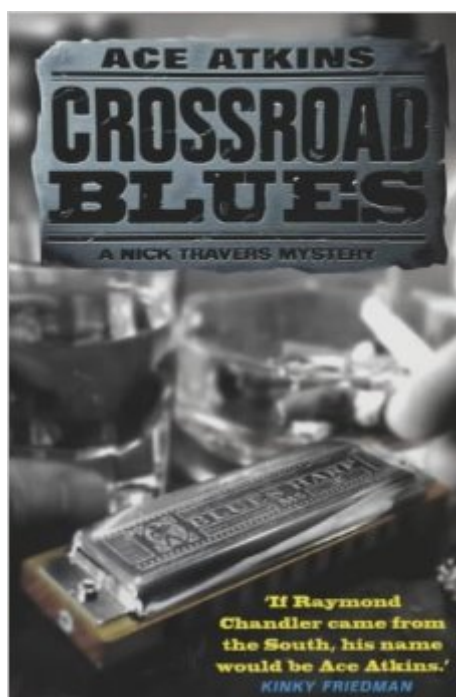


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Crossroad Blues (A Nick Travers Mystery)



Synopsis

Where in the world can you find a real blues hero? You can find him in New Orleans, living in his battered 1920s warehouse and playing harmonica at JoJo's Blues Bar in the French Quarter. His name is Nick Travers, an expro footballer for the New Orleans Saints turned blues historian at Tulane University. Nick heads deep into the heartland of the blues - the Mississippi Delta, investigating a crime over half a century old. In August 1938 outside a Greenwood Mississippi jukejoint the most celebrated figure in blues history, Robert Johnson, was murdered. Some say he was poisoned by a jealous woman while others say the devil took him after Johnson sold him his soul at the crossroads. Sixty years later a college professor researching rumours of the discovery of nine unknown Johnson recordings, goes missing in the Delta. Naturally curious, Nick decides to retrace his last-known steps. Nick finds himself pitted against a host of strange characters, including an eccentric negroid albino and a slick seventeen year old hitman who believes himself to be the reincarnation of Elvis Presley. Neck-deep in trouble, Nick has to fight to save his own skin while at the same time try and unravel the greatest mystery in all blues lore.

Book Information

Series: A Nick Travers mystery

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Customer Reviews

After reading the galleys, my first thought was, what a talented young writer. Ace Atkins' clever use of dialect, humor, and detail does more than unravel a mystery. He creates characters who are worth reading. Nick Travers is smart enough to make you think, interesting enough to make you

want more, and funny enough that you'd want to have a beer with him. Atkins also manages weave together the past and present worlds of Blues, the Delta and New Orleans into a story that really makes you wonder about the world of Robert Johnson and what really happened. And, Jesse is the hippest, funkiest villan I've read in years! Crossroad Blues is well worth reading.

Some people say there are only two types of stories: A new kid comes to town and someone goes on a trip. Crossroad Blues belongs in the later class because Nick Travers travels around New Orleans and the delta in search for a missing colleague. It's not as interesting as the chase for an albino whale. But then again what is? Along the way, we readers learn lots about he history of the Blues and the mysterious disappearance of one of the blues greats, Robert Johnson. Hard core to the core, situated in a typical decaying and corrupt urban setting, Crossroad Blues takes us to the other side of the railroad tracks where men and women are rough, nihilistic, and very very tough. The author,like most hard boil authors, does at every opportunity seem to want to rub our noses in the you know what. In Hard Boiled the main character does (predictably) have relationship problems. Nick is no exception. But in his case the relationship appears stylized, artificial, and tacked on. Unfortunately, the book is not balanced in other respects. After it hit us over the head a number of times, it lets us down at the end. And most annoying are the several plot defects that surface, especially the coincidental meetings of important characters at just the right times. Poor editing is another problem: rough edges should have been caught and repaired. All in all, though, for a first novel, it's quite entertaining. In fact, not bad. Ace Atkins, shows promise, and will probably, as he matures become one of our best hard boilers.

"Crossroad Blues" is a fascinating & engaging read because it contains many elements that keeps the reader interested - short chapters, punchy dialogue, intriguing character development & rich descriptions of the Mississippi Delta. The author seamlessly weaves the musical essence of the 1930s blues scene with a complete immersion into present day New Orleans culture. We are treated to a glimpse of life behind the facade erected for tourist consumption, & see gritty realism. We blues fans applaud this mystery series!

This novel is entertaining and filled with good blues trivia, but it suffers from many of the flaws I've seen in other series works. Implausibility - the lack of realistic reaction by the world at large - characters acting wildly beyond rational without the proper buildup. The hero of the story, Nick Travers, is an ex-New Orleans Saints football player who decked his coach (we are shown how this

was justified) and then went on to become a blues historian, professor (though you never actually see him doing this) harmonica player for a blues band (none of the other members of which you ever meet) and pretty much of a drunk from the amount of alcohol consumed during the story. Then you meet the kid who looks just like Elvis and wants to be the "E" of killers, who is one moment a Tae Kwan Do expert, and the next a complete doofus. You meet Jojo, owner of a blues bar in the big easy (the last REAL juke joint) - Cracker, and albino black man who was the last to see Robert Johnson alive, and a constant stream of others. Most of the characters start out realistic and well drawn and then become more and more ridiculous as the struggling plot requires it of them. Don't get me wrong. The story is entertaining - it just isn't any more than it appears to be on the surface - a very quick read requiring little concentration, and easily forgotten. The background material on the blues is very good, and that alone makes this one worth reading, but if you are looking for memorable, believable characters and action, you need to look elsewhere.

Two points up front - I'm not a Blues fan, and I like my protagonists to be likable. Much of this book is a history and discussion of Blues, the mystery seemed almost a side show to the discussion about Blues, and Blues musicians. It was well-written, the author is good at building atmosphere, and drawing you in with realistic conversations, but I just couldn't warm up to the subject. The protagonist - Nick Travers, was not a person I'd want to sit and have a beer with, so that made it even harder for me to get into the story. The mystery part of the book (and it was a small part) was less than compelling - at the end I was left shaking my head thinking - yea, so what? But because the story was so wrapped in Blues history, I may have missed the importance of the reason behind the quest, murders, and ending. It wasn't bad, and I will give the Nick Travers series another try because I really loved the two Quinn Colson books, but Crossroad Blues was a minor disappointment for me.

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