson returns as a deputy to the sheriff's office he used to run. There are many suspects, among them her abusive white-trash father, a local biker gang, a strip-joint madam, and a black drug dealer who's been sniffing after her. The supporting cast includes the dealer's sidekick, who's thinking about going straight, the local football coach they once played for who wants to mentor them,

her black ex-boyfriend, and a Syrian-American kid whose father runs a store. Lurking behind it is the mysterious death of the cheerleader's brother. Accidental shooting? She doesn't think so. It's another can't-put-it-down installment in the series. Atkins' portrayal of small-town northern Mississippi is depressingly and almost holographically real. Leaders and opportunity there are few, and poverty, despair, vice and corruption all too plentiful. Our characters frequently talk about getting out. There's little agriculture and no industry. People who should be leaders, like the coach and a local preacher, come off like stuffed-shirt windbags too often on the wrong side of things. The racial situation is more central than usual in these books, with a sense of white backlash against immigration, excessive or otherwise. Dealer Nito Reece says he'll get tagged for Millie Jones' death because he's black. The bikers go after the Syrian-American kid with post-9/11 flag-waving yahooism because Jones stopped at his store just before she died. Resentment of a growing Mexican presence is tangible. Some white people want to solve Jones' murder based on race. Some black people don't want to help white cops solve it. And the whole grisly spectacle becomes a national tabloid sensation. Greta Van Susteren and Nancy Grace come to town! But while race is at evil's heart in Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County, here in Atkins' Tibbehah County, it's becoming more about sexual violence. There's rape deep in various characters' pasts. There's the violence that underpins the local strip joint. There's trafficking in sex slaves, which the denouement suggests will play a role in the next story. And there's a lot more. Meanwhile our characters' lives evolve. Colson is back in Jericho after a tour training police in Afghanistan. His friend Lillie Vergil is now the county's first woman sheriff. Sister Caddy runs the mission started by her late boyfriend. Crime boss and strip-joint owner Johnny Stagg is in federal prison. The joint, now going upscale, is run by Fannie Hathcock, a high-end madam tied to out-of-town racketeers. Stagg, far away, still casts a shadow; he has dealings with Colson's own father Jason, who's trying to settle down in Jericho after years as a nomadic movie stuntman but now is trying to entangle his son in the pipe dream of starting a dude ranch. Colson's still messing with married childhood flame Anna Lee Stevens. But she's got a kid, is moving to Memphis, still has ties to her ex and resents Colson's plans to return to Afghanistan. More deeply, the two are from different worlds: Anna's gentry and Quinn's salt-of-the-earth. Atkins' books are good page-turning mysteries. What makes them a cut above is their portrayal of the badlands their characters inhabit. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Ace, Quinn and Lillie; all winners in "Innocents Lost." By John J. Bailey I loved "The Innocents" by Ace Atkins. Quinn Colson is a great character who has more women after him than anyone. Now Lillie, the acting sheriff, has the hots for him. But the two make a great law enforcing team that solves the mysteries in the book. Lillie is fascinating too and I'd like to count the number of "f-bombs" she uses in the book. But, she get the bad guys. This is a really fun book that gives lots of enjoyment during a hot summer. I can wait for the next book to see if Lillie really gets her man. Nice work Ace. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent storyteller By Jan I've been in a reading rut lately, nothing able to keep my interest. Last five or so books I've read have been blah. This one has broken my losing streak. It's the kind of book that makes you look forward to getting in bed at night because you know you get to read it. Atkins' character development is among the best, eerily good. You feel like you know these people by the end of his novels. His descriptions are gritty and seedy, and if you've spent any time in rural Mississippi, you know he's spot on. The way he develops his characters and describes a place in a way that makes it feel familiar to you remind me of Robert Galbraith's (J.K. Rowling) Cormoran Strike novels or Michael Robotham's Joseph O'Loughlin novels. I can tell you this: The man can tell a story.

From New York Times-bestselling Southern crime master Ace Atkins comes a gritty, darkly comic tale of greed, violence, and unexpected redemption. Quinn Colson didn't owe his home town of Jericho, Mississippi, a damn thing. After serving for more than a decade as a U.S. Army Ranger, he'd returned, been elected sheriff, and tried to make the town and surrounding Tibbehah county a better place. He was rewarded with being voted out of office, and went back to the war zone he'd left. Now, back in Jericho, trying to fix things with his still-married high school girlfriend and retired Hollywood stuntman father, he's drawn to becoming a lawman again. This time, he accepts a badge from acting Sheriff Lillie Vergil, a foul-mouthed law woman with shades of Calamity Jane. But what they must confront together is something brand-new. When a former high school cheerleader is found walking a back road completely engulfed in flames, the entire state focuses on the rural county, wanting answers. The light soon shines on several people: the girl's father, a worthless drunk named Wash Jones; a pair of teenage thugs with grand ambitions to control north Mississippi; and a red-headed truck stop madam named Fannie Hathcock, who has her own problems – the Syndicate from down on the Gulf Coast has big plans for her neck of the woods. As Quinn and Lillie uncover old secrets and new lies, the entire town turns against them, and they learn the most dangerous enemies may be the ones you trust most. Ace Atkins "sets a new standard for Southern crime fiction," writes The New York Times Book Review – and, with *The Innocents*, he sets it again. From the Hardcover edition.

Praise for Ace Atkins "In Quinn Colson, bestselling author Ace Atkins has created an American hero in a time when we need him." —C. J. Box "Ace Atkins's Quinn Colson series is, quite simply, the best in crime fiction today—and also so much more. With a rich cast of characters, and a hero we can count on, these are tales of morality and desperation, of shocking violence and the enduring resilience of family and community. And the emotional places they

take us make them unforgettable.” —Megan Abbott “With terrific, inflected characters and a dark, subtle sense of place and history, these are exceptional novels.” —John Sandford “Quinn Colson is my kind of guy. I would follow him anywhere.” —Lee Child “Atkins finds his natural-born storytellers everywhere. It’s all music to these ears.” —Marilyn Stasio, *The New York Times Book* “I will throw down against anyone who disagrees with the statement that Atkins is one of our best American writers. Period.” —Bookreporter.com Praise for *The Innocents* “[N]othing short of riveting, a page turner that you will stay up all night to read.... Atkins is a master of description on all points of the continuum.... While I inwardly groan at the thought of having to wait another year for more Quinn Colson, my feelings are balanced by the certainty that it will be worth it.” —bookreporter.com “The rough-and-tumble relationship between two tough-as-nails law officers and the place they love provides plenty of action [and] well-developed characters.” —Kirkus s “Quinn has to be the most refreshing New York Times Bestselling series character (there are numerous unsung independent publishing protagonists just as worthy) that I’ve come across in quite some time, and I’m hard pressed to name others that compare on this level—and, holy hell, that’s an invigorating statement to make... What else is there to say... read *The Innocents* by Ace Atkins. It’s literary crime fiction worthy of the hype.” —CriminalElement.com From the Hardcover edition. About the Author Ace Atkins is the author of nineteen books, including six Quinn Colson novels, the first two of which, *The Ranger* and *The Lost Ones*, were nominated for the Edgar Award for Best Novel (he also has a third Edgar nomination for his short story “Last Fair Deal Gone Down”). In addition, he is the author of four New York Times–bestselling novels in the continuation of Robert B. Parker’s Spenser series. Before turning to fiction, Atkins was a correspondent for *The St. Petersburg Times*, a crime reporter for *The Tampa Tribune*, and, in college, played defensive end for the undefeated Auburn University football team (for which he was featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*). He lives in Oxford, Mississippi. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Lillie Virgil stood high on a north Mississippi hill at daybreak listening to old Ruthie Holder talk about the man who’d run off with her grandson’s Kawasaki four-wheeler and her brand-new twelve-gauge Browning. Ruthie said she’d just gotten home from the Piggly Wiggly with a week’s worth of groceries when this skinny, bucktoothed varmint jumped out of the bushes and started in with a lot of crazy talk. “What exactly did he say, Miss Holder?” “He told me that the g.d. Mexican cartel was in my kitchen making chorizo and eggs and if I walked inside they’d have their way with me,” she said. “I told him it was a lot of foolish talk, but he insisted on going in without me. Next thing I knew, he was running out with my Browning and headed to the shed.” Lillie reached down and lowered the volume on the police radio. She was tall, with an athlete’s lean muscles and lots of crazy light brown hair she kept neat in a bun and under a ball cap. That day, she wore gold aviator glasses, a Glock 19 on her hip, and chewed gum, as she asked, “Have you ever seen this asshole before?” “This man wasn’t wearing a shirt or shoes, just a pair of ragged old Levi’s,” Ruthie Holder said. “He had a tattoo of Hank Williams Junior on his back. Do you think I’d ever consort with trash like that?” “No, ma’am,” Lillie said. Ruthie ran the Citizens Bank for years, served as president of the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and still offered her harp-playing skills to local weddings and funerals. Lillie didn’t think she even knew “All My Rowdy Friends” or “Whiskey Bent and Hell Bound.” “I sure love that gun,” Ruthie said. “I won it in a raffle. And since my husband died, it gave me a lot of comfort.” “Understand that,” Lillie said. “I feel the same way about the Winchester I had at Ole Miss. I won a lot of tournaments with her.” “Her?” Ruthie said. “Didn’t know a gun could be a woman.” Lillie smiled and shrugged. Standing tall, feeling good after running five miles that morning, finishing it off with a hundred push-ups and a hundred sit-ups. If she was going to watch over Tibbehah County in the years to come, better be in shape. “Makes complete sense to me,” she said. “What’d this man look like and which way did he head?” “He was ugly.” “Yes, ma’am,” Lillie said. “But can you be more specific, Mrs. Holder?” “Skinny and rangy. Black hair, but shaved down,” she said. “Wore an earring. And had thin little hairs sprouting on his chin. Like some kind of animal. What does all that matter? How many folks do you know riding four-wheelers without shirts and sporting a tattoo of Hank Junior?” Lillie grinned at her. “In this county?” she asked. “About every other son of a bitch.” Lillie told her they’d find him, already knowing they were looking for an authentic piece of crap named David John Norwood. She’d arrested Norwood for aggravated assault and drug possession a few weeks after becoming acting sheriff, back when the newly elected sheriff Rusty Wise got himself killed. Norwood only got probation and was left to raise hell and stir shit across the county as he pleased. Lillie climbed into her Jeep Cherokee with its big gold star on the door, grabbed the mic, and called in to Mary Alice at dispatch. “Can you get me D. J. Norwood’s parole officer?” she said. “Oh, Lord,” Mary Alice said. “What’s that boy done now?” “Same old shit,” Lillie said. “Lost his fucking mind. Also get me Jimmy Deets over at Wildlife. I think Norwood’s headed way, way off road and into the Big Woods.” “Which direction?” “Headed north,” Lillie said. “I say he’s going into the National Forest, looking for the Trace.” “Why?” “Probably because he wants to be with the rest of the animals,” she said. “Let Deets know he is armed, dangerous, and crazy as hell.” Lillie Virgil knocked her Cherokee in gear, following the muddy ATV tracks until they hit a dirt road into the hills. The back wheels of the Jeep spun out dirt and gravel before finding solid footing. She lowered the window and listened, chewing gum, rifle in the passenger seat at her side. So you were a cheerleader? Ó Fannie Hathcock asked the young girl sitting in a chair in front of her. “Yes, ma’am.” “Don’t ‘Yes, ma’am’ me or I won’t ever give you a job,” Fannie said. “Just how old do you think I am?” “I don’t know,” the girl said. She shuffled in her seat and glanced away. “Hate to say.” “But old,” Fannie said. “You

think I'm over-the-hill? Too old to show my goodies to fat old truckers?" "I didn't mean nothing by it," the girl said. "I just was trying to be respectful, is all. You dress real nice. Smell good. And you own your own place." Fannie smoothed down the lace on her white Valentino skirt, black shirt open wide at the throat. She wore a bright ruby in the shape of a heart on a chain around her neck. "You like it better than the old place?" "I never saw the old place," the girl said. "My dad used to go there. When he'd go on a drunk with his uncle and them. My mom said it was against God. But she's always saying things like that." Fannie, a true and authentic redhead cap to cat, rested her butt-nice and tight, for a woman in her forties-on the edge of her desk. Her office door was open, and from where she looked over the girl's shoulder she could get a good bird's-eye view of the floor of Vienna's. Vienna's Place is what she'd rechristened the renovated space of a true Mississippi shithole called the Booby Trap. Vienna was Fannie's grandmother, the woman who taught her the Golden Rule-Men will do anything for pussy. Vienna sure had made her rich. Fannie tapped at a Dunhill box and lifted a small brown cigarillo into her mouth and looked down at the girl. Bleached blonde hair, a dull, freckled face, and one piercing in her nose and one in the tongue. She also had a streak of black in the blonde. Girl said she was eighteen, but Fannie would need to see some ID. That's the last thing she needed-trouble with the law over damn Southern jailbait. "You know some tricks?" Fannie said. "Excuse me?" "I don't mean your twat, baby," she said. "I mean with all the cheerleading. Flips, tumbling. A damn naked handstand." "I was a flyer." "What the hell's a flyer?" "I was on top," the girl said. "Bigger girls would lift me up and toss me into the air." "Nobody will toss you around here," Fannie said. "We look out for our girls. Nobody gets hurt. I'm not Johnny Fucking Stagg." "I hear the money is real good." "It is," Fannie said, spewing smoke from the side of her mouth. "But the house gets forty percent. And you need to tip your bouncer and the DJ every damn night. You need to get straight with that right off." The girl's freckled face dropped. She looked down at her stubby little fingers, with black nail polish, probably thinking that she could keep all that trucker cash as long as she showed off those perky young boobies and shook that smooth, shaved tail. "OK," the girl said. "When can I start?" "When can you show me some ID?" The young girl opened up her purse. She had on a short pink T-shirt, cutoff jeans, and cheap brown boots inlaid with cactuses and cowboys. She showed her ID. Looked to be she was telling the truth. "Ever get nekkid?" Fannie said. "Sure." "For money?" The girl shrugged. "All of it flashing and jigging on a hot white stage," Fannie said. "With nasty old truckers and gray-headed perverts wanting to lick you like a damn ice cream cone." "I can do it." "Lap dance is forty bucks," Fannie said. "I never minded the grind. But I sure minded the smell." "What if they mess with you?" the girl said, looking Fannie full on in the eye now. "What if they're wanting to touch you and all?" "They can touch up top all they want, but never below," Fannie said. "One of them wants to start dialing home with his digits, you just make sure Lyle knows." The girl looked confused. "Who's Lyle?" "Runs a group of Bad News Bears around here called the Born Losers," she said. "They ride bikes and raise hell out of the motel across the street. The Golden Cherry. When they're not too drunk or stoned, they offer us some protection. That's the other rule-Don't mess with the bikers. They're hired help." "Yes, ma'am." "God damn it." "Sorry." Fannie smiled while the smoke scattered from the office and out into the big open space of Vienna's. Ceiling fans broke it apart. She'd taken down old Johnny's place to the studs and built it back up, with a new tin roof, heart pine floors, and a long old bar she'd had shipped piece by piece from Kansas City, Missouri. Fannie "Belle" Hathcock had just upped the class in this north Mississippi town by a hundred and fifty percent. "Whatta you say, girl?" Fannie said. "Forty percent?" "Let me know if you find better job opportunities in Jericho," Fannie said. "I heard they're hiring a fry cook down at the Sonic." In his previous life as the go-to Hollywood stuntman, Quinn Colson's dad, Jason, must've landed on his head a few times. Ever since he'd come back to Jericho, he'd been filled with all kinds of crazy ideas, schemes, and various delusions. There was a kids' go-cart track he wanted to open in the parking lot of the old Kentucky Fried Chicken, or bring a Hooters to the people of Tibbehah County-he knew some people in Memphis who'd back him-and, lately, he'd been talking about turning Quinn's farm into a dude ranch. Quinn didn't have time for any of it. He'd been going on little sleep since returning from Afghanistan seven days earlier, where he'd been training a local police force on behalf of the U.S. government. He was in his mid-thirties now, tall and lean, with a sharp-chiseled face, the high cheekbones from some Choctaw blood mixed in the ornery Scotch-Irish. Overseas, he'd let his hair grow out a bit, and now he sported a neat dark beard. He had on an old white tee and a pair of Levi's, as he watched the sun rise across his land, smoking a Liga Privada, with his cattle dog, Hondo, laying at his feet. Jason rode up soon after, lashing his quarter horse to Quinn's truck's tailgate. "Hadn't you shaved yet?" Jason said. "Barbershop's been closed since Mr. Jim died." "Might oughtta keep it," Jason said. "Women sure do love outlaws." "That what you were?" Quinn said. "Out in L.A.?" Jason grinned. "If that's what they wanted," he said. "Then, sure. Beach bunnies could call me Jesse James. Come on and walk with me, I got something to talk about." "We can talk right here on the porch." "Be better if we get up, see some things, get the old imaginations working." "Hell, Dad," Quinn said. "I know exactly what you're wanting to show me and the answer is no thank you. Can't you just let a man rest a bit? Sit back and fire up a stick with his dog he hasn't seen in a long while?" "Plenty of time for Hondo," Jason said. "But opportunity? Opportunity doesn't come around that often. Can't you hear that sound?" "That's just the cicadas," he said. "Screwing in the trees. They sure love all this heat." Quinn stood up, stretched, and walked back into the old tin-roofed farmhouse that had stood on his family's land since 1895 and grabbed a pair of beaten cowboy boots. He slid them on, broken-in and comfortable, and returned, the screen

door thwacking behind him. The house had a natural shotgun cooling effect between front door and back that helped as the summer wound down. He reached for his cigar, burning on top of a coffee mug, and followed. Jason was in his mid-sixties, wiry and fit, with a weathered face from years of drinking, fighting, and professionally racking up the odometer on his body. He kept a mustache and goatee, now snow-white like his longish hair. His T-shirt read stunts unlimited, an organization he'd helped found in the 1970s with a crazy man from Arkansas named Hal Needham. As Jason walked, Quinn noted the limp in his right leg was growing worse. The ball socket in his dad's hip and some of his femur had been telescoped when a landing platform busted on the set of *The Fall Guy*. It was hard for Quinn to pass judgment on someone who punished his body. Quinn's ten years as a U.S. Army Ranger, most of it as a sergeant in some godforsaken country, had left him with a lot of mileage and scars. The years he'd spent as Tibbehah County sheriff had earned him a couple of gunshot wounds, which the people repaid by voting him out of office a year ago. He followed his father through a ragged, twisting trail into some second-growth woods of pine, oak, and cedar, fringes of the land being eaten up by kudzu. It had rained the night before and the air smelled of damp earth and leaves, the canopy above him a bright green, lichen on the big trunks of oaks almost glowing. Water continued to drip on pine needles. "I know you've just gotten home," Jason said, "but you need to think on the future. You need to think about what's going to be here after I'm gone and you're gone. Don't you want to leave something for Little Jason? Or if you and Anna Lee start having kids of your own?" "Nothing's going to happen to this land," Quinn said. "And I don't think I'm having kids anytime soon." "Y'all talking?" Quinn didn't answer. "I started late," Jason said. "Missed out on a lot of things." "You missed out on a lot of things because you lived thousands of miles away." "For a damn good reason." Quinn just nodded, not sure if his dad had seen him or not, the older man intent on getting up the trail with that bad leg, cresting the hill over to the land that he wanted to discuss with Quinn. When the trail ended, so did the trees. And most living things. That rotten son of a bitch Johnny Stagg had strip-cleared one hundred acres of property that had once belonged to Quinn's uncle. When Uncle Hamp had fallen behind on some gambling debt, Stagg had swooped in, taken over the land, cut down every single tree, and bulldozed what was left. Johnny Stagg was like that. Conservation and the environment were four-letter words to his kind. And the reason every morning was a little brighter now with Stagg in federal prison.