



The Ashtabula Hat Trick

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#18 in the Milan Jacovich series! The people of Queenstown, Ohio, don't take kindly to strangers. But they have no choice in the matter after a man's body is found in a local park, pants unzipped and stabbed through the heart—and a second man's body turns up days later, his head bashed in. Local law enforcement needs help with the town's first-ever murder investigation.

Private investigator Milan Jacovich (pronounced MY-lan YOCK-ovitch) tags along when his main squeeze, Cleveland homicide detective Tobe Blaine, is dispatched to rural Ashtabula County to handle the case.

Word travels fast in the small town, and the mixed-race couple receives a cold welcome. The motel manager doesn't like their looks, the coroner conveniently forgets key details, and patrons at the local watering hole flaunt their disrespect for Tobe's out-of-town badge and her skin color.

Milan enlists his young assistant, Kevin "K.O." O'Bannion, to glean information from the town's teens, who tell tales of their parents' fervent devotion to their local pastor, an outspoken bigot. Did homophobia factor in the murders?

Looming over the case is nearby Conneaut prison—privately run, overcrowded, and rumored to employ some questionable methods (as well as many local residents). Inside its walls, a powerful convict known as "The Prophet" just might have the information Tobe and Milan need to solve the case—if they can get him to talk.

Queenstown might only be an hour's drive from Cleveland, but Milan, Tobe, and K.O. find themselves strangers in a strange land. They also soon find themselves neck-deep in serious trouble.

The Ashtabula Hat Trick Details

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From Reader Review The Ashtabula Hat Trick for online ebook

Beth says

It's gotten to the point where I feel like I'm reading this series out of obligation, as I've read all of the earlier books. It feels like the recent books mostly consist of Milan, K.O., and Tobe shooting sarcastic one-liners at bullies and/or beating the hell out of them. While there was an interesting plotline, it was subsumed by a lot of violence and a stereotypical and inaccurate picture of Ashtabula County (it is not all rednecks and racists, and Geneva-on-the-Lake is much nicer than depicted). As a Clevelander, I love these books for their setting and references to real people and places, but lately I'm wondering if Roberts lives in the same Northeast Ohio that I do.

April Helms says

I'm a big fan of the Milan Jacovich novels, and this one does not disappoint. It was a lot of fun and a quick read- I finished it in a weekend. I'm just loving the relationship between Milan and Tobe Blaine. Their dialogue just crackles with wit and fun. Only warning I have is be careful drinking beverages while reading this- because you may be doing a spit-take or three. Seriously, though, I hope we see more of Tobe in future books. Also really liking Kevin O'Bannion, who is quickly learning the ropes as a private eye and proving himself more and more indispensable to Milan.

The Ashtabula Hat Trick is set in a small (and fictional) town in Ashtabula County. This quiet, out of the way place has been rocked by two murders. Tobe, a homicide detective with the Cleveland police force, is called in to help investigate. She brings Milan along to assist in an unofficial capacity. Aside from the strange and brutal murders, Tobe and Milan quickly discover an overt prejudice in the town. Basically, anyone who is not white, Christian and heterosexual is viewed with a jaundiced eye. The African American Tobe and Slovenian Milan get a lot of stink-eyes cast their way. It takes the combined efforts of Tobe, Milan and "K.O." to get to the bottom of things, and not without some hazards along the way.

While the town and people are fictional, a lot of the issues are taken straight from today's headlines, particularly with the fire-and-brimstone preacher. The ending is perhaps the most "gray area" I've seen in this series. The reader is really left with a conundrum. I do wonder if the ending here will be revisited in a future book. While each of the novels in the series stands well on its own, they maintain a solid continuity. I don't want to say more than that for fear of giving away spoilers. Time will tell.

Glen says

I won this novel in a goodreads drawing.

Hotshot PI Milan Jacovich goes to a small town in Ohio, and finds a Bernie Sanders campaign speech come to life. Virtually everybody in town is a racist, and most people in town don't have the sense to come in out of the rain.

Jacovich screws around, and eventually solves the case, which Miss Marple would have solved in about 20 minutes.

Maybe Jacovich can't really cope outside of Cleveland. I guess Roberts felt like making lame political points was more important than writing a good mystery.

Judie says

Queenstown, Ohio, in Ashtabula County, was a very small town near Lake Erie in northeast Ohio. Unlike the idealistic small town of people's imaginations, however, it had an ugly underside. The murder of two of its long time residents, one by stabbing and one by being hit on the head with a club, lead to the exposures of some of that underside.

When the police chief of the three-man department found himself unable to solve the murders, the first in the town's history, he turned to the Cleveland Police Department for help. The CPD sent Detective Sergeant Tobe Blaine to help out. She, in turn, brought along her boyfriend, Private Investigator Milan Jacovich to assist. Their mere presence opened one of the major secrets: The people of Queenstown were extremely bigoted and the sight of a black woman, particularly a police officer, and her white lover, immediately made many of them reluctant to cooperate.

A third murder, the drowning of a woman by someone holding her head underwater in her spa, led Tobe and Milan to call for additional help in the form of Milan's young assistant, K.O. (Kevin O'Bannion) When he showed up, their opposition to homosexuality became a major issue as well.

The town seemed to run rather well. "This isn't Cleveland. It's a remote corner of Nowhere. We don't worry about government ruled; we make our own." In most cases, it worked.

One main source of employment and revenue was the nearby state prison in Conneaut. It had been pretty good until it was privatized three years previously. Since then, it became overcrowded and unsanitary and the prisoners suffered from abuse, awful food, and a lack of any programs to help them become rehabilitated..Many of the Queenstown residents worked there while they waited for a relative or friend to be released.

As the trio tried to determine what the victims had in common, the only thing they could find was that they all attended the same ultra-conservative church, so much, but not all, of the investigation centered around the minister and the congregation.

One person they interviewed stated, "I don't always agree with everything the parson says." Milan responded: "I don't agree with everything anyone says. Life'd be better if we thought for ourselves once in a while."

The minister and many of the congregants, in a situation that is all to frequent, tended to focus on specific actions and ideas as major sins. They were not above twisting parts of the Bible to match their own opinions. For example, one of their issues was the sin of masturbation and they cited the Biblical story of Onan as the source of that prohibition. The problem is that Onan was not censured for masturbating. His sin was refusing to follow the Levirate Law which required a man to impregnate his sister-in-law after the death of his brother so that his brother would have an heir. This would have economic consequences since the child would receive the inheritance of the deceased son. So Onan withdrew from Tamar and "spilled his seed" instead. That was his sin. But that was not the way the church taught it.

Other areas discussed include drugs and infidelity.

Interesting point: Conneaut is the northernmost city in Ohio.

The book is an easy, well-written read with several red herrings but, if you pay close attention, you may be able to figure out the killer or killers on your own.. K.O. shows that he is well-qualified for his job as he grows into his role. My main criticism is that the story is shallow: Too many interviews just skim the surface and end with leaving the reader wondering what the trio had hoped to learn and what they learned that made the inclusion necessary.

Francisco says

Good story of who dunnit set in a fictional place Queentown.

I would like to share a passage:

"When the Civil Rights Act first passed, Southern bartenders would openly break the glass a black person drink from, right in front of them, so no Caucasian could put his lips near it again."

Some things you don't learn from history books in school.

Colleen says

I love this series. Some of the content was a little dark for me, compared to the other books in the series. The main characters are very likeable.

Lesa says

If I was author Les Roberts, I wouldn't be heading to Ashtabula County, Ohio in the near future. His latest Milan Jacovich mystery, *The Ashtabula Hat Trick*, describes the people and county in not-so-favorable terms. And, I've never read about a community and had more sympathy for the killer than the other citizens. Admittedly, Milan and his cohorts have the same problem, sympathy for the killer.

Milan Jacovich, a private investigator in Cleveland, is really along to help out on a case if needed. His significant other, Homicide Detective Sergeant Tobe Blaine, is sent to Queenstown in Ashtabula County, a town of 3,000, because the small-town police chief can't handle a murder investigation. There have been two murders in sixteen days, and, soon after Milan and Tobe arrive, there's a third murder. What do two men and a woman, all killed in different ways, have in common? They are all members of a local conservative church, one that spews forth a message of hatred for gays and blacks. But, the racism is not unusual in the town where Milan and Tobe, a mixed-race couple, are made to feel unwelcome everywhere they go. When Milan's assistant, K.O., joins them, he notices the atmosphere there as well. "Something's going on in this town, and we're not getting it."

The Ashtabula Hat Trick is a timely, issue-oriented story. Roberts has captured the desperate nature of an area defined as Appalachia by the federal government. It's an area defined by poor-paying jobs at McDonald's and Lowe's, no industry, but there is a privatized prison. In an economically deprived area, it's easy for people to turn to hatred, drugs, drinking, and the church. If it's a church with a racist message, there's even more hatred. All of these issues are elements in this disturbing mystery.

Over the course of the series, Milan has suffered losses and dealt with the changes in Cleveland and the world, including the changes in the types of crime he deals with. When he went from cop to private eye, he thought he'd deal with security issues, so he called his firm Milan Security. Instead, he deals with personal problems, kidnappings, murder, theft. In this case, he and his friends deal with murder, racism and bigotry.

I've always read the Milan Jacovich mysteries because Roberts brings the Cleveland area to life, with its beauty and its dark side. The books always have a strong sense of place. This one is particularly thought-provoking and sobering. But, Ashtabula isn't unique. We just think of hatred and bigotry in big cities. But, "Bizarre crime happens not only on the mean streets of metropolitan cities, but in peaceful towns and villages, too." Milan Jacovich; a detective who walks the mean streets of Cleveland and the supposedly quiet streets in Ashtabula County, Ohio in Les Roberts' compelling mystery, The Ashtabula Hat Trick.

Eileen says

I like the author and his style of writing. Good mystery and lots of action involved in town close to our city, so makes it fun to hear about places I am familiar with. Some of the content was dark compared to some of his other books though and not as comfortable with that kind of content.

Kathy says

read it one sitting. Great story. love the different points of view. And then a shout out to some friends in the acknowledgements! practically perfect. can't wait for number 19!

Casey Hickman says

Good book. Kills me how liberal this author is. He repeatedly states in every book, Cleveland is not a town people wear sunglasses. That's one of the silliest things I've ever heard. If the suns out, yes we wear sunglasses!

Kay Wright says

I was positive Les Roberts died 20 years ago. I even looked him up one time because I missed his character Milan Jackovich. So finding a dozen of his recent novels on the bookshelf was like finding buried treasure. Brought home a recent, 2015, one and dove in. My guess if anyone from Ashtabula or Conneaut read this, Roberts might have been murdered. The portrayal of that county and those towns is inaccurate, cruel and possibly slanderous. It is a rural, hillbillyish, poor part of Ohio but Roberts makes it out like Mississippi. He must have it in for that area cause he really takes them down. The hat trick refers to three murders the locals can't solve, so Milan, his girlfriend and a sidekick drive a whole hour from Cleveburg and check into a motel until they solve the crime. And bitch about the local restaurants ad nauseum. Not fair to any of the small towns, including Geneva and Geneva on the Lake, in the area. Roberts has gotten old, a little stale and kinda grouchy. So has Milan. Their rants and righteousness about gay rights, racism, gender equality are so creaky you'd think it was 1995 when this was written.

Jerry B says

Now we've polished off the penultimate story ("Hat Trick" [for the three murders herein] being the 18th in Roberts' 19-book Milan Jacovich set) about a Cleveland-based PI protagonist we've mostly enjoyed. We've previously lowered our expectations for the series, which is light on pizzazz while posing mysteries solved by a nice guy difficult to dislike. The introduction of young intern K.O. Bannion, who now consumes about a third of the ink, has not really helped the appeal of these tales, but we are not about to abandon these novels with only one to go to finish the entire bibliography.

Unfortunately, in this one, Milan, K.O., and Milan's love interest Cleveland Homicide Detective Sergeant Tobe Blaine, are all on temporary duty (only Tobe officially) in Queenstown, Ashtabula County, to help the local police, unused to even a single homicide, to investigate two recent murders, which almost immediately becomes three. The book plods along very slowly as the lack of clues gives the three little into which to sink their teeth. A bigoted church pastor seems to be an obvious antagonist, but that doesn't help determine a suspect. Of course, all is solved in the end, with frankly an unexpected but not invalid perpetrator.

We had to wade through a lot of dull chapters to get there, so we're not about to commend this one as a stellar entry in the set. One book to go. {2.5}

Susan Walker says

I enjoyed the fact that this book had a murder in a small Ohio town that had never had a murder before. It was nice to read a mystery/thriller where everyone did not know all about murders. The dynamics between the female Homicide Detective and her boyfriend, a P. I. were a nice addition to the story. This was a very nice story that I would recommend.

Monnie says

I've been a fan of Cleveland writer Les Roberts for too many years to count, and while he's written dozens of books, my favorites are the ones featuring private investigator Milan Jacovich (who is, for the record, on my list of Top 10 favorite book "heroes"). By now, he's getting a bit longer in the tooth and losing some hair, but other than that, by golly, he's still got it.

The stories themselves are always a treat to read (I finished this relatively short one in a single day), but one of the reasons I enjoy the series so much is that my proximity to Cleveland and other parts of northeast Ohio is such that I've been there, seen that - and it's fun to get a view of it from someone else's perspective. This one in particular struck a chord; the action takes place in and around Ashtabula County - the county just north of ours (Trumbull) that borders Lake Erie - specifically, in the towns of Ashtabula and Conneaut. My husband and I visit the area fairly often; Just last week, in fact, we were sitting at a small restaurant in Conneaut Harbor chowing down on that delicious Lake Erie perch.

The story begins as Milan's lady friend, Cleveland homicide detective Tobe Blaine (pronounced "Toby"), gets sent to the ultra-small (and for the record, fictional) community of Queenstown, somewhere in between Ashtabula and Conneaut. Murders of two fairly prominent and local men just occurred there, and solving such heavy duty crimes is well beyond the capabilities of local law enforcement. Tobe drags Milan with her, and right from the start, they hit a brick wall: Tobe happens to be African-American and she and Milan are out-of-towners - two pulls from under of the welcome mat in this close-knit place.

Before they can get very deep into the investigation, though, a third murder is reported - this time a local woman. The *modus operandi* is different in all three cases, adding to the mystery. Further, it appears the town's rowdy, insolent teenagers may have clues to whodunit, with a trail that stops on the doorstep of the pastor of the local Baptist church. Every Sunday (and apparently every chance he gets in between), he rails about sinning - specifically homosexuality and the evils of people whose skin isn't pearly white.

To help, Milan brings in his young assistant, Kevin O'Bannion (K.O.) - an experienced armed services vet who loves animals and is working on keeping his hair-trigger temper in check but is great with kids. He has some success, and the trail veers off toward a possible meth lab and the now privately owned prison in Conneaut where a man known as "The Prophet" rules supreme and just may have some answers.

More than that you'll have to learn by reading the book, but I will say I'm glad that I've never encountered this kind of behavior anywhere in Ashtabula County. Neither has the author, for the record; in the acknowledgements he emphasizes that he's been to the county many times and enjoys the places and people. But the fact is - I'm paraphrasing here - stories about nice people don't tend to sell well.

In the end - maybe because the people involved were just too nasty - I didn't enjoy this one quite as much as the others (my actual rating for the book is 4.5 stars). But ask me again down the road a bit; I did learn of a new-to-me place to eat in Conneaut - a pizza cafe that's one of the 25 oldest Italian pizzerias in the United States (founded in 1934). If it's anywhere near as good as the book claims, the discovery will more than make up for that half-star.

Chad Malkamaki says

Another enjoyable Milan Jacovitch book. Because I live in Cleveland and have lived and visited many of the locations where the books are set. Even though I'm a Lake county Finn, this book hit close to home being set in Ashtabula one county over. Interesting set of characters and it was neat to see Finnish names sprinkled throughout the book, the one downer is the ending seemed rushed and our heroes in the book do little to solve this crime. Like always Les Roberts has quick, fun, reads that fans of detective novels will enjoy.
