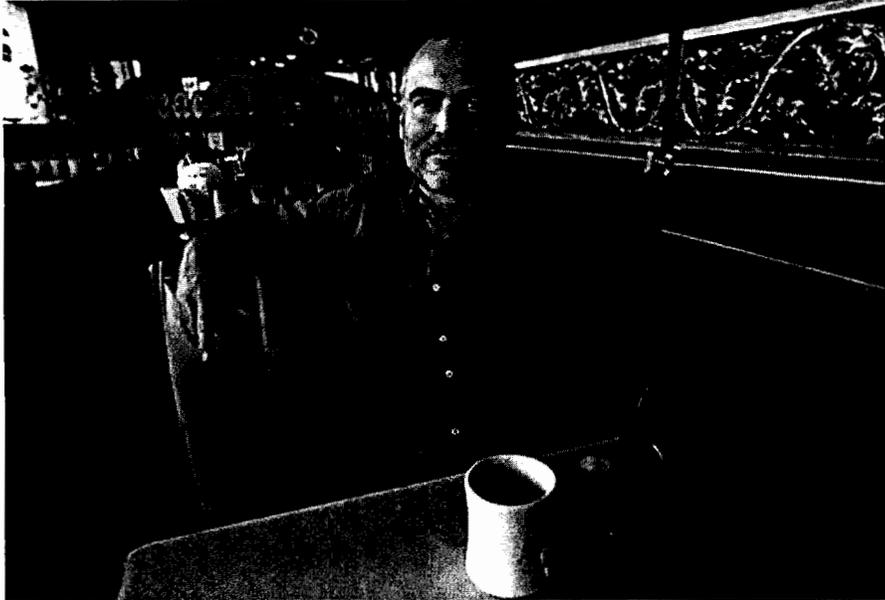


November 2, 2011

Meet American Novelist Ace Atkins

Filed under: [Author Profiles & Interviews](#), [Read of the Month](#) — Tags: [Ace Atkins](#), [Allen Mendenhall](#), [Fiction](#), [Infamous](#), [Novelist](#), [The Ranger](#) — Allen Mendenhall @ 12:01 am



SLR Contributor Allen Mendenhall Interviews Ace Atkins

SLR: What I suspect everyone wants to know is, how do you stay so prolific? How do you write so much, so quickly?

AA: I'm very fortunate to be a full-time novelist. I've been writing full time since 2001 and that gives me the freedom to concentrate completely on my stories. Many terrific writers I know have to carve

out time from from their jobs to work on a book. I am able to go to my office every day and work on that new novel. I feel pretty damn lucky and that in turn means I get to work on more projects.

SLR: You seem to have located *The Ranger* in regions of the South that you know well. Would you call this book "Southern literature"?

AA: Absolutely. I don't get into working in a certain genre — that's up to readers and critics — and can hurt the writer and reader. My new series of novels could not be set anywhere else but the South and certainly centers on many Southern themes. I gain a lot of inspiration from the gritty world of Faulkner's crime stories and turn my attention to the descendants of those people.

SLR: I noticed that country music and country musicians appear throughout *The Ranger*. Can you tell us about the significance of this to the novel?

AA: My first four novels were stylistically and thematically about blues. I always wanted to work on a novel that felt like an old Johnny Cash ballad — a soldier returning home to town, unrequited love, guns and violence. I listened to a lot of Johnny Cash and also tons of Outlaw Country — Waylon, Merle, etc. — when coming up with the background of Quinn Colson.

SLR: Who is Colonel George Reynolds? I noticed his name in the Acknowledgments.

George is the guy who saved my ass. I had contracted to write a novel about a U.S. Army soldier without knowing enough about the modern war in Afghanistan. Colonel Reynolds contacted me from Camp Phoenix in Afghanistan about signing a copy of my novel, *Devil's Garden*. He offered help if I ever needed. It turned out, I needed help immediately. He offered terrific insight direct from the battle front and introduced me to the real Ranger who provided the background for Quinn Colson.

I could not have written the book without him and he still provides me with a ton of answers to picky questions.

SLR: Where did the character Quinn come from?

AA: I never really planned on writing another hero-based series. But I'd thought about a movie or a TV show about the South and what kind of person would be a modern hero. It didn't take me long to think about all these men and women home from the front. We haven't seen a return of vets like this since Vietnam. I also had grown up in Lee County, Alabama — not far from Fort Benning — and was very familiar with the mystique of the U.S. Army Ranger.

SLR: Women seem to have played a major role in your last two books. Kate is the villain of *Infamous*, and Anna Lee, Lillie, and Lena, among others, shape the narrative of *The Ranger*. Are you after something in particular with these compelling female characters?

AA: I like strong women and often men can't write women worth a damn. They are often sounding boards or sex objects but seldom adversaries or equals. It's much more fun for me to write a woman like Kathryn Kelly in *Infamous* — who runs her husband — or Lillie Virgil — the deputy in *The Ranger* — who can keep up with the hero step for step. That's based on many women I've known in my life — on personal and professional levels.

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. I know I'm not alone when I say that I can't wait for your next book