

The Hollow Beast

Christophe Bernard

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In Christophe Bernard's novel *The Hollow Beast*, a patriarch's fervent pursuit of revenge has intergenerational consequences with the emergence of a mysterious beast that haunts one of his descendants decades later.

During a fateful hockey game, Monti Bouge stops the puck from entering his goal by catching it in his teeth. Nonetheless, Victor Bradley, a municipal mailman and referee, grants the goal. Thus, Monti's machinations of revenge against Bradley begin—helped along as he amasses wealth via gold prospecting. A few generations later, François Bouge contends with his ancestor's vengefulness as he returns home to escape and understand a mysterious beast that only he can see.

Monti's chapters are speedy. After the infamous hockey match, the back-and-forth between Monti and Bradley escalates with rapidity. It becomes integrated into his delusional pursuit of wealth, status, and gold. In this same amount of time, François's car ride home lasts for multiple chapters without a change of setting. Further slowing occurs with the intercutting of chaos at a house that's invaded by Yannick, François's rowdy brother.

In its absurd humor, the novel mixes overstatement and understatement, and characters are satirized. Bradley is a self-satisfied womanizer whose smart mouth gets him into trouble. François is absent-minded, honest to a fault, and interested in his academic research to the point of oblivion. A drawn-out knife fight between François and the Poupette over money ends with the succinct conclusion "They wept in each other's arms to make up ... then, with one swift tug, [Poupette] removed the knife from François's side."

Mixing family history with local lore, the satirical novel *The Hollow Beast* is a tale of revenge and hauntings.

ISABELLA ZHOU (March / April 2024)

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