

## Halo around the Moon

**Matt Ritter**

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*Halo around the Moon is a dark mystery novel that focuses on the strange, unpredictable ways in which events and people are connected.*

A grisly murder triggers a series of violent events in Matt Ritter's mystery novel *Halo around the Moon*.

Jack, an LAPD detective, always does his best work with his friend Marcus, a college professor, by his side. After a mutilated body is found in a stolen wood chipper, the duo's investigation leads them to an EPA office and a chemical company, both of which have secrets to hide. All the while, Jack and Marcus remain unaware of the endless web of coincidences and random events that brought them to where they are today—and that will determine whether or not they can bring the killer to justice.

Nonlinear flashbacks are used to tell multiple stories, all of which connect in the end, no matter how disparate they first seem to be. This adds intrigue and mystery to the story, wherein the two main plot threads focus on the current murder investigation and Jack's turbulent family history, which spans from rural Arkansas to a war-torn Vietnamese jungle. Crisp descriptions make each new location feel close at hand, despite the years and miles that separate all. The tension within these story lines increases in tandem, until the only way either can end is in violence.

But the story's breadth leaves little room for character analysis; everyday details, as of a CEO's bizarre fashion sense, are used to flesh people out instead. As a result, Jack's romantic feelings for a whistleblower, and the death of someone close to Marcus, have little emotional impact. And it is unclear why the LAPD allows Marcus, a biology professor unaffiliated with the department, to accompany Jack to crime scenes.

Jack is sometimes obnoxious, particularly in his interactions with women; this is despite a declaration that he learned his lesson years ago. The use of slurs, only some of which are justified by the book's historical settings, and LGBTQ+ stereotypes also mar the story.

Still, the story uses obscure trivia, some of which has been altered to make the story more exciting, and graphic details to create its fascinating, distinctive atmosphere. Here, even something as minor as a discarded magazine or a moment of pettiness snowballs into life-changing events. The book's emphasis on chance is a perfect setup for its ending, in which luck plays just as large a role as forethought.

The book's conclusion is startling. It involves touches of melancholy, hope, and foreboding. *Halo around the Moon* is a dark mystery novel that focuses on the strange, unpredictable ways in which events and people are connected.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (April 7, 2021)

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