

Introduction

“I’m a what?”

“A werewolf, kid,” said the grizzled veteran of what looked like far too many wars. “Ya know, howl at the moon, can’t stand garlic, eat babies.” He flipped up a crossbow that was dangling by a cord from his left hand. “Vulnerable to silver.” Istvan swallowed hard. “So that wasn’t a wild dog that bit me?”

The man smirked as he lifted the crossbow up to his shoulder. “Nope. But this is a very real crossbow.”

Istvan’s eyes darted everywhere, looking for a way out. “But I haven’t even turned into a wolf yet!”

The hunter said pulled the string back and placed a silver bolt into place. The catch locked down with a crisp click.

“It’s nothing personal, kid. People are just werewolves waiting to happen.”

The wolf has always been with us. Since human civilization learned to etch half-man/half-animal figures on cave walls, the wolf has remained our guide and our guardian. It was the wolf’s descendant, the dog, that helped humanity to flourish. Canines accepted man as a pack leader and man in return gave them food and shelter. Ever since, the relationship has grown stronger. The werewolf is the ultimate expression of this long-lived connection.

Definitions

The etymology of the word “werewolf,” like the strange hybrid the name suggests, is difficult to define. The word “wolf” is no mystery. The word “wer,” however, may have come from the German “wehr” meaning “defense group of men,” or the Prussian “wer” meaning “man,” or the Old English “weri” meaning to wear.

Another common term for werewolves is “lycanthroe.” Technically, it means wolf (“lycan”) man (“thrope”). However, the term has become muddled. Lycanthropy is also a clinically defined insanity wherein a person believes he becomes a wolf under certain circumstances. Technically, the term that should be used for all other shapeshifting creatures is “theiranthrope” (“animal-man”). Too many books on lycanthropes mix the werewolf with other shapeshifting legends that have nothing to do with wolves. Let there be no doubt—the peculiar mixture of humanoid and wolf is a unique combination that is by no means representative of transformation myths as a whole. Thus, the term “lycanthropy” and “lycanthrope” will only be used to refer to werewolves in this book.

Some scholars believe the word “werewolf” originated from the term “vargulf.” A “varg” (or “warg”) in Norse means a predator or murderer. Thus, “vargulf” is a wolf that slaughters flocks of sheep or herds of cattle but only eats a few of its prey. The term “worg” has since come to represent a large, predatory wolf in fantasy literature.

Of Wolves and Men

Over the ages, the wolf became a powerful representation of the warrior spirit. Warriors sought to emulate the wolf; they envied his senses, his hunting tactics, and his cunning. Just as the dog looked to man to lead him, man looked to wolf to shepherd him through wars and hunts.

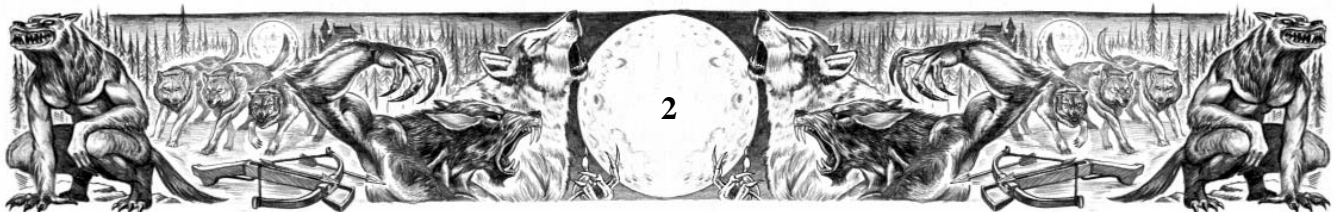
No wonder, then, that the distinction between man and wolf is often blurred in cultures all over the world, more so than with any other animal. The wolf pack at its most basic provides the elements of family structure and at its most advanced, human civilization. With lifestyles that were so compatible, the two races formed a strategic alliance that has lasted through the centuries.

This alliance is most evident in the tale of Romulus and Remus, the future leaders of Rome who were suckled by a she-wolf. The Viking berserkers wore wolf skins and believed the skins gave them the power of the wolf. Several Native American tribes adopted the wolf as their totem and ally. The ancient Greek priests of Arcadia venerated wolves as Zeus’ patron animal and called him Lycaeos (“of the wolf”).

Eventually, man turned to agriculture. Humans discovered that they could feed more children without having to rely upon the vagaries of the hunt. The very lifestyle that defined the wolf became less and less critical to civilization. Hunting became a dangerous occupation and the hunter had to contend with the dark woods. Suddenly, the forests, hills, vales and streams that had once been man’s home were dangerous.

But the wolf had not changed. He still prowled the woods. He still hunted in the darkness. He still fed on the weak, the old, and the dead. Suddenly, the wolf became the enemy. He became the embodiment of hunger, of madness, of rage, of devilry, of all things wicked and bestial.

It didn’t take long before the wolf that suckled great leaders and led warriors into battle became a demonic force of ravening evil. The “Big Bad Wolf” haunted fairytales, tricked the foolish into stepping into his mouth, and stalked



the forests. Symbolically, the wolf, which had always been a part of man, came to represent his worst side.

Enter the werewolf.

It wasn't much of a leap for the old sympathetic magic rituals, in which men wore wolf pelts to draw strength from their power, to be transformed into something far more sinister. Wolves and man became one being, an almost unilaterally cursed and wicked thing that ate loved ones and children. The werewolf hysteria spiraled to new heights in the Middle Ages and kept the fires of the Inquisition burning for decades. Serial killers, rapists, the criminally insane, and the deformed—all were tossed into the same refuse pile of the werewolf.

The werewolf lay dormant in the minds of American citizens until the arrival of cinema. The first werewolf appeared in a silent film titled *Werewolf* that utilized footage of a real wolf in the transformation scene. But it was the movie *Werewolf of London* that invented a werewolf's contagious bite. For the first time, moviegoers saw a half-man/half-wolf being.

Of course, *The Wolf Man* is considered the gold standard of werewolf movies. Lon Chaney Jr. added to the werewolf canon by playing Larry Talbot, a half-man/half-wolf hybrid who changed when the moon was full. The later *House of Frankenstein* established a werewolf's vulnerability to silver bullets.

It wasn't until *An American Werewolf in London* that a werewolf's transformation was fully and graphically represented. The protagonist changed before our very eyes, complete with bones popping and tendons stretching. Never before was it made so clear that transforming from man to wolf really *hurt*.

In more recent cinema, there has been a tendency to humanize our monsters. Ironically, some of the vulnerabilities that werewolves acquired through plot contrivances have disappeared. Few werewolves are concerned about the moon; indeed, many lycanthropes are presented as "natural" werewolves that can transform at will. The modern werewolf is more superhero than monster, capable of transforming at just the right time and using his wolf abilities in innovative ways that ultimately defeat the bad guys. This book allows for the full range of lycanthropic types.

A full cultural history of werewolves can be found at the Free Materials page of www.goodman-games.com.

