

Xolo: A Novel of Canine Horror

Peter Hurd

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In the measured horror novel Xolo, a man brings a pet home from abroad, but his decision results in brutal ends for his neighbors.

In Peter Hurd's horror novel *Xolo*, a real estate developer brings home a dog only to discover too late its unusual supernatural abilities.

Derek is an inattentive father; he tries to buy his children's love. While on a business trip to Mexico, he encounters a strange, almost hairless dog with a wispy mohawk and unsettling eyes. He thinks the dog might be a good pet for his children back in Colorado; despite warnings against doing so, he agrees to take the unusual animal home. The dog's breed is difficult to pronounce, so everyone takes to referring to it as Xolo.

But then Xolo attacks Derek's son and stares down a wounded doe, pulling a mist from it with glowing eyes. It commands a growing herd of vicious dogs; people are subject to violent attacks. As the attacks grow more frequent and gruesome, they trace a path that moves toward Derek's home.

The story is fast to establish its familiar horror roots, which follow the trope of buying an unusual animal despite its previous owner's warnings. Derek experiences a vision of Xolo being involved in ancient sacrificial rituals; he still agrees to take the dog with him. The escalating attacks are meted out in a way that creates tension; while the attacks themselves are gory, they also hold attention, showing blood splattering and relaying the sensations of canine teeth ripping flesh. Eventually, Derek is forced to face the implications of his decision to bring Xolo to Colorado, including the massacre of his neighbors. And the book's ending contains a nod to horror movies, with both its ambiguities and its final twist.

Every character is developed in rich terms, down to Derek's son's friends and those neighbors who fall prey to the dogs' attacks. Their exchanges are casual, flowing, and rhythmic, capturing events like a new friendship that results in peer pressure and insults well. Indeed, everyone who populates this novel has a place in its story—a fact amplified by the poetic descriptions of the settings. The prose maintains an underlying, mounting sense of terror; Xolo haunts it in cult horror fashion, implacable and ever present.

In the measured horror novel *Xolo*, a man brings a pet home from abroad—and unwittingly unleashes a brutal canine army on his unsuspecting neighbors.

JOHN M. MURRAY (November 3, 2022)

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