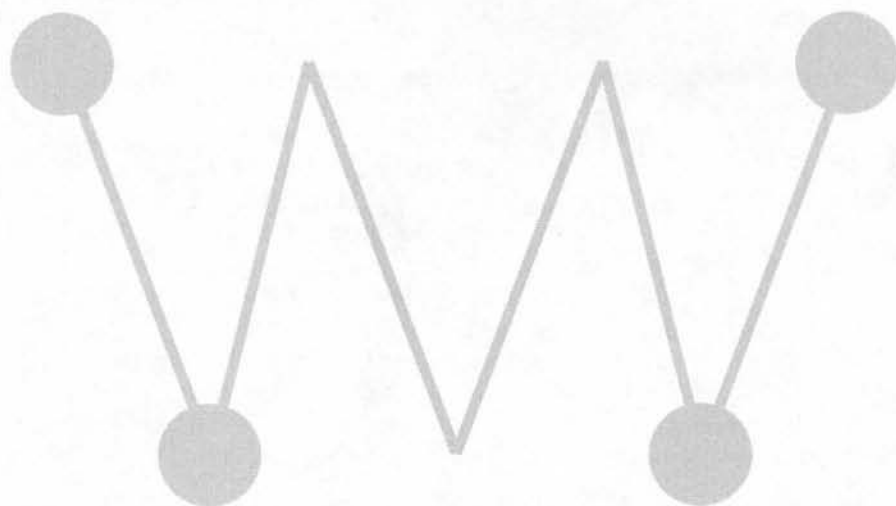


The Moonstruck™



An Enemy Book for Hunter: The Reckoning®

The Moonstruck™



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MAN SPENLE 02

PROLOGUE: HEARTLESS



I'm beginning to think this trip was a mistake.

The nice thing about being a travel agent is that you know how to find travel deals. I abuse that privilege for all it's worth. I abuse it for my friends, for other "called" folks, for my own enjoyment. And sometimes, I go *looking* for trouble.

I don't know what the hell this time was. All I know is that every single time I've gone to visit a well-publicized "haunted house," there was nothing there. So, I figured a tour of "Old West ghost towns" wasn't going to show me anything scary. I just needed a vacation. Take some pictures, maybe start writing a travel guide. I've been thinking about doing that for years. Plus, I'd get to talk to some spirits, if any were around. Not a bad idea, right? Would've been even better if Jake had been able to come along, but I'm not getting into that.

Actually, considering that I'm hunched in a sleeping bag about 12 running steps from the tour van, it's probably best that Jake isn't here. I'm not sure I could outrun them, but I'd get a lot farther than he would. He's still getting used to walking again.

I've never even seen a big cat up close before now. In zoos, sure, but that's always through glass or bars or across a moat. I remember one time I was in Cleveland (My flight schedule got mixed up. Don't ask — I sure wasn't there by choice!). So, I went to the zoo to kill some time. There was a Bengal tiger in an enclosure across a moat, and there were people crowded around watching him. As we were hanging around, he stopped pacing, faced the crowd and tensed up like he was thinking, "I'll bet if I jumped, I could land right there on that stupid woman

trying to roar at me." That was scary — the tiger really looked like he could do it if he wanted to. I walked away and looked at the monkeys. I can't exactly do that now.

The cat's breath is awful. It smells like rotted meat. It's hot and almost sticky, and the smell still lingers from when it stuck its head into my sleeping bag. I've got no idea why it didn't go for me then. Maybe I'm hunched too far down in here to reach.

The couple — Jones? Johnson? Something like that — are huddled in the tent. I can hear her crying. The cat hasn't even looked at the tent, but one of the wolves pawed at it a while ago.

I've visited two ghost towns in the last week and I haven't see one ghost. That's pretty funny.



I flew into New Mexico on Sunday. (Red-eye flight. Dirt cheap. I rule.) I was planning to fly home tomorrow. Red-eye again, with a Saturday lay over. I'd be spending more on souvenirs than on airfare. I've got a weakness for knickknacks, so what? Anyway, the tour group was meeting up in Church Rock, not too far from Gallup. The first thing on the agenda was a quick trip to Four Corners, the place where Utah, New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado meet. I'll say this: It's about as interesting in person as in conversation — gets old after about five minutes. But what the heck, it was a nice way to get to know folks.

When I told people I was a travel agent, they made a big deal about it. I'm used to that. It's like when little kids see their teachers at the grocery store and get all excited because their teachers have left school. No one ever thinks about

travel agents taking vacations. Anyway, it was a small group, probably because of timing. (Late August isn't a popular vacation time, which is why I took the trip when I did. Fewer crowds and all.) It was me, the Joneses (Johnsons?), the late Mr. Greevy, and our guide Daniel. Just five people looking for ghosts in towns that have been dead for more than a century. There's a reality TV show in there, somewhere.

Some folks on the net have a total disdain for "normal folks." I can't figure that out. I go round and round over whether I'd forget the whole thing if I could, but I never feel contempt for the folks who don't see what we do. It's nice to be around them. Jake's really the only other "called" person I've hung out with in person (other than that psychopath Rodgers). It always seems that when we get together — the called, that is — there's something in the air between us, like, "We shouldn't be lying here in bed watching movies because there's things out there that need to be taken care of." It isn't like that with normal folks. That's why I like tour groups.

Anyway, the Joneses were from Arkansas. They had me speaking with a drawl inside 15 minutes. Andy Jones was a schoolteacher. I never asked, but he must have taught science. He just screamed "nerd." I like nerds. His wife — she had a real common name, Jennifer or something — was the one interested in ghosts. Andy just liked to travel, and he loved the West (big John Wayne fan, apparently). That's why they were out here.

Daniel put on a big cowboy show, but he was a smart guy. I caught him in his tent the other night reading *Van Gogh's Bad Café*. He tried explaining it to me, but I was pretty tired. He was from Albuquerque and actually went on cattle drives sometimes. I asked him if they ever let people pay to go along like in *City Slickers*, but he said not that he knew of. I probably would have heard about it, anyway.

And then there was Mr. Greevy. I'm not sure I want to think about him right now.

I've counted four wolves. I don't know how big packs usually get. I knew there were wolves out here, but I thought they were small. Of course, I'd only ever seen them in zoos.

These are *big* wolves. Gray fur, yellow eyes. I'd think they were beautiful if I wasn't scared out of my mind. The cat keeps watching the wolves. It think it's a puma. I saw a picture of one in one of travel guides.

I always thought that when housecats played with string or chased the light from a flashlight they were hunting. That a wildcat would look the same. That's not the case at all. This cat looks to be all business, and the wolves look pissed, too.

I thought predators would leave each other alone. That as long as you didn't leave food out uncovered, you wouldn't attract anything. That's what we tell people who go on camping trips for the first time and are worried about bears. Just keep your food in a sealed container, same with your garbage, and they'll leave you

alone. But these animals don't seem interested in anything but each other. Why? Is that normal?

Not sure where Daniel is. He was sleeping on the other side of the fire from me. Apparently we're tough. We don't need tents. I don't see him now.

The cat's padding toward me again. As much as I hate to do it, I find myself thinking about Mr. Greevy.

Greevy was from Connecticut. I knew it immediately by his accent. I have no *idea* what he was doing on this trip. He wasn't married — at least, he didn't wear a ring — and he seemed bored to tears by the whole thing. Maybe it was all an act. Maybe he really was fascinated. Maybe he had a burr up his butt. I don't know. He just rubbed everybody the wrong way when he introduced himself as "Mr. Greevy." Andy and Jennifer kind of blanched at that — you could tell they weren't used to formalities. I am, so it didn't bother me. Daniel didn't even blink. If you looked up the word "unflappable" in the dictionary, you'd see Daniel's picture.

Greevy was maybe 30, but he was an old 30. He didn't walk with a limp or have white hair or anything, but there was this look about him that said he'd been through hell. I wish I could say, "I know what that's like," but every time I think something like that, I have to think, "Yeah, Liz, what have you been through? Seen a couple of dead people and ghosts. Maybe helped a couple remember that they're dead? At least your legs never got ripped off."

I wonder what Greevy saw that made him old. I'll never know, I guess. I had some idea that he might have been one of the called before he confirmed it, but it was just a nagging thought. I get those thoughts about everybody. See some guy on TV who shoots up his office — was he called? A story in the tabloids about a miracle in Boston, a woman called straight up to Heaven in a church — was she called, like me? It isn't like I got a brochure for this trip. But Greevy looked haunted. And maybe that was it. I didn't even think to look *really* carefully at him. Some folks on the net call it the sight. I'm not sure what he would have looked like, anyway.

Greevy took a lot of pictures. Not with a camera, but with a camcorder. He listened to every word Daniel said about the towns we saw. He asked a lot of questions about ghosts. What kinds of sightings there had been, how long ago, by anybody reliable, blah blah blah. Daniel just kind of took it all in stride like the nice guy he is.

The first ghost town that we visited was just over the border into Arizona. It was called Day's Junction. Weird name for a town, but what the heck. Daniel said it was named after some dude named Jonah Day, back in eighteen-forty-something. It was a mining camp until somebody dug a well. Then somebody else built a road between two other towns. Lo and behold, the little camp was right near the halfway point on that road. So, Jonah Day got the brilliant idea of building a little store or something so that

travelers could get something to eat. Daniel said it all lasted until about 1852, when the town fell apart. He wasn't sure why — got very mysterious about it. "Some folks say the well ran dry, which is a sure town-killer. Some folks say a disease broke out and killed everybody. Others say..." — dramatic pause — "...it was the curse of the Wendigo."

Greevy kind of coughed and said, "Actually, Wendigo legends didn't make it this far south."

Daniel just smiled that polite smile of his and said something like, "Guess it wasn't that, then," and continued on the tour.

Here's the thing, though: I've actually read about the Wendigo (in a kid's book of ghost stories, of all places). It's a spirit from up north that supposedly grabs folks, drags them along until their feet burn off, carries them up into the air and drops them. Jake says that in some legends it eats people. Daniel must have known that, but he said the "curse of the Wendigo" so... strangely. Like he *knew* that was it.

See what I mean? You get paranoid when you're called. What's Jake call it? "Imbued?" Either way, you start jumping at your own shadow. And if it's like this for me, what's it like for the folks that actually go out and *hunt* these things with fire and stakes and crap like that?

Anyway, we walked around Day's Junction and took some pictures. I was having a great time. There wasn't much left of the town, of course, but there was a skeleton of an old building and some mine shafts. Good "photo ops." There was a beautiful view from a small butte, so Daniel and I and the Joneses climbed it (Greevy said his legs weren't up to it). We were talking about camping on the butte, but it started thundering in the distance so Daniel said we should head back toward town. (Part of the fee for the trip was a "bad-weather charge." If you have to get a motel because of weather, you're already covered.) It stormed so hard that night, I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking of Jake, and for some reason I felt small, alone and scared.



Which isn't too different from how I feel now, actually. I've got a wolf on either side of me, so I don't dare stick my head out. I can barely breathe and it feels like a furnace in here. Don't know where the cat went. I can hear the wolves growling to each other. Do they communicate like that? I thought it was all body language and stuff, but one growls and then the other, almost like a conversation.

Jake talked about werewolves once. But then what about the puma? Why is it here? Maybe it's got cubs nearby or something. It could be female. Do pumas have manes?

See, this is the kind of thing that goes through your head when you're scared out of your mind. It isn't like I haven't seen weird stuff before. Hell, I went to bed with a guy with no legs and woke up with a dance partner. But there's something different about it when it's *animals*.

We all want to believe we're on top. Humans, I mean. We want to think we rule the world. Us "imbued" folks

know different, of course. We know other stuff goes on behind the scenes. Some of it doesn't touch us. Some of it can kill us. I try not to get in too deep. I just help the ones that need it. If you're dealing with the ghost of some guy who really wants his wife to know that he was cheating and he's sorry, it can seem petty next to the knowledge that a bunch of vampires are trying to take over the world (or some other B.S.). But at least that's something you can grasp onto, you know? You can maybe reason with a ghost.

But what about an animal? A real predator, on its own turf, looking you over like you might taste good. What's more scary than being eaten?

I guess Andy must have comforted Jennifer. I don't hear her crying anymore.



The next day, everything had that rain-washed smell. We all piled into the van and started heading northeast, toward Colorado. We visited a Navajo Reservation. Daniel said he had friends there, so we swung in for a few minutes. I bought a few things, including a really nice handmade blanket. Like I said, I can't help myself. Greevy muttered something about washing it before using it. I don't think I bothered to respond.

We got on the road and into Colorado just before nightfall. The weather was nice, so we pulled into a campground and pitched our tents. Sometime during the night, I got up, "knocked" on Daniel's tent and found him reading that book. I think we talked for a while, but I was pretty out of it. I hadn't slept well the night before, like I said.

The next day we drove up to Disappointment Creek and found our next ghost town. That one was much more commercialized, because it was bigger and in better repair. Daniel said that was because a lot of it had been rebuilt, which seems like a strange thing to do to a ghost town. Greevy didn't even bother with the camcorder. There were lots of people, comparatively, but most of the license plates were local. Daniel gave us a similar spiel about this town, but didn't mention the Wendigo. He knew why this town got abandoned. It was an out-of-the-way mining town, and its mines caved in one day after an earthquake.

We hiked a ways out and found a place to camp. Daniel reminded us to shake our shoes for scorpions in the morning and then took his tent up to higher ground. I thought about following him but got the sense that he wanted to be alone. The rest of us sat around the fire and told ghost stories. Andy actually told the "hook for a hand" one. I hadn't heard that since grade school. I have a few good stories, but I couldn't tell them. Most folks preface ghost stories by assuring you that "this story is true." Mine actually are — and that's why I can't tell them. Hell, I can't make stories interesting, anyway.

Greevy didn't say much, but after three of us told stories, he leaned forward into the firelight and said, "You want a story? You're in one. What does Daniel know about the Wendigo? I know those stories, and I'll

tell you, he's got them wrong. 'A man wanders off under the full moon,' they used to say, 'and you'll find him dead the next morning — heart torn out and eaten by the Wendigo. All you'll get as warning is a howl.'"

He couldn't have timed it better. A coyote howled *right then*. We all nearly jumped out of our skins — Greevy included — and laughed. Greevy looked embarrassed and tried to continue but we were having too much fun howling back at the coyote, so he just walked off into the dark. I remember him kicking the sand. Sand looks blue in full moonlight.

He wandered off under the full moon. And we *did* find him dead the next morning, but we had no way to tell whether his heart was torn out or not. He'd been crushed under a boulder. Daniel kept telling me that I should look away, that we should all go back to the van — and that he'd make sure the police took care of everything. We saw a sheriff's car drive up. Daniel stood there and talked to the guy for a while. They looked like old friends. Andy kept saying that they'd want to question us, but Daniel just came back to the car and got in, and we started driving away. Andy and Jennifer huddled quietly in the back of the van, trying to come to terms. Probably, they'd never seen death like that before. I had. Daniel and I talked about it this afternoon, in fact, while Jennifer and Andy were off calling home. Daniel said that Greevy must have leaned on a rock wrong and been unable to get clear when the boulder fell.

But I don't think that's how he died. Daniel didn't see it, but there was a symbol smeared on a rock wall not far from the boulder. The symbol was one of ours, and it meant, "trap." Talk about a mixed message. I almost told Daniel, but finally I couldn't.

It was pretty obvious that Greevy made the mark before he died. But what killed him? The legend of the Wendigo keeps coming back to me. "All you'll get as warning is a howl."



The howl I hear now startles me, and I poke my head out of the sleeping bag a little. The wolf is behind me and I don't turn around. The fire's gone out, and the moonlight is just bright enough to let me see the puma — but it looks different. Maybe it's a trick of the light, but the cat looks *huge*. More like a saber-tooth tiger than a puma. Looking at it *that way*, I know it's more than a cat. It's got that same other-glow that ghosts have. Never heard of a ghost-cat before. So what's that make the wolves? I can't see them, anyway.

The puma springs and lands on the other side of me. I feel it land. I hear tearing and snarling, like a dogfight. I curl up into a little ball and pray I don't get caught in the middle.

Something spatters my sleeping bag. It sounds like rain. But somehow, I don't think it's raining.



The four of us had dinner at a little roadside café. Mostly truckers. Country music on the radio. Everybody



was real polite, which helped. I think they could see we were shaken up a bit.

Daniel said that the tour was prepared to refund half our money, as we'd only gotten through half the tour. We all felt that was fair. I reminded Andy and Jennifer that I was a travel agent, and we decided that the next day we'd drive into Grand Junction and try to catch a break on flights.

We were going to stay in a hotel that night, but the only one we found was so run down that we decided we'd rather camp. We found an out-of-the-way spot with no rocks or boulders. Andy and Jennifer went to bed early. Daniel and I stayed up, talking. Mostly talking, anyway. And then things got a little crazy.

I'm not sure what I'd tell Jake, even if I ever decide to try. But it was like I *had* to, not like I was being forced. I just wanted him. It was almost like when I was young and decided to rebel by screwing around with scummy guys. I didn't get the same bitter rush from having sex with Daniel, though. It was very pure, and very rough. I've heard that sometimes couples will make love after funerals, just to feel alive or better or whatever. I never believed it before, but I don't have another explanation. I really wish I hadn't done it, but at the same time, I know I'll be thinking about it next time I'm lonely and missing Jake.

We lay there in my sleeping bag and heard the first howl. I thought it was a coyote, but Daniel tensed up and told me to stay put. He got out — still naked — and started walking toward his stuff, I guess to get a gun. That's when I looked over and saw the wolves pawing at the Joneses' tent. I don't know where the puma came from.



The snarling has stopped now. I hear something sniffing around outside my sleeping bag again, and I just keep curled up tight and try not to make a sound. Finally, I hear a noise halfway between a grunt and a bark, and something runs across the sand.

It's another few minutes before I dare move. Then I pull on my shorts and my bra — they're still in the bottom of my sleeping bag. I don't know where the rest of my clothes are. Finally, I poke my head out.

I smell blood. It's covering my hands as I climb out of my sleeping bag. My clothes are on the ground, but they're completely soaked. My pack is back in the van, come to think of it.

The Joneses' tent is wrecked. I run over and, once I see the full damage, I throw up. Andy and Jennifer are both there, dead. I don't even try to figure out which is which.

I sit down on the sand and cry. I cry for Jake, for me, for Greevy, for Andy and Jennifer, and for Daniel, wherever he is.

That thought clears my head some. I stand up and start walking around, afraid to yell. Off in the distance, a howl echoes, and then three or four more pick up the chorus. Whatever they are, they're still out there. I need to find Daniel and get out of here.

I hear a moan a ways off from our campsite. Daniel's lying there, and I almost throw up again when I see him. He's still naked, and he's entirely covered in blood — mostly his own, I think. His left hand is missing and a jagged shard of bone juts out from the wrist. He's got bite marks up and down his body. His stomach's torn open. And somehow, through all of that, he's still alive.

I look down at him and know through the sight where that puma came from.

"They didn't kill you?" he whispers.

I shake my head. They must have missed my smell because of the blood on my sleeping bag. A million-to-one chance, but that seems to happen to me.

"Sorry...."

I kneel down next to him. "What?" I ask, as tenderly as I can.

"Sorry. About Greevy. He thought he was looking for me. He was looking for...."

"The Wendigo." I look up, expecting to see the wolves coming back. I shudder. The night's gotten colder since Daniel crawled out of my sleeping bag.

He nods. "Call the police. Get Sheriff Brown — my brother. Sorry... Liz."

He closes his eyes and says something in a language I don't understand. He whispers it three or four times before his breath finally stops.

I call the police on Andy's cell phone and eventually get put through to Sheriff Brown. A while later, he arrives and asks what happened. I tell him the truth. What else could I tell him?

He looks around at the bodies and turns back to me. "Wolves don't do this, you know." I nod. "Pumas, either."

"Neither do people," I say.

"No," he mutters. "Don't reckon they do." I try to repeat what Daniel said and ask the Sheriff if he knows what it means. He gets a sad smile and coughs a bit, like he's trying not to cry. "It means, 'Finally I fly with Thunderbird.'"

He motions toward his car. "Maybe you should wait there." My face must fall, because he adds, "You ain't under arrest. You didn't do this. But I can't just have you wandering around. Wait there for a minute." I nod and get into the cruiser. The Sheriff walks around the campsite, looking like he doesn't know what the hell to do. I know how he feels.

I sit in the car, crying and bloody, wondering about Jake and how I'll tell him what happened. I wonder about what really *did* happen. I finally curl up on the backseat and shut my eyes.

Some time later, Sheriff Brown gets into the car and starts it up. He thinks I'm asleep, but I'm not. As we drive away, I hear a howl from somewhere in the desert. I still feel cold and empty, small and alone. I feel like I've betrayed Jake and lost a friend. I feel like I could have helped if I'd tried.

The Wendigo has more than one way to eat your heart.



FRAN SPENLER OR

INTRODUCTION

Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.
— Luke 10:3

BEASTS THAT WALK AS MEN

Say the word “werewolf” and you immediately conjure images from the collective human unconscious. Images of wolves biting people who in turn become part man, part beast. Rampaging killers that transform under the full moon. Stalkers of both animals and men as prey. The notion of these ferocious killers pervades human culture and history. Indeed, the image of such beings has become so commonplace that the concept of the werewolf is almost synonymous with the term “monster.” Notions of what shapechangers are, what they crave and what they are vulnerable to have worked themselves into legend and lore. We all draw on the same pool of images when “werewolf” comes to mind.

The same is true in the World of Darkness, a reality that’s a mere shade removed from our own. Its people conjure up the same images of lycanthropes that we do. That means hunters — people abruptly and painfully awakened to the truth of monsters’ existence — also approach werewolves’ existence with the same preconceptions. But in the World of Darkness, beast-men aren’t myth, legend or some subconscious expression of buried desires. They’re real. They’ve existed for millennia. And because these predators really do lurk in the

wilds, which “understood” aspects of their nature are accurate? What images of them have been fabricated to keep their existence a secret? And what stories about them give an aware human just enough information to get himself killed when dealing with these creatures of the night?

The fact is the imbued know nothing and can take nothing for granted about shapeshifters, their nature or their very existence. These beings have eluded discovery by mankind and preyed upon the human herd for so long that people comprehend next to nothing about what man-beasts are really like. Popular myths may once have derived from fact, maybe even facts known widely by people far back in human history, perhaps during the Stone Age. But time and mortality have taken their toll on these precious morsels of wisdom so that they are now mere glimmers of what they were. And now, such fragmented information is all that hunters have to work with. They’re confronted with the reality of nature’s fury and left to arm themselves against that horrifying truth with only more rumors and Hollywood portrayals.

At least, that’s how hunters’ experiences with werewolves and forays against them might begin. If the chosen are lucky enough to survive such encounters, they may learn through hard knocks which legends

about shifters are real and which are patently false. From these trials, the imbued may glimpse something of what man-wolves really are, how deeply they intrude into society, and what some of their vulnerabilities may be. But, of course, such discoveries are still only the tip of the iceberg. Beings as ancient as these predators must protect unimaginable secrets and partake in feral acts that not even imbued eyes have witnessed. Indeed, if hunters can achieve any successes in saving or destroying werewolves, maybe those creatures faced are only the weakest or "youngest" of their kind. Surely, the deadliest and most fierce possess immense power, are kings among beasts, and hold court in primeval dens that no human has seen.

And yet, despite the insurmountable odds against them, what choice do the imbued have but to do *something* about the shapechangers and beast-men that they spot in the wilds, that lurk on the urban fringes and that even stride along city streets? Monsters are out there, stalking, murdering and devouring unwitting people. What choice do the chosen have but to confront and stand up to these abominations, perhaps even at the cost of hunters' lives?

CAGING THE BEAST

Hunter: The Moonstruck explores the ordeals of the imbued when they face the mysteries and terror of werewolves and other man-beasts. This book illustrates the confusion, misunderstanding and outright paranoia that arises for both the chosen and shapeshifters when they discover and contend with each other. Ideally, **Moonstruck** helps you as a player understand the kinds of reactions to werewolves, their allies, their capabilities and their influence that your imbued character may have. The book also answers many of the questions about shifters that plague players and hunters. Possible truths of man-beast origins and goals are revealed. Yet, the fact that these "disclosures" are made by hunters struggling through their own ignorance, and by the very things that hunters contend with, makes such discoveries extremely dubious — as are all revelations in the World of Darkness. Hunters who take the "truth" with a grain of salt, or who look for truths within the truth, might just survive.

Moonstruck also helps Storytellers understand how werewolves might respond to the hunter phenomenon and its *possible* threat. ("Possible" because the human masses have been kept in the dark about beast-man existence for centuries. So how is it that a handful of the cattle could suddenly know the truth and dare to use such knowledge against their betters?) Storytellers can also find all kinds of story ideas throughout. Lies and schemes perpetrated by the Other Side might lead hunters to weak or raging enemies that need to be dealt with or, alternatively, to imbued self-discovery. Or,

contact with skinchangers might lead the imbued into traps as the beasts further their own agendas at the expense of the chosen.

The Moonstruck tells three stories about hunter and werewolf interaction, each told in two parts.

Chapter 1: Lost reveals how subversive and subtle werewolves can be within human society, and how bloodthirsty and brutal they can be without it.

Chapter 2: Knowing the Predator explores how the imbued might initiate a hunt for werewolves once they know these creatures exist.

Chapter 3: Trail of the Wolf gives a hint of how sympathetic and misunderstood shapechangers and hunters might be to each other.

Chapter 4: Nightmares is part two to "Lost" and concludes the story of human prey and their flight for survival.

Chapter 5: Becoming Prey continues "Knowing the Predator" and reveals how little hunters truly know about shapechangers, and what such ignorance can cost them.

Chapter 6: Into Hell completes the story begun in "On the Trail of the Wolf" as the imbued learn just how similar — yet antithetical — hunter existence can be to that of shapechangers.

Chapter 7: Rules and Storytelling is intended for Storytellers alone. It offers tips and guidance on how to understand and portray werewolves in your **Hunter** chronicle, and it embellishes upon information provided in the core rulebook and in the **Storytellers Companion**. This chapter (indeed, this whole book) operates under the tenets for depicting shapeshifters explored in the article "Building Better Monsters" in the **Hunter Storytellers Handbook** (p. 47). That is, werewolves don't have to be blood-soaked killing machines or instinct-driven beasts to terrify hunters and their players. The creatures shown here can have human lives, minds and outlooks. They can walk as easily beneath towering skyscrapers as beneath primeval trees, yet are prepared to stalk and kill prey in either setting. Werewolves represent the raw power of nature as it assaults the delicate shelter that humanity has created for itself. The security that people feel in their homes, offices and towns is a lie. Humans are still prey animals, and werewolves remind them — and hunters — of that bone-chilling reality.

Ultimately, this book is meant to allow you to capture the mood and feel of shapechangers as portrayed in **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**, without having to own that game. **Werewolf** certainly helps if you want to capture the breadth of man-beast existence, society and machinations in your chronicle, but it's not essential. In fact, you could take all the information about changers presented here and cast them any way you like, with

origins, purpose and feral existence all of your own creation. That way, they become your antagonists alone and are nothing that players familiar with the other Storyteller games have ever seen before. It's your chronicle.

SOURCE MATERIALS

Lots of stuff about heroic people who deal with werewolves (usually in a manner that proves fatal to some or all participants) is available. We've tried to avoid silly or over-the-top sources in compiling this list. **Hunter** is about regular folks facing a suddenly monstrous world. They're scared, yet they do something anyway. We've tried to pick out books and movies that emphasize that very real resolve and bravery — **Hunter's** theme.

Werewolves in the World of Darkness owe some of their traits to classic Western shapechanger literature, but the reading list goes far beyond that. S.P. Somtow's *Moon Dance* is probably the best example of recent werewolf horror fiction, and the most applicable.

To perhaps get an ideal feel for all aspects of the werewolf experience, we recommend a number of books on wolves, myths and environmental concerns. Jack London works such as *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* are just as suitable as Barry Lopez's *Of Wolves and Men* and Farley Mowat's *Never Cry Wolf* (which has also been adapted to film). For capturing the American Indian viewpoint on shapechangers, we recommend *American Indian Myths and Legends* (edited by Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz) for the legendary side, and just about anything by Sherman Alexie for the human side.

Sadly, most werewolf movies qualify as "decent" at best. *Wolfen*, *The Howling* (the first only — its sequels are strictly avoidable) and *An American Werewolf in London* are probably the most applicable. Others include the classic *The Wolf Man*, *Wolf* (the Jack Nicholson movie) and *An American Werewolf in Paris* — most of which are probably better for illustrating what hunters think they know about werewolves than for breaking away from accepted myths. For a quirky take on lycanthropy as malady and contagion, the Canadian tragicomedy *Ginger Snaps* can't be beat. Finally, Hayao Miyazaki's animated film *Princess Mononoke*, though not strictly about werewolves, is a masterwork that

depicts the innate rivalry between man and nature, and the spiritual aspects of nature at their best and worst. With a rich cast of humans and nature-spirits (and also, huge, sentient wolves), it's as close to "must see" viewing as we get.

ERRATUM

The following paragraphs from Chapter 3, page 49, of **Hunter Book: Wayward** appeared incomplete in the published work. The full text appears below.

Before we play 20 questions, I want to let you know that while you two were skipping town, I was in the waiting room at Jiffy Lube. Remember, *the car needed an oil change?* I saw the news about the explosion on TV. Twenty minutes later, I was crossing fire department barriers to try to find you. The same arson investigator at the place Peleus torched showed up again, so I had to leave. I checked one hospital in East St. Louis, afraid that I might find you guys there, when I realized the arson cop was tailing me. So I shook her, got out of town and ditched the car for a new one. In other words, it was all rotten luck on my part *and* yours.

Shall we commence with the interrogation, officer?

>And don't try to bullshit me because I know you pulled the trigger.

You were the one who told me Peleus was holed up with those two, based on information from our mutual friend. The wife was probably banging every militia monkey and klansman on the West Coast — Peleus for sure — and the husband knew it but turned a blind eye. You were the one who figured out hubby was mixing monster patrol and gay bashing, and then you told me, knowing what had happened to my brother. You didn't tell me all that stuff so I'd go give the guy a medal. You told me because you were afraid your girlfriend's gal-pal was falling in with a bad crowd. Which is exactly what they were, all three of them. As you recall, the thanks our friend got for associating with them was Peleus trying to turn her into roadkill. By all rights, he should have died when he tried to take her out. But he survived the crash.



CHAPTER 1: LOST

Behold, I send you out like sheep among wolves; you must be shrewd as serpents, innocent as doves.
— Matthew 10:16

DISASTER

Okay, first thing's first. My name is James MacTeague. Most folks just call me "Teague." I was on my way to meet someone in a small town in British Columbia called Devine. I flew into Vancouver from Sacramento and got on a puddle jumper plane to fly to Devine. The plane went down and I have no idea where we are.

There are seven other people still alive (eight, counting the kid). One of them is a monster. I have no idea which one.

THE CRASH

It's been several hours since the crash. No one has showed up to rescue us. There's been talk of setting a fire to attract attention, but it's awfully dry out here and May is afraid it might spread out of control. I guess it's pretty amazing that the plane didn't start one.

Everybody's pretty freaked out. Penny's kid is still crying, although they got his leg to stop bleeding. We've all kind of separated. I can hear Desmond preaching to whoever's listening, which is probably no one. So, I think I'm alone.

Thank God, my laptop still works. I'm going to need to upload this to hunter-net as soon as we reach civilization. We can't be too far from Devine. I think we should walk it.

Okay, rambling a bit. Here's what happened:

I fell asleep almost as soon as we got into the air. I wear a patch behind my ear when I fly to keep from getting airsick, but it also makes me drowsy. I was going to Devine, like I said, to meet a guy on the net. We were basically going to swap stories and maybe deal with a problem in his town. Those details aren't important right now. There were about a dozen other folks on the plane, counting the pilot and co-pilots. No flight attendants. Puddle jumpers don't even give out peanuts.

I woke up because the plane jumped really bad. I heard the pilot shouting from the cockpit, and then suddenly a co-pilot (his name is Gerald) came running into the cabin. He had blood on his face. I found out later that the windshield shattered and the pilot was killed instantly. The plane started to dive. I reached under my seat and grabbed my bag and hugged it to my chest. No idea why. Everybody was screaming and panicking, but I couldn't put voices to faces and I had my eyes shut. Then we hit.

We must have skimmed through a couple of trees and come to rest on the forest floor. I opened my eyes and saw people in the air, and for whatever reason, I turned on the sight. The lights went out in the cabin at exactly the same second, and all I could see was silhouettes. But

one of those silhouettes was *wrong*. It gave off a very distinct "this should not exist" sense, like that walking corpse I saw back home. But then the plane bounced and I cracked my head on the window.

When I came to, a man was shaking me, trying to wake me up. I still had my bag in my hands. My head was bleeding and I was disoriented, but a look around reminded me what had happened. The cabin was wrecked. The back end of the plane had snapped off from the main body. No one had been sitting back there. I was the furthest back. I picked my way out of the plane and saw who was still alive.

SURVIVORS

There were eight others, like I said. Just so anyone reading this can keep them straight, here they are:

May. My age (that'd be 21 or so). Blond, athletic. Says she's a student, although I haven't asked her where she goes to school. When I climbed out of the plane, she was sitting on a tree trunk tending to a cut on her leg.

Gerald, co-pilot. Also pretty young, I'd guess late 20s. He's in complete shock and just keeps babbling. Somewhere in his ramblings, he mentioned that this was his first day on the job.

Bai. I assume she's Chinese, but she doesn't speak a lot of English. She wasn't even scratched in the crash, but was very obviously in shock.

Desmond. Big black guy. Sounds like he's from the South, but I'm not sure. 40s, maybe. Obviously a deeply religious man, because he started with the Bible quotes almost immediately. Frankly, it's getting annoying. He's walking with a limp, but doesn't seem hurt too bad.

The guy who woke me up hasn't said a word. I don't know his name. All I know is that he was bickering with a woman when we took off. His wife, maybe. She died in the crash. He hasn't cried or really reacted yet.

Penny and her son Luke are from California, like me. Luke's six or seven. I'd put Penny at about 30 or so. She's holding it together for his sake. His left leg is cut pretty badly, although like I said, it's stopped bleeding. She hasn't let anyone else near him and gets frantic if anyone tries.

Finally, Kim. I'm not sure what she does, but I'm guessing waitress or checkout clerk. I'd guess her age at 25 or 26, but she looks older. She's been whining about wanting a cigarette, but apparently no one else who survived was a smoker, so she's out of luck.

No one knows about my computer yet. It was in my bag along with a change of clothes. (Always take carry-on luggage!) I hear May trying to gather everybody together, so I should get back. One other thing, though: I can't "see." I've tried several times. I know for certain that one of these people isn't human, but I have no idea what that makes him or her. I've read through posts on the net before, but half are from religious nuts and the

other half from alien conspiracy theorists. I've got no idea how much of that crap is true.

It's 3:21 PM. I'll include times from now on, as much for my own sake as anyone else's.

THE PLAN

It's 4:33 PM. We've discussed it and decided to start walking in the morning if no one shows up. We crashed on a mountain side, so we're just going to head down. It's pretty steep, which will make for slow going (particularly since Penny insists that only she can carry her kid, and even when he walks, he can't walk fast). We figure it can't be too far to Devine or another town.

What we're going to eat is another matter. Like I said, no food on puddle jumpers. Penny has snacks for Luke but won't share them. No one's really in the mood to try and convince her otherwise. We all look like we're pretty healthy people. Kim's a little thin, and she's a smoker, but otherwise I think we could pull this off.

Except for one little thing — one of us is a monster.

God, I wish I could tell the rest. For all I know, one of them could be one of us. If I could just remember one of those Goddamned symbols! Or turn on the sight again, or something. I'm just going to have to watch. If any of them does anything weird, I'll have to hope and pray that someone lends me strength again. As it is, I've kind of been hoping for a hunch, like that first time, but no luck so far.

I guess it's possible that I was imagining it, but I don't think so. I got a very strong sense of "wrongness" from whoever I saw, and it could have been any of them. (Except probably the kid, but I don't know that that rules Penny out!)

I'm going to go see what I can get out of them. I'll boot the computer back up tonight and type in what I find. If I don't figure out who it is, maybe somebody else could if they read this.

FIRST NIGHT

It's just after midnight. Moon's almost full. That doesn't make me feel any better.

I spent the evening talking with everybody, but mostly with May. She's a smart woman. She goes to UCLA, studying bio. She laughed a little when I told her I was a rising junior and was still undeclared. Back in school we joke that I'm "majoring in indecisiveness." That's where my hunter.net handle came from. Indecisive346. Pleased to meet you. Not that I've ever posted.

Anyway, May and I talked. The cut on her leg isn't as deep as she thought. It just bled a lot. She says the cut on my scalp might need stitches. I'm hoping I don't have a concussion. What if that's why I can't see? Does it work like that?

No sense scaring myself. Al scares me enough as it is.

Al's the guy who hasn't said anything yet. He just sits by himself with this real distant look on his face. The only reason I know his name is because May heard his wife say something like, "Honest to God, Al, how do we always end up on these commuter planes?" I think he

might be in shock, but how would I know? Maybe he died in the crash and just doesn't know it yet.

Desmond was happy to talk to me. He is from the South: Macon, Georgia. He's a deacon in his church (Baptist), was coming back from a conference in Vancouver and got a great deal by taking our plane to Edmonton to fly home that way. I don't know if he's always this zealous, but I haven't ever met anybody outside of Crusader17 who's this stuck on Jesus. (I'm exaggerating; Desmond's not that bad) His Bible survived the crash, so he's been looking for passages to help inspire us. No one's told him to shut up yet, but I saw a pentacle tattoo on Kim's shoulder. She kind of bristles when he talks. I think we need to keep those two separated.

I'm trying to find way to be polite about Kim. I really am. Her grammar and basic attitude don't suggest that she's a doctoral candidate. May put it a bit more succinctly. "She's white trash." I'm not sure I'd go that far, but I wonder if she's going to make it through this. I talked to her briefly. She insisted on referring to me as "college boy," as though she should get some badge of honor for going to the "University of Life." I'm trying to be rational, here, but that attitude really annoys me. I'm in college because I don't know what else to do. I don't pay tuition because my uncle is a professor.

Like you need to know this. Sorry. So that's Kim. Bai, like I said, doesn't speak much English. I got her to understand that we were going to start walking tomorrow, but that was an adventure in itself. Desmond tried to help, but when it became clear that she didn't understand him, he started raising his voice. I've never understood why that's such a common reaction. It didn't help. I really feel for Bai. We're all freaked, but she's alone.

Talking to Penny was impossible. Luke had drifted off to sleep. When she saw me coming over, she shook her head and waved me away. Maybe tomorrow.

Ditto Gerald. Poor guy hasn't been able to stop pacing. Which is really too bad, because I'd like to know what the hell we hit. The pilot's dead and Gerald's incoherent.

I'm going to try to get some sleep. Away from the wreckage. I don't want the monster coming for me while I'm sleeping. God, that sounded childish.

MORNING

I actually meant to type more last night, but was interrupted. It's 4:42 AM. The sun's rising and I can hear people stirring, so I'll make this brief.

Gerald's dead. It was him I heard scream last night. I ran over to where the others were sleeping. May was already awake and had followed the sound. Penny was trying to shush Luke, who was upset but staying relatively quiet. Bai was standing, looking around uncertainly. I told everybody to stay put and ran off to find May. I bumped into Al in the woods, but he just ran by me, looking sick. I found May kneeling by a shoe. She didn't look too hot herself.

Gerald's foot was still in the shoe. It looked like it had been chewed off.

Al still isn't talking and May and I agreed not to say anything to the others until morning. It isn't like we can help Gerald anyway. I'm going to go wake her up, and then try to explain what happened to the others. I'm dreading it. I've got no idea how to make Bai understand.

What the hell killed Gerald? And where'd the body go? I'm not a tracker or anything, but we found his foot in a clearing. There was no blood trail, no underbrush beaten down. (At least not that I noticed, but let's be honest, I wouldn't know what to look for.) We didn't hear any animal noises, but something tore his foot off. Was it the monster in our group? If it was, I don't know who it was. I guess Al or May, but they both looked pretty shaken up. And besides, neither of them had blood on them anywhere.

I'm not smart enough to figure this out right now. I'm going to go wake the others and try and get us moving.

DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

It's 10:12 AM. We've stopped to rest. Been walking since about 8.

I woke everybody up around 5:30 this morning. Penny nearly took my head off. She actually started screaming, "Get away from Luke!" She calmed down after she woke up and remembered where she was. Luke's been quiet. When I was seven, I'd have been going nuts, especially if all I had to eat was snack crackers (Mom used to say I had a hollow leg to eat as much as I did).

Anyway, we told the others what happened. Kim started spouting off about bears, but we managed to get her to keep quiet. May and I buried what was left of Gerald last night (it didn't take long, even without shovels). Desmond said a little eulogy. Mostly Bible quotes. It wasn't like we knew anything about the deceased.

Exactly what killed him apparently didn't weigh as heavily on their minds as on mine, but then again I've got information they don't. I didn't bring it up. What good would it do? We started off down the mountain.

FOREST PRIMEVAL

Even in the early morning, the woods can be scary. Ignore the fact that we just survived a plane crash and we have no idea where we are. That I could deal with. It'd be scary, sure, but you just walk in one direction. Simple. But that's not what we're dealing with.

There's something here. Maybe it's the monster I saw. Maybe it's something else. I don't know. But it knows we're here. It's watching us, I'm sure of that. It's killed once.

There are all kinds of legends about the woods. Bigfoot, Sasquatch, stuff like that. Maybe that's why people cut down trees, just to prove to themselves that there's nothing there. But then we feel bad about it and people yell to leave the trees alone.

I was thinking out loud about that to Kim earlier, just trying to get to know her a bit. She talked about how the forest and the "natural world" was part of us all, and maybe we'd made something mad by cutting down trees.

Maybe, yeah. Maybe we're afraid what'll happen if we leave the woods standing, and afraid of what we'll see if we cut them all down. I know what it's like to have a flashlight and be afraid to turn it on.

We stopped in a clearing. I keep hearing water running and there's this odd electricity in the air, like before a storm. Not a cloud in the sky, though. May and Desmond decided to look around for the water. We're all thirsty. We're screwed if we dehydrate. Kim, last I saw her, was wandering around looking for a place to pee. Bai, Al and Penny are resting.

I have this really odd feeling that the forest knows we're here. I don't know if that's my sight coming back or if I'm just going crazy.

I hear May yelling to get going again. She needs to watch her tone. She sounds like a drill sergeant. She'll end up pissing someone off.

LUNCH

1:30 PM. Haven't eaten since about this time yesterday. I am such a middle class white boy. I know there are folks who go days without eating, and it must suck to be them. I feel like hell.

Penny and Luke seem to be doing the best out of all of us, as it happens. Bai's got this haunted look on her face and winces with pain every couple of steps. I didn't think she was hurt in the crash. Maybe I was wrong. Desmond's limp is getting worse. I caught Al standing on a fallen tree trunk looking down into a gulch. When I called his name, he snapped back with a look on his face like, "Oh, right, here I am." That lasted about two minutes. Then he went all distant again. May's been getting a little friendlier with Kim. They must have found a common interest. I missed it, I suppose.

We don't want to stop here too long. Just a bathroom break. Someone — Penny, I think — thought of grabbing a couple of rolls of toilet paper from the plane before we started walking. Gotta give her credit, she thinks like a mom.

THE SYMBOL

Bad news all around. Let's start from the beginning.

We reached a clearing and a tree with some symbols carved into it. We got all excited because something had been carved there. Carved means people, right? But we had no idea what it was. We asked Bai to look at it. She just shook her head and essentially said she didn't know. That's when things got bad.

Kim grabbed her by the shoulder and started yelling. Stuff like, "You know. You fucking know. It's Chinese or something. You know what it means." Desmond pulled her off Bai, yelling at Kim that the symbol could be

Arabic or something. That we didn't have any way to know. Well, that did it. Kim was screaming, "Don't touch me, you fucking nigger," and stormed off into the trees. Bai was crying. Desmond just stood there with a look of rage like I'd never seen before. He was all set to go off into the trees after Kim, but May stopped him and went after Kim herself.

Meanwhile, I just stood there with my thumb up my ass. I did, however, try to render the symbol with the Paint program on my laptop.

That's pretty close to what it looked like. You'd have needed a pretty big knife to carve it, I think.

From where I'm sitting, I can hear Kim and May talking about Desmond. Kim's still ranting about how he grabbed her. May has tactfully refrained from pointing out that Kim did the same to Bai, in the interests of not wasting too much more time. I can hear Luke crying.

That symbol bugs me. It's almost like some of "our" symbols, but it isn't, or I think I'd recognize it. Or, hell, maybe I wouldn't. I still can't use the sight. I don't know if that's necessary for those symbols or not. Understanding them kind of trips the same "instinct" that seeing does. I need to go back and take a good long look at that symbol.

NIGHTFALL

I can't believe how much ground we covered since I last wrote here. I said before that May sounds a bit like a sergeant. I took a year of ROTC and no sergeant was ever that tough.

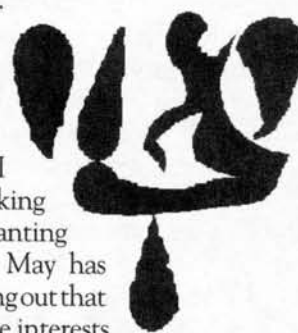
She kept saying we need to get to more even ground before dark. That's reasonable. It's kind hard to sleep when the ground is at a 45 degree angle (okay, I'm exaggerating). We must have covered miles, which considering the terrain and the fact that we had to wait for Penny is quite a bit.

We still don't know where we are and still have no food. May suggested that maybe we should keep watch tonight, just in case. Just in case of what? Nobody wanted to ask. I took first watch. Lets me catch up on my typing.

Too bad there's not much to report. My entire body is aching and I'm still hungry. It's about 9:00 PM.

MORNING

And God smiled upon the weary travelers! We all woke up this morning to the sound of something crying in pain. For a second I thought it was one of us, but we were all accounted for. We followed the sound and found a deer trapped under a fallen branch. Its back was broken and it was barely alive. I think Kim actually said something like, "Aw, poor thing," and we were all agreeing before May suggested we cook it.



Good thing it was already dying, because I don't know how we'd have talked Kim into it if the deer had been able to walk. Desmond's the biggest of us, so he took a branch and clubbed it once or twice. That was all it took. Building a fire was a little tougher until somebody thought to ask Kim for her lighter. Nobody had a knife, of course. We'd all been on a plane, but Penny improvised well. She had a plastic game board in her bag that, when snapped in half, had an edge. (Luke wasn't happy about having his game broken.) We had roasted venison on a stick for breakfast, and then roasted a bunch more and wrapped it up in our clothes (most of us had carry-on luggage). It'll probably taste like shit, but it'll be edible, and we sure can't lug the deer carcass with us.

You know, it's funny. Desmond didn't even say grace. He just tore into that meat like it was the tastiest thing he'd ever had. Of course, none of us had eaten in almost 48 hours, so that's probably how we all felt. I know I thought it tasted great. I've got a buddy who goes deer hunting and he always raves about how great venison is. I'll have to tell him he's right.

We're taking a few minutes to digest before we get going, but everybody's in noticeably better spirits. Except maybe me. I feel better physically, but I can't shake the feeling that the forest is watching—and watched us kill and butcher that deer. Somehow, I think maybe it approves.

THE STREAM

You wouldn't think crossing a stream would be such a challenge. Now Bai's injured and we've wasted another day. Let me see if I can get it all straight.

We left our "campground" after eating the deer this morning at about 10:00 AM (spent most of the morning skinning—or at least dismembering—and toasting the meat). We kept moving downhill and came to a stream. Not really very big. About 10 feet wide and not too deep. But very, very cold.

Desmond went first, because he's the tallest and strongest. We figured, if the current was strong or something, he'd tell us. He crossed with no problem. May went next, still no sweat (although I will admit to being more than a little interested when she crawled up out of the cold water and turned to face us). Kim crossed, bitching all the way about how cold it was. Penny managed to get through, carrying Luke (who screamed like crazy when his injured leg got wet). I almost had to shove Al in to get him going, but once he was in the water he kept moving. That left me and Bai.

I crossed, but I got smart. I took off my jeans, stuffed them in my bag (around my computer) and waded through barefoot, wearing boxer shorts. My balls receded to my throat, but the water only came up to my navel. I held my bag over my head so nothing got wet. That gave me dry pants to put on when I reached the other side.

That left Bai. I was tugging on my jeans while she was trying to move down the bank. She was the only one

wearing a skirt and it didn't help any. Her skirt got caught on a tree root or something and tugged up. She chose modesty over common sense, tried to pull it back with both hands, lost her footing and fell in the water. Desmond and May were all set to go charging in, but she surfaced and started floundering toward shore. When we pulled her out, we saw the problem.

Her right ankle was twisted and swollen. We've got no way to tell if it's broken, but she can't walk on it. We were all cold and shivering, anyway, so we decided to camp there for the night. The ground was even, anyway.

I looked around for fish in the stream, but no luck. No other obvious sources of food, either. I'm trying to ration the venison I've got left. I also made sure I didn't eat in front of the others. Call me crazy, but I don't want other folks to know how much food I have left. Especially Desmond. He didn't have any carry-on luggage, so Penny carried some for him and he's already eaten it.

Better join the group. It's 5:46 PM.

SUSPECTS

I still can't seem to see the monster, but I damn well wish I could. I'm pretty sure it's either Kim or Desmond. Not that I have any *real* evidence.

Kim: I have no idea where she was when Gerald was killed. When I looked around the clearing before running toward the scream, I saw Bai, Penny and Luke. I met Al coming out of the woods and found May. When I came back, I saw Desmond coming from the other direction, but I didn't see Kim again until the next morning. That isn't really evidence. She might have panicked and run. But it certainly bears noting as far as I'm concerned.

Desmond: I guess he could have killed Gerald and circled back around the campsite. Who knows what monsters can do? But what really got me thinking was something he said to me earlier. We'd gotten Bai settled down and got her foot elevated, and May, Desmond and I (far and away the three coolest heads here) walked off to talk things over. I suggested making Bai a crutch from a branch. May thought maybe we could split up—leave Penny, Luke and Bai here (probably Al, too) and have me, Kim, Desmond and her press on, since we'd move faster that way. If I didn't know that one of us was a monster, I'd have been all over the idea. I didn't say that of course. I just reminded May of what happened to Gerald and she conceded that we were probably safer together.

Desmond appeared to be deep in thought. I wasn't optimistic. I thought maybe he'd just throw another Bible quote at us. What he finally said was, "If she was a horse, we'd have to shoot her."

May and I were both pretty shocked. Desmond seemed to realize what he'd said then, and started apologizing and even quoted the Bible again, but May and I just gave each other this look like, "Oh, shit, he's a psycho."

So I think it's either Kim or Desmond that killed Gerla

TROUBLE

Don't have very long to write. Kim thinks I caused the plane crash — caught me wrting. Don't think she saw what I wrote about her — hope not, anyway. Kept screaming about how you can't use computers on plane, and how I should hav told them about it. For whatever good it would have done. Not like I have a cell modem on this thing, even if I could get a signal. May backed me up, thank god, because Desmond didn't say anything and I don't think Penny or Al knew what to think. About 7 last time I wrote, 9:02 PM now.

SECOND DEATH

Bai's dead. Luke is crying and Penny's trying to comfort him. Everyone has kind of gone their separate ways for the moment. We'll need to get moving soon, but no one wants to be the one to say it.

Last night after the fight between Kim and I, everyone managed to bed down. We kind of abandoned the idea of keeping watch, because Kim wouldn't speak to anyone but Penny (she's still pissed at Desmond from before, and now won't talk to me or May). Everyone except May is leery of me, and we're still worried about Desmond. I stayed up for a while, but then found a spot near the stream.

I woke up to splashing sounds. The moon was full, so I could see well enough. Something was in the creek with Bai. Whatever it was, it was standing on two legs and looked huge. I didn't get a good look, but I saw it bite down on Bai's shoulder.

I heard her gasp, but she couldn't get enough breath to scream. I only got a glimpse, but it looked like it was covered in fur and stood maybe eight or nine feet tall (although since it was standing in water, it might have been taller).

It bit her again, across the throat, and then started charging downstream holding her body. It climbed out of the stream on the opposite side and charged into the underbrush on the same side of the creek as us.

I hate to admit it, but I was paralyzed. I was so scared, I couldn't move. I wish I could explain the feeling. I've been saying that the forest knows we're here. It was as if that thing was the forest. I was completely frozen. Even after it was out of sight, I just thought, "Please God, don't let it come back for me."

I curled up on the ground and started shaking. The whole time, I was thinking that I needed to get up and wake the others, but I couldn't. When you're a kid, you think that if any part of you is uncovered, the monsters can get you. Kids are smarter than we give them credit for. I kept thinking, if I move, it can get me.

I don't know how long I lay there. All I know is, I heard someone moving, and then May's voice calling for Bai. I got up and pretended I'd been sleeping. Everybody woke up — that was around 3 AM, I guess — and started searching. Desmond found what was left of her. Only him, me, May and Kim got a look. We didn't let Penny near, and Al was sick as soon as he got close to the body.



Her shoulder had been chewed up pretty badly and her throat was torn out. Her legs had been ripped up. No one wanted to turn her over to look for any other wounds.

We talked about what to do. Finally, we decided not to bury her. No shovels. We covered her in brush and leaves, and Desmond said a eulogy again. It was short and choppy this time, like he wasn't sure what to say for a Chinese woman. Or maybe he's just losing it. He kept spitting, too, like he had a bad taste in his mouth.

We're getting moving soon. It's 8:43 AM.

MONSTERS

Break for lunch. Or at least a break. I'm not sure any of us could eat even if we had food.

Kim and May started talking again, but Kim still avoids me. I heard her say something about computers, but May shut her up. Desmond's started muttering to himself, mostly about needing a shave. It's true — his beard's sprung out a lot since this all started.

I've been thinking about monsters. Mostly werewolves. Are there such things? There'd have to be, right? If there's vampires and zombies, there should be werewolves. It just makes sense. There's been legends about them for God knows how long, and I remember reading something on hunter-net about how other cultures have legends about different things. Like the Chinese don't have werewolves, but were-tigers or something. Wonder if Bai knew anything about that.

Okay, that was mean. Sorry.

Anyway, like I said before, I never read much off the net. I thought folks there were nuts, and I still do, but there had to be some accurate stuff on there, right?

It's a full moon. So maybe one of us is a werewolf and just can't help it. Both people that died were weak in some way — Gerald was nuts and bleeding, and Bai was too injured to run. Real wolves chase down weak and sick animals, I think. That'd make sense.

But wouldn't a person look like a werewolf? I mean be hairy or muscular or something? Desmond's muscular, and he's complaining about his hair. He's got a thing for meat.

Let's forget the others for right now. What do I know about werewolves? They change shape. Human to wolf. But that thing in the stream looked more like a bear, or at least it was the right size. So maybe it's a were-bear? If people came up with were-tigers, why not bears? Silver bullets? I don't have a gun, much less bullets, much less anything at all made of silver. If that's really the only way to hurt a werewolf, we're in trouble.

What if it's not a werewolf at all? The thing that I saw back in Sacramento wasn't a werewolf. It was human, more or less. It was a walking dead person, and I've searched for references to zombies and walking dead on hunter-net and found dozens of stories. But I never looked for anything else. I don't know if a zombie could do this.

Anyway, that doesn't make sense. Whatever's killing us is at home here. We're wandering through its territory like a flock of sheep, and it's picking us off one by one. Is the monster among us the same one that's killing us? Is there more than one, is one responding to (or controlling) the other, or are they completely unrelated? Hell, maybe Gerald or Bai was the monster I saw.

A werewolf makes the most sense — animalistic, full moon. But I haven't heard any howls. Don't they howl?

I'm so damned ignorant. I wish I had more to go on. All I got that first time was a re-arranged headline in a magazine — "DO NOT FEAR FALSE STRENGTH." At the time, I didn't know what the hell to make of it, but I managed to get the thing out of the building without a major incident. Later on, the message made some sense. That zombie looked meaner than hell, but it gave in pretty easily. Somehow, I don't think that's going to happen here.

It's 1:29 PM. We're about to start again.

SLAUGHTER

I feel sick. I had to fight to hold down the little bit of food I've had today. My hands are shaking. I think I'd better wait before getting this down.

HOPE DASHED

We thought we were saved. We were headed down the mountain and May suddenly perked up and said, "Anybody smell gas?" We all sniffed and yeah, we thought we did smell fumes. So we split up through the woods and started looking. I found it first.

I have no idea how to describe this. I know it sounds impossible. There was a road — you could see where it had been, but it was completely overgrown. It wasn't paved, it was dirt, but there was so much brush growing out of it that it couldn't have been used in years. And yet, I found two jeeps. Both were smashed up, rusted and fallen to pieces. But that wasn't what scared me.

There were people in the jeeps. Two each, a driver and passenger. All dead. No way to tell how they died, but they weren't skeletons. The time doesn't match up. Between the overgrowth on the road and the condition of the vehicles, it looked like everything had been there for years. But the bodies were still decaying. You could see the holes in what was left of their skin, like they had been chewed up. If the bodies have been here only long enough to decay that much, why are the jeeps falling apart and why is the road so overgrown? It's almost as if the forest is trying to reclaim what people did to it.

I was going to try to trace where the road goes, in either direction, but then I saw something that stopped me. There was a symbol scratched into the hood of one of the jeeps. I did my best to draw it here.



What's scares me most about this is that people have been here before and it's like the forest has taken them, too. There's no gear in the jeeps. Nothing we can use. May and Kim showed up and saw me looking around trying to keep my lunch in. May looked positively scared out of her mind. It's the closest I've seen her come to losing it. She was pacing and hyperventilating, and tugged on my sleeve, telling me we had to get out of here. Kim, though. I'm worried about her. More later. Got to keep moving. 4:43 PM.

SUSPICION

We've stopped for the night. Managed to get down the mountain a ways, but the ground's still steep. Found a rock outcropping to sleep on. It's not comfortable, but it'll do. Anyway, what I was thinking earlier about Kim. She looked utterly calm as she looked over the cars and the undergrowth. Like it wasn't surprising to her. And the symbol — she actually nodded. I don't know if she's just too dim to realize the implications, if she's trying to look smart or if this is some eco-Nazi trip for her. But then she got all mystical and said something like, "This is what people get. They think the Goddess doesn't care and doesn't act, and then this happens." Normally I'd have argued, but when the evidence is right in front of you like that.

I thought before that Kim might be the monster. Now I'm almost sure of it. She wasn't around when we

found Gerald, and I have no idea what happened when Bai died. She's had opportunities and she's sure as hell unbalanced. I don't have any idea what she was doing on that plane — maybe the forest sends her out to get sacrifices. Shit, she seemed to recognize those jeeps. How long has she been at this?

I don't want to get too far ahead of myself. 7:37 PM now. I'm going to look around and see if I can find something to eat, but I've got more to get down here.

CONFRONTATION

It's 1:32 AM. Don't know where Kim is. She went running off after the fight. I'm rethinking my theory, because if Kim were the monster, I might well be dead. As it is, my lip is killing me.

I left my computer unattended earlier to go find food, but more importantly, I left it on. I'm officially an idiot. Kim was watching me and as soon as I left, she read the screen. Thank God she's not computer literate, because she didn't figure how to delete anything, and thank God I came back and found her when I did. I crept up behind her and snatched the computer off her lap, but she screamed at me and punched me in the mouth. All I could do was back up and try to keep her away. If I dropped the computer, she could have smashed it or grabbed for it.

She was screaming at me. Stuff like, "You think I'm a monster, you rich motherfucker? You think I killed



those people? You think I crashed the plane?" I kind of lost track of everything she said, but it was mostly along those lines. I hope she didn't read far enough back to catch references to zombies or werewolves or anything like that, because then she'd *really* think I was nuts. As it was, May and Desmond showed up and pulled her away from me, and she started into them, too. Finally she just turned around and crashed into the woods.

I talked to May about it, but didn't exactly confess everything. I said that I'd seen some things that weren't normal, but I didn't want to get into it now because things were scary enough. She agreed, and even apologized for losing it down by the jeeps. She said she got a really bad vibe down there, like something was watching us. I had to agree. I've had that feeling since day one.

Sleeping next to May tonight. She tosses and turns a bit. She's not concerned about the computer, so I'm not too worried. I don't know where Kim ran off to. None of us have seen her since the fight. Al still hasn't said anything to anybody. Desmond was throwing sticks at squirrels trying to knock one down so we could eat it. No luck. Those of us with bottles or containers refilled them when we crossed the stream, so at least we have water. The insects were worse at the stream, so we're all scratching.

Still can't "see," but I'm starting to feel more normal, like maybe it's coming back. I always feel the most "keyed in" to whatever the sight represents when I'm thinking something through, when I'm on the right track. Maybe I just need the right clue to turn myself back on.

Speaking of turning things on, I can't believe my computer's batteries haven't gone dead yet. I paid a little extra for them, and made sure to charge them before leaving Sacramento, but this is ridiculous. I'm not complaining, but I can't explain it.

The moon's behind the clouds. It's completely dark. I guess that's why I'm still typing. I know that if I turn off the computer and try to sleep, I'll be in pitch darkness listening to night sounds. And it'll be hard to turn a light on once it's all dark.

Does that make any sense? When I'm at home, if I get up in the middle of the night, I try not to turn on any lights. It's not about being blinded suddenly. I have bad dreams most of the time, and I'm always afraid that if I turn on a light, there'll be something there. I never know what, and I'm sure as hell not going to speculate now that anything from my dreams or worse could be waiting.

That wouldn't be much like a predator, though, waiting for a dramatic moment. The thing killing us didn't. It grabbed the weakest of us and took them out into the woods to kill them. Was it Kim? Did she wash herself in the stream after killing Bai? Is she running through the woods on four paws even now, waiting for my light to go out?

I don't think sleep is in the cards tonight. But what else is there to do? Walk in the woods?

MORNING

Everyone accounted for this morning except Kim. I guess she's gone off on her own. Luke actually asked where she was, and before any of us could say anything, Penny answered, "She's gone down the mountain, hon. Maybe we'll see her later." Not what I would have said. I don't know what I would have said.

Getting started was tricky. We actually had to back-track to find a place to that wasn't too steep. We found what looked like a path, probably a deer trail. I mentioned that out loud, and Desmond said he hoped so. He had that hungry, desperate look again. We'd better get out of this soon, because I don't know how many more days of sanity he has. He's not alone, really. I ate most of my remaining meat this morning. Probably eat the rest tonight. We'd better find something else soon.

We did get down to some more level ground and found a clear spot. I looked up at the mountain and couldn't even tell where our plane hit. I don't have a compass or anything. I've got no idea how many miles we've covered, but it can't have been too many. We've had a lot of delays. I know one thing — I'm definitely going to report those jeeps when I get back. I'm all for conservation, but I want this forest to pay. 11:24 AM right now. Rest break for Luke.

TWIST'S

It's 1:51 PM. Still haven't seen Kim. I'm thinking we won't see her again. The forest has her. I think it's hungry, even during the day. But I've added another suspect: Penny. She just screwed us and I can't think of a reason why, except that she's the monster. More later.

CHANCE AT RESCUE

We took a break around 1:00. Luke was fussing and the rest of us weren't real happy, either. Desmond, May and I decided to walk into the woods and see if we could find anything to eat. We got lucky. We split up for a minute, and then May started yelling that she'd found something. Another deer. This one wasn't dead, just cornered against the mountainside. Pretty small, too — not much more than a fawn. I'd be really sad about killing it if I weren't starving.

Anyway, Desmond just walked right up, grabbed it by the neck, and twisted until it fell over. That didn't do it right away. He actually had to stomp on the poor thing's head three or four times before it stopped moving. I never saw anything die before, other than bugs. It wasn't the deer's fault that this happened to us. May must have guessed what I was thinking, because she touched my shoulder and reminded me that deer are prey animals, so we were just doing the same as other predators. That didn't help much, but I took a good look at Desmond. I don't know if it came from hunger or if he was just having problems keeping his "predatory" side under control, but he looked like he was enjoying himself.

He picked up the carcass and headed back toward where we left Penny, Luke and Al. And then we heard the helicopter.

It flew right over where Penny was. We were yelling and waving but were under a lot of brush. It never saw us. It just headed straight down the mountainside. We came into the clearing, and Penny was hiding under a tree, covering Luke's ears. Al came into the clearing at the same time as we did, holding a roll of toilet paper.

There were some pretty heated words. The worst thing about it was, Penny was grasping at straws to hide the truth. She gave us some bullshit like she thought it might be thunder, she thought it might be an avalanche (she actually said that!). Shit like that. The truth was — and she won't admit it — she knew what it was and hid from it rather than even try to flag it down. Why? I can think of only one answer: she's at home out here.

It makes sense, in a way. She protects her son like a bear protects her cubs. Penny and Luke have probably eaten less of the venison than anyone, but never seem hungry. What if they had another source of food? Makes me wonder where Kim is. I've got half a mind to grab Penny's bag and search it, if I thought she wouldn't fight me tooth and nail.

So what could we do? Desmond really got pissed. He started yelling about Judas and Jezebel and stuff like that. May walked off into the brush and started breaking branches. I'm just numb. I can't believe she did that. In my book, that makes her a monster even if she's not one.

Al walked off alone. Not wanting to leave Desmond and Penny alone together, I didn't follow. But when he came back, his face was streaked with tearstains. Apparently, reality is getting through. Some of that distant look has faded. He looks more "here" than he has. He still doesn't talk, though.

We built a fire and cooked the meat, but it didn't seem to taste as good somehow. I guess it was the knowledge that we could have been in a hotel or something by now. Penny and Luke ate away from the rest of us. No one really feels like letting her get too close right now. The real heartbreaker was listening to Luke say, "Mom, why are we eating over here?" in a kid's whisper. (The kind where a kid thinks he's being quiet but you can hear him anywhere in the movie theater.) I feel bad for Luke. His Mom's got some kind of agenda going on, and she obviously thinks she's acting in his best interests. The scary thing is, maybe she is acting in his best interests. Who knows how parent-child dynamics work with monsters? But if she's not a monster, she may just have doomed him and the rest of us.

At the moment, I'm sitting here chewing on an especially tough piece of meat, trying to get my mind around all this. The moon is bright above us. Not so cloudy tonight, so I can see. I'm beginning to wonder if that means someone else won't die tonight. I've set

myself up so that I can see everyone sleeping. Desmond's lying near the fire, snoring. Al's not far away, leaning against a tree. I don't know if he's asleep or not. Penny and Luke are curled up together about 30 feet away from me. Actually, I can't see May. Maybe I'll go and find her. It's 10:49 PM.

CONSOLATION

I found May last night. She was wandering. We sat down and talked a bit. I learned a little more about her. She's an orphan — parents both died in a freak accident (part of their house collapsed). She was 18 when it happened, and went to live with her uncle in northern California. She's had kind of an interesting life. It was refreshing to talk to someone who's had an interesting life when it doesn't involve monsters. It's not like I haven't considered going hardcore and giving up school, my friends and everything else. I have considered it. But I keep thinking that when I "woke up," I managed to save someone's life because I was in school, waiting in an office like a regular guy. I used to think that people woke up completely at random, and that the messages we get are just our own minds giving us hints, like in dreams. But maybe something — like the "Messengers" the folks on the net talk about — really is choosing us.

So maybe they took my "gifts" away because I can't help here? Or I'm not supposed to? None of this really makes sense. I still can't see. May could sense I was frustrated about something. She asked if it was her. Weird question. She's actually very easy to get along with. She said that sometimes she gives off a weird vibe to people when she's nervous. I can see that. She's a very intense person. But I don't feel uncomfortable around her.

We talked for a couple of hours. She says she has trouble sleeping, but that she was going to give it a try. I thought maybe I should, too.

When I wandered back to where the rest of them were sleeping, Penny and Luke were gone. They came back into the clearing about a minute after I got there. Wonder where the hell they were?

SIGNS OF LIFE

I think Kim is still alive, or was recently. Today, while walking, we found some places in the brush that had obviously been passed through by a large animal. There were even footprints, but not very clear ones. It's been pretty dry lately, like I mentioned. They looked human, though.

The thing that worried me was that there were prints surrounding the trail that "Kim" left, like something was following her. We followed the prints for a while, but then they started curving back around and headed up the mountainside, and we decided to keep going down. If Kim is still alive, she'll have to find her own way down or wait until we can send help, but we're not going to endanger the group because she stormed off.

Of course, that doesn't make me feel any better, since it was because of me and my suspicions that she left.

It's 12:30 PM. We've stopped for a quick lunch. (Venison again?) We seem to be making progress. The ground's getting more level, anyway. But I can't help feeling that even though we're getting closer to civilization, we're in more danger. The forest is deeper here. Sunlight doesn't filter down as much, and there are few natural paths. Every now and then something rustles in the brush and you know it's a chipmunk, but what if it isn't? And this is during the day!

MORE SYMBOLS

Something is very wrong.

We found a stream. Much smaller than the last one. More like a creek. Don't know where the water's coming from. It should be a dry bed, given how dry the rest of the woods are. But the forest is playing by its own rules now. We're just trying to get out alive.

The scary thing was the footprints by the stream. They were wolf prints, that's for sure. All over the place. No way to tell how many. But they were all just there. No trails leading up, no wolf shit in the area (not that we saw, anyway). Nothing. It was like this pack of wolves appeared out of nowhere.

May said the word "werewolves" before I did, and that makes me feel a little less crazy. She looked at the prints and then up at the sky, as if expecting to see the moon in the middle of the day. Penny and Luke were behind us a ways. Al and Desmond had crossed already and were moving ahead. May whispered to me, "It's like werewolves. Something attacking us on the full moon." I could only nod. I felt my heart pounding. I was thinking, maybe she's like me! But I think she just studies folklore or something. The next thing she said was, "There's a legend about werewolves, about how you can cure one if you can get

him to drink water from a wolf's print. Or maybe that's how you become one. I don't know. It's been while." Some of those prints did have water in them.

A small tree had fallen across the stream, right by the footprints. There was another of those symbols carved into the wood.



Looks like a rainbow over water. I looked at it closely. I don't think it or the others were made with a knife.

I found little bits of hair — coarse, like a dog's — embedded in the wood. It wasn't

a human that made these marks. I don't think, anyway. So what does that mean?

Maybe it means there's several monsters out here. There may or may not still be a monster with us. If Kim was the monster, she might be stalked by a bunch of werewolves, or she could be leading them somehow. The werewolves can apparently walk around without leaving tracks. (Except near water? That might explain why we didn't see any tracks up higher on the mountain where it's so dry.) They don't seem to mind killing us, but they apparently don't want to kill us all at once. Maybe they just want the weak and helpless, like that fawn. Which doesn't explain why Luke's still around. Of course, Penny is protecting him.

Getting off track here. It's like these things have a language. They're communicating with each other, and they apparently don't like people very much. Maybe it's like Kim said. Something about the Goddess protecting the land. Maybe these creatures are just defending their homes, just like we would against monsters.

It's 2:13 PM. My computer still thinks it has a charged battery. We need to keep moving.



CHAPTER 2:

KNOWING THE PREDATOR

And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered.

— Genesis 9:2

FEAR OF T'OOOTH AND CLAW

Fear has been the one constant of my life since I changed. I thought I knew fear before — losing my job or my wife, or something happening to my kids. Some of those fears I've confronted because they've come true. Others I've managed to avoid. But one fear has ruled my life for months and it's time I faced it or let it defeat me.

Yes, I know that sounds dramatic, but I'm writing this in the knowledge that whoever reads it will take over my work. If it's Manisha or Josh, thank you. I sincerely hope I'll be around to see what you do with this information. If I'm not, the very best of luck to you, and take care. It seems that the hunt claims most of us in the end, but I hope you're spared.

Months ago, I encountered a gathering of shape shifters in rural Suffolk. I saw them, and the people that consorted with them, reveling in the woods just outside a village about 10 miles from the coast. You'll find a map of the approximate location in this file. I'm ashamed to say that I ran. I ran to my car and drove for as long as I could — down the A12, round the M25 and home. I locked myself away in the comfort of my house and hid behind a computer, losing myself in useless debate on hunter-net.

I've spent the last few months trying to make up for the consequences of that decision. Like my friend Jake — Bookworm, as some of you may know him — I took time out to travel and help other hunters in the UK. My own little group here is some testament to that success, as is the group I was directed to in Manchester. I'm glad my wife has yet to find out about the middle-aged Scottish woman sharing the house with me. That would certainly speed up the divorce proceedings. I don't want her to divorce me, but I gave up my right to a life when I let Ed kill another one of us.

My relationship with Kirsty is hardly a sexual one. I'm about 20 years too old and Kirsty is a very troubled young woman. Being changed has done something to her — even more so than what happens to most of us. I'm not going to abandon her, and she seems most calm when she's with me, but she's still dangerous. Sometimes she plays the good housewife, tidying up and occasionally cooking dinner. Sometimes she sets the table for four people. There's only the two of us here. When she goes out, though, she kills the other side easily and without guilt, as if our calling demands that someone dies.

Another hunter died because of me. I'm not going to let Kirsty's problem kill her, no matter how scared I am of her.

Fear. Fear of Kirsty. Fear of failure. Fear of the things out there. Fear of the animals that prowl the countryside. That's what this is about. When we deal with rots and ghosts, there's a kind of simplicity to it. We know on an instinctual level that people shouldn't come back from the dead. There's something wrong with creatures like that. They defy nature, or what we used to think of as nature.

Hello, my friend.

Here's the information you asked for. I've gathered all SoS29's material on shapechangers and most of it's here. I'm far from sure that I'm doing the right thing by sending it to you, but I don't see what other choice I have. There's too much to deal with, and this threat isn't going away. Use what's here wisely, and don't throw your life away. There aren't enough of us about to lose you and your friends, too.

Or maybe they just replace us as soon as we die.

Joshua

PREY ONCE MORE

Werewolves, though, they scare me in a different way. They scare me in a way that my body feels, if that makes sense. Like I should run from them if I want to live a second longer. Maybe like a mouse feels when a hawk passes over it. People think they're safe in their nice little houses, with supermarkets and central heating and cushy jobs. We don't think the world is very dangerous. Not like it was for our ancestors.

I was watching a show on BBC1 last night. Some pseudo-documentary about what life was like for humans when they were still pretty much monkeys. Life was almost simple then. You had two big things to be afraid of: being eaten or not having enough to eat. We still feel the latter. That's why so many people are fat. They eat as much as they can whenever they get the chance, because ancient instincts tell them that they have no way of knowing where their next meal will come from, even if they live next door to a bloody supermarket. But what if our fear of being eaten — our fear of predators is still there? I know that sounds like a weak excuse for my own cowardice, but that's not what I'm getting at. Do we, and by "we" I mean hunters, focus on the dead so much because we're afraid to confront the things of nature that are out there?

CITY LIMITS

I've been doing some trawling through my own hunter-net archive here, as well as some personal correspondence. A few interesting things have come up.

1. The majority of reported encounters with werewolves and other shape shifting things seem to have taken place on the edges of cities or in the countryside. That's interesting for a number of reasons. The relative

paucity of hunters who claim to be from rural areas might explain why we've had so little word of the beasts. The few of us in those areas simply might mean we don't encounter them much. The worrying aspect of this is that we have no idea of the things' numbers. They could be rare, with only a handful in any country. Or they could be much more common. We just don't know. The sooner we find out the better, even if we don't like what we discover.

2. The encounters that have been reported are notable for exceptional violence, or some degree of communication. Unlike relationships like, say, the one Jake had with a vampire, these creatures seem to be at least semi-open in their dealings with us. When they're not simply trying to kill us, that is. There's evidence of an exchange of information and, often, warnings. That suggests to me that at least some of the creatures are intelligent.

Perhaps we can classify them, much as someone has done with the walking dead. Perhaps there are intelligent, reasonable ones. Would they be planners or leaders? If these things operate in groups, as I saw, it stands to reason that some kind of leadership would be necessary. Even natural wolves have their alpha males and females. So what about the violent encounters, then? Are communicative leaders prone to violence under the proper circumstances, or are some "followers" prone to violence? Do some forgo leadership to revel in being bloodthirsty?

Then there's another possibility. My own encounter, and several reports from hunter-net of people being harassed by werewolves that actually wanted to breed. They might suggest that there's a third class. Ones that seek to reproduce, as anything in nature does, I suppose. While not overtly monstrous, my "breeders" were certainly wrong, even if I was never able to pin down exactly why. Perhaps their interaction with obvious monsters was enough. Corruption by association.

It's also interesting to consider society's migration toward cities over the centuries. I know the "accepted" economic reasons: availability of work, the opportunity to aggregate resources, economies of scale and all that. But is there a more profound reason? Are we running from something rather than to the city? Do we know, even if it's not in our conscious minds, that there's something out there that we need to escape? Something that's feral and hungry? Something that makes us feel like our ancestors did all those years ago?

If there are communities of these creatures, perhaps they make their homes in the most sparsely populated areas. No, that's the wrong way around. Perhaps these areas stay or become sparsely populated because the creatures choose to live there. If that's the case, we might have a way of pinpointing where they are.

I think I need to sit down with Manisha and get some maps out. If we can figure out where the least

populated areas in Britain are, we can trawl through local newspaper archives for stories that might hint at other things going on. It's a long shot, but it's worth a try.

I'm not sure I want to get Kirsty involved in this yet.

NATURE VERSUS SUPERNATURE

From: stella142

Are you an idiot, Paul? I like where you're going with these ideas, but do you have any idea of the gaping hole in your argument? Let's have a little quiz. What do walking dead and werewolves have in common? That's right they're both super_natural (or space aliens, or the collective evil of millions of years of human evolution or some other such nonsense, but let's run with "supernatural" for now). They are not part of nature. They're something above, far above it. Now, I freely admit that I and the others have had very little experience with them. If I go more than 10 miles outside the M25 I get homesick, but it seems to me that your argument breaks down when you consider that.

Or maybe I'm talking out of my bottom.

Thanks for showing me this, anyway. You're not thinking of heading back out to Suffolk are you? If you do, take that psycho Scottish bitch. Sorry, I mean, "Regards to Kirsty."

Yours,
Josh

BREEDING RIGHT'S

I'm not entirely sure I agree with Josh on this one. Unlike many of the creatures we've reported, werewolves actually seem to be living beings. Now, I don't have conclusive proof of that, but I do have Forscherin's account of meeting with what she described as a rat-person. She claimed to have access to the corpse for examination and found it to be a normal rat, as far as she could tell. There was nothing to indicate that the corpse had been dead for anything more than the few hours since her friend killed it.

Certainly, the interaction I saw between the werewolves and what appeared to be more-or-less normal people in Suffolk was pretty natural. They looked to me as if they were about to have marital relations. That implies fairly normal breeding, as far as I know, but I'm no expert in these things. I was really bad at biology at school, and that's more decades ago than I like to think about.

Still the idea that they have sex is frightening enough on its own — that they may be able to breed. It's troubled me since I stumbled on that group. Not only does it imply that their numbers could be considerable, it means they're natural beings in some way. I hesitate to suggest the idea, but could they be the result of breeding between humans and animals? Jokes about bestiality aside, perhaps there's a fundamental reason why such



acts are warned against in the same breath as witchcraft in the Bible.

Of course, I'm speculating on very little evidence — again. I know that testing these theories means going out into the field, and trying to confront or communicate with some of these things. But I know that I'm not halfway prepared. But if the research Manisha and I have been doing the last few evenings offers anything useful, I might have an approach. If Jake can do this, I can. After all, he's just a kid. I'm a middle-aged man with a whole lot more experience in the University of Life. I can do this. If I can track down one of the breeders, they might be easier to deal with than any of the others.

I need to do some research in the archives about shapeshifters beyond just wolves. I'm sure I recall other accounts like Forschrin's in some of the older files.

HUMANITY

From: stella142

Thanks for the update on your thinking, Paul. One word: wizards. Thank you, and goodnight.

Josh

STRANGE CHANGES

I'm not quite certain what Josh was trying to say here. I did some research, though, and amongst a whole load of other things I found some legends about transformation. Certainly Celtic lore has many tales of people being turned into animals. That might have some relevance to what we're dealing with here.

Certainly all the legendary sources seem to suggest that, in some way, werewolves are related to humanity. People are transformed into animals by various magical ways. The "bite of a werewolf" legend seems to be a recent one. Perhaps it got confused with the traditional vampire myth — that the bite of a vampire would cause you to rise as one after death.

So, what are they? Transformed humans of some sort? If we accept that the walking dead seem to be some sort of spirit that animates a corpse (even if that's hazy conjecture), maybe werewolves are human or animal bodies that have been possessed by some sort of spirit. That might explain their obsession with the physical, visceral world — having sex and eating.

But does that invalidate my breeding theory? Or do the creatures born through their intercourse actually accept these possessing spirits more easily? That might explain the possibility of leaders — those whom spirits control fully. Maybe other "lesser" creatures aren't as capable of thought or communication, or don't have enough control to accomplish those things.

Is there a wizard connection? There's certainly a traditional link between magicians, demon summoning and transformations. Perhaps magicians summon spirits into bodies. If we could find some connection between

log started

[sos29] Thanks for coming, everyone.

[bookworm55] No problem. Sorry I've been out of circulation for a while. My stay in Chicago kept me very busy, I guess. Too busy to spend much time on here.

[sos29] I'm glad you're here, though. You've done more work on compiling information on changers than anyone.

forscherin263 has joined UnityChat

[bookworm55] I'm not sure that's true any more, but I've been doing some catch-up of late, and I guess we really don't know a lot more than we did when I first did all that.

[forscherin263] Sorry I am late. I was confused about time zones.

[profgeo160] hola!

[sos29] np forskerin

[stella142] I thought you Germans swore by your punctuality?

[forscherin263] Yes, I will begin. I want to talk about the mass of the beast. Where does it go? The one I have been studying massed no more than a normal rat, yet it was once bigger than me.

[stella142] Umm, so what?

[forscherin263] That is not possible in the laws of science. She does not allow that. The creatures must not be under the laws we understand if we accept what we see about them.

[stella142] What's not to accept? The reports we get are pretty consistent: fur, teeth, more muscle than a weightlifter convention.

[forscherin263] You should not joke, Stella. Too many people have died facing these creatures.

[sos29] Behave, Stella.

[forscherin263] I_saw_ a tall rat man. I found a dead rat. What if it was never more than a rat, and I_saw_ it differently because of its danger?

[bookworm55] I don't understand. If it was something like the werewolves some of us have seen, how is it different?

[forscherin263] Why do you make the assumption that they are similar things?

[stella142] Because they look the same and act the same. If it looks like a turd and smells like a turd...

[profgeo160] ?????? I believe I understand what forskerin says. I think that perhaps a demon can make a rat become a man or a man become a rat. It is not the animal that it starts with that is the problem, it is the demon inside. I do not believe that the demon travels by bite, though, for I know a friend who was bitten by one of these things and he is still a normal person, thank God.

man-beasts and magicians, we'd be a good step along the road. I need to e-mail Jake.

And yet, I can't get away from the fact that this is all guesswork. We're not really going to learn anything until we get out there and actually watch some of these things in action. Still, I'm not risking my life or anyone else's until we have more to go on. I'm going to get Manisha to check out some maps and newspaper archives while I push the research in other directions. I'll hit the library after work and see what I can find in other hunter lists.

MAGIC AND SAVAGERY

From Bookworm55

Paul,

Your thoughts are pretty interesting, if scattered. I haven't seen a lot on hunter-net or on my own to back up what you're trying to say. I mean, it's all cool, but it's really a lot of guesswork. Like you said, the only way to tell is to try and actually contact some werewolves, but are you sure you're ready for that? While I'm usually all for trying to make some sort of contact with the other side, I know the risks as well as anyone. Even now, I

believe that the one I ran into could have killed me just as easily as warn me off. These things are strong, and I'm not sure you've really got anyone on your side who could protect you, except for maybe that Scottish lady, but she sounds like as much of a problem as a solution. If you can wait a few months, I might be able to get over there to help out.

Your idea on different breeds of werewolf certainly might hold some of the answers, but it's far from the only possible explanation for how these things behave. I mean, people are different based on where they live, right? Maybe the same holds true for shapechangers. The differences we've seen in their behavior might be regional. The reports from Warden, Forscherin and Lotus in Europe, for example, seem to show especially violent creatures. It might simply come down to personality.

I'm pretty uncertain about the warlock link. From what Purple told me all those months ago, there was nothing that made any link between the two. In fact, everything I've learned since suggests to me that there really isn't much of a link between any creatures, except maybe antagonism.

Good luck. I have a gut feeling that if we understand werewolves a little better we might stand a chance of opening a dialogue with them. I often wonder if the problems we've had with them have resulted from hunters' own aggression.

SCIENCE AND LYCANTHROPES

I had an interesting letter from a German poster this morning. I'd decided to follow up on Jake's comments about European werewolves, and corresponded with Claudia. Much of the debate hasn't really pushed any ideas forward, but some of her research is interesting, and this most recent letter has really shifted my thoughts.

It appears that some of the attributes we've suspected about werewolves might be explained scientifically, if what she says is true. That raises some questions about whether they're natural or supernatural. In fact, I think all this lends some credence to Jake's one-time idea that werewolves are a separate species from us, one that has lived alongside us for centuries.

From Forscherin263

Dear SoS29,

Thank you for your ideas. I have given them much thought. We run into the old problems of trying to apply our science to creatures which do not fit into the way we view the world now. Let me give to you an example: you talk of animals and humans breeding. Now, science tells us that is not possible. Yet, we hear of babies born all over the world who have scales, fur and other things on their bodies. I can show you the reports if you wish to see them.

Science tells us that the babies suffered some form of genetic damage or development oddity while in the womb. This is a fallen world, as the Bible teaches us, so

Library Notes

Werewolf = Old English. *wer* is OE for man, hence "man-wolf" literally. French equivalent is *loup-garou*.

Lycanthropy = Greek. *lukos* = wolf, *anthrops* = man, therefore again literally "wolf-man."

Interesting. Same basic term in use since the Greek era. Not a new phenomenon, and almost universal?

No. Other legends from other parts of world are of other animals: tigers, hyenas, leopards. None of these directly experienced by other hs.

Not true! *Kitsune* = fox spirits. Sound like what Pariahdog encountered. Pity he's dead.

Witch shapeshifting connection. Often seen to transform into cats. Link with creature ProfessorGeo saw? English legends, follows Josh's idea.

Wolves:

St Patrick said to have turned Vereticus, King of Wales, into a wolf. Magical transformation again.

Interesting eating connection. Transmission through bite. Transformed through eating human flesh. *Lycan*, King of Arcadia, transformed by Zeus into a wolf for eating human flesh (Ovid).

Neuri able to assume shape of wolves (Herodotus)

Family of Antaeus - one chosen annually to be transformed into a wolf. Victim continued in that shape for nine years.

Skin proof against shot and steel, unless weapon blessed in a Chapel to St Hubert. Where do I find a church of St Hubert?

all things fall a smaller or greater degree from God's perfection. These problems create a baby with odd skin conditions. The human mind, which is shocked by the sight of a damaged baby, tries to comprehend it by explaining the deformity to itself in terms of the closest natural thing it can comprehend, like feathers and scales. The baby actually just has deformed skin.

Science teaches us two things about lycanthropy, as we call the state most people call being a werewolf. The first is that it is a psychological condition. People actually believe they are werewolves and use this as an excuse within themselves for extreme violence. The psychiatrists call this lycanthropy, so that is the proper use of the word. There was a recent documented case in Germany, where a young man invited a stranger to have dinner with him. He turned on his guest and savagely attacked him. When caught, he claimed himself to be a werewolf and was treated for psychiatric illness. While some sufferers of this affliction believe their bodies to be turning into those of wolves — often in small parts like hands becoming claws — other people cannot see what they could see. I am very curious to know what one of us would see, if we were to look at such an individual with our special sight, and am now trying to track down a patient I could find a way of visiting. I shall let you know if I succeed.

The second thing that science teaches us is that people in extreme stress can take on the appearance of the traditional werewolf. This has been proved through the studies of the feral children. These are children who have for some reason been raised alone or by the animals in the wild. There are cases in India that are of fame. When they are found they often resemble the werewolf: hair-covered, feral creatures. Science has shown that this is because some humans, when seriously malnourished and deprived of protection, will start to grow excessive amounts of hair. This gives them the appearance of the werewolf.

It would go some way to explain some of the legends of the past. Here in Germany, we have many tales of the werewolf, including drawings and others. In the past centuries, it would be easy for people who lived outside the villages to become cold and malnourished.

My problem is this: can these creatures who are merely humans with problems be anything to do with the werewolves we see? I do not see how, although your ideas of different breeding groups of the werewolves is an interesting one. I would like to discuss her more with you. To be sure of your theory, I would like to chance to talk to, or study a group in more close positions. I have asked my boys to obtain the flesh samples of any of the werewolves they encounter. Could you do the same for me?

Thank you, Herr SoS.

Claudia

WHERE NOW?

Claudia's thoughts, while interesting, have backed me into a corner for a little while.

I think I need to leave this angle of attack for now and try to approach the subject in a different way. I'm going to spend a few weeks looking into other creatures that have been reported to hunter-net, many of which bear a startling resemblance to werewolves, except being in animal forms. If the encounters are genuine, they might support my library research about different cultures having different shapeshifter myths. Maybe Jake's right. Maybe there are regional variations.

I'm on a work visit to Manchester for the next week. I'm going to spend some time with the group there. I've downloaded the archives to the laptop and will try to get some follow-up from people who have encountered these things.

THE OTHERS

What do I have to show for a week's work? Not as much as I would have liked. While the majority of the encounters I've been able to find concern werewolves, we have a significant body of evidence to suggest that other such creatures exist. I've looked for patterns among them, but am not sure if I've found any.

AT SEA

From Soyboy134

Thanks for bringing this up off-list, SoS.

I know it's been a long time, but I'm still sure I saw what I saw. It looked like a shark with legs and arms. I know that sounds ludicrous, but it wasn't at the time. Sure, I sounded pretty brave when I wrote about it back then, but I'm sure you remember all the macho bullshit on the list back in the early days. We had no idea what we were getting into and all wanted to sound tough.

I was terrified and I'm still shitting myself at the thought of it. I haven't been anywhere near a beach since. I'm just too fucking scared that I'll see something that I never want to see again. Sharks are part of life down here. We know the risks and know how to react when one is spotted. No biggie. Sharks are pretty simple bastards. They go after blood and eat until they're done. This thing, this was intelligent. That bastard knew I was there, knew I was doing something to stop it getting near its prey, and it fucking hated me for it. Shark attacks, and I've seen one, are bad enough. Calculated shark attacks just scare the hell out of me. There's no escape. You can get to shore and the thing can keep coming. If it can turn into a human like you hear about other changers doing, maybe it can hunt you down to your bloody home.

Once in a while, we hear stories of people being found as nothing more than bloody chunks of meat in their homes. We all assume that it's some human psycho,

a serial killer at work. What if it's these things coming out of the sea to hunt us down? What if we're not safe in our own homes?

You wonder why I don't post much anymore? I've got a job to do. There are people I love and I'm going to watch over them. One day that bastard is going to come for me and mine and I need to be ready.

FERAL AND FELINE

From profesorgeo160

Greetings my friend! It is too long since we wrote each other. I like you have seen death stalk my friends, and I understand why you feel sad. But we must go on, if we are to understand the vitalis that flows through us all.

Sí, I remember my confrontation with the cat creature all those long months ago. But I have a surprise for you, my friend! We have had other meetings with such things in the months that have passed. I do not like to think too much of them, for the cat things are difficult to deal with. With the ghosts you can believe that what you dealt with was once like us and might have thoughts like us, sí? Well, it is not so with the jaguar people. I see people with their pet cats and they think "ha, this cat is my friend" and they think wrong. Their little friend is an animal that likes to prey on other animals. They just think we are bigger predators like its mother. This is why they bring us the little gifts, sí?

Can you imagine a big cat toying with people like our pets toy with little mice? This is how they think, my friend. We humans are the little animals that they stalk like a little cat stalks a mouse. I do not want to die at the hands of these things. It seems that a mouse is in much pain when it is the toy of the cat. I have talked with one since and consider them to be dangerous. I tried to make it see that I did not hate it, but it had no interest in me. When I persisted in talking to it, it attacked me, just as did the first one I encountered. Only the angel of God protected me and I will not try to talk to it again.

I do not think that they are really part of the natural world. I think that in some way a demon takes the form of a man and uses the vitalis of the world to mix its form with that of an animal. I cannot believe that God would take the form of the human and make it into something else, something like the beasts for which he made man to rule. I must find a way to persuade the demon to leave the man and see if the animal leaves with it. I have seen one demon dead and it did indeed take the form of the man, not the beast. I fear I did nothing but kill the man and free the demon. I want to free the man without his death.

I do not know how I will do this, for I fear that if I confront another of the jaguar people, maybe the angel of the Lord will not be able to save me.

I do not know if this is of much help to you my friend, but I am glad to write it.

MORE EVIDENCE

From Ticket312

Yes, they're real. I met one on a trip recently. I'm alive. No one else on the trip is. No, I don't want to talk about it just yet, but I would like to see what you've discovered. Anything that would make sense of what happened would be good.

Please don't tell Jake about this.

VERMIN

From Forscherin263

I hope that what I said before was as accurate as I can be. I am a scientist and when we write our papers, we put in all the facts even if they do not seem to matter to us. What I faced I think was a giant rat person. I was most afraid. Part of me still wonders if I did not place my own fears onto the thing I saw. We in science often have to be cruel to animals for the better life of humans. I think this is a good thing, but many peoples do not agree with me. This I know.

I think we all fear to be treated as we treat animals some times.

All my research has shown the corpse of the rat to be little more than a normal rat. I finally sent a small sample of her tissues for testing at a genetics center that has the better equipment than us. While they found some minor genetic abnormalities, it is not something that radiation or a city existence could not explain.

If you want my opinion, Herr SoS, I think that these creatures cannot be natural. God gave man (and woman!) rulership of all the beasts. He would not make such beasts that attack and hurt humans. So, they must be the work of the Devil. The Devil can not make anything new — he can only twist that which God makes and use it for his ends. He take a man, which is God's work, and the beast, which is God's work, and makes them together a parody of the Lord's creation.

But he has to work within some of God's laws, which is why we see some things we would call natural in the way that they behave. Do you see?

CONCLUSIONS

I have been flicking through the late Pariahdog's account of his meeting with what appears to be a fox shape shifter of some kind in the Survival Guide page. It seems to fit into the broad pattern of what I expected to find. Creatures which take on a variety of shapes, some human, some animal, some a mixture of the two. Behavior patterns seem to vary a little. There seems to be a general propensity toward violence, although the degree to which that's the result of confrontational situations is an open question. I'm sure if they were comparing notes on us, we'd look pretty damn violent too.

Initially, I thought the evidence was building toward Jake's idea that there are regional variations in the type of

shifters we see: sharks in Australia, big cats in South America, big fox things in Asia. That certainly makes sense. If there is a relationship between wolves and werewolves, then why would werewolves be found where there are no wolves? Other creatures would be better suited for the spirits to work with. The imbuing seems to be a worldwide phenomenon, so there's no reason to doubt that the monsters are, too.

There are problems with this argument, though. For one, Claudia saw her rat thing in Germany, where there are also many confirmed reports of werewolves, so the situation must be more complex than I've made it out to be. The other problem is that we really just don't have enough evidence to work from. We've had less than a dozen reported encounters with anything other than werewolves in the history of hunter-net. I mean, that's less than things like goblins, which seem so rare that I'm inclined to believe they're actually one of the other sorts of creatures we've encountered, and that the people who have met them have just misinterpreted what they saw.

In all fairness, I think this is a blind alley for the time being. Unless something comes up that gives us more information about these things, I'm better off spending my time where we have the most evidence: werewolves themselves.

ANOTHER THEORY

From Forscherin263

Herr SoS, I thought some more about our discussion. May I make another idea suggestion to you? I think perhaps that what we see is not what is real. Can I explain this? Well, I said to you that when people see strange babies they make what they see to be something they understand in their heads. Now, maybe when the angels show us the monsters, we make them into something we understand when we look at them. We see an animal monster that walks like a man and which makes us afraid. We try to understand it but we cannot, so we make ourselves see something we do understand. For many people wolves are the most frightening animals, so they see a man wolf.

I feel some guilt about the rats we kill, so I see a man rat. Soyboy fears the sharks that swim in the sea, so he sees a shark man. Maybe they are all the same creatures. It is only the way that we see them that changes. I do not think we can understand the monsters yet. I think we have hidden their knowledge inside our brains for too long. Why else can no others see them? The angels lead us to an understanding we can cope with. As we grow in our missions and faith, they will give us more understanding.

Claudia

VIOLENCE AND SABOTAGE

From Manisha

Paul,

I've found something very interesting. This is kicking stuff. Multiple locations around the UK fit the parameters that we worked out. I've narrowed it down to three major locations: the area of Suffolk you identified for me, the area of Scotland north of the Ochils and south of Perth, and an area of central Wales around 30 miles north of Swansea.

I've done a thorough search of the local newspapers that keep archives online, and followed up with a physical search in the British Library. Boy, that place is stuffy. I can't find anything conclusive to be honest with you, but there were some interesting trends.

Either the businesses in these places have the worst maintenance staff in the country, or something odd is going on. Almost all of them seem to suffer break-ins, vandalism and perhaps even sabotage at a level that just doesn't match local crime rates. Before you say anything, I've checked. The problems rarely rate significant mention in the papers, given the scale of some of the problems. I'd have rated them as front-page news for some of the local rags, but they're buried on pages four and five, after the pictures of old farts planting trees and getting awards.

The Suffolk one seems to be the most obvious example. There's not a lot of industry in the area. It's mainly agricultural, and the population density is low. There's some food-processing plants around, making processed poultry. The sort of thing Mum would never let us eat as kids. They've had a certain amount of trouble.

However, there's a much more sizable issue here: a nuclear power station called Eastsea, on the coast in Suffolk. It has two reactors, A & B. While the plant itself doesn't seem to have suffered directly, at least three lorries going to or from it have been involved in serious road crashes. One actually traveled 500 metres off road before going over a cliff — and it was two miles away from the road it should have been on.

A few members of the staff have gone missing, and others have been hurt in car crashes, fights outside pubs and other incidents. The problems are scattered over a number of years, which may be why no-one's picked up on them before. If we're right, there's certainly something odd going on.

So, do you want to tell me why you think it might be werewolves? All this seems very organized for animal behavior. Why would they be making coordinated attacks, and how? Surely they would suffer just as much as we would if there was a serious accident in the plant. If there was a leak, the wind coming in off the sea would contaminate Ipswich, Colchester and Chelmsford. Unless the things are somehow immune to radiation, which



would certainly give them the upper hand. I'm also surprised that the plant supervisors aren't yelling blue murder over everything that's happened.

It's possible that something similar is happening in the other areas I named. There's a series of refineries on the south bank of the Forth, around a shithole called Grangemouth. It seems to be spun out of the North Sea oil industry. There's pipelines, and tankers come into the place fairly regularly. There seems to have been a disproportionate number of deaths, accidents and temporary shut downs at some of the plants there.

The situation's the same in Wales. Moves to get industry to invest in what's a pretty damn poor area seem to be thwarted repeatedly by large-scale industrial accidents. A shopping centre development has been repeatedly delayed after workmen have been injured.

We need to meet and talk this through. Are you free on Friday? And could you bring Kirsty? I think she'll have some interesting thoughts on the problem.

I don't see anything in all of this to prove werewolves are involved, but I think we need to take a look. Even if it's rots, it needs sorting out.

REACTIONS AND HOPES

Manisha's right. There's nothing here that suggests werewolves directly. But there seems to be something happening. Could it really just be coincidence that one of

the centers of activity is more or less where I saw that group of creatures? My belief is that it isn't. I think there's a link here, and that if we can grasp what the connection is between the power plant and the werewolves, we might take a step towards understanding them.

MAKING PLANS

I want to get this down before I forget it. Kirsty had the idea first. We got big maps of the areas in question — Manisha brought them along to our meeting — and we marked out each of the news stories she turned up. The Scottish map didn't reveal much. The vast majority of the supposed attacks were clustered along the river, with no discernible pattern, bar the focus on those refineries. The Swansea map was better. There was a distinct cluster of incidents to the north of town, thinning to the south and ending at the city itself. That implied, to Kirsty's mind anyway, a group operating out of a base somewhere in the hills to the north. She's the one with reservist training. I'm going to have to take her word for it. Management courses don't tend to help with military tactics, and I've avoided management's wilderness survival bonding trips for all I'm worth. Damn fool idea.

It was with the Suffolk map that we really hit paydirt. Leaving aside the concentrations of incidents at Eastsea, the other incidents formed a rough circle. In Kirsty's guess, the werewolves are likely to be operating

PRIMAL PROPHECIES

I'm flying above the sea, with the sun above and the wind in my hair. I bank and fly and cry with joy. Then I turn back toward the shore and feel that I'm no longer alone. I can't see who's with me, but they're guiding me. On the shore, I see something shining in the sun. As I fly closer, the air begins to chill. I shiver and then see the darkness at the heart of the shining thing. It reaches out for me, tries to claim me. The others are there, though, around me and protecting me.

Through the dark, I can see the manbeasts. They're slashing away at the dark, trying to cut it to ribbons. The more they slash, the bigger it becomes. I'm afraid that the whole world will turn black.

And then one of the manbeasts looks at me and I feel nothing but anger from it. The others are sad, and I feel nothing but loss.

Typical. This is just as hard to make sense of as the rest of Manisha's dreams. I wonder sometimes if she's taken too many drugs and is hallucinating.

If this was a vision of some kind (maybe meant for her?), it could imply that creatures are in some way hostile to something on a shore. The question is: Is this a reference to Suffolk, or Scotland or someplace else entirely?

out of somewhere roughly in the middle of that circle, which is a lightly populated area about 10 miles from the coast. It was, in fact, about where I saw the things gathered months ago. Manisha was still skeptical that this had anything to do with shapechanger activity. Kirsty didn't care. She just sees targets. I need to have another talk with her once we get home.

I had to convince Manisha, so I sat down and came clean to the pair of them about what happened all those months ago. Seeing the werewolf. Looking for others. Finding the man that was wrong in the pub. Following him into the woods and seeing the group. Manisha was understanding. Kirsty looked at me like something that she'd scraped off her shoe.

We discussed it for a while, but we all knew what the conclusion was going to be. We have to head out there and find out what we can. I've contacted some of Kirsty's old group in Scotland, and they're looking into the Grangemouth situation. In the meantime, I need to arrange some time off work and set up some hotels for us.

REFINED SENSES

From Angus:

Paul,

Hope this finds you well and that you're keeping Kirsty under control. I haven't heard of any bombings or mysterious deaths for a while, so I assume you're having some success with her.

We drove past the plants you asked us to check at Grangemouth. Most of them seem to be off one long road on the outskirts of town. We went along at a fairly normal speed. It looked pretty nasty even to normal eyes. We took it in turns to focus on the security guards with the sight. Most of the buildings were fine, but when we got to the sales office of a division of Endron — Endron Polyolefins — we struck gold. The wee fucker on guard was as wrong as you please. We stopped and two of us "argued" over the road map, while I got a good, long look at him. I can't say for sure, but it's as if there's something in him that shouldn't be there.

We're going back for another look in the wee, small hours tomorrow. I'll get you the chat when I get back.

INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENT

From Angus:

What have you done? Pamela's dead. Stewart's badly hurt, and I don't know if I can risk taking him to

From Forscherin263

Well, Herr SoS, we have news. I managed to get myself, after some effort, on a prisoner visit scheme. I think the fact that I am a religious girl helped me — too many people get rejected because they just wish to mock the prisoners or have an unhealthy sexual interest in them. It did not surprise me to learn that our werewolf friend has had no visitors when I volunteered to visit him. Most people find what he did too horrible.

When I entered the room he was not very happy to talk. He was very withdrawn. His cheeks were sunken and his eyes staring. He snapped "yes" or "no" or simply ignored me. I tried to tell him that God loves him and wants him to repent from his sins so he may be saved, so that my cover — is that the word? — was not broken. As I did this, I used the sight on him.

Do you know what I saw? He might be a werewolf, or so the angels told me. As I looked, I could see, but only in a hazy way, the fur and the mouth and the huge body. It came and disappeared like mist. But I think that he does not know what he really is, that he has only a sense of it. There was an innocence or naïve side about him. If he truly knew what he was, he would not be a prisoner. I could not imagine those bars holding such a beast. Or he knows what he is and seeks to be held a prisoner to not hurt anyone again.

I will not tell my boys of this. They will want to find a way to kill him, and I do not think that is safe for them in this place. We have been lucky so far, but attacking a prison would be deadly, even before they met the man.

I will continue to meet with him to see what I may learn.

hospital. I need help! Whatever the fuck they are in that plant, they're way more than we can deal with.

From SoS29:

Angus,

Get a car and head to Glasgow. Stop in the car park nearest the Clyde at Braehead, the shopping centre on the outskirts of the city. Flash your headlights three times. Others will be there, watching for you. They'll be able to help Stewart and give you somewhere to lie low. I'll be in contact.

DECISIONS

It's happening again. People are dying because of me. I can't rely on other people any more. It's not fair to them.

Everything's booked. We've got two different types of accommodations set up, arranged through Liz in the States to try and disguise the trail as much as possible. Joshua's man Jason has got two cars that can't be traced to me or him. I'd rather not know how he got them. It's taken a substantial chunk out of my savings. I don't have time to worry about that. I've got to figure out what our findings mean and that means going back to Suffolk.

I've got Kirsty and Manisha to back me up and we're not going to do anything rash. I'm cautious and methodical. That's always been one of my strengths, so I'm not going to lose sight of that now.

Angus and his team are safe in Glasgow. I need to make up for Pamela's death.

Jake does this all the time. I can, too.

EIGHT PEOPLE DIE IN FIRE

By Iona Rodger

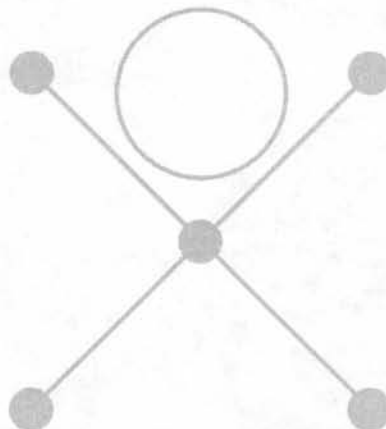
Five men and three women were killed in a house fire in Glasgow's Kelvinside district late Sunday night. Investigators suspect arson may be the cause of the blaze. The fire appears to have started on the second floor and spread rapidly to the upper floors.

Neighbours raised the alarm around 3am, and were evacuated as soon as the fire brigade arrived. Firefighters battled for three hours to control the blaze and eventually extinguished it around 6.30am.

Two of the victims have been identified as James Munroe and his wife Phyllida. Another was Angus Donaldson, a solicitor from Stirling. The other victims have yet to be identified.

"It was a particularly intense fire, which looks as if it was started deliberately," says Neil McKay, the investigator in charge of the inquiry.

Police are treating the deaths as suspicious and have launched an appeal for information.





CHAPTER 3:

TRAIL OF THE WOLF

*I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps,
and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour
them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them.*

— Hosea 13:8

Email Program

Subject: Begging Your Pardon in Advance

To: kayaker319@hunter-net.org

From: drcarawlings@notmail.com

Copied To:

 Send Message

 Get Messages

—Original Message—

Sent: 15 July

Kayaker319:

I feel somewhat awkward writing this, but I don't know if there's any more appropriate venue to make contact. I am a friend of a friend of a friend, if that make sense. A friend of mine was also an acquaintance of your late associate Eric Wyatt. You have my sincere condolences on your loss.

However, I must admit that it's business that drives this letter. It was only recently that my friend told me enough of the circumstances of Mr. Wyatt's death that I came to realize he and I were of the same ambition, the same calling, if you take my meaning.

Upon being told of the circumstances surrounding the death of Mr. Wyatt, I could only assume that all the members in his "circle" — Mr. Wyatt, Mr. McCulloch and you — were of a similar mind. It was my friend who gave me your email address, upon my request. I think that if we meet to share information, we can prevent a similar tragedy from occurring the next time you or I go wolf hunting.

Can we meet? I assure you I'm the farthest thing from an Internet stalker. I have a practice and my name is in the phone book. You don't have to respond, but I hope you do. The fact that there are two of us in town who have the potential to do something, to share and compare resources, is very encouraging.

Yours,
C. A. Rawlings

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE



FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION SPECIAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT



To: Assistant Director Gerald Osbourne
From: Regional Director Marcus Questor

G. Osbourne

Director Osbourne:

As I indicated in our recent conversation, our agents have encountered a break in the Pisgah case. The enclosed transcriptions were among a collection of microcassettes found in the office of one Charles Arthur Rawlings, a marriage counselor in the western North Carolina area who has been missing, along with his wife, since January 11, two months before the Pisgah incident. Forensic analysis provided a link between Mr. Rawlings and the remains agents found at the Pisgah site. The recordings have not only confirmed our suspicions, but offered some new potential insights into the nature of lycanthropes and a potential lead on one of the unsolved serial killer cases currently confounding the Bureau at large.

The nature of the two "free agents" who are the subjects of these recordings is unclear and may bear looking into. Although evidence suggests that both are delusional, their delusions appear to be shared. I'm sure you'll agree that this is too often an indication of something more extensive at work.

I will have a formal report for you by week's end. I look forward to your thoughts on these findings.

Marcus Questor

[Tape 1 transcription notes: The first speaker, identified as Rawlings, is a mature male with a slight Southern accent. Rawlings was 43 at the time of his disappearance. The second speaker remains unidentified. She seems to be a female in her 20s, with a faint Midwestern accent, college-educated, profession unknown. Background noise seems to indicate a quiet room with some muffled traffic outside. Possibly Rawlings' office.]

[Recording begins]

Voice 1 [Rawlings]: There. We're recording now.

Voice 2 [Jane Doe]: Yeah, okay. Um. This feels so weird.

Rawlings: Yes, that's what my patients usually say the first time. [Laughs] This is, however, a very dramatic change from recording the woes of an unhappy couple.

Doe: Yeah. It feels good. I wish more people who, you know... knew... would leave permanent records. Maybe you feel you don't have time to update everyone, but it could make all the difference, right?

Rawlings: Exactly. So, you told me you've been doing research rather than actual fieldwork since you... became aware?

Doe: For the most part, yeah. I just keep having these flashes, and they tell me not just that monsters are real, but that they've always been real. And I think to myself, well, someone else must have known before me... us. I mean, look at all the legends about vampires and... and werewolves. Someone had to be doing this kind of thing before us. Somebody had to be writing stuff down or telling their kids or something. For all we know, the answers we're looking for are in those stories, in some books that didn't get burned or forgotten. And it... it's got to be better than going out there ignorant.

Rawlings: I agree completely. That's the same reasoning that drove my research. So I take it you didn't go digging into occult books before?

Doe: Uh, no, not really. Back in college, I used to have a roommate who did card readings. It was her way of giving advice to her friends. She hung out with a few people who would dance around bonfires or whatever the hell they were doing. Sometimes I went with them to shops, but I didn't really read the books they had there. It was all "vision quests" and "sex rituals" — stupid crap. It didn't seem real. It still doesn't... not like... the truth.

Rawlings: I see.

Doe: So... well, I guess you ought to know. When everything changed, I was staring at, well, you know, and the message that pounded in my head was, "They can be understood." That message gave me a kind of... well... it sure as hell wasn't inner peace. It was more like a calm. When I looked in the eyes of the thing, I saw something intelligent. It passed by and headed off the road into the woods. I just about shit my pants.... Sorry. I guess I shouldn't swear like that.

Rawlings: It's all right. I'm not editing this for television or anything.

Doe: [Nervous laugh] Yeah. So, once I started to figure out it wasn't just me that was different, that there were other people out there, I started making contact.

Rawlings: Over the Internet?

Doe: Yeah. When you wrote me later, I felt kind of weird that you weren't on the mailing list I was part of, but you know, it wouldn't make sense that all of us were.

Rawlings: Of course not. It's not as if we can take out a TV ad.

Doe: No kidding. So, anyway, I eventually hooked up with a couple more guys. Good guys. Good men.

Rawlings: [Softly] And... they died.

Doe: Yeah.... I told them to try silver bullets. They did... and the things killed them anyway. I only got away because the things didn't see me somehow, same as the first time. I swore I wasn't going to be unprepared the next time it happened.

Rawlings: Because you knew there'd be a next time.

Doe: Yeah. Yeah, I did. Somehow I just I knew I was in for good. So it was time to try understanding them, right? I started out by going to the spiritual sections of bookstores. It was just crap, you know? The only stuff I found on shapechanging was all this shaman bullshit about finding your animal and having visions and stuff like that. It just made me want to scream. Like, if that's what these things really are, I wouldn't have had two friends get torn apart.

Rawlings: Would you like to stop for a while?

Doe: [Angry] No. No, we're recording this so people won't make the same mistakes, right? So... So after that happened, I did something else. I looked online. I looked around for all kinds of keywords: "lycanthropy," "werewolves," "wolfsbane." You name it. I did a search on Amazon for some books.

I think I've got some ideas now.

Rawlings: I see.

Doe: Yeah. Sorry about that. What about you? What got you reading more than the others seem to do?

Rawlings: Well, obviously I wasn't part of the, ah, mailing list community that you were. It would have made things much easier if I'd known! Once I came to the realization that the... things I would eventually have to take up arms against were so powerful and cunning, it seemed like self-defense. I would have to know as much as possible if I wanted to succeed. As you know, there isn't much margin for error. That's how I started, and even when I got my own assistance, there was no reason to stop. I merely had to be more selective about the books.

GETTING LEADS

Doe: Your own assistance? What do you mean?

Rawlings: Hmm. Where to start? Well, you see, the first thing I did was start reading literature about, ah, the unexplained. It was much like your own experience at first. Too many books about spiritual self-help or cheap Halloween thrills. Not enough that seemed to have any sort of, well, authenticity. I certainly wasn't able to find anything that seemed written by anyone who had actually been... contacted. So I decided to, ah, try a larger library. More specifically, I've been working on a book, a self-help book, for some time now. I told my wife that I had hit a block, that I needed to do more research to flesh out the final chapters. So, I arranged for a vacation in New York. While she

enjoyed the sights, I went to the libraries to do research. Not the sort she expected, though.

Doe: Good thing she didn't know about online ordering.

Rawlings: Yes, well... I count myself fortunate that she has yet to determine that computer literacy would give her a new venue to use our credit cards.

Doe: Cute.

Rawlings: I'm sorry. I assure you that wasn't meant to be a sexist comment.

Doe: Right, whatever. So you were looking in the weirder stacks for something to prove you weren't crazy?

Rawlings: Yes. I also tried to find a few of the more... esoteric bookstores, just in case. I checked volumes on mental disorders, studies on angelic possession, even demonic possession. Somewhere along the way, I suppose I was noticed. While I was in one of these bookstores, a woman approached me. She seemed awfully familiar, and I realized later that I'd seen her in the library, in the same section I was in. She started a conversation about the books I was considering. Then she said something to the effect of, "There are better books than these for what you're looking for." Then she handed me a notebook and left.

Doe: Holy shit. That's weird as hell. Did you, you know... look at her?

Rawlings: I'm sorry?

Doe: You know....

Rawlings: Um, there wasn't really time to see if she had any of the, ah, characteristics. I was taken somewhat by surprise, and was still learning about myself as much as anything. It took some reading and asking around before I found out about the, ah, community.

Doe: And the notebook?

Rawlings: The notebook.... It had lists of book titles, authors, the names and addresses of bookstores. The more I checked, the more books I found that... seemed to have a common thread. Common lore about werewolves. About all manner of beast-people from different places. Jaguars, lions, hyenas, snakes, apes. I certainly don't believe that all the information is genuine, or that even a fraction is. But even if 5% is true, it's still twice as much as we've gotten from sharing experiences with others.

Doe: Did you see her again?

Rawlings: I never have. I asked the storeowner if she was a regular customer. He said he didn't know the woman.

Doe: So... you think they gave you the book? Why? How do you think they knew?

Rawlings: I think she was one of them, and to me that meant the truth was in the notes she gave me. Maybe she wanted me to know. I still had to learn everything for myself, but it was a start—a good one. It led me to feel truly confident about my chances for the first time. I don't think I'd have found out half the things I did if not for her and that book. It's led me to some truly... remarkable reading.

THE FIRST BEASTS

Rawlings: The first thing you learn when you start researching these... things... is that their legends go back very far. They may have been with us forever. Our earliest myths may have been werewolf myths. Depending on what you want to classify as "werewolf" lore, that is. In Catal Huyuk and other places, you see paintings of hunters wearing animal skins — presumably to grant them the senses and skills of their prey. It might have begun there.

Doe: "It?" You mean lycanthropy?

Rawlings: Yes. Whatever lycanthropy is — a disease or an acquired trait, most likely. It may have had its beginnings in the Stone Age, when we lived so close to the animals. That may have been when the lines blurred. When I began my research, I was astounded to find so many accounts of things that might have been werewolves. Creatures with the traits of both beasts and men are present in so many myths. Even back in the time of the Sumerians, Gilgamesh paired with the "wild man of the woods," Enkidu, a creature made out to be as much animal as man. There are plenty of half-human, half-beast entities in Egyptian and Greek myth, too. We get the first recognizable werewolf story from the Greeks.

Doe: Lycaon.

Rawlings: Right. The king who tested Zeus' divinity by offering human flesh as part of a tribute. The god cursed Lycaon by turning him into a wolf. What most people don't know is that Lycaon was king of the city-state of Arcadia, and a number of Greek writers throughout the age mention the "werewolves of Arcadia." The Scythians also claimed that a neighboring tribe, the Neuri, turned themselves into wolves at festivals.

Doe: That's... frightening. To think that those stories might have been... genuine. I did some reading on Rome — about how, you know, Romulus and Remus were raised by a wolf.

Rawlings: I thought about that myself, but the Latin word "meretrix" can mean she-wolf or prostitute. There might have been a touch of confusion somewhere along the line. Personally, I'm more inclined to believe that Rome's founder and his brother were raised by a prostitute than a werewolf. The she-wolf interpretation sounds more dignified, which is why you'd expect the Romans to favor it. But the prostitute has the ring of... Well, it just feels right to me.

Doe: I didn't know that. But it doesn't stop there. This poet Virgil—

Rawlings: Yes, a quite famous one. [Laughs]

Doe: Um, yeah. Well, he talks about a man named Moeris, a sorcerer who could turn into a wolf.

Rawlings: Yes... there are some interesting hints of werewolf activity in the Roman Empire. Some of the sources I have note instances of various men who could transform into wolves through witchcraft. Others indicate that Roman centurions might have found werewolves living among the barbarian tribes they subjugated, particularly in Germania and Scotland.

Doe: No shit? You have to let me see those books.

Rawlings: Now, really, they're not that impressive. They're just a few bits of information I've found. It took quite a lot of sifting and cross-checking to get that much.

THE EUROPEAN CONNECTIONS

Doe: Yeah, I guess. So, anyway, there's some stuff from the Dark Ages. St. Patrick isn't just famous for driving snakes out of Ireland. I found references to him running into trouble when he was converting the locals. A bunch of folks started howling like wolves to mock him during his sermon. He cursed them to turn into wolves every seven years. He did it again to this Welsh king...

Rawlings: Vereticus. To teach him humility.

Doe: Yeah. You're really making me feel ignorant, you know.

Rawlings: Please don't. If it weren't for the leads I was given, I'd have next to nothing.

Doe: But at any rate, what I'm saying is that Europe's full of werewolf stories. I thought I'd find a lot of stories in Eastern Europe — you know, 'cause...

Rawlings: Transylvania? The Carpathians?

Doe: Yeah. But it's hard to find good books from there, much less anything that could be real. On the other hand, Ireland's full of werewolf stories, or at least "big fucking scary dog" stories. Scotland and England have a lot, too, although they're all countryside stories. No werewolves of London, y'know? Just these big, black animals that people see while they're walking at night, and then later someone in the house dies or something. There aren't any wolves on the islands any more, so I figure there's got to be something there. Not that it does us much good.

Rawlings: Well, it might do us some good if we figure out how they came over here, and why.

Doe: If they can turn into people whenever they want, then the how isn't hard to guess. Shit, those big liners used to get all kinds of stowaways. They could have just slipped aboard and eaten passengers whenever they got hungry.

Rawlings: Yes... there are a number of stories that imply cannibalism.

Doe: It isn't cannibalism. Cannibalism is eating your own kind. These things eat people. That's different.

Rawlings: Well, ah, the stories seem to imply that the werewolf is human on some level.

Doe: Bullshit. Okay, there's this guy. Peter something. 1500s. He got tried for being a werewolf and confessed thanks to this wolfskin belt. He confessed to all the crimes they charged him with. You know what they were?

Rawlings: Yes. Stubbe [spelling?] murdered men that angered him. He raped women while in human form, then murdered them in wolf form. He committed incest with his sister. He sexually abused his own daughter, ultimately impregnating her. He killed and ate his own son. He killed pregnant women and ate the fetuses.



He confessed to it all, and to using his gift to do it. [Gently] I was appalled to read the story, just as you were.

Doe: [Long pause] And they... the authorities killed his daughter and his lover, too. As accessories. My God... I mean, when I think that that things we're dealing with now might be like him....

Rawlings: So many people in history were accused of being witches that they can't all have been. Not every human being tried for murder and cannibalism could have been a werewolf. If Stubbe wasn't a werewolf, his actions may not be typical of the race. Even if he was, what he did may not have been typical, and we can take heart that he was executed.

Doe: [Pause] Right. I'm.... Why don't you go ahead for a while?

Rawlings: Of course. As long as we're on the subject of Europe, we'd be foolish to omit France. There has to be a strong concentration of them in France. That's where you get some of the most common legends. Gilles Garnier, in the late 1500s... I can't remember the exact date. Arrested on the grounds that he changed into a wolf to kill and eat children, and freely confessed the same. Jean Grenier, half a century later. Also arrested for eating children and taking the form of a wolf, and also confessed as much.

Doe: Uh huh. And the Beast of Gevaudan. It tore up the countryside for three years and was killed by a hunter who... get this... killed it with bullets that

were made out of a silver chalice that had been blessed by a priest.

Rawlings: The first mention of silver! And yet, it didn't start appearing until later werewolf legends. I imagine that people attributed holy power with killing werewolves and other demons, not silver. Silver didn't come into the lore until a story from 1800s Canada about a horrible wolf that was said to devour trappers and break their traps until shot with a silver bullet. They said the wolf was the size of a bear and as smart as a human. Old Fang, they called it.

Doe: So they could have been in Canada then.

Rawlings: I'd be almost sure of it. Werewolves would appear to prosper in places of sparse human settlement. Just enough people for them to find a place in society — or for whatever ulterior motives they need humans for — but enough open space to roam as wolves if need be. Canada — North America — would suit them nicely. I can see why a werewolf would move here once it gained the ability to change shape.

Doe: But is it ever the other way around? What about wolves being given the power to take human shape? Because... that might explain why they act the way they do. They're animals.

Rawlings: I wonder. Animals don't seem to respond well to werewolves. Your late friend wasn't the first person I've heard of to find that out. Dogs apparently go insane with fear or hatred. They bark feverishly, but run if a

creature gets too close. Cats spit and flee. None of us has ever gone after a werewolf on horseback, at least not to my knowledge, but I imagine it would be a very bad idea.

Doe: Yeah... the two guys I went with; one of them said he got the idea to use dogs to try and flush werewolves out, like they do with birds. He says he thought he got close to a trail once, but his dogs came out all messed up and weren't any good for hunting after that. Afraid of the woods, if you can believe it. What a dumb bastard....

Rawlings: I'm sorry.

Doe: Yeah. I know. Thanks. Look, can we call it here? I figure we've been over enough stuff for one day. I... I still need to do some more research, you know?

Rawlings: Of course. Why don't I email you some of the information out of the notebook I was given — some of the more recent leads? Newspaper files should be easier to find, with microfiche and all. I have some other reading to catch up on, so I wouldn't be able to do it, anyway.

Doe: Yeah. Yeah, that'd be good.

Rawlings: All right. Thank you for meeting me... ah, one moment.

[Recording ends]

THE MODERN WOLF

[Tape 2 transcription notes: The same two speakers on this tape. Background noise seems to indicate the same location as before (Rawlings' office?).]

[Recording begins]

Rawlings: Good to see you again. How has your research been going?

Doe: Good. Real good. Those names you got me, they've been helping me turn up a lot of information. Stuff I never would have guessed was out there, you know? Stuff that I wouldn't have put together.

Rawlings: That's good to hear.

Doe: Okay, some of the leads went to Satanic cults and ritual killings. It was... freaky stuff, but nothing that really stood out as "werewolves," you know? Killings with knives, not fangs and claws, things like that. I didn't dig too deep into those. It looks like your mystery friend wasn't able to get you only accurate stuff.

Rawlings: I'd expected as much. Many of the sources are contradictory, after all.

Doe: Yeah. Some of the other stories were about animal attacks in national parks. Mostly bears, but there were a few about mountain lions, and a couple where campers or hikers or whatever said they got attacked by wolves, but Forestry officials denied it. In a couple of reports, it sounded like the people weren't 100% sure they were attacked by bears, but that's what the experts said. There were a couple of articles about people who just vanished. The searches turned up nothing.

Rawlings: Hmm. Interesting, but perhaps more circumstantial evidence than anything.

Doe: Yeah, but that's not the good stuff. In Chicago, in 1921, the bodies of some gangsters turned up all ripped to pieces. They said at the time that rivals must have set their dogs on them, to intimidate the other gangs. But one witness later swore that one of the mob enforcers was a werewolf keeping everyone in line.

In Lawton, Texas, in 1971, there were multiple sightings over two nights of what people said was a werewolf. People actually talked about a big hairy man. Nobody was attacked or injured, though.

In Alaska, in 1990, a wolf hunter claimed to be ambushed by a "hairy man" who beat him senseless, took his shoes and clothes, and left him to walk home. He swore off hunting wolves forever. There are a couple other instances of wolf hunters turning up horribly maimed, too. They said eco-terrorists were responsible.

In Chicago again, in 1993, there was an outbreak of "gang violence" at a nightclub, leaving several people dead. There were multiple reports of "huge dogs" or "people in wolf masks." Eventually, the papers posted retractions.

Rawlings: [Pause] Remarkable.

Doe: When you get out of the States, the stories get more and more outrageous. I guess it's because our media is more cynical and won't print this kind of stuff. India has had a bunch of actual werewolf sightings — no kidding. And there's at least one thing I was able to verify. Apparently wolves have been carrying off children there — so frequently that the government offers compensation to families. Sure, it could be loss of habitat driving animals to attack people — but it's close enough that we can't rule out werewolves. Some Brazilian newspapers have also reported huge dogs or those "eco-terrorists" again attacking forestry crews. There's... oh Jesus, do you mind if I stop for a bit? The more I talk about this, the more it sinks in.

Rawlings: No, no. Here, let me show you what I've found. I haven't been able to uncover quite as much as you, but here's something interesting. In 1995 in a small town in upstate New York called St. Claire, a riot broke out at a high-school dance. A witness later claimed that the homecoming queen was "a witch who set wolves on the crowd." That came on the heels of a rash of kidnappings that attracted national attention. By any—

Doe: Hold on. Kidnappings?

THE VANISHING ONES

Rawlings: Yes. Children, most of them very young, vanished out of locked homes. Presuming that werewolves were responsible, it may be more evidence for the theory that they practice some sort of pagan religion that might... demand sacrifices. Or it may be a further argument that they have a taste for human flesh. The abductions stopped after the riot. Perhaps they were exposed and fled the area?

Doe: That sounds about right.

Rawlings: Pardon me?

Doe: Okay, this is something I came across. I tried cross-referencing sightings of wolves or wild dogs with

kidnappings or disappearances, and I found a few cases. Not many. I mean, if it were that obvious, everyone would know about these things by now. We're talking 20 incidents over 20 years. But there was just enough to form a pattern. And it was usually teenagers — kids in high school who ran away or vanished into the blue, and someone saw some wild dogs in the area about the same time. Once or twice the kid came back, most of the time he didn't.

Rawlings: My God. Grubbholb.

Doe: Yeah. That was one of the cases. You remember it?

Rawlings: Yes, indeed. I used to be one of the Senator's constituents before I moved here. His granddaughter vanished from — from her coming-of-age party, of all things — which was held on his country estate. She disappeared after a number of disruptions caused by a pack of... wolves. I had forgotten entirely.

Doe: You know my theory? I think this may mean werewolves carry people off for... breeding. I mean, most of these disappearances are young, healthy kids, just becoming adults. Isn't that a bit... convenient? And think how many more teenagers disappear every year...

Rawlings: That's a disturbing theory. But I don't know if there's enough evidence for it. Wouldn't genotyping have been able to pinpoint a "beast gene," if that were the case? If werewolves have been among us so long, surely their blood would have spread among us to the point where science would have discovered it by now. These kidnappings could be for... food. Or sacrifices, or worse. If the power is granted through a pact with... Satan... or something we know nothing about, there are certainly other reasons that spring to mind.

Doe: [Pause] You mean Gilles de Rais.

Rawlings: Ah... yes. His story was... very much like that of Stubbe. Sexual sadism that went beyond gratification and into the realm of a... religion. There are many other anecdotes of the sort, of ritual rape and murder combined, but they aren't exactly easy to uncover.

Doe: They wouldn't be. Nobody likes to admit things like that happen.

WOLFSKIN

Rawlings: [Gently] I understand that it's a difficult topic, but remember, we're here to try and understand.

Doe: Right. Sorry.

Rawlings: At any rate, I'm not sure I favor the breeding theory. It's not something that appears in the majority of books I've read.

Doe: Yeah, what did that notebook say? Infection? I don't know if you ever saw *An American Werewolf in London*, but that had the werewolf's bite passing on the disease. Lycanthropy.

Rawlings: I've encountered some references to transmission via bodily fluids, but they're in relatively recent works. Maybe the idea of being spread by contact

has become more popular given what we now know about disease. What I've read is still contradictory, though. The scientific approach is, from what I can tell, useless. A disease can't grant the ability to defy the laws of physics. No virus can make a hundred pounds of bone and muscle appear and disappear. If transmitted by bodily fluids, that would make lycanthropy like an STD — very easy to transmit. There would be just too many werewolves as a result, and we can see that there aren't. [Pause] Well, yes. There are too many werewolves. What I mean to say is that they couldn't hide as easily.

Doe: So, it could be a curse. Like in the St. Patrick story.

Rawlings: Possibly. There are numerous stories that imply werewolves exist because someone, usually a man of faith, cursed people to become beasts.

Doe: More like a curse for the people who live near the wolf. I mean, come on. It's not like they can really suffer all that much compared to the people they murder.

Rawlings: Yes... funny you should say that. I was actually going to suggest that it might be a deliberate process. Most of the classic werewolf myths are about a person putting on a wolf skin and undergoing the transformation as a mystical rite. They offer their souls to Satan or some other...

Doe: You believe that? I thought you were a churchgoer?

Rawlings: [Quietly] More in name than anything else, anymore. If there's one thing I've learned, it's that no organized religion seems to tell you everything.

Doe: Yeah. I turned to the church a while, but now... The church can't offer peace when you live like this.

Rawlings: Yes, well... the word "werewolf" was often interchangeable with "witch," at least in a classic sense. In many cases, it appeared that it was inconceivable to the writer for it to work any other way. Everything supernatural that happened is attributed to witchcraft. There's one account I've found that...

Doe: That what?

Rawlings: Well, I wouldn't want you to get the impression that I consider it particularly credible. There's nothing I've found to back it up... nothing to disprove it, either, but certainly no proof. It's an old account written from the perspective of a scholar who... who claimed to be a werewolf himself.

Doe: Yeah... it sounds kind of weird. I mean, why would he write that down?

Rawlings: Well, it seemed he was quite proud of his accomplishment. According to his story, it was quite a feat to earn the pelt necessary to effect his transformation, and I suppose the sense of power and invulnerability was intoxicating. Maybe he couldn't resist boasting.

Doe: Or he was making it up.

Rawlings: Well, yes. There are parts such as Mephistopheles himself bowing to our werewolf scholar and calling him "master." Not something you'd expect to be genuine. But he goes into great detail about the rite to...

sanctify was the term, I believe. The rite to sanctify the pelt, and to fashion it into a garment that caused the transformation. The writer seemed certain that it was the only way to become a werewolf, and I must admit that it makes the most sense. A deliberately acquired transformation.

Doe: Well, like you said, there isn't much proof. But it's not like we have any better theories.

Rawlings: And doesn't the idea... make sense? Don't werewolves act as though they revel in their power? It's easy to see how someone might want to transform into a werewolf... from a certain point of view. The motivation is there. The idea of magic makes it possible.

Doe: [Pause. Cold tones.] The thing that killed my friend was an animal. They don't seem like they have human intelligence. Cunning maybe. I'll give them that. But not human.

Rawlings: Ah... yes. I suppose I've been speculating. [Long pause] Perhaps the problem is that we've been exchanging too much theory.

Doe: Do you mean...?

Rawlings: I think so. We have a sound foundation of information here — theoretical material, at any rate. I'll transcribe the rest of the contents of the notebook to audio format and file it with these tapes. Then maybe we should gather some more practical information. After all, the creature that killed your friends is still out there.

Doe: [Pause] Yes it is.

[Recording ends]

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

—Chatroom 3—

>>Welcome, Kayaker319!

>>There is currently one registered user in this room.

>>Battery275 has logged on.

Kayaker319: You're here, Battery?

Battery275: Hey there. Yeah, I'm here. You doing all right tonight?

Kayaker319: Yeah. I just wish this chat room was guaranteed secure. Call me paranoid.

Battery275: You think the enemy has an Internet connection? I wish. Maybe they'd spend more of their time downloading porn instead of killing people.

Kayaker319: Come on. I mean other people randomly dropping in.

Battery275: And what? Anyone listening in is going to think we're actually talking about killing real monsters with real silver bullets? Don't sweat it, Kayaker. Hey, do you really kayak?

Kayaker319: I used to. I do some raft guide work, too. I haven't done much lately. It's the off-season, but it's not like I'm going down river for pleasure anymore.

Battery275: I hear that. If I feel the need to escape, I lock myself in my apartment and drink until I pass out.



It's the only way I can stand not looking over my shoulder all the time. So, how come you wanted to talk? We haven't done this before.

Kayaker319: Well, it was kind of a no-brainer. There aren't many people on the net who say they've killed one shapechanger, much less three.

Battery275: Yeah, well, there aren't that many people on the net who are so lucky. That's the only reason I'm still here. I learned a few things, sure, but not all of it's good news.

Kayaker319: Good news or not, I need to hear it. We're going on a wolf hunt. Anything you can tell me to give us an edge?

Battery275: I don't know how to break it to you, but you've picked just about the worst thing to go after. You might have an easier time of it in the big city with the things that supposedly turn up there.

Kayaker319: Can you help me or not?

Battery275: Don't get like that. I'm just trying to look out for you.

Kayaker319: Don't do me any favors. I'm not exactly in a metropolis here. There's miles of forest all around that could be filled with these things, and sometimes they /do/ come to town. They've already killed two people I know. God knows how many others. Don't tell me to look for easier targets. I don't have a choice here.

Battery275: Okay, I'll tell you what I know — but you're not going to like it.

Kayaker319: I'm sorry. I just really need information.

CATCHING THE SCENT

Battery275: The first thing you need to know is where they live. These things are dangerous enough without us being ignorant or going in with the wrong information. But then, we have no idea what's really genuine and what's not about these things.

If you don't know where a changer sleeps, you better know where it eats. If it's got a favorite restaurant (don't laugh, some do). If there's a place where it hunts prey. Something like that. If you don't know either, you better have a damn good reason for hunting this thing, because wandering around on its turf, hoping to get lucky will get you killed.

Kayaker319: Hold on. Why do you call them "changers"? Why not "werewolves"?

Battery275: Because they aren't just wolves. Have you read the stories about hyena-people in Africa, wererats in cities, jaguar-monsters in the Amazon, intelligent monkeys in Asia? Well, from what I can tell, some or all of those stories are true. You heard I've killed three of these things, right? One was a rat. Fought like a motherfucker. Screeched the whole time. It tried to strangle me with its fucking tail. I nearly lost an eye. If I hadn't been wearing a bracelet, I'd be dead. I was flailing all over and my bracelet hit the thing. It screamed and loosened its grip. That was my chance.

So yeah, "changers."

A Brit I talk with uses the word "zoanthrope." He says "lycanthrope" only means wolf. No matter what you call them, they're always predators. Always mammals. I heard about scorpions down in Arizona once, but that sounded like someone making excuses for coming back scared and empty handed.

Kayaker319: What was it about your bracelet? Silver?

Battery275: Yeah. Get yourself some. Those Western stores where you can get gems and dream catchers and shit are great. You can usually find silver jewelry to go with turquoise belt buckles and string ties and all that crap. Even a little bit, plated or whatever, ought to burn them like fire. Get a necklace and it might keep them from grabbing you by the neck. Heavy bracelets are good. Be careful, though. If you wear too much, you might tip them off that you're ready for them. But you don't want it under your clothes when you make your move, either. It's got to be skin-to-silver contact. Nothing else works.

Kayaker319: Okay, got it. How bad does it hurt them? Can I kill one by pressing silver against it?

Battery275: You better hope it doesn't come to that. I don't know if you've ever tried to give a big dog a bath, but animals fight hard when they sense they're in danger. All out of proportion to their size. They use everything they've got. That's how a 60-pound dog can outmuscle a person three times its weight. Changers are the same way, only they're bigger than any dog, and lethal. You push some silver up against a changer, it's gonna fight like shit to get away, or it's going to fuck you up. Don't try it unless you've got one pinned under a bus or something. Even then, it isn't a good idea unless you have other options.

All that said, silver might kill one of them. I haven't seen it done, but I've got no reason to believe it wouldn't. Silver is more like an ace in the hole.

More important, though, is tracking them down. That's the real hard part. If you were going after one of the city changers, it might be different. You'd have a lot better chance of spotting its territory without drawing too much attention to yourself. But cross-country? No good.

Look for places where there are few people. No major parks, logging sites or ski resorts. Doesn't matter if there are real wolves in the area or not. I don't think that means shit to them, maybe any more than vampires care about living in places where there are lots of bats. Look for a place where no one will hear if you scream. Or maybe someplace with a history of bad accidents. They might not be so accidental.

Kayaker319: Arranging accidents? You mean they might kill people without attacking them?

Battery275: These things can turn into people. That means they have human intelligence. Wolf attacks make it into the papers and mean hunting parties are sent into woods. It's a lot easier for all concerned if people just "vanish," or if they meet with "accidents." I mean, wouldn't you try to cover your tracks?

Kayaker319: I guess.

Battery275: I would.

So, pick yourself a likely stretch of forest or swamp or whatever. Some place where the nearest town has one gas station that doubles as a grocery store, and the roads are unpaved. Try staking out the general store. These things live like humans, so they might have to come down for supplies every now and then. Even if they eat meat and nothing but, they may have to come down for clothes or tools. I can't imagine they go to the malls for that.

Kayaker319: Okay. I'm in the kind of country for that. I know a few places.

Battery275: Okay, but there's talking to the locals, too. If you do, be sure to check them out real hard first. Maybe someone's been bit but has never turned, and is in with them.

Kayaker319: What do you mean?

Battery275: I've seen a couple of people who looked kind of strange. Somehow, I don't think they were changers, but they had that kind of wild look to them. Like they were related or something. If you find someone like that, there's another potential stakeout. They might know something. Maybe they know a thing or two about a real changer that no other locals would. The way I figure it, that's because they're halfway down the road to howling at the moon themselves. If they look funny, but they don't look like wolves, that says "carrier" to me. Somebody who's got the disease, been infected, but hasn't changed. So they start thinking more and more like changers do, and then they finally make the change. Some of the other folks who've seen changers have talked about them having allies, people who look wrong, too. Watch out for them. They might lead you to a changer, but aren't necessarily on your side. Sooner or later, they might be the ones hunting on all fours.

Kayaker319: Thanks. It's good to hear some concrete information for once.

Battery275: I'm not done. Don't use dogs to flush a changer out. Dogs don't like changers. They can smell that something's wrong with them. That means they don't usually want to follow a trail. Take them to where they can smell a dog that's 10 times their size and they're going to head for home. They might be braver if the changer's on their territory, but taking them onto a changer's turf makes them real scared. Trust me. I tried it.

Kayaker319: I know about dogs, too. I might try to find some deer hunters and talk to them. They don't really consider it trespassing around here if you're hunting. They might have seen something. The locals don't really care much for newcomers like me, but it's worth a try.

Battery275: Good call. They might even know where to go for ammunition. You probably aren't a gunsmith, but plenty of folks sell silver bullets as kind of a conversation piece. You can get a few without attracting too much attention. Maybe even from a five-and-dime

kind of operation. But order a bunch of them and you're going to freak someone out.

Kayaker319: I've got some sources online. All they know me by is a credit card number.

Battery275: Good. Get yourself some pepper spray, too. Changers are animals and probably have sensitive noses. You could really fuck them up with a spray in the face.

Kayaker319: Have you ever used it?

Battery275: No. If it's a choice between experimenting with pepper spray and using a silver bullet, I'll use the bullet. So this is just theory, okay? Last-ditch desperation stuff.

Kayaker319: Okay.

Battery275: Fire might work the same way. Nothing in nature stays calm around fire. I assume that changers are part natural, anyway. I heard a story about one in a burning building, panicking to escape. I don't know if fire will actually kill them any easier, though. So like I said, don't rely on it. Just hope that a big fire will stop it from thinking with the human side of its brain.

And here's the most important thing: If you find out that there are at least two changers sharing territory, get the fuck out. If they aren't killing each other over who gets to hump the prettiest bitch, they're probably related, and maybe have a whole pack. Not all changers travel in packs, but I wouldn't want to go up against a pack if I had 20 buddies armed with silver buckshot. You find one of their /nests/, like Six of Swords 29 did, and you're done if they catch your scent.

Kayaker319: Nests? How many are in a nest?

Battery275: Fuck if I know. Ten? Twenty? Just play it safe if you know there's more than one. Walk away. It sounds shitty, but at least you live, maybe to find one alone another day.

Anything more you need to know?

Kayaker319: Not that I know of. We may be fucked. I don't know where our target sleeps or where it eats. Just that it's out there somewhere. My partner is doing his best to find out the details. We've got a shot. He's got a real eye for seeing things. Patterns, you know?

Battery275: Don't know the man, but we have to trust that he was chosen for a reason, just like us.

Kayaker319: Yeah, I hope so. Thanks.

THE WOLF HUNT

[Tape 3 transcription notes: This is the last of the Rawlings/Doe tapes. Rawlings alludes to our Jane Doe making a similar recording from her perspective of the activities performed, but she apparently didn't store her tapes with his. Hers is unavailable. In addition, her voice is muffled and often unclear throughout this recording, likely due to distance, so we cannot match her voice to the voice on previous tapes with 100% accuracy. Background noise is largely identifiable as a

mix of crickets and frogs, indicating an outdoor environment at night.]

[Recording begins]

Rawlings: Excuse me, I'm a little nervous. My partner and I are about to put the theoretical knowledge we've assembled into use, by means of... a practical hunt.

Doe: God, this [is so fucked-up?].

Rawlings: By virtue of... by virtue of observations and the help of an acquaintance, we have managed to locate the territory of a solitary werewolf, one that we suspect of having made kills in the area before. The subject is a male and lives alone in a mountain cabin under a human alias. It eats its lunch at a local gas station, where we were able to observe it carefully. It, ah, it has a weakness for alcohol, a failing first detected by my partner, and later verified by the proprietor of the local package store.

Doe: [Incomprehensible]

Rawlings: Both... my partner and I have pocket tape recorders, which we will leave running. We hope no detail will be omitted. [Coughs] Are you ready?

Doe: Yeah.

Rawlings: Very well. Ah, I have ascertained that the werewolf drank heavily before dinner... and passed into a stupor. He may be awake again, now that we're well into the night, but the alcohol may slow him sufficiently for... our purposes.

Doe: You're sure about this?

Rawlings: There are no guarantees, of course. But I am as certain as I can be.

Doe: That better be good enough.

[Several minutes pass without dialogue. The background noise is consistent with two people walking an unpaved road at night, which is in turn consistent with the details of the attached case file.]

Doe: [Muffled whisper] The [light's on?].

Rawlings: [Also whisper] He passed out before going to bed, but we shouldn't take chances. You take the window. I'll go in through the front.

Doe: [Whisper] I don't know if I can do this.

Rawlings: [Whisper] Yes, you can. You have to. This thing murdered your friends. You don't know how many others it's killed. You have to do this. Right? [Pause] Right?

Doe: [Whisper] Right.

[Dialogue stops for a few more minutes. More background noise of footsteps, with more time between each. Then a click and thud. Presumably a door being thrown open.

Unknown Voice: [Garbled] [What the?]

Doe: [Shouting] Look out, he—

Unknown Voice: What's [going on?]. Get that gun out of my—

[Deep animal growl]

Doe: Wait! Look, we— No, don't—

[Six gunshots. The sound indicates a large-caliber revolver. A heavy crash. Almost certainly a body falling.]

Rawlings: [Breathing rapidly and heavily.] We did it! He's dead!

Doe: Jesus. You... he's dead? How do you know? You never said you'd done this before.

Rawlings: What? I haven't.

Doe: But how do you—?

Rawlings: Look, we don't have time for this right now. We should leave.

Doe: [Pause] All right.

Rawlings: I need to clean up first. We can't leave any evidence behind. You go. We can't be seen together. I'll get in touch when I get back.

Doe: Uh... okay.

[The cabin door closes.]

Rawlings: Well then. It's just you and me.

[Recording ends]

BODY FOUND MUTILATED

The body of Donald Gahagan, 32, was found in his cabin yesterday morning by neighbors.

No cameras were allowed near the scene. Sheriff Cody Goforth, the officer in charge of the case, reported that the body had been mutilated, but declined to release further details about the cause of death. "All we can tell you is that the victim was dead for quite some time before being found, and that the body was cut up pretty bad," Sheriff Goforth stated. "We have no reason to believe that there will be further attacks."

Gahagan was unmarried and did not live with any family. Neighbor Sam Ogle, whose wife Debra discovered the body, said he could think of no reason why anyone would commit such an act against Gahagan. "[Debra] went up the road to his place to ask if she could have some old newspapers. She came back white as a sheet," Ogle said. "She said, 'Somebody's cut up Donnie,' and then passed out right in front of me." Mrs. Ogle was unavailable for comment.

"We didn't talk much, and we never saw him in church," Ogle said, "but he was a decent neighbor. I pray that he rests in peace."



CHAPTER 4: NIGHT MARES

Whosoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death.

— Exodus 22:19

Blood

It's about 4:30 PM. We've stopped, maybe for the day. Maybe for good. I had to wash the blood off my hands before writing this. They're still shaking from the cold.

Kim

We found Kim about a half-hour after I stopped typing the last time (making it about 2:45 or so). She had crawled into a hollow log. The only reason we found her was because Desmond saw the blood trail and thought it might be from something to eat. But when we looked into the log, there was Kim.

I sent Desmond to take Penny and Luke away. Al went with them. May stayed with me and we broke the rotted log away enough to see her face. She was still alive. She had blood trickling from her mouth and she was pale, but still alive. We pulled her out of the log and set her on the ground. We knew right then she wasn't going to make it.

She had only one wound, not like Bai who was torn apart. Kim was disemboweled. Something cut her across the stomach and it looked like she crawled into the log, holding herself together. She was covered in blood and her face was dotted with insect bites. When we got her out, she regained consciousness enough to tell us what happened.

Attack

She said that after she left, she found a place to sleep that just "felt right." She couldn't explain what that meant, and I didn't ask. This is hard to say. She was that close to going. She could have meant it was just a comfortable place to lie down. May was trying to put Kim's insides back where they belonged. I couldn't look, so I focused on Kim's eyes. I can't believe she stayed conscious as long as she did. She's a hell of a lot stronger than I thought.

Kim said that in the morning, there were paw prints around her. She was scared, but didn't know why the wolves didn't attack her. She decided to try and catch up with us, but by that time we'd moved on. That's when we backtracked, so she didn't find us. It was mostly because of Penny and Luke. We were afraid to take them straight down where the slope was too steep. But for Kim, just one woman, it wasn't so hard. So, she left the area later than we did but made much better time (which I guess is why we found her footprints later).

She made it to the stream before we did. She saw the symbol, too, but didn't know what it meant. She didn't know what any of them meant. I think she wanted to know, and made up ideas that suited her, but really didn't know. Maybe that was her way of coping with what was happening. And then she said the wolves appeared.

I was right about something. They didn't leave tracks. She said four big wolves just came out of nowhere. She turned to run and something else was behind her. She said it stood on two legs. What could stand on two legs and get along with wolves?

She tried to say more after that, but I couldn't understand her. I guess they tore her up and left her for dead. She was still alive and crawled into the log.

I can't say for sure, but I'd guess that it all happened not long before we got there. The blood still looked fresh. That gives me a feeling I don't even want to think about. Would they have killed us all?

I apologized to Kim for scaring her, but I think she was already dead. Her eyes just stared into the sky. I closed them. If you're reading this, pray you never have to close another person's eyes forever.

COPING

It took some time to be able to think again. We covered Kim up the same way we did Bai. I wanted to bury her. I actually started digging, but May pointed out that it would just wear us out. So we gathered around her, like before. Desmond didn't say the eulogy this time. I did. I think Kim might have been offended to have Desmond do it. It was hard to know what to say. Basically, I said she was strong and it was a tragedy to have something like this happen. I also said I wished I'd known her better, and I realized I meant it.

May and I sat together for a long time. She leaned over to me and I put my arm around her. I don't think she knew I was crying until I wiped my nose. I guess several days of shock caught up with me. Maybe it was just that I hadn't touched another person since before I left Sacramento, and that was to give my mom a hug.

I guess that's why I've never done what people on hunter-net spout off about. How they leave their lives behind for the "hunt." How do they keep from going crazy? Living this way, you'd go out of your mind. Some of them already have, I think.

I'm trying to get my mind around this. Get back on track and try to figure out what's going on. May's lying down beside me. Not sleeping, I think, just resting. We need to get moving, though. We're way too close to that stream, and I think those monsters think the stream is important. They're obviously willing to kill people near it.

God, I just thought of something. Have any of these people returned as ghosts? Are Bai or Kim or Gerald hovering around us now? I can't tell. I can't use the sight. I need to rest.

NIGHT

Shit! Dozed off and left the damned computer on. Still reads a full battery, though. That's too weird to consider right now.

It's 6:58 PM. It's getting dark and we didn't move. We're still only about 30 yards from the stream and not far from Kim's body. I'm going to wake everybody up and get us moving.

HUNTED

Finally managing to catch my breath. We're all alive, but there's definitely something out there in the dark, and it knows where we are.

I woke May up, and she panicked because we hadn't moved. She kept saying she was a total idiot for dozing off. She's taking it pretty personally. We woke everyone and got them moving. Easier said than done for Penny, who'd just gotten Luke to sleep. His cut looks bad. Maybe infected. But if he gets attacked by wolves, that won't matter. Penny saw that logic, too, and we all got going.

We couldn't run in the dark. We all stayed together. We'd gotten maybe 50 yards when Desmond, in the lead, stopped. When we asked what was wrong, he held up a hand and whispered, "Listen!" We did. Then we heard it, too.

HOWLS

It sounded like they were further up the mountain, but it was really hard to say. They were impossible to count. Impossible to say how many wolves and how close. The sound was so faint we had to stop and listen, but once we did, it was almost deafening. We only listened for a moment before we started moving again, faster, trying to get wherever the wolves weren't.

They followed us. The howls changed direction and got louder. We went right (no idea what actual direction that was). Then I could see flashes of fur in the brush ahead of us. We turned and ran. I heard a growl from the brush to our left. We ran from that. We'd made it to a large clearing and had to stop so that Penny could catch her breath. May said they were herding us.

She was right. These wolves have language, spoken and written, and they know we're here. They know we're trespassers and they're treating us like prey. They don't have any interest in eating us — just killing us. I pulled out my laptop and started writing this. To hell with what the others think. I need to get this down. Maybe I can save it to disk and stash the disk somewhere.

There are symbols on every tree around us here. I don't have time to draw them, but they're all about eye-level. Each tree has a different symbol. They don't look similar. Doesn't look like a "12 stations of Christ" kind of thing. Actually, there are 13 trees with symbols. These symbols are more elaborate than the others. The brush is light, too, like someone's cleared it. This place is special, somehow.

And we stopped here to rest.

I can hear them getting closer.

DEUS EX...?

Still alive. Not sure what happened. It's 8:28 PM. At least we can see now.

We were in that clearing when everything just went dark. Not like the moon went behind a cloud. I mean dark like no light at all, like in a cave. I felt around and found Penny and Luke. She grabbed me tight and whispered something like, "If something happens to me, take Luke



and run." I think I said, "Yeah." I don't know. I didn't find Al or Desmond or May. I heard sounds, though.

It sounded like a dogfight — low snarls and barks and growls. I heard a whine like a dog in pain or afraid. Then I heard the howls again. I swear to God, it sounded like the things were talking it over. It's like they decided to back off. That's when the light came back, just like a switch, and we were all in the clearing.

God, I wish I could see. I think one of us talked the wolves into backing off. It couldn't have been Penny, because I knew where she was. That leaves Al, Desmond or May. And I rather doubt it's May. But whoever it was, how did they do it? Is there a "foreign werewolf" in our group? Either way, if our monster did talk the wolves out of killing us, how did they do it. What do you promise bloodthirsty monsters to keep them away?

We started moving straight down the mountain. We stopped only when Penny couldn't go any further, and none of us have slept. I'm about out of ideas here. I wish to God I could figure something out.

MORNING

Woke up this morning to thunder. Great. If my laptop gets wet, I won't be able to type anymore. I'm saving all this to disk, so I won't lose what I've written, but it'd be nice to be able to finish it. That'd mean I'd survived. But I think it's becoming a foregone conclusion that I'm not going to make it.

We're moving out in a couple of minutes. No wolves in the night. Whatever "our" monster said to them seems to have worked, at least for now. It's 7:56 AM. I think I'm on about an hour of sleep, maybe two.

DESPAIR

We've lost the will to keep going. Maybe we're all just exhausted. I don't know. Penny was actually the one who kept us going, not May. We stopped for lunch and I didn't even care enough to drag out my laptop. None of us really ate much, not even Desmond. He just sat there, scratching at a huge deerfly bite on his neck, staring at his food. It's almost dark. I'd be surprised if we covered two miles today. Didn't help that we wound up going in a big circle.

It would have been scary if we weren't so damned exhausted. We passed by a huge fallen tree that looked like it had been split by lightning. No symbols on it, thank God. Then, two hours later, we walked up to the same tree. Al just sat down and hasn't moved since. Desmond started laughing, but it was a desperate, crazy laugh. He kept trying to say something, but couldn't get it out. "And the Lord said" was as far as he got. Penny started crying, which meant Luke started crying. May just walked off into the brush. I'm here watching the whole thing.

I really don't know how this happened. Our plan isn't complex. We're just walking downhill. That means we had to turn around and walk uphill to get back to this tree, but we didn't. I'd try to figure out which way is north, if it mattered,

but since I don't know what face of the mountain we crashed into, I don't think knowing directions would do us any good.

I've seen too many people die in the past few days. I've walked too far and tried to stay rational too long. I don't have much strength left. I hope May has enough for both of us.

INSIGHT

It's morning and everyone else is still asleep. The forest doesn't seem to hate us today. It actually seems kind of peaceful. Birds chirping, sun shining, that pleasantly cold feeling in the air that you know is going to change once the sun gets higher. The air of dread and despair is gone, or at least lessened. Maybe what I needed was some sleep. And the dream I had! Jesus. I don't remember much of it, but what I do seemed to relate.

I was blind. I could see myself kind of in third person, like in a movie. I could see myself stumbling around, both eyes missing. There were wolves closing in behind me, but I couldn't see or hear them. I just kept going. As I stumbled, I broke branches and trampled plants. One of the wolves jumped at me, but something — something huge — swatted it down. That's all.

I don't normally go in for dreams, but this one got me thinking about those jeeps. About motivations. Why are these things killing us off one at a time? I know folks on hunter-net would say something like "bcuz their monsterrs that's why cant you see that?!" I don't buy that. It's too damned easy. If all they wanted was us dead, why haven't they killed us all? And what about the monster with us? I've got some ideas.

Language. They seem to have a spoken (growled) and written language. If my guess about one of us talking them out of killing us is true, then that language isn't necessarily bound by territory. It's more instinctive, like animal communication, which makes sense.

They killed folks before who brought technology into the woods.

They are extremely territorial.

What all this suggests so far is that by crashing into the mountain, we not only invaded their territory but brought an unknown technology into the woods. If my guesses are correct, that would set them off. Which may be why they killed Gerald. Maybe the monster in our group didn't kill him. Maybe it was the wolves. But why not kill the rest of us?

What's a werewolf? A person who turns into a wolf? But what if it were the other way around? What if a wolf turned into a person? It would be scary enough for a person suddenly discovering he could get big and hairy, but at least that person would have the word "werewolf" and a concept to attach to it. What if a wolf suddenly found himself wandering around on two legs during a full moon? No hair, no claws, can't catch food. How scary would that be? If it happened today, that werewolf (were-human?) would get locked up and experimented on. But let's say it happened for the first time a thousand years ago. That were-human slowly learns to act human. Then it breeds.

Do that for a thousand years and you have a society, complete with cultural identity, behavioral rules and language. Maybe those Sociology classes weren't a waste of time, after all. A lot of this makes more sense if these things aren't mindless, but actually have some kind of history. Maybe that dream finally cleared my head.

What about the monster in our group? What if somewhere along the line, a were-human has a kid with a normal human? Maybe that kid is a true werewolf, a person who changes into a wolf. And now the society grows. If you figure that were-humans are comfortable among were-humans and normal wolves, and werewolves are comfortable among werewolves and normal humans, then you've got not just one society, but two. Their languages might be the same, descended from the primal communication methods that wolves use. Their social behavior would likely be different, though, because the werewolves would have a regard for human life while were-humans wouldn't. Maybe that makes them rivals. Or at war.

Maybe we had a werewolf on the plane and crashed into a forest full of were-humans. And the werewolf is protecting us, just not doing a perfect job of it. It talked the were-humans out of killing us all after they'd killed Gerald, and again when we stumbled into their important place or whatever that clearing was. What I don't understand is why this werewolf would be protecting us. Dead people seem to act on things they did in life. I can understand that. Maybe a werewolf has some regard for human life?

I'm trying not to twist theories into facts, but it all explains a lot. Bigfoot legends? Stories about killer wolves? Murder rates go up every full moon. Is it because werewolves in cities need to get in touch with their true natures?

Of course, this still gets me no closer to figuring out who the thing in our group is. I'm banking on Desmond, just because it fits logistically. But what if werewolves can appear and disappear they way were-humans seem to? What would be logical about any of this then?

There's no way to verify anything. Not without seeing the truth. I'm not sure if I'm right about any of this, but I think I'm on the right track.

Whoa. Felt a flicker just then. Like the sight coming back, maybe. I felt something like that once before, when I tricked that zombie out of the building back at school. Like I knew I was doing the right thing. Maybe I'm finally getting my mind around this.

Thunder. Better switch the machine off and keep it dry. I'll try to see and verify any of this. It's 9:02 AM. The others are waking up.

FALSE ALARM

Still can't see. We're pausing under a big tree. We haven't gone far. The rain makes moving slippery. No one else is in good spirits but me. Wish I could tell them why. At least the rain keeps the damned bugs away.

REVELATIONS

Wow. A lot has happened. No one's dead. Haven't seen hide nor hair of a wolf all day. Sorry.

The rain stopped around two in the afternoon. We didn't go in circles and the ground leveled out. The others were getting a bit more upbeat. Desmond actually seemed to calm down. He'd been either manic or unresponsive since yesterday. We found some pine trees where the ground wasn't soaked and decided to stop there. The ground is always soft around pine trees. No one was sleepy so we started to talk. I think we should have done that from day one.

We talked about what had happened and, after Luke dozed off, about making sure that the others' bodies got found. We talked about the wolves but no one brought up werewolves. I told them where I was in school and what I was studying. Desmond said he's a deacon in his church (which we knew), and works as an electrical engineer, which kind of surprised me for some reason. I don't know what I thought he did.

Al still wasn't talking, but was listening. May asked Penny what she did for a living. Penny said she was unemployed, but was going to look for a job as soon as she could. Desmond asked what grade Luke was in. Penny said it first—but she thought about it for a second. May and Desmond didn't seem to notice the pause. I did, but I thought maybe it was just fatigue. Then Al spoke for the first time.

It's weird—he's so quiet you can barely hear him, but his diction is very clear. He told us later that he's a high school teacher, but is moving to Oregon and hasn't started teaching there yet. Anyway, he said to Penny, "You kidnapped him, didn't you?"

I was completely floored. Penny's face fell and she started crying. I heard her say, "I am his mother." Al just shook his head. "That's why you hid when the helicopter flew over. If we make it to a city, you think you can disappear, but if we get rescued, you're going to jail."

Penny kept crying, and Luke started waking up. Al told her to be quiet, since Luke didn't know that he was kidnapped, right? He just thought he was going away with his mother. Penny nodded and calmed down a bit.

Desmond had that look of rage back in his eyes, and May didn't look too forgiving, either. I was about to talk them down, and then I remembered that the helicopter thing happened before Kim died. I didn't point it out, but I've never felt so angry. It didn't have to happen that way.

Penny explained quietly, telling us that her ex-husband had won custody but that it wasn't fair, so she decided to take Luke away and try to make it to Canada. She had, too, and was flying to Devine because it looked small enough for her to go unnoticed. Desmond got up and walked away in disgust. May went after him. We've agreed that no one should be left alone. I was a little worried about that, though. What if Desmond was the monster? They didn't go far. I could still hear them in the brush. Meanwhile, Penny was holding Luke and crying.

I tried to take my mind off things, so started talking to Al. He answered my questions. That's when I found out what he did. But he was still very distant. Toward the end, he said, so softly I could barely hear it, "We were thinking of getting a divorce." He looked straight at me, and then stood up and walked after Desmond and May. That left me alone with Penny and Luke.

Luke was getting upset. His leg hurt and his mom hugging him tightly wasn't doing him any good. Penny and I just stared at each other for a while. I had nothing nice to say, so I kept quiet. Penny was looking at me like she was begging for forgiveness. Not from me.

She finally said, "Remember you made a promise."

What the hell was I supposed to say to that? It wasn't Luke's fault what happened. I nodded. Penny smiled and asked if I'd look after Luke for a few minutes while she went to the bathroom.

Luke was awake by then, so I showed him my computer and let him play Minesweeper for a while until he got bored. He fell asleep leaning on me, and is still there, breathing quietly as I write this. It's about 10 PM. And oddly enough, even though I'm still pissed, I'm also optimistic now. It's like we all got a chance to be reminded about being human.

Except that one of us isn't.

SEPARATION

It's 6:23 AM. We're in trouble again. Luke's still next to me, but I don't know where anybody else is. I hear growling and rustling in the brush. The fact that Penny hasn't come back is frightening. And I can't get up to look and leave Luke behind.

The kid is holding up pretty well, considering. The cut on his leg is oozing and looks unhealthy. I know Penny's washed it a few times, but she was complaining about not having any disinfectant. Of course, he's wearing shorts, so his arms and legs are covered in bug bites. Poor kid must be miserable. At least I'm wearing jeans.

BATTLE

I'm alive! And I've just learned more about werewolves (were-humans?) than I expected to. I have no idea about the rest of us, though. Luke's still okay, and Al's not hurt badly, but I haven't seen Desmond, Penny or May since I woke up.

After I shut down the computer, I listened a bit more carefully and decided that there were two wolves out there. They weren't herding us. I boosted Luke up into a tree. Then I walked toward the sound.

I was all ready to jump if anything happened. Whatever was happening, it didn't involve me.

I saw a wolf-thing rise up. It looked a lot like the one I saw kill Bai—probably nine feet tall, red and gray fur. As it stood up I felt my mind start to go, just like before. I started to panic. To be perfectly honest, I had to change

my clothes afterward. I stood my ground this time, though. Just like that. I don't know where it came from.

The thing took a step toward me — and then another wolf tackled it. The other one wasn't on two feet. It looked like a wolf, but huge. It wasn't the same color. It was black, except for a white patch on its head. I didn't even see where the black one came from. They both went head over heels into the brush. I half-expected more wolves to jump in, but none did.

Then something I can't explain happened. A patch of the woods went black. It was like looking into a cave mouth, right in the middle of the woods. I could hear sound coming from it, but couldn't see into it. I didn't realize until later that the same thing might have happened to us in that clearing. I heard something yelp in pain and something run through the brush. I stepped closer to the darkness. No way was I going in, but I wanted to know how big it was. It was about 20 feet around, and on the far side I found Al.

He had a bite on his arm. Bloody, but not too deep. He said he'd been taking a leak and ran back when a big black wolf jumped out and bit him, then ran away. I asked him how big. He said not more than two or three feet — still pretty big, but nothing like what I saw. I told Al to go check on Luke and to find something to bind his arm. He ran off. I wonder if his bite means he'll become one of them.

As soon as he had gone, the blackness disappeared and a red wolf was lying where it had been. It was the

same color as the thing I saw before, but now it was the shape of the black one, like a giant wolf. It was struggling to get to its feet and was wounded badly. It had claw marks across its face and a huge wound in its side, and it was still trying to get to me. I backed up, but it was dying.

Even then, it looked like the cuts on its face were closing. I watched them seal up. It finally collapsed, though, and then shrank into what looked like a "normal" wolf. Still red-gray, but not any bigger than what I've seen on TV.

I ran back to the tree where I'd left Luke. Thank God he was still there. Al was sitting at the foot of it. He'd torn one of his shirtsleeves off and used it to wrap his arm. I had Luke pass down my satchel so I could change my pants and write all this down. Still no sign of Penny, May or Desmond. I'm going to hand this back up to Luke and then Al and I are going looking for them.

CASUALTIES

Found them. May and Al are off talking with Luke now. Desmond is still covering Penny's body.

Penny was killed a long way from where the fight happened. She was killed more like Bai than Kim. Torn apart.

Luke's hysterical. We're going to get moving and try to put some distance between us and all this, just in case that black wolf comes back. Of course, it could be that the black one was one of us and the one that died was one of the ones hunting us. Either way, we're heading out. I'm going to try to figure this out.



THEORIES

I didn't think of it before. Since everyone here is accounted for, the wolf that died back there must have been a "native."

I need to think today through.

CHRONOLOGY

When I woke up this morning, everyone but Luke was gone.

Penny. I don't think she wandered off. I think the werewolf in our group knocked her out and carried her off to kill her. She was killed in the same way as Bai and the red wolf (multiple injuries all over her body).

May. Said she woke up early this morning and went outside the camp. She was elusive about why, but muttered to me that she thought she was starting her period. She was mistaken, she told me, but was trying to find a stream or something. I didn't press the issue. We found her later looking for us, not far from Penny's body.

Al. I've already mentioned that he went off to piss, and I found him on the far side of that hole, with a bite that he says came from the black wolf. It's possible that if he's the black wolf, he could have bit himself. I'll have to watch to see if it heals up quickly. He said the wolf ran toward where we found Penny's body.

Desmond. May, Al, and I found him on the way back to Luke. He was hiding under a tree and saying something about the Devil. After we found Penny's body and covered it up, he calmed down some. Now he just looks confused.

Desmond worries me the most. He's probably strong enough to knock someone out with one punch. He could have dragged Penny off and killed her, and then discovered or been discovered by the other wolf. Plus, that wolf was black. Does that matter?

Any of them could be the werewolf. I really don't know. The only way I can test it is to watch Al and see if his arm heals quick. Or he changes, too.

THEORIES

It's 12:34 PM. We've stopped, but haven't said much. Luke's awake and still pretty agitated. I have no idea how he's going to get through this and stay sane. Kids are pretty resilient, but all this is going to scar him for life. I wonder if it's possible for a kid like him to be changed like me.

We haven't talked about this morning. No one wants to be the first to bring it up, I think, including me. I don't dare say anything until I know who the monster is. I'm afraid of how I might find out.

At this point, I have to question the moon as a factor. I've seen these things active both before and after the full moon. Maybe the actual night of the full moon is just the worst of it. Maybe these things change shape whenever they want. The flight was supposed to land in Devine well before sundown. Does it matter if it's even night time?

Based on what I've seen, werewolves (and maybe were-humans) seem capable of taking on more than two forms. I've counted four — normal human (guessing — haven't actually seen one change to or from human), normal wolf, wolf-man, and, for lack of a better term, big wolf. The two-legged wolf-man I saw really defies description. I was scared in a way I've never known before. Like the forest itself wanted to kill me.

That's not getting me anywhere. What have I seen? I've seen the red-gray wolf take three of the forms, and others take two, possibly three (the one that killed Bai and the black one). They can heal fast. But a bad injury will apparently still kill one. Is the "silver bullet" thing a legend? Or even a story the creatures spread themselves?

Nothing says that the one I saw die won't rise from the dead. Maybe they can't be killed for long.

If they've got a society, how do they keep it secret? If they're just a few rampaging monsters, do people just overlook them or do they hide from us, except out here?

Everyone's scared. Al's arm doesn't seem to be healing miraculously. Luke's stopped crying but whispers things under his breath. May's white as a sheet and keeps looking over her shoulder.

Desmond isn't limping anymore. He was walking with a limp when we started out. I don't remember when it stopped. His beard is a little gray. Does that mean he'd have a white patch as a wolf? He's been craving meat the whole time, acting crazy and then depressed. He said he was an engineer, but that didn't ring true for some reason.

I could get May and Al away from him, but do what? Tell them he's a werewolf? Why can't I fucking

DISGUISE

I switched off the computer earlier and lost a bit of text, but none of it was important. Mostly it was just me bitching about not being able to prove anything about Desmond, and that's not real productive. Especially now.

It's 8:46 PM and the moon is rising. We've covered a lot of ground and haven't circled. We did, however, enter a dip — not a valley, really, just a small dip in the ground. We passed a tree with a symbol, but I didn't point it out to anyone and I didn't get a chance to draw it. It looked kind of like a snake falling into a net, if I remember right. I'm staying close to May and Al, and especially Luke. If anything goes wrong tonight, I want to be able to help them, sight or not.

Desmond hasn't been acting any less crazy than usual. I asked him about his leg. He says he just twisted it climbing out of the plane, but it's feeling better. He could be telling the truth, but somehow I just don't buy it.

The forest is darker here. The tree cover seems thicker. No soft pine beds here. Just cold, hard earth and huge trees with knobby roots. Not like I'm going to sleep anyway. The forest seems more active tonight. I'm thinking it might storm again, but it's not cloudy. I'm starting to get that same feeling I had before. The forest knows about us.

Maybe that means we're getting close to another place that's important to the things. We did pass a symbol. If were-humans are really part human, maybe their special places have a vibe humans can sense. Kim said something about a place "feeling right."

Hell, maybe they use places like that to trap prey. How would I know?

I think my nerves are rubbing off on the others. Everybody's keyed up and, I hope, ready to run. Desmond, too, but with him it's different. He looks ready to fight, like he's made up his mind about something. I dearly hope if he has, he's made up his mind to fight the things and help us get the hell out of here.

COMPANY OF WOLVES

Only stopping to catch my breath there's a whole bunch of them having some kind of meeting chasing us
WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME

We're safe. At least for the moment. I'm still not sure about Desmond, but he's dead. That, I'm sure of.

We'd stopped to bed down or to at least wait out the night. About 20 minutes after my last entry, we heard the howl.

The ones we've heard before were nothing like this. They were distant. This one sounded like it was right next to us, loud enough to rattle our teeth. Luke snapped his head up, started shaking and wet himself. Al ran over and tried to keep Luke calm, but he kept struggling. May jumped up and gave me with a look I can't quite describe, like there was something she wanted me to do or say. Desmond started heading toward the sound.

What could I do? I followed. I had to be sure. May grabbed me, but I told her to take my bag and the other two and run. I'd find them. (I did.) I went after Desmond, who wasn't even trying to be quiet. I caught up with him and told him to at least walk carefully and that I'd go with him. He had that crazy look in his eyes, the same as when he killed that deer. He nodded and grinned.

We pushed through the brush as the howl got worse. More joined in. I couldn't believe we were walking straight at them, but Desmond wasn't slowing down. He was muttering. I don't know much about the Bible. "Walk through the valley of the shadow of death" or something. God isn't the authority here.

The howls died down as we reached a clearing. I couldn't count them all. They were all wolves. Some of them those huge kind. Some normal sized. They were all red or gray and were in a circle. One of them — maybe old, white-gray fur — was in the center. It was like it was talking. Not with words but with growls. The rest were almost listening. There's no other way to say it.

Desmond was breathing heavy and looked pissed. If he was going to change, I didn't want to get in his way. I climbed a tree to get a better view, and to get away. The

ground in front of the old wolf had been cleared of twigs and debris. More symbols were drawn on the ground there.

As I watched, the wolf crossed out four of them with its paw. I started to get a sinking feel, but didn't get a chance to see much more, because one of them noticed Desmond. They all jumped up and started stalking him. I jumped down, hoping to turn on the sight and figure something out, but he yelled at me to run. I did.

I'm not even going to try to describe what I heard behind me. I didn't look back. I don't even know how I got away.

I made it to May and Al, and we all ran. I haven't told them what happened yet. What would be the point? Those wolves will probably run us down soon, too.

MORNING

It's 7:21 AM. I've deleted a bunch of stuff I wrote last night. Mostly about dying and what I want done with my stuff. Who cares about that? I'm alive, at least for the moment. So are the other three.

God, that sounds so wrong. We started with eight. How the hell are we going to explain this to the police or whoever? "We had eight, but five of them got eaten by wolves."

We need to keep moving. It can't be that much farther. Unless we've made another circle in our panic.

THE TRUTH

I've figured it out. Al, Luke and May are in a clearing. I told them I was going off to take a piss. I know who the werewolf is. It wasn't Desmond. And I know we're only about four miles from Devine city limits. There's a sign that says so.

I'd like to get Luke walking toward the city, but I want to wait until I verify this. I can see again.

BREAKTHROUGH

We were all sitting together. May, Al, Luke, myself. Catching our breath. Haven't seen a wolf today. So far, so good. I was scratching at bug bites and reflecting that mosquitoes are bad, but deerflies are the worst. They leave huge stinging welts on your body that last for days.

I looked over and saw that Luke had bug bites on his legs. I remembered that Desmond had a really nasty one on his neck. And then I looked over at Al and May.

Al had bites up and down his arm where he'd torn his shirt away, and some on his neck. But May doesn't have a single bite on her.

I think I made a noise when I realized it. They both looked at me, but I just shook my head. I was staring at May, though, and I don't know if she figured it out. But it's true. Not one bite. I've never seen her scratch. The things heal quick. Maybe too quick for bug bites to have any effect. I've finally figured it out!

Now I can feel the sight again, like an itch. I want to get this down before I look for sure and confront May. She's been with us the whole time and has probably killed some of us.

Gerald's whole body disappeared except for his foot. May was right next to his remains when I found her. But she didn't have any blood on her and she looked scared. I think that the other things killed Gerald and she talked them out of coming for us, at least right then.

But Bai was another matter. She'd been hurt and was slowing us down. I think that night was a full moon. May could have killed Bai, washed off in the stream and circled back to us to get some distance from the others. I was the only one who saw. I was near the stream.

Penny didn't flag down the helicopter and May was pissed, because she's in danger here, too. Kim stormed off and got caught by the native wolves, possibly because she was in a sacred place or something. We were all in a sacred place when the wolves came for us. The clearing with the symbols on the trees. Did May create that shadow to talk them out of it? So we wouldn't know?

Shit, those deer were probably set-ups. She needed to eat, too. It wouldn't be hard for her as a wolf to run down a deer, break its back and put a branch on it.

What happened then? Al exposed Penny. So the next morning, May knocks her out and kills her, but then another wolf shows up. Maybe a scout or something. May jumps it and kills it, and if she's injured, she heals it up too quick for me to notice. Then she bites Al — maybe to throw suspicion on him, or maybe she can't help it — and runs back around and changes back.

But what about last night? Did she save me from that pack? She couldn't save Desmond, even if she'd wanted to, because he was standing his ground? She must have doubled back and helped me. But why? And why hasn't she just run off? Why stick with us this long?

I need answers before I tell them how close we are. There's a dirt road here. I'll talk to May. I need to know, even this close to civilization.

BEAST UNMASKED

May's a werewolf. And my battery is finally running low. I've got to finish this. I'm hurt pretty badly. Pain doesn't seem to be bothering me yet. Maybe shock.

I went back to the clearing. May was there alone. Al and Luke had started walking, she said. I asked her why. She said, "Because we need to talk." And that's when I looked at her. I was right. She looked just like the silhouette on the plane. But what could I do? I sat down.

It was a very strange conversation. Almost like a breakup talk, at first. She said, "You know, don't you?" I said I did. She asked how and I told her about the bug-bite thing. No way was I going to try and explain anything more! She said that was very smart.

I asked her why she killed Bai and Gerald, just to test her. She said she didn't kill Gerald. She found what was left of him, and that's how she knew we weren't alone. I asked who the others were. Almost called them "were-humans" but

caught myself. She said that they were crazy animals that wanted all people dead. I asked her what she wanted. What happened then was the scariest thing I ever saw in my life.

Her eyes got this glow, like Desmond's but worse. She said something like, "I brought the plane down on the mountain to find them. But I didn't expect to find you." I didn't ask how she brought the plane down. Instead, I asked what she meant about finding me, and she got even more intense. She cracked this huge smile, like I was her best friend. "You don't run and scream like the rest. You've got a gift, and I want to help you with it. I want to bring you home with me and introduce you to my people. You might be the key to winning the war."

I didn't even ask what war. She was on her feet walking toward me. I didn't feel threatened, exactly. I didn't think she was going to hurt me. But she was crazy. Werewolf or not, she was absolutely insane. She was still talking, but some of it was in another language. She said something about "breeding" and "coming of our father" but none of it made any sense. I backed up and tripped. There was a broken branch behind me. And then, finally, I wasn't alone.

May had been wearing the same clothes the whole time since the crash. (Which means she must have undressed every time she changed shape, I guess.) She was wearing a long-sleeved T-shirt with a designer name on it. As she came closer, the letters read, "STRIKE NOW."

I threw that branch as hard as I could. It wasn't very big, but it knocked her down. I grabbed my bag and started running.

Then I heard Al. He and Luke hadn't left, after all. They were coming out of the woods. Al was probably taking Luke to the bathroom the whole time. Al ran up to May as if to see if she was okay. I screamed for him to get away, but she was already changing.

Her clothes tore right off. She changed into that black man-beast thing. But this time, I wasn't afraid. I was, but I just knew I could face her. I can't believe that thing was May. She grabbed Al and killed him. There's no way he could have lived through what she did to him. There was nothing I could do. Luke was screaming. She looked at him, then at me, and came right at me. I tried to get away, but she was on me. She tore at my leg. It's still bleeding bad, even now. Then she was gone. In the direction of the road I found, like she knew it was there the whole time.

What good would the city be to her now? Is she even going there? Can the other wolves be far away? Do they come this close to the city?

I'm cold. I can't walk.

I'm giving this disk to Luke along with the name and address of the man I was supposed to meet in Devine. I don't want to put his name in here, just in case. A car has to come by sooner or later. Of all of us, Luke has the most right to get out. He's just a kid.



PAUL SPENCER '02

CHAPTER 5: BECOMING PREY

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

— Matthew 7:15

ARRIVAL

Monday

The journey up this morning was pretty uneventful. There were roadworks on the A12, as per usual, but we were in the hotel not long after lunchtime. Manisha and I are posing as businesspeople up here for a few days to try and close some contracts. It's about the only way that a middle-aged white chap like me can get away with travelling in the company of a young Asian woman without attracting the sort of attention that we could do without. Suffolk is a quiet, conservative place with very few ethnic minorities. Manisha does stick out somewhat, so we're going to have to be careful. She hates wearing a suit, but I'm finding it quite amusing.

Kirsty came up separately, posing as a holiday maker. She's rented a cottage off toward the coast, and that's going to act as our main staging ground should anything happen. We've got two separate places to hide out, and we can be back in London within two hours — or summon help from there if need be. There's no guarantees, but I feel we've made what preparations we sensibly can. Kirsty's going to pay the reactor a visit. They've got a tourist center, believe it or not. Manisha and I are going to do some driving around today, before having a

quiet night on tonight. Of course, that all depends on what Kirsty finds later on. I hope I've done the right thing in letting her go there alone. She does seem to have accepted what I've said about the need to study before we act.

I must admit, I feel a lot less certain of myself now that we're up here. I'm used to an urban life. In the city, the rows upon rows of houses filled with people seem to offer some vague protection, even if it is largely illusory. Here, though, it's different. The villages are just little clusters of homes, pubs and shops, dropped down in the middle of the countryside. As you approach them from a distance, they look like they're huddling together for safety — a bit like the wagon trains in old cowboy movies. It seems like a long time since I had the chance to just watch a movie on TV.

Knowing what's out there, I can't help but feel that maybe that's the right way for the villagers to feel. There really are things in the woods, and I need to understand why they're there and what they're doing. I know my feeling of security in suburbia is false, but it allows me to carry on. Here, that feeling is ripped away and I feel more vulnerable and exposed than I ever did. Perhaps I should be glad that this area is flat and only lightly forested. You can see a long way in all directions and that makes me at least a little happier that I might see anything coming.

Hello again,

Further to the package I sent you a few days, here are SoS29's journals relating to the Suffolk trip, and those of his team. He and I agreed a long time ago that the potential benefit of keeping these sorts of records outweighs the potential risks.

For obvious reasons, it took me a few weeks to get hold of Paul's journal, but I managed it with Jason and Manisha's help.

Joshua

Although, I do recall some rather nasty tales on the list about creatures appearing from nowhere and vanishing into thin air. Like I said, the illusion of security is what keeps me going.

COMPLICATIONS

From Kirsty

Paul,

I've been trying to get online for half an hour. The phone lines around here are a piece of shit. Maybe I should get a job here for real and try to help the phone company get them working properly.

I paid a visit to Eastsea this afternoon, as we discussed. Looks like a pretty well-run, well-maintained facility to me. It sits right on the coast, on a flat area between two villages. If the bastards did attack the place, I've no idea how they did it. You've got good visibility in all directions, including seaward. They'd have to have found some way to sneak into the place — although if what we hear about them just "appearing" is true, maybe that's the way they did it. Any halfway decent CC-TV based security system would see the bastards coming a mile off.

There's one big problem. The whole place felt wrong to me. A couple of the security guards were definitely some of them, although I have no way of knowing exactly what they are. You want to send Manisha over to have a look? She might get a better idea, but I'd just be plain guessing. Then we might be able to get a serious plan together for getting rid of them.

Or give me the word and I'll take care of them myself right now.

We're all still meeting for dinner tomorrow, right?

Tuesday Morning

Thank God Kirsty did nothing but look. Manisha and I talked well into the night about what her news might mean. Supernatural influence in the nuclear plant wasn't something I'd considered before, but maybe I should have after the news from Scotland. It means one of two things. The first idea, and the one I "favor," is that after the attack the werewolves have found some way to infiltrate the plant with their own people. If that's the case, we need to find out why, and soon. I'm glad I made the decision to bring us all up here.

Manisha disagrees, though. She thinks we might be seeing the results of some power struggle between supernatural creatures in the area. Her opinion is that the werewolves seem to be a natural phenomenon. A corruption of nature by the supernatural, as she put it. Whatever is in the plant here, and the ones in Scotland by extension, it she guesses that it's a corruption of the man-made by the supernatural. Her theory is that we're seeing a supernatural version of the battle between the countryside and the city that we see in real society.

I do find her idea interesting. If we push the envelope on it, it raises the possibility of using one set of beings against another in a coordinated way. That way, we can step in to deal with the weakened forces in whatever way we see fit. That's pie in the sky, of course. With only three of us here, we can't hope to do much more than find out what's going on and then try to develop a coordinated response.

In the meantime, Manisha's going to drop me off in Lowestoft to do a little poking around, while she goes on the same tourist trip that Kirsty took yesterday. Let's hope Kirsty doesn't do anything rash while we're waiting for Manisha to report back. That would blow our cover and ruin any chance we have of learning more.

CORRUPTION

From Manisha's Notebook

Based on what Kirsty said, I began to look as soon as I approached the nuclear plant. She wasn't kidding. The

LOCAL MAN FOUND DEAD ON BEACH

The body of George Child, a 36-year-old father of two, was found washed up on the beach near Great Yarmouth yesterday. He had been shot at least twice, according to police sources.

Child, who worked at the Sellafield nuclear plant, had been missing for two weeks. He failed to return home from work, and his wife Mary reported him missing. Police have launched a murder enquiry and are said to be pursuing a number of promising leads.

In an emotional statement, Mrs. Child pleaded for anyone with information that might lead to the arrest of her husband's killer to come forward. "George was a wonderful husband and father."

Alex Hall, a spokeswoman for the plant said, "George worked for us over four years and was highly regarded by his colleagues in security. We are all deeply upset by this senseless loss."

whole place has a definite sense about it. The more I focused on it, the more unwell I felt. By the time I was passing through the gates, I was almost chucking my guts up. The security guard wasn't overly other, but he was concerned about me — which I can't blame him for. I must have looked terrible.

As Kirsty said, the security was heavy, but then you'd expect that from such a place. The visitor centre was little more than a PR effort, as far as I could tell. There to convince people they're safe. I've always been suspicious of people who try too hard to sell something, but I was willing to keep an open mind. Or at least, I was until I saw the security guard in the gift shop. He was one of the others, without a doubt. It was as if some black shape was on him or in him. My head was beginning to swim, and I knew I couldn't stay there long.

He noticed me staring at him, so I gave him the best shy smile I could muster, the one that works so well on nightclub bouncers. I made for the door, my heart pounding. He already knew I was there, so I couldn't try to hide from him without making myself seem more suspicious. I stared straight ahead until I got back to the car. I opened my door and glanced around. No one was paying me the slightest attention. I drove maybe three miles away, taking turns down country roads pretty much at random. I pulled up in the car park of a pub and used the payphone inside.

I told the old man what had happened and suggested that he call the psycho to see if she could catch one of the wrong people as they left and tail them home.

PURSUIT

From Kirsty's Journal

During my scouting yesterday, I found a good sea view parking spot that offered an excellent view of traffic coming from the power plant. You've got two choices when leaving the plant: head toward the coast or the main road. I decided to watch the one to the main road.

For over an hour I pretended to be enjoying the view, the sea air and a nice flask of coffee. Truth be told, I nearly did enjoy it but for the infuriating knowledge that there was something evil nearby and that I had yet to deal with it. Shortly after six o'clock, a car carrying two men, one who was wrong and one who wasn't, passed me. I tossed the flask on the back seat and pulled out after them, doing my best to keep at least one car between us. It wasn't easy. The traffic in this part of the world is light and for a few minutes I was directly behind him.

He pulled over in the village of Shoreford. I pulled over in a garage forecourt and got out my map, pretending to look at it. He let out the man who was free of evil and waved goodbye, like he was some normal person and not a fucking monster. I put the map down and got ready to move as he drove off.

We drove for maybe another 10 minutes before he turned off again, this time into a small cul-de-sac. I drove on and pulled into a car park in the centre of the town, amongst the shops and almost directly opposite a pub. I walked back around to the cul-de-sac and looked for his car. It was parked outside a bland little modern house. Two stories. Box-like.

I sent a text message on my mobile to Manisha and Paul, telling them where I was and then found a place in the neighboring field where I could watch without being seen. The fact that night was falling made it much easier. I must have waited three hours with no sign of him leaving. Lights went on and off inside, so I knew he was there.

CONTACT

Tuesday Afternoon

My day in Lowestoft was a complete waste of time. Trawling the libraries and bookshops turned up nothing that I didn't already know. Certainly there was nothing in the local mythology that helped. While there were plenty of legends of ghosts in and around the Norfolk broads, there was nothing related to werewolves or anything like them. I ended up buying a few maps of the area, including some historical ones for cross-referencing, and found a restaurant to have some lunch and while away the hours reading the Daily Telegraph until Manisha called.

For a little while, life felt normal again. It was like killing time in a restaurant between business meetings, back before I knew how the world really was. I felt a rush of anger then. The things are to blame for this life. If not for them, our eyes wouldn't need to be opened.

I won't let the creatures out here get away with what they're doing. They hide, they prey on us when they feel like it, and they hide again. It can't happen any longer, and my own weakness has allowed it to. I ran and hid before, like other people do in the face of these things. But my cowardice was worse, because I had the knowledge and the power to do something. Instead, I let them win. Perhaps that's the reason they attack places like this power plant, if that's what's really going on. They don't want us to have a chance to undermine them. They don't want us to progress, because we might pose a real threat.

Well, bad luck. Even if something happens to me, others will follow. There's a letter to Josh waiting to be posted if I don't return. He and his group or others like them will take this up.

BREAKING

Early Evening, Tuesday

I'm in the car with Manisha. We're on our way to meet Kirsty. We have the first solid lead we've had since we got here. We're about to break the law, but the things probably don't consider that an issue. If we succeed, the law won't matter. If we fail, the police will be the last of our worries.

We need more information and this man would seem to have it. Be brave, Paul.

ENTERING

Early Hours, Wednesday

We did it! I'm not sure I believe that we got away with it, but we seem to have. We've made contact, but I don't know yet how to turn that to our advantage.

We met Kirsty outside the village pub after dark, as directed. She'd worked out a way into the house from the field behind and had already eased out a section of the fence before we got there. As it turns out, she'd already knocked out the alarm, too, against my orders not to get too close. I suppose I shouldn't complain, but sometimes I fear what she might do if I had no influence over her (and even then she might turn on me one day). But if she hadn't pushed ahead so quickly, I'd have probably lacked the courage to go ahead with this. Planning to break into a house is one thing. It's quite another having the guts to go ahead and do it.

The back door was unlocked. We walked straight in. It stank. It stank so badly that I gagged, and I saw the other two were struggling too. "What on earth is that stench?" whispered Manisha, shoving a handkerchief over her nose and mouth.

"I don't know," muttered Kirsty, "but I'm betting it's bad news."

Then Kirsty reached into her coat and pulled out a small pistol of some kind. I grabbed her wrist and said, "I thought we agreed."

She glared at me. "I never got rid of it," she said. "You may be an idiot but I'm not."

And then everything went to hell.

The man, if that's what he was, walked in and looked at us in astonishment. It seemed like he saw Kirsty's gun and smiled. Then he just changed. One second he was a man, the next he was this mass of teeth and tentacles. I think I willed the bloody thing backward out of sheer revulsion.

Kirsty shot it several times. It stopped moving and turned back into a human. Manisha got closer, poking at the carpet by it with a newspaper off a table. The end of the newspaper dissolved from blood or something that came from the creature. The carpet was eaten away, too.

"That change was no illusion," Manisha said. "Whatever it was, it was real enough."

"We should go," I said, desperate to get out of there. "Somebody probably heard."

"No, we're clear," Kirsty said. "If I'm right, people will assume it was a farmer killing vermin. I'll stand watch while you two look around."

In some ways, I wished we'd left. Searching the place was nerve wracking enough. What we found was worse.



In the upstairs bedrooms, we found the rotting corpses of a woman and two children. From the look of them, they must have been dead a long time. God only knows how he lived with the smell.

I told Manisha not to go in. She took one look at my expression and agreed. We didn't find much else. Nothing to indicate that his life was anything out of the ordinary before something got inside him. I could see it upset Manisha—the thought that we'd killed someone. Someone that we might have saved.

It was time to leave. When we got back downstairs, I asked Kirsty if she'd seen anything.

"Nah, you're all right," she replied.

"Then why is there a van pulling up outside?" I asked.

Kirsty glanced out of the window and her eyes widened with surprise. "We've got company," she said.

"Who is it?" Manisha asked.

"I don't know, but they're not human," Kirsty replied.

"I'm staying then," Manisha said.

"What? Are you mad?" I asked.

"I should be able to hide from them," she whispered, her doubt evident in her voice.

I asked what if it didn't work?

She told me, "We're here to do a job. This is our best chance to learn something."

I started to argue, but Kirsty grabbed me and dragged me out the back door.

She let go of me outside. "Go after her now and we'll all be killed." I couldn't argue. She was right.

EAVESDROPPING

Manisha's Notebook

I found an out of the way corner of the living room and concentrated on not being seen. I don't think I've been so afraid in all my life. If it didn't work, I was dead. The door crashed down and my heart nearly stopped.

Three of them walked into the room. One was a woman, dressed in jeans and a shirt, with long auburn hair. One of the men, big, had bright red hair. The second man was short, stocky, with black hair.

The three of them looked at the corpse on the floor. I've tried to write down everything as best as I remember.

"Someone beat us to it," said the black haired one.

The red head nudged the corpse with his foot. "Dammit. I thought we might learn something from this one."

"I do not see why we do not just destroy the corruption," stated the woman, her voice oddly inflected.

"We've been through this," the red head replied. "It would mean turning this whole place into wormhole. When are you going to get your head around that?"

The woman made a noise that I could have sworn was a growl, and then bent down as if to get on all fours. By the time she was down, she was a wolf. I don't know

what I'd imagined, but I never thought that the change would be so quick.

She sniffed around and I realized that she was looking for trails. I huddled back into the corner, praying that she wouldn't find me.

She barked twice. The red head nodded. "Human scents, still very fresh."

"Do you think it's worth going after them?" asked the other.

"Maybe, once we've checked if there's anything we need to deal with beyond."

"I'll check," the black-haired one said. He seemed to look at the mirror over the fireplace and then just disappeared. I'd read about them doing something like that, but I never really believed it. He just vanished, like he'd never been there. I had to stifle a gasp.

A few seconds later, he was back. "Come on. We've got problems," he said. Then he changed, too.

Changed is such a piss useless word for what happened. His whole body grew, transformed. It twisted, his arms shifting position, his clothes disappearing, a muzzle forming and fur spouting out of him. It was all I could do to stay put and not run for fear. The other two did exactly the same thing, and then all three disappeared.

Some time later, I don't know how long, I found the courage to leave.

THE NEXT STEP

Wednesday Morning

We all met up again at the cottage Kirsty was staying in. The door to the bedroom was firmly shut the whole time. After seeing her gun back at the house, I could guess what she had through the door, but I didn't see the point in forcing the issue. Things were getting risky, and I didn't see Kirsty as a threat to Manisha or I.

Manisha joined us over an hour later, visibly shaken. I made her some tea and let her sit for a while before we started questioning her. I was just glad to have her back alive. I hated leaving her there, but I knew she was capable of hiding and maybe learning enough to give us the key to the situation.

Eventually, she spoke. Her first words were not encouraging.

"We've got a problem. They have our scents."

"So what?" I asked.

She said, "They're wolves. Well, they can be wolves. If they're anything like the real animals, they hunt by scent. I don't know enough about it to know if they'll be able to follow us after we've traveled by car, but it sure wouldn't surprise me. Oh, and the reports on hunter-net were right. They can just disappear into thin air. I don't think they're just turning invisible. I think they're going somewhere."

I sat down. It was a lot to take in all at once. My mind was reeling with the possibilities. Kirsty, however, was all business. She wanted them dead. She quizzed Manisha about everything that happened, particularly how they reacted to the dead bloke's corpse. I just listened, sorting through the information for the clues we needed. A chance to study the other side without actually confronting it is all too rare.

"How do you know they have our scents?" Kirsty asked, obviously coming to her own decisions.

"One of them said so."

"Are they after us now?"

"I don't think so. They went 'outside' or something, because they thought there was a threat there."

Something made a connection in my head. "Where did they say, exactly?"

Manisha thought for a moment. "'Beyond,' I think."

That was interesting. From my dabblings with cards and other mystical claptrap years ago, I knew the Celts had a myth about another reality, an otherworld composed of magical and symbolic things. I wish I could remember more, but it was just one of my passing fads and I only concentrated on the bits that interested me.

I told the others what little I could remember. Kirsty looked thoroughly bored by the information, but Manisha was attentive.

She said, "I'm not sure how that helps us right now. We've got three things on our tail, and we've got no idea how to deal with them."

"I'm not sure that's a problem," I said.

My reasoning was this: At this point, they have no reason to believe we're an enemy. They're going to want to know why we killed that man, who was apparently an enemy of theirs, too. From what Manisha overheard, they'll want to know why we did it. They'll want to question us before killing us, which would buy us time to bring our abilities into play.

Kirsty snorted in disgust. "They're animals, Paul. They deserve to be killed. I don't see the point in talking to them."

She was on her feet by then, agitated.

Manisha shook her head. "We still have no real idea what's going on here. What's the harm in trying to talk to them? As long as we stay cautious and don't do anything rash, we may open a dialogue. They obviously have as much problem with the things at the plant as we do. Let's find out what else we have in common."

I kept quiet. I was less keen than Manisha on the idea of actually befriending these monsters, but what she said seemed to keep Kirsty quiet. I could take a guess why. The only time I've seen Kirsty turn down the opportunity to kill one of the others was when she thought waiting would give her a shot at even more of them. I was willing to accept that for now. We didn't know which way this was going to go.

For the moment, we decided to keep watch through the night, with Kirsty going first, Manisha second and me last. If they came during the night, we'd deal with them here and try and get a discussion going. If that wasn't possible, we knew the territory and had a good chance of protecting ourselves.

If we made it through the night, we'd set out to find them in the morning. We'd start at that pub where I saw one of them months ago, and go from there. Kirsty rigged up a microphone / radio combination that slips into my suit jacket easily enough. That should allow us to tape the conversation and, more importantly, will mean that Manisha and Kirsty could stay nearby, listening in, ready to help if I run into trouble.

INTERVIEW WITH A WEREWOLF

Thursday Evening

We did it! We bloody did it! I can hardly believe it! We made contact and I'm still alive. I have to get this down now, just in case anything goes wrong from here on in. We spent the morning checking that the equipment Kirsty had rigged up worked, and we tested its range. We were hoping that the girls would be able to sit in the car nearby, depending on where I was.

About 11 am, when the pubs generally open, we set out. I was in one of the cars, the girls in the other. I left maybe 10 minutes before them, and Manisha made me swear that I wouldn't start anything until they texted me to tell me they were in position. By 11.45am, I was inside.

Within a few minutes, I got the text from Manisha and looked closely across the bar. Sure enough, the barman was wrong. I stared at him for a moment, trying to get a better idea of what it was. There was something. A feral cast to the eyes and a hint of fur on his skin.

I placed my empty glass down and asked for the same. The barman nodded and started to pull me a new pint.

"You up here on business?" he asked. "We don't get many guys in suits in here at lunchtime."

"Yes," I answered, starting to feel fear gnawing at my gut for the first time. "Yes, I'm here to see you, in fact."

He glanced straight at me. "You from the brewery, then?"

"No. No, I'm not from the brewery. I'm here because I know what you are," I said it as conversationally as I could. He looked at me sharply. "I know who you associate with," I added.

He stared for a moment and then went back to wiping down the bar. "I have no idea what you mean."

"I don't think that's true. I know what you are and who you're working with. And most of all, I know what you're trying to deal with."

"I don't know what you mean," he said.

"I rather think you do," I said, feeling the beer stoke my confidence. "I think you know exactly what I'm talking about and probably don't want it discussed here."

To my surprise, he laughed. "Go on, then, if you want," he said as he handed me the pint. "The people in here either won't believe you, or if they do they'll be ready to back me up in a second."

My mind raced. It wasn't going the way I hoped.

"Look, I only want to help," I said. "I know all about the nuclear plant and what happened yesterday. I want to meet with the people involved and discuss something that might be to our mutual benefit."

His eyes narrowed. "Are you sure that's what you want?" he asked.

I nodded, taking another drink to try and conceal my nervousness.

He seemed to think for a moment and said, "Follow me." He took me into a back room, down a short corridor and indicated for me to sit down. "Wait here. I need to make some calls. It might be a little while. Don't try to leave. We'll stop you."

I settled down into the chair and let out a long sigh. I felt the worst of the tension leave my body. I hadn't closed the deal, but I was certainly well into opening negotiations. This was familiar ground for me. I've been

doing it all my life. I knew I could pull it off. If I told myself that often enough, I might believe it.

WOLF AT THE DOOR

Just over half an hour later my phone beeped. It was a text message from Manisha indicating that the red haired man from the house had just walked through the front door of the pub.

I reached into my pocket and switched on the transmitter and waited. And waited. I felt an urge to go to the toilet, but I stifled it and hoped that it would all be over soon. Before long a red haired man walked in. I assumed it was the same. I also knew I was facing one of the creatures that had haunted my dreams for months.

Taped conversation from SoS29

SoS29: Hello, pleased to meet you, I'm...

(A growl, and a gasp of fear from SoS29)

SoS29: I... I... was right. You... You're a werewolf.

(More growling)

SoS29: I... I don't understand.

Second Speaker: Is this better? Can you cope with me better when I look like you?

SoS29: Y... yes, yes. Thank you.

Second Speaker: Listen, arsehole. I'm not sure why I'm here. Give me a good reason or I'll tear your head off and use your skull for a mug.



SoS29: I... I... I want to help. I have already helped. The thing in the house yesterday, from the plant. That was us. We knew you wanted it dead, so we did it. Saved you the effort. Hope that's okay. It was a gesture of good faith. Open discussions...

Second Speaker: Slow down. I get the point. You one of us?

SoS29: Uh, no. No, I'm not.

Second Speaker: Which makes you kin to us... or something worse.

SoS29: How... how do you know?

Second Speaker: You're not curled up in the corner drooling like the village idiot. What normal people do when they see what you just did.

SoS29: I can see why.

Second Speaker: (Laughs) So, tell me about yesterday.

SoS29: What do you want to know?

Second Speaker: How you knew about that thing would be a good start.

SoS29: Question for a question?

Second Speaker: I'm sorry?

SoS29: I'll tell you, if you answer a question of mine.

Second Speaker: (Laughs) All right. If that's what you want. I'm probably going to end up killing you anyway, so there's no harm, right? How did you know about the worm spawn?

SoS29: Worm food, surely? I'd seen the appalling safety record of the plant. I started to look into it and things didn't add up. So, I took a look around and that fellow struck me as being out of place. I followed him home to confront him, and he turned on me. I had to kill him before he did anything to me.

Second Speaker: Huh. Not sure I believe all of that, old man. Your question?

SoS29: There are a lot of you around here, aren't there? And the barman is one of you?

Second Speaker: Yeah, you could say that Sonny is part of the family. So's the woman who runs the shop, and most of the farmers. And yes, there are a lot of us. So, don't try any funny business, old man, because we'll eat you alive.

SoS29: I... I'll bear that in mind.

Second Speaker: My turn. Why do you want to help?

SoS29: There's something wrong in the plant. It threatens us all. It makes sense for us to deal with it together.

Second Speaker: Why not just do it yourself?

SoS29: No, it's my turn. What do you want with the plant?

Second Speaker: We want to wipe that accursed blight off the face of the Earth. Pretty simple, huh? Now, before I get angry, why don't you just deal with the reactor yourself?

SoS29: Because I don't have the resources or skills to do it alone. Why do you want to destroy it?

Second Speaker: Ha! Same reason you do, I imagine. It's leaking seven kinds of shit into the sea and air, and this is my land. It don't want to see it fouled any further, but you bloody monkeys seem to insist on shitting where you live. That direct enough for you?

SoS29: Yes... yes, it is. Thank you. Um... are all werewolves like you?

Second Speaker: (Laughs) No. Some of them are much nastier. Most of them would have killed you by now. But I'm curious. Tell me, do you know who your parents are? Have any members of your immediate family gone missing in the past?

SoS29: Uh, what?

Second Speaker: You heard me. Answer the question.

SoS29: Um, not as far as I know. Why?

Second Speaker: Because I can only think of two reasons why you know what I am. One makes you potentially useful. The other makes you a corpse. My problem is that you probably have no idea what the truth is.

SoS29: I don't understand.

Second Speaker: I didn't expect you to.

WINDING UP

SoS29: But do you accept what I'm saying?

Second Speaker: (Laughs) Are you mad, man? You walk in here, demanding to see us, and then you think we're going to just accept you? By all rights, I should just kill you for knowing that we're here. But I'm going to let you live for a while longer. If you're what I hope you are, you'll have a lot to learn. If not, well, I hope you've made peace with your maker, because I'll be sending you to meet him. Be back here at midday tomorrow and we'll talk more. Oh, and I know about your two friends, by the way. Don't try to keep anything from me again.

(Sound of footsteps followed by a door shutting)

Thursday Evening (continued)

I've just been through the tape again, and my feeling of elation has passed. I can't believe that I'm still here. How many times did that bloody thing threaten me? Kirsty wants to hunt it down and be done with it. I sympathise, but I don't want to throw away the chance to learn more from him. It. Whatever. We'll go back tomorrow and see if I can be a little more persuasive. I just need to forget that he's a monster and think of him as a potential customer. Christ, I've got 30 years of selling under my belt. I must be able to pull this off.

I still can't believe I was stupid enough to reveal our numbers. I should have remembered that Manisha said they had our scents. That was a mistake. I'm so in the habit of concealing the existence of other hunters, I did it automatically. Luckily, he didn't take it too badly. I ought to apologize and explain. I don't want

one mistake, one stupid slip, to blow the trust I'm trying to build here.

We're following the same watch tonight. Then we're going back tomorrow for a second meeting. I hope we're on the verge of a breakthrough here.

AWAKENING

Early Hours of Friday Morning

I'm on watch again. Manisha woke me a couple of hours ago, saying that she thought she had heard howls. Kirsty's fast asleep, but I can see that Manisha hasn't slept since I relieved her. I think I've heard howls twice, but until I'm sure, I'm not going to wake Kirsty. I need her rested in case things go wrong tomorrow.

I'm scared. I'm scared that I'll die here in this holiday cottage tonight. I'm scared of the things running around outside in the dark. I'm scared that I'll be torn apart tomorrow in some dingy little pub in the middle of nowhere. But I owe it to the people who've died because of me. I have to understand these creatures if I'm going to stop them.

Anyway, they know what I look like. They know what I smell like. They can track me. I can't just run away like I did last time.

END GAME

Friday Morning

Kirsty showed Manisha and I the tracks in the mud this morning. They were here last night and made no effort to conceal it. She wanted to turn the tables and track them down. I talked her out of it eventually, saying that we had no idea of their strength or numbers. She countered by saying that she could make an estimated guess by the number of tracks.

Her option seems pretty damn appealing. Set a trap for them by the pub, be ready and kill them when they arrived. Free myself from the fear of being caught and the terror of dying at their whim. But that's not what we're here to do. I've set a goal for myself. I'm sticking to it.

Manisha wanted to break for London. She's afraid. I don't blame her. She's a 20-year-old kid. Kirsty and I convinced her to stay. I hope Manisha doesn't suffer for it.

We made a minor change in the plan. Kirsty and Manisha are going to stay closer than we originally agreed. If nothing else, if the things do attack, we stand a chance of surviving if we work together. It's all we have at this point, and I'm going to remain as optimistic as I can. I've posted yesterday's tapes to London. As soon as I finish writing this, the journal is going to London, too. Josh knows where to collect them if we're not in contact within a week.

I'm not a religious man, but right now I wish I was. God, be with us today.

LAST WORDS

Taped conversation from SoS29

SoS: I'm glad to see you decided to meet me again.

Second Speaker: Are you now?

SoS: Yes, of course. Why else would I be here?

Second Speaker: Lots of reasons. I'm a long way from trusting you.

SoS: I thought we'd been through this. Wasn't what we did to that thing proof enough? I'm sorry about misleading you about our numbers, but surely you can understand me trying to protect my friends.

Second Speaker: I can understand that. As for whether killing that thing being proof? Not really. Our enemies are ruthless. They'd quite happily sell one of their own out if it meant getting at us. So, where does that leave you and me?

SoS: Like I said, we want to help.

Second Speaker: We seem to be doing a pretty good job without you. What makes you think you can help us? Just knowing who we are and what we're doing doesn't qualify you. I know lots of humans who know who and what I am, and I sure as hell wouldn't take them with me to... correct a problem.

SoS: Yes, well, our point is that perhaps we can help you deal with the problem without too many people losing their lives. I'm sure you don't want that.

Second Speaker: You mean without killing people? Where's the sense in that? We leave people alive and they'll just start over again. We've learnt that mistake in the past. This time we have to shut the place down for good and we can't worry about any monkeys getting killed. There are just too damn many of you, and most of you serve him.

SoS: Serve who?

Second Speaker: The Worm.

SoS: Is that... the Devil or something?

Second Speaker: You really have no idea at all what's going on, do you?

SoS: Help me understand. I know some things. I know that something bad is happening at the power plant. I know there are things in there that aren't human. And I know that you've been trying to get rid of them. That's what me and my people do.

Second Speaker: People? You're a team? What are you, military?

SoS: Uh... no. I have a small group committed to the same ends as me... and you. But we're ordinary people... more or less.

Second Speaker: And you're their elder?

SoS: Um, yes, you could say that. I would prefer "manager" but elder will do, I suppose. Are you an "elder"?

Second Speaker: (Laughs) No, not by a long way. If I survive long enough, maybe. Still, it looks like we both have that in common. We respect our elders.

SoS: I'm not sure they always respect me, but we do seem to be able to work together. There's one thing that concerns me, though. We do what we have to, and we acknowledge that it sometimes means breaking the law. We don't believe in killing innocent people, though. We can't condone that.

Second Speaker: And just how do you define innocent?

SoS: The innocent are untouched by the corruption of the world. We can see the corruption. We try to deal with it: the walking dead, ghosts, vampires....

Second Speaker: Wait, you can see other things for what they are?

SoS: Is that a problem?

Second Speaker: Damn right it is. (Sound of chair being scraped back?) What in the Mother's name are you little man? Answer this carefully or I'll knock that grey-haired head off your shoulders.

THINGS FALL APART

Letter from Manisha to Joshua Talbot

Kirsty was suspicious from the start. I didn't pay any attention. I mean, she's a real paranoid bitch at the best of times, right? I didn't expect her to fly off the handle so soon. When we saw that the pub was closed, she wanted to abort and get away. Paul had already knocked and been let in, so there was nothing for it but to wait. The bug we'd put on him was just as good today.

Things went bad so fast, I didn't have time to think. But Kirsty moved, fast. We were sat in the car, listening in on the conversation, when suddenly she swore. I looked around and saw a man and woman moving toward the pub. Then I was seeing them that way, even though I hadn't switched it on. They were werewolves, both of them. The same ones I'd seen in the house.

"They're coming for Paul," Kirsty said. She was angry.

She scrambled out of the car, pulling something out of her coat before I had a chance to stop her. She had a shotgun and fired. The black haired man fell. His chest was a bloody ruin. It was horrible. The woman changed, becoming a massive thing like what I saw at the house. She ran right at us. I could have sworn we were both going to die.

Kirsty emptied both barrels into the monster and it just kept coming. Where the hell did she get that gun? I had no choice. I let the light out of me. One of my tricks. Kirsty yelled something and the monster staggered around trying to find us. It was howling in a way that made me want to run there and then. I didn't, though. Kirsty needed the light. Just staying was one of the hardest things I've ever done.

She flipped her gun around and brought its butt down on the creature's head. It roared in pain and she hit it again. Her gun broke, but the damage had been done. The creature collapsed and looked like a big dog.

Even as I let the light go, I saw Kirsty walk toward the man, who was struggling to get to his feet. She pulled a small gun and shot him twice, looking right in his face the whole time.

That's when I realized fog was rolling in. It wasn't natural. It couldn't have been. It was filling the car park. Kirsty and I looked at each other for a second when we heard a crash. The back door of the pub flew open and Paul ran out. He was terrified.

THREATS

Taped conversation from SoS29

(Loud noise. From outside?)

SoS29: What was that?

Second Speaker: Gunfire. Those friends of yours?

SoS29: I... I... don't know what you're talking about. I... I'm sure they wouldn't.

Second Speaker: You're lying. I can smell it. If this has anything to do with you, I'll kill you.

SoS29: Oh my God... he just... vanished.

Letter from Manisha to Joshua Talbot, continued

Paul screamed at us to get into the car and drive. Even Kirsty obeyed without question. She slipped into the driver's seat. Paul was getting into his own car when another werewolf came out of nowhere behind him.

Kirsty shot through the open window of our car. It was enough to save Paul's life. The thing's claws missed him and tore up the car. I tried to find the light again as I leapt out of our car and ran toward Paul, but it wouldn't come.

Paul shouted about it getting back, and suddenly the creature staggered away, as if something pushed it. Paul dove into his car and flew out of the car park.

I screamed at Kirsty to go as I ran to get back in, expecting her to follow Paul. I was wrong. She drove past me, straight at the werewolf. She slammed into him and crushed him against the wall of the pub. She crawled out of the wreckage, bleeding badly from a cut over her eye. One of her arms looked broken. But still, she pulled out her gun and emptied it into the trapped thing. Then we ran.

She made a fist with her good hand, put it in the pocket of her coat, punched through the glass of a car parked outside the pub, and told me to get in. She'd taught me how to hotwire a car before, and told me to get it right or we were dead.

I did it. We were on the road quickly. The fog was getting thicker and heavier. The cold air coming in through the broken window chilled us both. Kirsty

passed out shortly afterward. I headed for London and prayed that Paul was doing the same.

PREY

Transcription of message on Joshua Talbot's answering machine

"Josh, it's Paul. We need help. I don't know where Kirsty and Manisha are. I'm in my car. I'm lost in the fog and I think they're after me. God, it's getting thicker. I can't see. Shit! Shit! The engine just died.... I can't get it to start.

"C'mon, c'mon.

"Josh, we need you. We're in Suffolk near—

"Oh, God. Oh my God, no!"

IN MEMORIAM

From the Journal of Joshua Talbot

The funeral for the man we knew as Sixofwords29 was one of the most depressing events I have ever had the pain of attending. This happens too often. It should be me in that box. I'm the one who's supposed to die young, so why is it always others who die first?

Maybe I'm fated for something else. Maybe the survivors are the unlucky ones. Talking of survivors, Manisha was there with me in the rain, watching them put Paul's body in the ground. Kirsty's in hiding for the time being. A few of Paul's neighbors noticed her coming and going from his house and now she's wanted for questioning. Big surprise there. Manisha's refusing to tell me where she is, and that worries me. Paul seemed to keep her under control. Without him? I'm not sure I like to think about it.

It was a pretty bland service. His son spoke for a while, doing well for a kid in his early 20s, and his wife cried a lot more than I expected, given how acrimoniously they separated. Looking at her reminded me of why I don't let Penny get too close. One day, it'll be me in the ground.

It was a closed casket. Paul's body was in such a bad state when they found it. The police have it down as a

bad road accident caused by the fog. It all seems convincing enough, but I know better. The local farmers are up in arms about it. Not because a man is dead, but because they think their livestock is in danger if cars hit them. Callous bastards.

Irony isn't it? A man dies trying to save humanity and all people care about is their own bullshit. Paul annoyed the hell out of me sometimes, but he deserved better than this. He gave up pretty much everything, and now he's given up his life.

I can't carry on his work directly. There's too much linking him and me as it is, not to mention that my group has problems of its own to deal with right now. I've been in contact with some others and they've agreed to help. Manisha gave me her and Kirsty's relevant material at the funeral. All that's left to do is box it up and send it out.

See you soon, Paul.

Subject: SoS29

From: witness1

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

I regret to inform the list of yet another death. Sixofwords29 died two days ago, on the trail of what we believe were shapechangers. Stella142 will post more information shortly.

Many of you knew SoS29 by reputation and by his posts. Some of you met him in person. Indeed, some new members were introduced by him. This is a loss to us all. Many months ago, he suggested that the list numbers of fallen members be left empty out of respect. In memory of him, 29 will remain unused, as is now our custom.

Witness1

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: bookworm55

Subject: Re: SoS29

I have no words. He was a friend, a thoughtful and open-minded person, and a real asset to the cause. Rest in peace, my friend. You've earned it.



BON SPENCER '02

CHAPTER 6:

INTO HELL

*It shall devour the strength of his skin: even the firstborn
of death shall devour his strength.*

— Job 18:13

THE WILD HUNT

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: ticket312

Subject: Wolves

I know not everyone on this list reads every post that comes along. Those of you who do read this one — get everyone you can to read it. This is really important.

I don't think any of you remember Kayaker319. She posted here a few times, mainly about beast-men and her experiences with them, and then she dropped offline for a while. I talked with her a little off-list. Really short stuff.

Anyway, I got a note from her about two weeks back and she didn't sound good. I mean, not that you can tell over email, but she seemed like she was really close to a breakdown. At least as far as I could tell. She said she had some information and I needed to get it out there. She said she didn't have time to type it up, that she was after a missing partner, and she'd left what she had buried off the Blue Ridge Parkway. There were these GPS coordinates to find it. That's all I got. It sounds kind of mental, but on this list, what doesn't?

So I got a GPS tracker and drove six hours to the coordinates. I found six little mini-tapes, along with a

handwritten note: "Not everyone who hunts wolves is a hunter." I didn't know what that meant until I listened to the tapes.

There's stuff on them that we all need to hear. I'm posting the transcripts. For God's sake, read them to the end. Hope and pray for Kayaker319, and use the information she got us as best you can.

CRUMBLING

[TRANSCRIPT 1]

This is... this is an audio log of my attempt to track down my partner. He was a hunter like us. He didn't use hunter-net, so he didn't have a handle there. His name is Charles Rawlings, and he's... missing. Presumed "turned." It doesn't seem possible, but I think he's gone over to the enemy. Willingly.

The two of us went on our first hunt together a week ago. I mean, we'd started earlier, but a week ago was when we confronted that thing. A werewolf. It lived in a cabin. We came up on it when it was drunk, and... it didn't have much of a chance. He shot it several times and that was that.

It was late at night... and we knew there was a chance the shots might have been heard. So, we got set

to leave... or I did. He said he wanted to make sure he'd gotten rid of any evidence. I went back to where I left my car... but I had a bad feeling, so I stopped at the bridge and I waited to make sure he got out okay.

I...

I waited for him for an hour, and knew something had to have gone wrong. His car was still where he'd parked left it, where he and I walked the half-mile to the thing's cabin.

I went back to the cabin and he wasn't anywhere to be seen.

I looked inside and...the body had been skinned. Head to toe. I... I wanted to throw up, but couldn't. All I could do was get out of there.

It was... it was just like they described in the "Skinner" killings, that bunch of murders on the news. I've read a lot about them lately. What I saw was just like the others. When I got back and checked the reports, I found that... that the victims were all runaways, homeless or unidentified people. Could... could they have been werewolves? Or was our target... our victim... a werewolf at all?

I knew he wasn't human, but I guess he could have been anything that I've read about online. I relied on the word of my partner that it was a werewolf. I think that I saw him show fangs, maybe claws — but he never changed into an animal. I'm doubting myself completely here.

I now believe my partner was — is — mentally deranged. I don't know if he snapped with the stress or if he was off-balance from when I first met him. I never got any... warning signs about him. Maybe I'm the insane one.

I... I'm making this record of what happened, and I'll continue to record everything I find. If there's one thing I still believe, it's that Rawlings had the right idea when he said recording our discoveries would benefit someone after us. I only hope that... if I can't find my partner and bring him home, that whoever comes after me will be able to learn from this.

SKINS

I didn't try to contact Rawlings — or anyone else — for two days after finding the... body. I was afraid. When I finally got up the courage to try and reach him, he was unavailable. His receptionist wasn't working at his office. The answering machine said that due to a personal crisis, he'd be unavailable for an unspecified amount of time. The answering machine at his house didn't even say that much.

I don't have a hell of a lot to go on. I've tried staking out his house, but I just don't see any activity there. He must have taken his wife someplace. Maybe on a vacation.

So, while I'm waiting for him to come back, if he does, it's back to doing some more... reading.

The Skinner. He's like some kind of urban legend. Never hit the same town twice, and picked off people here and there. Nine victims — only nine victims that ever got found, I bet.

The first one was in '88. They didn't find a second until '93. They were so far apart, the cops didn't think they were related. But then there were more of them. One in '95. Two in '96. Another in '97, and then three in '98. Never the same place twice.

And... and like I said, they fit a pattern. The victims either didn't have any immediate family, they had left their families without warning and hadn't been seen for years, or they were completely unknown. It's entirely possible that they were werewolves. I... I find it very easy to believe that they were. None seemed to have been killed by stabbing, strangulation or anything that would require the murderer to be able to overpower them. Seems like normal people would struggle like hell out of fear.

In our last conversation, before we actually went after our target, my partner suggested that werewolves weren't born, cursed or infected... but made. He said something about a wolf skin that caused the change being the most realistic or... attractive way of becoming a werewolf.

I think he believed it. But maybe not that the skin had to be a wolf's. He may have decided that it had to be a werewolf skin.

People skin wolves all the time. Alaskan wolf hunters do it. Nobody thinks anything about it. Why wouldn't someone like Rawlings do it, too?

The answer... as near as I can figure, is that maybe it's too hard to find a werewolf that lives like a wolf — those are the ones that live in packs. The werewolves that live like people, even if they don't live "normal" lives — maybe they're easier to find and isolate. Easier to kill. That was the only thing going in our favor.

I'm left believing that the Skinner, the serial killer, was someone trying to re-enact whatever ritual makes a werewolf. Without the ability to hunt down a wilderness werewolf, the Skinner tracked down the human kind... or people he believed to be werewolves. Was he insane? He killed wolves and then started onto people? Was he one of us... imbued?

Whatever made him do... things like that... it must have gotten to Rawlings, too. I can't believe that it was Rawlings himself.

SIFTING

[TRANSCRIPT 2]

I guess this is my first update. I hate to say it, but I haven't got much of anything yet. Same message at his

office, same message at his house. Nothing. I even tried going up to one of his neighbors and pretending that I was having some kind of emergency marriage crisis, and I really needed to know where he was. Still nothing. All I got was some old bat telling me when her church had meetings. So fucking nothing there.

The cops don't seem to have had any more luck than I have. I don't know if that's a good thing or not. They've put a statement in the paper every other day, but it keeps getting moved farther and farther from the front page. Maybe it's because the editor figures people are getting less and less interested in hearing the same old "still no real leads, but we sure are trying" story. Or maybe it's just because people see it for the bullshit it is. They never caught the Skinner, and I guess people figure they never will. Sure makes it easier for someone to follow in his footsteps.

I started trying to find out who Rawlings was before all this. I'm no private investigator, so what I could come up with was basically not much more than just using the Internet. I knew his full name. That was a big help. Still, there's more than one Charles Arthur Rawlings out there, which just goes to show how difficult it's going to be to find him.

Rawlings is from Georgia originally. He was middle-class. Got his degree from Duke University. Pretty much went right into marriage counseling after that. Married not too long after college. I wasn't able to find out anything about his wife other than her name: Lisa Conyers Rawlings. If...

Please, keep your ears open for that name. I still don't know where she is. Rawlings always talked like she had no idea what was going on — like his wife wasn't "one of us." I don't know how close they really were, and since I don't think he could just out and out tell her what he'd been up to — what he did that night — I... I'm just worried.

They don't have any kids, which is... kind of weird. I mean, they're old enough, and they're conservative, and they went to church at one time. It's not something we talked about, but... I guess I just don't know many people his age that decide not to have kids. Maybe they couldn't.

I don't think Rawlings was much of an outdoors type. I mean, he wasn't out of shape, but he was more the kind to do some jogging than to spend a lot of time hiking or something. So that means... that probably means he didn't hunt when he was a kid. He probably learned to skin. He probably learned recently.

I ran some checks on disappearances, animal attacks — those kinds of things — comparing them to the various places Rawlings lived. It was a long shot, and it didn't pay off. Pretty unfair — life turns out to be like a horror movie in all the bad ways, but you never catch a break in a good way. I guess whatever his first encounter

with a werewolf was, it didn't make the papers. I guess that means nobody died — or was found.

I wish I knew just what his first encounter was like! Why the hell would it send him running to look up books about witches and werewolves, and why would it drive him to skin a man — a werewolf? What did he see that made it all so tempting?

And why the hell is he the only one? I mean, on hunter-net, you don't hear much about people who start to sympathize with the monsters. Maybe somebody talks their way through a situation instead of shooting, but that's it. How many more of us out there are being tempted? I just don't understand it. I looked at that skinned body.... I saw it lying there on the floor, and all I felt was sick. When I saw it while it was alive, I didn't admire it. I didn't want to be it. It was a monster!

I don't understand at all. But I have to if I want to catch up with him before... before anything else happens.

If it hasn't already.

REVELATION

[TRANSCRIPT 3]

Goddammit, I am such a fucking idiot. I...

I don't even know for sure he was one of us. I mean...

I don't know if Rawlings was chosen. I don't know if he ever got the call. When I described my first time, I remember that he kind of looked confused, but then just kept talking. I took it for one more of the things that we don't understand about the real world. We know so little about the things, why wouldn't my story sound strange, even to another one of us?

But he never told me about his own contact. He never explained just what set him after werewolves. I guess I wanted to allow him that much privacy. God knows the things we see... and do. He just seemed to know. He... he had a wife, for God's sake. Nobody told me monsters could live normal family lives. I mean, it doesn't make sense. I never figured he was one of them. But now....

FRACURES

I guess there might have been holes in his story from the beginning, if I'd looked for them. I've only ever worked with two others who confessed to being changed. They were the only ones I ever even met face to face. And talking on hunter-net — don't get me wrong, whoever's listening, it seems like the best thing we have going for us, but it's not the same. Some people like to be secretive, I guess, so they don't put themselves and their families at risk.

Right now, I understand how they feel.

But the point is that we don't really ask each other the hard questions. We don't want to make anyone

rely what they've seen and done. We just assume that we understand what each other has gone through. But what if that means we don't understand each other at all? I mean, is it possible that some of us are working with people who never heard the call, who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and who stumbled across other people who know? Are there others out there who hunt monsters even though they never got told to?

Come to think of it... that notebook Rawlings talked about, the one someone gave him — whatever the hell she was — it was supposedly all about werewolves. He never said there was any other kind of information in it. Nothing on ghosts or rots. Nothing but people that turn into animals. Maybe that's not too far-fetched. Maybe whoever did that research just specialized.

But we never really talked about anything else. I told him once that I didn't see too many rots in the city, like other hunters say they do. He said he didn't see the use of hunting other things —

Oh my God. He said he didn't see the use of hunting other things, "even if they were out there and we could find them."

He... he can't have gotten the call. How could he, if he could say something like that? I mean — we have to do something about all the creatures. That's... that's the whole reason we're here. And about not being able to find them —

Rawlings can't see. I kind of wondered about things he said. I thought maybe he missed things. That he had his nose in a book too often. I thought maybe he just didn't have the sight as strong as I do. But... maybe he never had it in the first place. All he had was guesswork and research.

Okay. When we were tracking down our target, he acted real funny. Not like Eric or Tom did. When we found the place where our target ate, we set up outside. We, uh, we pretended to be sketching the town, like for art class or something. And when the werewolf drove up and got out of his truck, Rawlings just... he said, "That matches the description. I think that's him." I looked at the guy that way... and there was no mistaking it. He was wrong.

But... but when I said, "Yeah, he's not human," Rawlings seemed... impressed. He asked me what else I could see, and I looked harder. I told him that the guy sort of had the look of an alcoholic to him. That he had blotched skin and a gut.

At the time, I... I mean, I've heard what some others claim to be able to do. I thought maybe Rawlings just couldn't see the way I could. But...

But I don't think he had the sight at all.

And then there's the marks. He never used them. He never once mentioned reading a message from another hunter in the code, or leaving one.

I... I put the mark, the one that means "Friends" on my car not too long after I was called. Like people put American flag stickers on their cars now. It just seemed like the thing to do. When I met Tom and Eric, they recognized it. Tom said, "Never hurts to advertise, does it?" And... he laughed.

Sorry. I should stay on subject. Tom and Eric both noticed the mark. Eric even said he'd probably put the same thing on his truck. Rawlings, though. I don't think he ever noticed it. I mean, we both met before driving to that cabin, but...

I feel like I'm really reaching here. Goddammit! What if he saw it and he thought it was just a band sticker or something? If he didn't recognize the mark, and he didn't have the sight, something had to be wrong. But — he knew. He knew the truth.

INFECTION

So... so what was Rawlings? I mean... what is he, if he isn't one of us? I don't know. I never looked at him with the sight. I was careless. I mean, he obviously wasn't a rot... and I don't think he's a ghost in a living body. We met during the day. Ghosts can't come out during the day, right?

Whatever Rawlings was... is... I think he started out normal. And like I said, he was never interested in anything other than werewolves. He had to have some connection to them.

Battery 275 mentioned... he mentioned that people who are bitten by a changer might be infected, that they could change themselves. Is that what happened to Rawlings? Maybe he thought I'd been bitten too, and that's why I was hunting werewolves.

God, it'd make sense, wouldn't it? If he thought Eric and Tom and I were all out looking for revenge... if he thought we were survivors, looking to kill the thing that bit us before... before... I don't know. I don't know what would happen next. I don't even know if I'm right!

I mean... I guess he could just be human. Just a lucky person. But he acted like we shared a secret or something, like we were related. I don't know. I thought he was talking about the imbued. That's why I believed him. That's why... that's why I never looked at him. So he must have thought we were alike, too. Whatever he figured made him different, he figured it happened to other people, that there were others out there like him. Just like I did.

And if... he was something else, either part monster or all monster, then... I told him so much. I told him about hunter-net. I told him I could get him on the mailing list if he wanted me to. I told him things about myself, about the rest of us... and now that he knows, who else does? Who gave him that notebook? Is he going to pass it on to someone else? Is he going to add everything I told him?

Jesus, the notebook. I don't even know for certain that he got it the way he said. This woman, just handed it to him? But... why would he make up something like that? If he just got the information himself, he could have said so. Why lie about it?

God, trying to figure out what he was thinking, I keep realizing that I was the same way. We compared notes because we each thought we had the right idea, that we were hunting monsters for the only reasons there were. But he wasn't one of us. It's... it's making me scared. I don't know what the Messengers or whatever are all about. I don't know if I was supposed to run into Rawlings. I don't even know what I'm supposed to do! (sobbing)

I... I'm sorry. I shouldn't be acting like this. I'm going to let you all down. (crying)

Please, I'm so sorry that I put you in danger like this. I... I'll bring him back. I will. I won't let this go. Please forgive me.

CONTACT

[TRANSCRIPT 4]

He lied to me. He fucking lied to me. He told me he got all his information from one of us. He told me he got it from someone who wanted him to use the information to defend people. Shit, no. He got his goddamn book from someone who wanted him to kill werewolves and wear their skins.

I met her.

She was one of them.

I'm... I'm going about this all wrong. And I guess I'm not being fair. Rawlings didn't actually tell me he got the notebook from a hunter. I just assumed that's where he got it, and he never corrected me. Or maybe I wasn't even making sense to him....

I woke up today and found this note shoved under my door. It said, "Rawlings is fine. He's doing well. You'll be able to visit him soon."

It said, "You're doing very well. Would you like to talk? Today? I'm afraid I don't have another copy of the notes I gave him, but we can chat in person."

There... there it was, like a date. In the park. In mid-afternoon. Broad daylight. I could tell right away that whoever wrote this note wasn't afraid of me in the least. I...

Oh God, I was so terrified. I still am. I mean, I'm still alive, but she knew — knows — where I live!

I had to go. She probably told him about the werewolf we killed — that he skinned.

I was shaking so hard. I threw up before I even left the apartment....

But I got there. I had my pistol in my purse. The one Daddy gave me when I went off to college. For protection. I didn't ever need it in college, but now.... I knew that if I shot her in public, I'd go to jail, and nobody



would ever believe me, but... it would be better than some of the things that could happen.

When I got there, I... I was kind of late. I was so nervous, I was looking all around with the sight — I guess I really hoped I wouldn't see anything. No such luck.

I could see her clear as day. It hurt to look at her. She was a wolf-thing, and her fur was all kinds of colors — brown and red and black, all in patches. And her eyes... it hurt to look at them. I had to shut my eyes tight, to clear my head, to see her the way she wanted me to.

And there she was, smiling at me.

The woman is white, about 5'9". Built like a runner: flat-chested. Sharp chin. She looked like she was in her 30s. Brown hair, in a braid, bangs. Some freckles. If you see anyone who looks like that, check her with the sight. If you can, take her down.

I don't think she really was one of us, even though she said so. She never said a thing about the call or about anything that'd make you think "Messengers." She just talked about her family like it was my family. I've never thought of hunter-net as my family.

Dammit, I'm doing this all wrong. Our conversation's on a separate tape. Sorry. I don't have access to anything that would let me put them together here. All I can do is keep buying tapes and mark them in order. Listen to what she says and decide for yourself if beast-people are our enemy. They may say that they start out as people, but I don't believe it.

She knows where I live. I don't think I can go home anymore.

[TRANSCRIPT 5]

Stranger?: "Hello. I was hoping you'd show up."

Kayaker319: "Oh, yeah? Why? So you wouldn't have to hunt me down?"

S: "I'm not saying that at all. I'm glad you decided to come. It takes the decision out of my hands. We have a lot to talk about."

K: "Yeah. Yeah, we do. Where's Rawlings? Where's the guy you gave that notebook to?"

S: "It's all right. We're watching him. He's going to be one of us now."

K: "One of you? What the fuck are you?"

S: "We're a family. We're the family on the outside, the ones who are going to be the future."

K: "The future? The future of what? The future of the human race? The future of the world?"

S: "Temper, temper. You don't really want to start a fight with me. You're still human, I'm afraid. I'm not. Not anymore."

K: "G... shit."

S: "That's right. So let's just talk. Like... girlfriends. All right?"

K: "I'm serious: What are you?"

S: "You've probably guessed already, haven't you? We're werewolves. We've earned the privilege to run in wolf skins by our own hand. We've passed the test. We're the future of our race, and we might just be the future of yours."

K: "What, you mean that you kill a werewolf and wear its skin, and you become one yourself? It's that easy?"

S: "(Laughs) No, it's not that easy. Nothing worth having is. That's why we don't just do it for you... for people like you, who are ready to come and join us. If you can earn it on your own, you're worthy. You'll change."

K: "What? I... Back up. 'People like me?' What the fuck do you know about people like me?"

S: "Ordinary people don't know we exist, because they don't want to. They can't handle it. If you showed them a picture of one of us, they'd never believe it was real. They'd claim you faked it. Of course, that doesn't mean we're not careful. There's no point in drawing too much attention. But an ordinary person wouldn't be able to stand knowing. They believe, deep down, that we exist — but the truth would make them panic. Except for a special few, that is. People who've been touched, like you."

KINDRED SPIRITS

K: "Oh, God. You know."

S: "(Laughing) Of course I know! I was one of you! I had the blood in me. I knew the truth about my family. I knew I was destined for something more. And I proved it! You see?"

K: "About... your family?"

S: "What else? Ah... but some people don't understand right away. Rawlings was one. He didn't know the truth about himself. He only suspected. You must be one of those as well. Don't worry, dear. It'll come with time. I have great hopes for you."

K: "Okay. Right. I'll... take your word for it. You say you were once one of 'us'?"

S: "Yes. Perhaps not directly, but... a kindred spirit."

K: "Right. And then... you got contacted. Someone taught you how to... how to change yourself."

S: "No. That was something I had to learn for myself. I had to learn what I was looking for, and how to achieve it. They left hints for me. They helped me make the... they helped me gather the materials, although I didn't know it at the time. I should have known it wouldn't be so easy without them watching."

K: "So... the werewolf Rawlings killed. You helped. You set him up in some way?"

S: "Yes. Oh, don't get me wrong — that was still his kill. His trophy. The danger was still there. But without us running interference for you... I'm afraid you never would have made it out of there alive. Two ordinary people against even a solitary werewolf? Impossible."

K: "You... sound awfully sure of yourself. All... all it takes is a silver bullet."

S: "That's the theory, isn't it?"

K: "What?"

S: "All you know is that silver kills them. You don't really understand the truth. You could find out. You could reach in your bag there, pull out your gun, and aim it directly at a vital organ — nothing else will do. But that's all you'd get to do before I'd change and pull you limb from limb."

K: Is that a threat?

S: Of course not. I'm just making a point.

K: So... if people like... me kill a werewolf, it's because people like you help? Because you're watching? Making it possible?"

S: "Sometimes. There aren't that many of us. There are... others who might help you kill one of our cousins. But they wouldn't let you go on your way afterward."

FACIONS

K: "Wait. I'm trying to understand here. First you say that you're a family on the outside... so you're not the main family or something? How many groups of you... your kind are there?"

S: "Curious little thing, aren't you? Hmm. Let's just say there are three. Two are at war. The third — we don't care a damn thing for their war. We're more interested in finding our own way, and in helping others come along. Trust me, we're not your enemies, not like the others."

K: "And they're the ones who hunt humans."

S: "Oh, yes. They've hunted you forever. Since the beginning of time."

K: "So, cave-paintings.... We once knew for certain you were out there."

S: "Yes. Humanity once knew. That's why you still have legends of werewolves. As I said, humans still know, in a way — but they don't want to believe it. They shut their eyes to the truth. Only your eyes are open. That's why we have a... an affinity for you. We were once alike. But the others — they don't know what it's like to be human. They don't even care."

K: "So, the other groups... how do they spread? Do they pick out their own chosen people and—"

S: "(Snarl) None of your goddamn business!

(We almost lose the signal; Kayaker breathing heavily.)

S: I... I mean.... (cough) They have their own ways. Believe me — you don't want to know. They're not willing to share their power with... stock like you. We're the only ones who are willing to show you how to take the power with your own hands, how to claim the blood-right for yourself."

K: "Why...? Why share? Why teach us how to kill werewolves, when you're werewolves yourselves?"

S: "Because each of us was taught by the First — and he wanted us to spread the gift. He wanted us to teach

you. He wanted you to take the blessing for yourself. And so do we. Oh, we were very quiet at first — we were never as bold as we've been with Rawlings, or as bold as I'm being with you. There used to be more tests. There used to be so many tests, and so few people judged worthy. But then, we were attacked. Many of us were lost. Not all of us. But then we knew... we knew we couldn't keep on like that. We had to recruit more...."

K: "Wait. Attacked? Who did you mean by 'they'? People like me? Like... like you were?"

S: "People? No. Only they could have hurt us the way they did. The others. The old families. Their war wasn't enough for them. They had to reach out and kill us, too."

K: "Other... beast-people?"

S: "Say it."

K: "Other... werewolves."

S: "Yes. Other werewolves. Threatened by our presence. Unwilling to share their power, their gift. Jealous of our success, and afraid that we would replace them. And they should be, because we will. It's only a matter of time. You understand, don't you?"

K: "I.... All I understand is that you killed a monster — monsters — so you could become one yourself. You didn't even hate what they were. You just wanted it for yourself."

S: "Of course I wanted it for myself! They don't deserve the gift — they deserve to die! You know they do! Why else would you have gone along with Rawlings? You didn't even know what you were, or that you could become like us, and you knew that werewolf had to die! And it was easy, wasn't it? Now you can do it again. You can do it again and get a skin of your own. You can be one of us, part of a true pack. I'll bring you in myself. You can call me 'big sister.' You'll be family."

K: "No."

S: "No? Aren't you listening to me?"

K: "I understand now."

S: "Understand what?"

K: "You.... You're scared of them. You're scared of the others of your kind. You're afraid that they'll catch up with you, and they're more powerful than you. That's why you let people like Rawlings try to work out the magic spell themselves — because if the others come and kill Rawlings — or me — they won't know you're responsible. You use others to protect yourselves. You're cowards!

S: "(Growl) Enough!"

(There's a crashing sound. The stranger's voice is deeper, more like a snarl, but with words in it.)

S: "We are not afraid of the others! This is our world now, not theirs! You'll see! Go to his house and see what he's hidden! Go see what he found! Then you'll know the truth — and you'll be back."

K: "No!"

S: "Yes! You're already one of us! You see us for what we are. You've been chosen! Then you'll come. You'll gather your skins and you'll come."

(There's nothing more than heavy breathing after this point, and then the recording stops.)

[TRANSCRIPT 6]

I don't have time to talk much. But like I said, I'm going to continue recording.

After I met the... werewolf, I risked going home, packed an overnight bag and started sleeping in my car. I was terrified that she'd find me again, and that was the last thing I wanted. I hope she hasn't followed me since.

I stayed in my car for three days. It wasn't easy. Around here, most of the places you can park all night without anyone saying anything are... well, they're on back roads, near the woods. I wasn't able to sleep much at all, and eventually I figured I wasn't any safer — I was just making it harder on myself. So, today I went home.

She'd been there again, although this time she'd left a note in the mailbox. There was a key ring inside, with the address of Rawlings' house and a code marked "for the alarm." Like I didn't already know where he lived.

Every nerve in my body is screaming "Don't go," that it's a trap — but I don't see what choice I have.

(This section of recording stops here. Then the following section begins.)

I wish I had a better solution than this, but I'm just not smart enough to think of anything else. I'm inside Rawlings' house. The key and the code both worked. There's no sign that anybody's been here recently. I checked the fridge and the expiration dates on things like the milk are past. There's one car in the garage. I think it must be his wife's, but there's no sign of her. There are dishes set out for cats — but no cats. Everyone's gone.

I'm more than a little freaked out. It's just a house. It's clean, for God's sake.

Found what must be the basement door. It's locked. The other key works. I don't know, I've seen too many movies. This is ridiculous.

Where's the light? Ah....

Holy shit!

This is it. There's... there's, like, an entire bookshelf here full of books. Covers a wall. And a desk, a chair, and... there are these notebooks on the desk.

Okay. There are three books on the desk. They're all hardbound journals, like you get in bookstores, but one of them's kind of beat to hell and another one looks... older. That one's got a title. "The Diaries of Zeerne," kind of burnt into the cover, like with a magnifying glass or something. Shit. I... Maybe "Zeerne" is some kind of name he's chosen for himself. Some kind of occult name. Maybe it's the notebook he was talking about.

Oh, fuck, that's not it at all. It's all filled with diagrams, and what look like poetry or lyrics. Words I don't know. Voras... Dratoesim.... What the fuck is this?

This is it. The beat-up one. This is the one with all the lists of, like, bookstores and book titles and authors. I don't really want to take this with me. That's what she wants. But I guess the list of stores might help me find Rawlings if he goes back to any of them.

Okay, the third one... is his journal. His personal notes. His handwriting is fucking terrible. Should have been a real doctor. Maybe he wrote about where he's....

The....

The last page is addressed to me. Oh my God.

"My Dear April,

"I apologize that I couldn't be here myself to talk things over with you. Unfortunately, I can't take that chance. There are windows of opportunity that remain open only so long, you see. They can't be delayed or postponed, any more than I can delay the moon from rising. And yet, I feel that I should explain a few things. That's why I asked my friend to give you the keys and security code, so you would come here and understand. I wanted you to see for yourself. After all, we are kin, and I think we are of the same mind when it comes down to it.

"You have no idea how difficult it is to actually find someone like us who isn't already under the thrall of the werewolves. It was something I first found out in my reading. They watch those with the potential and control them. Most of our kind live as slaves. That, or they have no idea they have the potential. Only a few of us get this kind of opportunity. I did, and now you have, too.

"I did have a friend who knew Eric Wyatt. That was no lie. When I started asking about the strange circumstances surrounding his death, I realized he was a werewolf hunter. And when I found out that not one, but three people went hunting a werewolf, that only one survived — and that she had not gone mad — I knew I had to contact you. I got your email address from Wyatt's computer, and I made contact. I don't regret it for an instant. In fact, I hope you will come to understand implicitly.

"At first, I had my doubts. Your experiences were quite unlike the ones I had. I wasn't sufficiently sure of myself yet that I dared tell you everything. I especially couldn't afford to mention the ritual itself until I was certain that you hadn't been compromised by the other factions. And I admit that your reference to some sort of "call" mystified me. I wasn't sure if I was somehow deficient. But that didn't prove to be the case at all.

"I'm not deficient. You are the exceptional one. It's a rare gift to be able to hear the voices from the other world, but that's what you have. You are guided in a way that I can only envy. I'll return to explain more once I'm ready, if you'll allow it. Don't worry. We'll keep an eye on you.

"As for me, I hope you'll understand that I don't really have words for what's coming. I can't distill down the ritual itself here. Nor can I really summarize all the things that led me to it. But I feel you should know that it is a sacred thing. A holy sacrament. I have no option but to accept. It was meant to be used by people like us. I suppose I don't even technically know for certain that it will work. But I have the utmost faith. It took me a long time to figure out just what my place in the world is. Now I believe it will be a homecoming of sorts.

"I worry that you might not understand yet, but I think you will. You have such potential. You have gifts that will serve you well in your new life, should you accept it. I would like it very much if you followed in my footsteps. Please use the books in my library. I won't be needing them for a while. Learn from what I've learned. Apply your own insights. This is a chance almost none of us receive. Remember when we first met, you told me you'd received a message from the spirits about understanding? There is no better way to understand a person than to walk a mile in his shoes. Or, if you'll pardon the play on words, his skin."

It's true. It's all true. He was never one of us. He never heard the call. He was... he was something else. Whatever he was, I don't know, but he thought I was one of them, too — just like I thought he was one of us.

How long did he know? Was he looking for books on werewolves even before he knew what he was? Why did these — these other monsters — why did they want someone like him? Do they — do they want us, too? Can any of us really make the change?

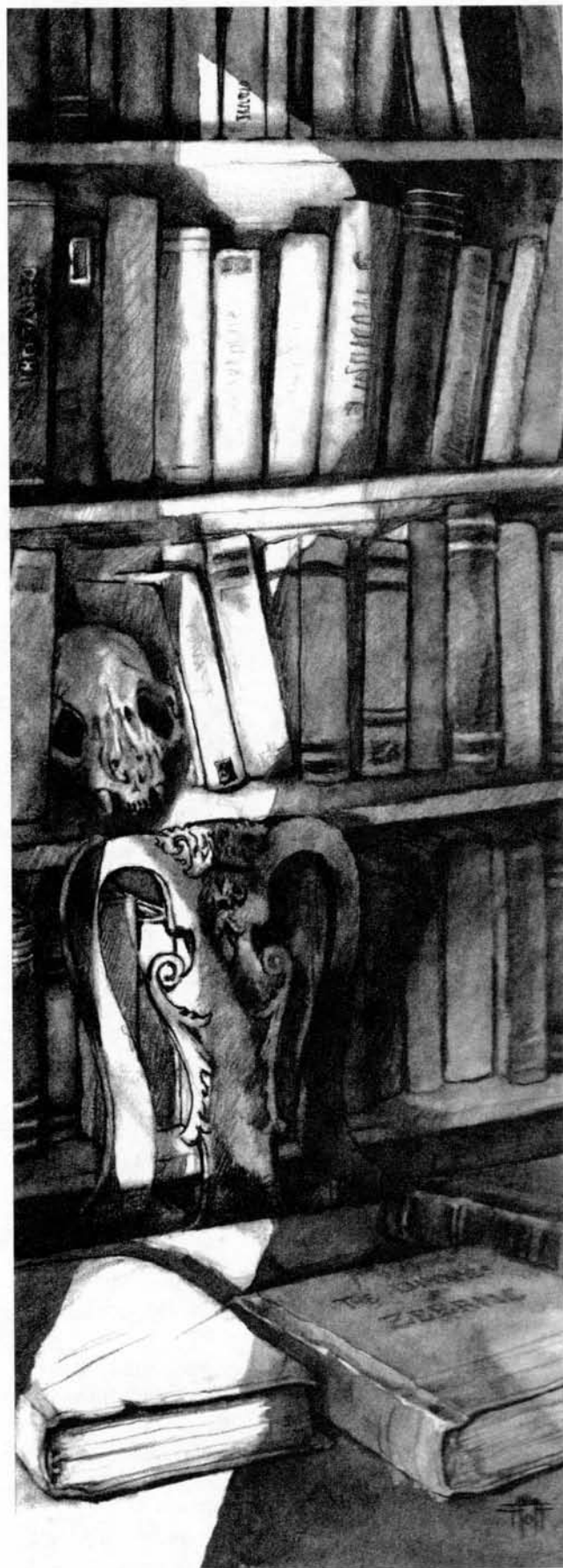
And if we wanted to... would it turn us into something like him?

These books. We need to look out for them. Maybe we can find the answers here. Titles... you may need to know the titles. "An Encyclopedia of Occultism." "Songs of the Waning Moon." "The," ah, "The Yellow Truths." "Die"... shit, that one's in German. I can't pronounce it. "The True Luper... calian Rites." "The White Curtain." "Trimesti... Trimestigus." "Chronicle of the Black"... Aw, fuck. This is all....

I don't care. I know I should be recording all this, but I just don't care. Somewhere in all this is the book that pushed him over the edge. It... It all has to burn.

Ticket312's notes: That's where the last tape ends. I tried checking back with her, but I got nothing. I made some calls, and I found a story about a house in the right place burning down. The residents — the Rawlings — were nowhere to be found.

If anyone out there runs across Kayaker, or anything related to all this, please post your information here as soon as possible. We need to know more about what she's learned, and more importantly we need to help her.



These things know we're here, and they have some kind of interest in us. We need to fight this however we can.

HUNT'S END

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: lark364

Subject: Kayaker319

Hi. I know it's been a long time since we last heard anything about Kayaker319. The woman who went hunting for her partner, a man who was trying to make himself into a man-beast. I tried to keep my ear to the ground, like everyone else, I guess. I almost forgot about it until this.

I hope nobody gets really upset with me, but I've got this friend in the FBI. We grew up in the same small town, dated in high school, and I still sometimes invite him over when he's got some free time. So we talk sometimes about his cases. And he described one out in the Pisgah National Forest that sounded like a ritual murder, I guess. Like some kind of Satan-worshipping, horror movie thing. After I got a rough location out of him and checked out the area.

I thought I was being really careful. I guess I wasn't, because on my third night, this woman shows up right out of nowhere, on a trail about a quarter-mile from the nearest campground. It wasn't hiking season, so no one else was around. She was looking at me like she expected to find me there.

I did what any of us would have. I looked at her. I mean, something like that happens, you expect it's a monster ready to kill you on the spot. She didn't look like a monster, but she didn't seem right, either. She looked a little sharp around the edges, just a little wild. I was ready to run when she asked me, "Are you looking for your friend?"

I don't remember exactly what I said. Something clever like, "What friend?" I guess. And she said, "The woman who was tracking down the skinner."

I nearly freaked out. I remembered that on the transcripts, Kayaker said something about this woman werewolf approaching her. I tried to remember what she described about the woman, but couldn't. (I looked it up later. They weren't the same. This one was blond, and younger.)

Anyway, I asked her how she knew about that, and she told me it was the sort of thing that "her people" paid a lot of attention to. Then she reached into her pocket. I went for my gun, but she spread her hands to show me that she wasn't armed. She set this thing down on the ground, and backed off. "This is for you," she said. "It's all right. You deserve to know what happened." So I came forward to pick the thing up, keeping my gun out.

It was one of those micro-tapes. Unlabeled.

I guess the look on my face must have been something even at night, because this woman just said sadly, "I'm sorry." She started backing off like she was leaving. I lowered the gun and called after her. I asked her to wait, that I had questions.

Wrong thing to say, I guess. She tensed up and gave me this look. "What do you want from me? Do you want to ask me questions about my people?"

I kind of waved the tape at her and said, "She really wanted to know about you."

"So did he," she said. "What were her reasons? The same ones that brought you here with a gun?" She said something like that, anyway.

I tried to explain, but it just set her off. "You want to know about them? They're our family. I've been in love with one since I was a girl. I'm going to marry him, even though I'm going to sit up every night praying that he comes home, begging for him not to get killed. What do you want to hear? Do you want me to tell you things that make you his enemy?"

There was nothing I could say to that. She just gave me this proud look, turned and left.

I almost started after her, but I got this real bad feeling. It felt like the whole forest was watching me, like I was prey.

So, here's the tape. I tried to type it up like Ticket312 did. I hope it helps answer some questions. I'm just sorry it all came out like this.

THE RITUAL

[Recording begins.]

It all has to happen tonight. The books say that all the skins have to be taken under the same moon. It's the half moon, same as when we killed that werewolf and Rawlings took its skin. The notebook he left me, his journal... it was all in there. I don't know if he realized he was leaving me a trail to follow when he decided to leave me that letter. Maybe he expected me to show up tonight. Maybe he's farther over the edge than....

I need to focus or I'm going to get myself killed.

I'm at a campground in Pisgah National Forest. This is one of the weekends when they close the park to campers. The rangers are sure to have gone home. I didn't have any difficulty slipping in. This is the place mentioned in Rawlings' notes as the ideal site. Apparently, there have been no sightings of so much as a large dog in the area. This is the half moon he needs. It has to be tonight.

I haven't seen his car, but that doesn't mean anything. There are all kinds of places to park out of sight, especially at night.

I... I don't know where his wife is. She isn't important to the ritual. She might not be here. She

might not know. She might not be alive. I don't know anything about what he's thinking right now — only that he wants this thing so bad it's taken him over.

[She doesn't say anything for a while.]

Shit. I might be lost. God damn it. I can read the map with my flashlight, but there's not enough light to make sure I'm on the right trail.

[She stops talking again. She's walking the whole time. I hear brush and tree branches being pushed aside.]

I... I hear something....

It's like chanting.

[She starts moving faster. If I turn up the volume all the way, I can hear the chanting. Sounds like just one person.]

Oh, shit...

Rawlings!

[I can hear the chanting clearly in the background now, even without the volume all the way up. It doesn't stop.]

Rawlings! It's me! Don't do this! For God's sake, don't!

[The other voice — "Rawlings" doesn't say anything I recognize. It's like a foreign language, like German maybe. He's chanting faster and faster.]

Rawlings! Charles! Listen to me! You have to sop! For the love of God!

[The chanting gets louder, like she's getting closer or maybe he's shouting. Then he howls. Not like a wolf's howl, but like a man imitating a wolf.]

Charles! Where's your wife, Charles? Where is she?

[He yells something I can't understand.]

Stop!

[This is hard to get straight. There are several sounds at once: a snarl; a shriek and three gunshots, about a second between them. There's some crashing, the sound of something being hit, and then I don't hear anything but some heavy breathing until Kayaker speaks again.]

[She sounds shaken] It's... done. I... I've shot Rawlings with silver bullets. He came at me... with his teeth and nails. I think he believed he was transforming, but he didn't. He never changed. He's lying here... wrapped in... these skins.

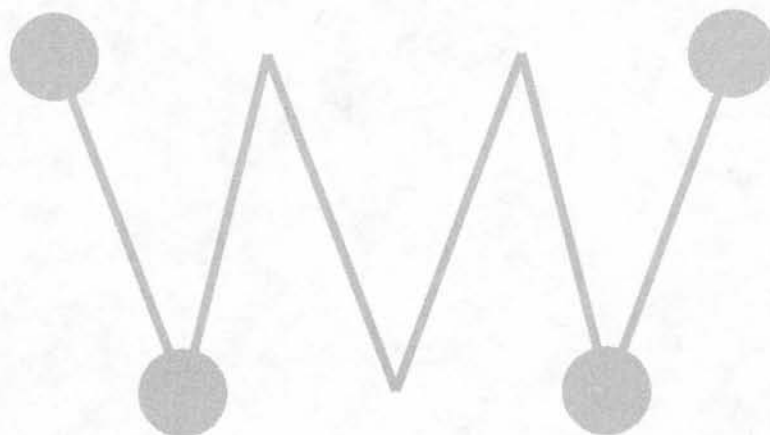
I think there's... still time. I have to get everything together. Burn it all.

No.... [Whispering] They're coming. It's too late.

I... I don't have any choice. I'm going to have to reason with them. Maybe they'll be the true-bloods, and they'll understand that I was trying to help....

Shit. I... I have to get rid of this recorder. They'll kill me if I have it. Oh, Jesus....

[Recording ends.]





CHAPTER 7: RULES AND STORYTELLING

For jealousy is the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance.
— Proverbs 6:34

WEREWOLVES: THE TRUTH

Jeremy Sutton pushed his wet hair out of his eyes and for the hundredth time that evening wondered what the hell he was doing out in the rain, instead of sitting in front of the TV with a beer in his hand. He had to be insane. He glanced at the sign on the wall again. A seemingly random collection of lines and dots that inexplicably shouted “man-beast” to him. Yeah, he was insane all right.

He shifted position, trying to ease the growing numbness in his legs as he crouched behind a dumpster. This was damn stupid. And yet, he was determined not to move until he’d seen something more than that sign — anything that suggested what was going on in the building he watched. Despite the rain. Despite the cold. Despite the fact that he was an idiot who didn’t know what was good for him.

And then the door opened. Sutton let out his breath slowly, daring a peek. One guy. In a suit. Rich looking bastard. Arrogant. Sutton dipped back down behind the dumpster and gathered his wits for another look. This time, he’d look the other way.

On a count of three. One, two...

Sutton felt a wave of panic come over him. The urge to run was almost overwhelming.

“It’s a changer. An animal pretending to be a man,” he thought desperately. He tried to retain his sense of reason, as if accepting the mere possibility of the creature’s existence meant standing up to it.

And in that moment, Sutton knew he was in way over his head.

For millennia, humanity has been afraid of the wilderness, of the isolated places where civilization doesn’t reach and predators make weaker creatures prey. There’s a reason for humanity’s fear. There’s a reason why the people of the World of Darkness huddle in cities and hold back the night with artificial light. There’s a reason why they build thick walls around their homes and purge their streets of trees.

Once, they were the prey. Werewolves and other changing beasts considered the world their own and hunted humans like animals, culling them like sheep. People don’t recall that time, but somehow they remember it deep down inside, on a subconscious, instinctual level. And they can’t cope with the concept. They block it out and find false security in the artificial shelter they’ve created for themselves. They unwittingly lie to themselves and believe they are at the top of the natural order.

Hunters are different, however. Although once just like everyone else, the imbued have been reminded — perhaps forcibly — that monsters exist and stalk the world, that humanity once was and still is a prey animal. Whereas other people ignore and hide from the truth, hunters are “blessed” with a comprehension that is mind-numbing to anyone else. Whatever strength or protection the Messengers grant, it keeps hunters from abject panic in shapechangers’ presence. Whereas other humans are

overwhelmed by defense mechanisms and run or turn a blind eye, the chosen are able to stand, see and reason. That resistance doesn't stop the imbued from being afraid, though. A looming, fanged killer is still a looming, fanged killer. A hunter simply retains his faculties in circumstances where other people lose their wits.

But what are these monsters that treat humans the way modern people treat wild game? Why do they walk as men, and what are their goals? Read on, and you'll learn all you need to know. This chapter gives you the **Hunter** rules, references and advice you need to make your portrayal of werewolves and other werecreatures vivid and intense.

PLAYERS

If you're a player, not a Storyteller in your game, please stop reading here. While it's hoped that you have enjoyed the previous chapters, which show ways in which your character could discover and interact with beast-men, what follows is for the Storyteller's eyes only. Reading any further will only spoil your own enjoyment.

WHAT THEY ARE

Werewolves in the World of Darkness are not quite the ravaging man-beasts of movies and legends. They're a race apart, related to humanity and natural wolves but distinct from them as well. They can assume different physical forms, ranging from man to wolf, and including various combinations between.

Their differences from humanity extend further than the fact that they are a physical mix of man and beast, however. Werewolves tend to harbor a burning rage, their predatory instincts focused into a fury that they turn on their enemies, whether rival beasts, people who inflict harm upon the world, or creatures that seek to destroy the Earth. Harnessing this rage makes these beings amazingly fast and strong, and they can heal at a phenomenal rate. Indeed, most can shrug off a gunshot wound within a minute or so.

And yet, werewolves are as intelligent as any human being, and they fight with reason, cunning and tactics. Their tendency to work in groups called packs makes them frighteningly effective as combatants, and as a combat force. A group of hunters working together may hope to take down one or *maybe* two werewolves, but probably not a whole pack. Perhaps even more daunting is that these shapechangers combine human intelligence and deceit with a wolf's understanding of the natural world, dominance and submission, and a casual propensity for violence. Although the creatures can think and plan like humans, any sense of human compassion or mercy can be absent when it comes to the kill.

Surprisingly, these raging beasts also have a spiritual aspect and regular dealings with a spirit world they call the Umbra, a shadow of the real world. When hunters see werewolves "vanish" into thin air, the beings actually "step sideways" into this spirit realm. Hunters are unable to see there or follow, being inhabitants of the physical world alone, so werewolves simply seem to fade from existence.



Werewolves believe themselves to be partially creatures of this other world, and it is the source of their spells, which are taught to them by the denizens of that realm.

Unlike the ferocious werebeasts of legend, werewolves don't reproduce by spreading their infection through their bite. Instead, they breed with a type of human or wolf that already carries the shapechanger bloodline. Werewolves can be born of humans or wolves who carry this dormant lineage. A mating between a werewolf and a human or wolf produces the best chance of birthing a new full-blooded werewolf, for pure bloods are born only occasionally. If they bred more easily, the world might be overrun with them by now.

Werewolves tend to congregate in groups that work and live together, and which call themselves septs. The majority of septs make their homes in the countryside, although some dwell in cities. Most septs have a particular holy place in or near their residence where they venerate the inhabitants of the spirit world. Some groups of werewolves keep families nearby that haven't developed pure blood for breeding and support purposes.

MOONLIGHT AND SILVER

How true are the various legends that surround werewolves? Well, we've already established that they don't spread their condition by their bite. A werewolf bite is savage, painful and often lethal, but not infectious.

Do they shift into their "wolfman" form under a full moon? No, that particular piece of superstition is inaccurate, and liable to get a hunter killed if he thinks it's safe to go out under a new moon. The moon does affect werewolves, however. Their ability to change forms and use spirit magic is driven by the burning anger they feel over the corruption of the pure, natural world by humanity and other forces. This anger rises and falls depending on the phase of the moon. Their fury is often at its peak during a full moon, which is one possible explanation for the legend that has sprung up about the time of their transformation.

Are werewolves vulnerable to silver bullets? Yes. In fact, all forms of silver are inimical to these beings, to the point where they are hurt merely by its touch. Weapons made of silver are particularly deadly and feared. Werewolves go out of their way to conceal this fact from other creatures, and the only way a hunter may have of testing the theory is trying it firsthand in combat. Not only is that foolhardy at the best of times — if a werewolf confronted with silver isn't killed outright, it certainly kills its attacker — doing so also means gathering enough silver to make an effective weapon. That's no easy task for any hunter on a budget.

ORIGINS

Where do werewolves come from? Not even they know for sure. While werewolves have existed alongside humanity as a separate species since prehistory, they have no way of knowing exactly how they came to be. Werewolves don't live much longer than humans, and

most die young as nearly all warriors seem to. They preserve legends of animals and humans being combined to make the Earth's chosen protectors, but they have no way of knowing whether these stories are true. Although an inquiring Visionary might seek to comprehend the origins of werecreatures, she is hard pressed to find any accurate information — even from the beasts themselves.

WHAT THEY WANT

As mentioned previously, werewolves venerate the denizens of the spirit world. They ultimately believe themselves the servants of a great mother spirit of the planet whom they call Gaia. They base their lives on the assumption that this mother spirit commands them to protect her from harm and corruption.

Werewolves identify all forces of corruption and entropy with the name "the Wyrms" and tend to blame everything from pollution to environmental damage to human sexual perversion on the Wyrms' insidious influence. They seek to fight Wyrms-inspired phenomena and Wyrms-tainted beings wherever they perceive them,

HUNTERS AND THE SPIRIT WORLD

You may have noticed that very little is said here about the spirit world that werewolves sometimes visit. There's good reason. From the moment of the imbuing, hunters are barred from the spirit world. Something inherent to their new existence or awareness keeps them in the physical world alone. A werewolf cannot carry a hunter with her into the spirit world. None of a werewolf's spells take a hunter into the spirit world. Nor can any magic item. The Messengers, for reasons best known to them, may want to keep hunters focused on this world; the imbued cannot be taken into the spirit world by any means *whatsoever*.

Furthermore, second sight and observation edges such as Witness or Discern do not allow hunters to see into the spirit world. Once a werewolf has gone beyond, it's gone from hunters' awareness until it returns to the physical world.

As an optional rule, if a werewolf uses a trick from the spirit world that affects the physical world, a hunter may glimpse the werewolf when power is used, assuming she has second sight active. The creature appears hazy and only for the trick's activation or duration, whichever makes more sense. Hunters are unable to use any edges against such otherworldly werewolves.

(Perhaps the only exception to all these rules regarding the spirit world applies to the infinitesimally few Hermits out there who have manifested the Transcend edge. See *Hunter Book: Hermit*, p. 90.)

whether the shifters' suspicions are correct or not. Hence, the kinds of attacks on various factories and power plants that Sixofwords29 investigates in previous chapters. Werereatures' goal is to return the planet to its ideal natural state, unblemished by the scars that technology, pollution and humanity have left.

An admirable goal, you might think. Wrong. Saving the Earth is far from the same thing as saving humanity. As far as the majority of the werewolves are concerned, people as a whole are pawns of the Wyrms. Many believe that if humans were culled — or even largely wiped out — the battle for Gaia would be all but won. Indeed, many ages ago in the very age when man was still prey, werebeasts did exactly that. With no heroes to protect it, humanity was utterly defenseless against werewolves' fangs and claws, and untold numbers died in purges.

Now, as the World of Darkness spirals ever deeper into chaos, despair and perhaps The End, the werebeasts grow bold again. Humanity throngs ever thicker on the face of the Earth. Some werewolves feel it's time for a second great culling. Others are simply casual in their disregard for human life. If a person dies under their claws while they seek to destroy some corrupting spirit or entity, so be it. There are so many humans that the death of one or a few is inconsequential.

Few hunters are prepared to stand by and let such a callous slaughter of people go unanswered.

WHAT THIS MEANS

Werewolves' ideal of "fighting against corruption" is pretty nebulous. How does it actually manifest in human-level terms that hunters understand? Mainly, it comes down to property damage. The most blatant signs of "corruption" that humanity spreads are the towering office buildings, cookie-cutter suburban sprawls, belching factories and ubiquitous shopping malls that proclaim modern mankind's presence. For reasons best known to themselves, werewolves take particular exception to some structures over others and do their best to destroy them. Sometimes, it's a building under construction. Sometimes, it's one that's been standing for years. The only factor that might seem to be held in common is a bad pollution record or the destruction of an area of natural beauty.

This destruction and loss isn't measured just in money, but in human lives: employees and security staff, innocent bystanders, visitors and anyone else who happens to witness an assault. Why have these attacks not inspired outrage by now? The whole thing has been hushed up by monsters in positions of power to keep their existence a secret. After all, if werewolves were revealed to the masses, vampire or ghost puppet masters would be equally jeopardized by any witch-hunt that arose. Or, werewolves' crimes against humanity go unrecognized because mankind's own natural defenses against the supernatural kick in. People don't remember an attack by werewolves. They remember an attack by feral dogs, a murder spree by a serial killer or a

mentally ill person having a psychotic episode. Or they don't understand what's happened at all. The human mind simply cannot bear the truth, and the facts become blurred, misunderstood or forgotten. Hunters, however, with their awareness of reality and Herald-granted ability to resist supernatural fear, may seek justice.

Corporations and structures aren't the only possible targets of werewolves' wrath. Some creatures root out the corruption at the source and may strike at significant individuals within a company, or at politicians if they promote infection as werewolves perceive it. Maybe a town councilman campaigns for the location of a landfill nearby, or a public-service group insists that purifying chemicals should be pumped into a water source. Werewolves tend to consider these individuals "tainted" and the cause of further corruption. Some of these people might have the best intentions at heart or may actually be in league with the Wyrms and appear wrong to second sight. It doesn't always matter how truly "evil" an enemy is to enraged werewolves. They seek to kill or destroy him for their own purposes.

So, if you think werewolves are fanatical eco-terrorists with an animalistic twist, you're part of the way there. Werewolves also have a strong spiritual side, they maintain close relations with extended families, and they harbor a deep desire to cherish and protect the natural world. They are not one-note bad guys who break shit. Their values can be understood. Even their methods can be sympathized with, and whether their methods are extreme or exactly what's called for is up to each hunter. The bottom line is that these beings have their own complicated needs and motivations, which, if given more than a superficial reading, are quite understandable.

THE BIRTH OF A WEREWOLF

The majority of werewolves are born as normal human children. For all intents and purposes, they're just that. Only as they approach puberty do problems arise. They become more surly and uncommunicative — even more so than the average teenager. Other children start to become uncomfortable in their presence, sensing the predator emerging. The burgeoning werewolf becomes aggressive and angry, and often he isolates himself.

Then bad dreams start as the spirit world reaches out to the young person to expose him to his heritage. Finally, in one moment of blind rage, the youngster undergoes his first change, revealing his werewolf nature.

Soon after the change, other werewolves arrive to collect their newly changed brother. Sometimes, other werewolves are informed by the youth's family members, who have raised the child on the creatures' behalf. Sometimes, existing werewolves are told about the newcomer by spirit-world entities that watch over the child. Once the new werewolf is found and put somewhat at ease, he is taken to live with others of his kind and is trained in their ways. To the mundane world, these adoptions can

WHAT THEY THINK OF HUNTERS

So, what do werewolves think of these strange humans that stand firm and occasionally strike back? As a race, shapechangers have yet to really notice. Werewolves have been around since the dawn of time. They know all there is to know about humanity, or so they think. Most of them have yet to encounter hunters.

One reason for this oversight or misunderstanding is that werewolves perceive nothing unusual about hunters. The imbued seem perfectly normal until they activate edges with *overt* effects, or until hunters are perceived to be obviously resistant to the supernatural fear that clouds most humans' minds. Even then, werewolves don't understand what hunters are. If anything, changers assume these people are werewolf relatives — those who carry the blood and who are similarly immune to "the fear." Or maybe hunters are fellow shapeshifters who have yet to undergo their first change and who are still unaware of their own heritage.

For young werewolves, ones who have undergone the first change in, say, the past 10 years, facing a hunter can be a disturbing experience. Many imbued are powerful or cunning enough to be a problem for a young werewolf. Hunters can interfere with sabotage efforts or witness events that a werewolf would rather went unobserved. Not to mention that hunters can pose a significant threat if they work together as a group. But can such a beleaguered changer really go back to his colony and ask for help? There's no glory in killing an ordinary human, and once a hunter is dead there's no evidence that she was anything other than a normal person. Reputation is very important among werewolves, and damaging it to ask for help in dealing with mere humans is unthinkable.

Thanks to these social implications, many encounters with hunters simply go unreported in the werewolf community. Even shifters who come across the imbued and successfully persuade their elders that such things exist are patted on the head and told that they just failed to recognize a wizard, a leech's blood slave or some other long-established denizen of the world.

And even if the werewolf community does slowly become aware of hunters, some are likely to view the imbued in much the same way they do any offense against the natural order: as a sign of spreading corruption. Others may regard hunters as new, if uneasy allies in their struggle for a purified world. After all, hunters can prove just as interested as werewolves in destroying such obvious cancers as vampires and the walking dead. Maybe the two can find common ground. But the question is: When might hunter-werewolf allies become at odds over what they believe is best for the world and humanity?

See "Building Better Monsters" in the **Hunter Storytellers Handbook** (p. 47) for more advice on how to understand werewolf perception and "understanding" of hunters.

look like kidnappings or suspicious disappearances, although police investigations never shed any light on the matter. Hunters, with their ability to perceive and cope with shapechangers' existence, might be more successful.

Werewolf organization is not what it once was. Whereas shifter numbers used to be sufficient to find all first changes, they're so few now that unchanged werewolves can go unnoticed or forgotten. Perhaps the parents know nothing of their child's heritage, spirit-world watchers desert their post, or werewolves' war with the Wyrms precludes them from gathering a newcomer. With no one to guide him, a solitary young werewolf often gives in to his feral instincts and goes on a rampage — perhaps thereafter existing in confusion, frustration and fear for years. Such rogues can be the focus of hunters' imbuing and immersion in the supernatural world.

While werewolves are never human, many live a human life until their first change. They understand human society and how it works. In human form, they can move freely among other people as if they were normal themselves. Hunters who seek to open a dialogue with these beings can play off that mutual origin, using it as common ground and the basis for other shared beliefs or values, even if other hunter and werewolf experiences are as similar as night and day.

OTHER BIRTHS

Not all werewolves are born of humans. Some are born among normal-seeming wolf packs in the few places left in the world where such animals run wild. There, future werewolves grow as normal cubs until they reach sexual maturity at a few years of age. Then, they start challenging other wolves in the pack. Some are successful and rise to become pack alphas. Others fail and are driven out to become lone wolves.

Whatever happens, these feral creatures eventually experience a sufficiently stressful situation — an encounter with human game hunters or a struggle for turf with another pack or prey animal — that they undergo the first change. From that point onward, it's clear that the beings are not normal wolves. They can assume human and other forms! They have to deal with a sudden influx of reasoning ability that totally transforms their relationship with their packmates, just as human-born werewolves have to deal with new animal instincts. Some packs do their best to drive out a werewolf, sensing that it is no longer one of them. Others sense that the werewolf is more powerful than they are and submit to it as pack alpha. Sooner rather than later, other werewolves find these "feral-born" and teach them about their existence and new life.

Unlike human-born werewolves, wolf-born ones have little ability to pass as human. While they have the right looks in human form, they have no comprehension of the subtleties of human interaction and are noticeably rude, direct and odd in their manner and thinking.

JUST SO WE'RE CLEAR

No one who carries the werewolf bloodline is imbued. A hunter cannot have a blood parent, grandparent, uncle, aunt or child that is a werewolf or that is werewolf kin. The Messengers simply never choose anyone with such close ties to the supernatural.

This proscription also applies to sexual interaction with a werewolf. (Given that werewolves are living beings that can assume human shape, it's possible for other people to have sex with them.) A hunter cannot become pregnant by a werewolf, nor can he impregnate one. Perhaps the fact of being imbued precludes the supernatural from perpetuating in this way, or the Messengers do not allow the imbued to achieve a lineage with monsters.

The point is, no one with such physical ties to shapechangers can be imbued. They cannot even become bystanders.

A third breed exists, as well: those born of two werewolves. These creatures are rendered disfigured and sterile by their unnatural birth. They are raised in the company of werewolves, and while they have some understanding of both human and wolf society, they don't quite fit into either.

THE BREEDS

The birth form of a werewolf influences more than just its socialization. It has a profound affect on thought processes, capabilities and role in werewolf society.

HUMAN-BORN

Werewolf society is dominated by the human-born. They are by far the majority, and they wield that influence over their brethren. Werewolves as a whole therefore tend to behave in more human-like than animal fashion — holding gatherings to discuss issues, preserving legends through oral and written traditions, and debating courses of action rather than immediately and unilaterally resorting to violence. That is, they tend to behave in human ways until they lose their temper.

Human-born are by far the most likely to agree to communicate with hunters who approach them. They can even identify with hunters' predicament to a degree (assuming such open lines of communication can be achieved with the chosen). They too were plucked from a normal life and dropped into a war in which they didn't ask to participate. They also go through a period of struggle to come to terms with what's happened to them and with the new knowledge they have. It's essentially a false link, though. The human-born usually have the resources of a whole community and the passed-down knowledge of generations to help them adapt. Hunters have none of that support structure.

Human-breed werewolves do not regenerate damage in their human form. One well-placed shotgun blast

can actually kill a human-born werewolf while she's still in human form.

WOLF-BORN

The wolf-born are a dwindling minority in werewolf society. As their race increasingly upholds human ideals such as politics and discussion, the "feral-born" feel increasingly marginalized by the direction their kind take. This alienation creates problems, because the wolf-born favor direct solutions over debate and involved plans. If they believe something is wrong and needs to be dealt with sooner rather than later, they act without thought for long-term consequences. They also show less compassion and sentimentality than the human-born. Existence as a wolf leaves no room for such perceived weakness. Obviously, such forthright belief and action leads to conflict with other werewolves who do defer to talking and planning.

Hunters are extremely unlike to encounter wolf-born who are amenable to dialogue. These werewolves are the most likely to mercilessly kill humans, whom they believe are the root of the world's problems. To many wolf-born, hunters' resilience and edges are clear signs of corruption. Letting such people live, let alone talking with them, is unthinkable.

Wolf-breed werewolves usually have no technological skills and cannot regenerate damage while in their pure wolf form. They are rarely comfortable in human shape, although they are physically indistinguishable from their human-born cousins in that form.

WEREWOLF-BORN

Changer society at large regards the werewolf-born with disdain. Werewolf mating with werewolf is against their fundamental laws, which exist to prevent such cross-breeds from arising. Each and every "mule," as werewolf-born are often called, has some major deformity — a twisted arm, hunched back, complete lack of body hair or some sort of mental disability. They are derided and treated as second-class citizens as other werewolves regard their distortion as a sign of the corruption that shifters fight as a whole.

Given their outcast existence, werewolf-born are actually surprisingly amenable to approach by open-minded hunters who seek to understand these beings. Estrangement from mainstream werewolf society and bitterness over their lot makes these beings willing to accept the friendship of others. Whether such a relationship can prove useful to a hunter is up for debate. A werewolf-born, unlike a vampire, wizard or one of the walking dead, was never human in any way. It may look human (although its disfiguration carries over into human form as well). It may even have lived among people, but it was never a human child and has no idea what it means to be truly human. That gulf in understanding may be too much to bridge. Concepts of attending school, struggling with teen angst or dating may elude the being. And if any member of the werewolf's community learns

MMM...TASTY

Contrary to legend, most werewolves do not eat human flesh. They quite happily tear chunks out of any hunter who opposes them, but they don't actually eat them. Consuming the flesh of humans drives werewolves mad, slowly but thoroughly, and their society prohibits doing so.

Like all prohibitions, this one is occasionally broken. A maddened werewolf, intelligent yet deranged, that stalks humans through city streets and eats them would make a perfect antagonist for a hunter group, especially one bent toward violence against the supernatural.

System: Any werewolf that eats human flesh gains a derangement from the **Hunter** rulebook or any of the creed books. Anytime the creature is in combat with a human, a successful Willpower roll, difficulty 8, must be made or the beast makes bite attacks in an attempt to feed again. If even one such bite succeeds, the creature gains another derangement. Only one ailment can be gained per meal (encounter with humans), even if the werewolf eats several people at one "sitting."

that it has spoken with "one of those strange humans," the outcast is likely to be pressured into driving off or killing the hunter, under threat of suffering the same fate.

The werewolf-born are truly terrible in combat. They can shift to man-beast — half-human, half-wolf — most easily of all the breeds and can regenerate damage in any form.

THE LIFE OF A WEREWOLF

Contrary to expectation, werewolf existence is fairly structured. Although many changers do not have the problems of mortgages, alimony or a demanding boss to deal with as many hunters do, some who cling to (or hide behind) their old lives do. They may have the debts and obligations of human society to deal with, as well as their mission to fight what they consider the degradation of the world. Werewolves' structure of obligation exists on a number of levels.

THE PACK

Like hunters, werewolves tend to work and operate in groups. That doesn't mean they always travel in numbers, just that most work in small groups of three to seven. The so-called lone wolf is a rarity in the World of Darkness. (She's usually an outcast based on her breeding, a crime committed against the community or because she was overlooked upon her first change.) Any hunters who take on a werewolf assuming it to be working alone are probably in for a deadly surprise.

Different werewolves have different roles to play in their groups, or packs. Whereas hunters are defined by their

attitudes and approaches to the hunt, werewolves are defined by their capabilities. There tend to be combat, magic and communication specialists within any pack, and the response a hunter gets when approaching a pack member can be determined by that monster's role in its group. Warriors are typically uninterested in anything beyond fighting, for example, although an aggressive hunter might be able to find a point of reference to allow for some dialogue. Magic specialists might believe that hunters have some kind of tie to the spirit world, thanks to their edges, and seek to learn what it is. Communicators might be interested in talking to hunters who seek to aid or understand werewolves. The sheer fact that the imbued don't go catatonic may be enough to pique a communicator's curiosity.

Such encounters should never be straightforward, though. Despite pack roles, werewolves' very bestial nature means any discussion may simply be a prelude to an informed attack.

Virtually no hunter group stands a chance of taking down an entire werewolf pack in a pitched battle. The creatures are just too well adapted to combat and too resistant to harm to be defeated. Judicious use of edges and tactics might allow hunters some small victories, but they do well if any of them escapes alive. Confronting hunters with an entire pack is pretty much a death sentence. As Storyteller, you can emphasize how pack members work together while avoiding a full gang face-off. Warriors might be sent in when something or someone has to be destroyed. A magician might act when spells can give the pack an advantage in position or information. Communicators get involved by doing the talking and investigating a suspected vein of corruption. Observing such specialization among werewolves lets hunters understand that the creatures are organized, and that maybe fighting isn't the only solution to problems with them.

THE COLONY

Werewolves' central community is their colony, also called a sept, which is composed of many packs. This overriding group is usually based in a place that members consider holy because of its purity and ease of access to the spirit world. The majority of colonies exist in isolated wilderness areas, their sanctity protected in part by their distance from humanity's influence. Yet, most large cities contain at least one or two colonies of werewolves, based in parks or hidden gardens and surrounding buildings. Much as hunters try to convince themselves that werewolves are a strictly rural phenomenon, they're wrong.

Hunters are extremely unlikely ever to infiltrate a werewolf colony to any significant degree. Changers don't let even their immediate thin-blood kin, let alone a hunter, within sight of a holy place. The presence of a colony is most likely apparent to observant hunters due of the number of deaths, attacks on factories and other commercial premises, and mysterious disappearances in an area. Such information might, after extensive investigation and

guesswork, allow the chosen to approximate a center of werewolf activity, assuming hunters even know what they're looking at and for. But even knowing the general location of a werewolf hive doesn't do hunters' much good. A direct assault is suicidal. At best, informed hunters could keep tabs on werewolf activity in the area and perhaps try to keep it from extending too far.

In chronicle terms, introduce the idea of a colony into your game only if you want confrontations with werewolves to be an ongoing theme. Once hunters learn of such a place, they're unlikely to just turn their backs on it or hope that it will go away. Indeed, suspicion and discovery of a werewolf colony is likely to lead to a body count if hunters are rash. Observation of multiple werewolves in the area or a large-scale werewolf assault upon local vampires can be sufficient to warn hunters off any direct tactics against a colony.

HERITAGE

As already discussed, werewolves reproduce by breeding with humans and wolves that carry some werewolf genetic material. Could hunters with a scientific background track down such genes? Probably not. First of all, isolating any gene—even a mundane one—and its relationship with the body is a fantastically difficult process that requires years of work and expensive equipment. Only a fraction of the genes in the human genome have been explored. Added to that is the fact that this "gene" might not exist in the traditional human genome at all. It could be a function of werewolves' supernatural nature and may not be detectable by human science.

On the whole, werewolves tend to breed with the same groups of families. The result is that, over time, distinct lineages of werewolves have emerged. They have each adapted to a niche in the modern world, and a *very few* experienced hunters might *just begin* to recognize the distinctions between them.

CITY WOLVES

Just as many animals from rats to foxes, pigeons to ducks, have adapted to city living, so has this bloodline of werewolves. These wolves rarely mix with the high society of urban culture, preferring to prowl among the dregs where they can stay better hidden and pursue their agendas freely. There, the wearisome problems of killing investigating policemen and intruders are diminished.

These urban creatures breed with street people and the poor. More information about what's really happening in the world is passed around by folks on the streets than in the boardrooms of big firms, and the city werewolf knows it. The homeless sneak under most people's radar and can see and learn things that ordinary people overlook.

City-based hunters should have more encounters with these werewolves than they do, given that both tend to live in the same places and may even travel in the same circles. Like all animals that survive in the city, however, these werewolves are damn good at keeping their heads down, their activities hidden and their

secrets their own. A hunter who spends months chasing evidence of suspicious happenings and who finds it leads not to a wily shambler or manipulative vampire but to a vagrant werewolf may be in for a fatal shock.

TECHNO WOLVES

Werewolves on the whole reject mankind's science as a sign of humanity's fall from the purity of the natural world. These werewolves are different, using technology with an almost gleeful abandon. Whereas most changers are hostile to the concept, these creatures believe that technology itself is not the culprit, but rather humanity's misuse of it. They think science can be used to help correct the human problem. Everything from handheld computers to submachine guns is this bloodline's stock in trade. They're as capable of fighting tooth and claw as any other werewolf. They just choose not to.

These werewolves are almost exclusively city dwellers, but unlike their city-wolf cousins, they choose to breed and mix with the upper echelons of society—people with the power, influence and authority to further the werewolves' cause, not to mention their access to the really good toys.

Techno wolves make surprising adversaries for hunters. They're as likely to strike back at the imbued with a pistol or a slashed credit rating as they are to shift into man-wolf form and leap to the attack. It's this clash of appearance—a raging beast—and reality—a cunning corporate predator—that catches most hunters flatfooted. A werewolf responsible for corporate decisions that cost people jobs, that worsen the economic situation of a town, or that lead to injury or death may attract alert hunters' attention.

FAMILY WOLVES

Werewolves need nonwerewolf family members with whom to breed, or the race would die out. This particular group of wolves makes looking after breeding stock, human or wolf, their primary duty. These creatures live much closer to their kin than do others of their kind, and tend to act in conventional human ways. They drink, dance and fight with a passion that some of the other more pragmatic bloodlines lack.

The family werewolf can encounter hunters with a fair degree of frequency, as far as such meetings go. The creature mixes with relatives, who in turn mix with human society. Any interaction between a predator clothed in human flesh and humanity is bound to be fraught with problems and lead to potentially serious flashpoints that draw hunters' attention.

Indeed, family wolves' obsession with breeding and conceiving more werewolves leads to a casual attitude toward sex. In theory, any human could be kin, so is worth breeding with. These beings can go so far as commit rape, especially when alcohol is involved. They can also pressure known family members to breed out of obligation. Many kin, accustomed to modern society's attitudes, may resist such advances and seek out friends or acquaintances—but



almost never the authorities—to help them. Those friends or acquaintances my just turn out to be hunters.

And yet, family wolves' desire to protect relatives may motivate them ally with hunters when mutual threats, mundane or supernatural, arise. A hunter and an inhuman member of the "close" family down the street may need to work together when malicious spirits haunt the neighborhood. There's certainly room to inspire empathy between the two sides, which both seek to protect their own.

WARRIOR WOLVES

In many ways, warrior wolves best represent the traditional idea of werewolves: fast, fierce and with little regard for their own or others' safety. The idea of honor is nearly as important as actual victory in battle for this bloodline. Fighting is their reason for being, and they devote their lives to becoming great warriors. Thus, they tend to be tougher, more experienced and more skilled fighters than their already formidable brethren. They have a respect system based on numbers of kills and the quality of them.

So, knowing all this, why would you as a Storyteller pit your players' characters against such a nightmare? A lone warrior makes a formidable challenge for a tactics-and-combat orientated game, as long as it involves aggressive hunters aplenty.

And yet, hunters might not be so much at risk from the attention of this bloodline as you might expect. All save a few

of the manic imbued mentioned above could possibly present a challenge to a warrior wolf. Why would one of these prestige-driven champions waste his time fighting a seeming tubby, middle-aged bank manager or a winsome teenage student? Even if he did, the existence of hunters is not yet so widely accepted—or known—among werewolves for these combatants to boast of a triumph over such a "mighty" human. At best, the warrior is laughed at for wasting time and energy on a pathetic person. At worst, she's regarded with shame and is diminished in the eyes of her peers.

If hunters can make their presence significant enough that a warrior wolf is forced to deal with them, the creature's code might still prevent him from taking lethal action, leaving room for negotiation, communication and perhaps understanding. Indeed, some violently inclined hunters might actually find more in common with these wolves than they could guess.

This is not to say, however, that if a hunter makes enough of a nuisance of himself, he can't be killed out of hand. Not for the glory, but simply to eliminate him, maybe never to be mentioned "back at the sept." If one of the chosen proves himself a considerable opponent, he might be viewed as an honorable enemy and receive the attention of several warrior wolves.

LEADER WOLVES

This niche of werewolves is composed of those that consider themselves the elite of their kind. Ironi-

cally, they are also the most human. They are prone to using politics and other manipulative, "human" ways to get what they want.

Leader wolves breed with the blood-kin of human society's elite: the hereditary rulers, and smart, savvy politicians that grease the wheels of the human power structure. Because of this "cultured" upbringing, they are slightly less inclined to violence than other wolves are. In fact, they tend to use other werewolves to do their dirty work for them.

This sort of creature is best reserved as an ongoing enemy for a group of hunters, appearing over the course of a chronicle. They may become aware of the existence of such a leader only after multiple encounters with her minions. The chosen may in turn become enough of an impediment to the leader's plans that she decides to deal with them herself.

Conversely, leaders might be willing to ally with hunters who seek understanding or cooperation. While these werewolves are unlikely to see hunters as *equals*, they may see the imbued as useful tools for the cause. Adept at dealing with people, leaders could convince hunters that their agendas are similar — and that may actually be true. Much of the corruption that werewolves fight is equally inimical to many people. The question is: When do such coinciding purposes cross, say when a hunter's own company or town is targeted for attention?

MUTANT WOLVES

Amazingly, not all werewolves are dedicated to serving and protecting Mother Earth. Some have become twisted or perverted by the very struggle to save her. Others have been touched directly by the Wym. And some have been tempted over to the other side thanks to overwhelming pride, greed or selfishness. The result is shapeshifters that actually seek to destroy the world through corruption. They strive to poison the land, water and air, kill all humanity and wipe out other werewolves in the name of the Wym.

Such allegiance can have a terrible warping effect on these traitors' bodies and minds, making them far more ugly than even the werewolf-born. Although they function much like others of their kind, these creatures' bodies are twisted by exposure to foul chemicals and possibly as a sign of the depravity they have embraced. These twisted wolves revel in emotional abuse, pointless and gratuitous violence, and worshipping twisted spirits of pain, hate and fear.

"Fallen" werewolves can suffer the same mutations as the werewolf-born (see p. 91), but bear more of them. Young members of this breed have one or two mutations. Older and more powerful ones may have three to five. They all suffer some general effects, too: rough and mangy fur, anti-social behavior and an obvious love for inflicting pain and suffering.

THE FAMILY OF A WEREWOLF

Werewolves may be powerful and deadly, but they'd be nothing without their support structure: the people

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

You might think by now that there's a whole load of information about werewolves here that you never expected to know. They're complex beings. It's not necessarily presented here to be trickle-fed in entirety to your hunters and players, though. Even the most successful (and lucky) hunter group learns only a tiny fraction of the information presented in this chapter. Imbued might discover a little about werewolves' struggle, the way they live or the relationship between them and their kinfolk, but characters are unlikely to learn much about all three. The depth provided here allows you to choose those elements that are revealed to your hunters, to allow you to decide what tip of the iceberg they see.

The rest of the information can be used to give the werewolf antagonists and allies you create depth, a feeling of background and history. Scientists sometimes say the more they learn, the more they realize how little they know. A **Hunter** story can be the same. Each hard-won discovery about the other side may hint to the vast information and secrets that still elude the imbued. A glimpse of a werewolf showing love, care and affection to one of its human family hints at the bigger picture of their breeding and life. A muttered call to a spirit may clue hunters in on werewolves' deep spirituality. Apparently there's more to them than something to hit.

Of course, experienced **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** players and Storytellers might be amazed at how simplified and distorted all the information in this chapter is. That's because it's all presented to be relevant to **Hunter**. If you really, really want to get into the level of detail presented in **Werewolf**, feel free to check out that game or any of its supplements.

and wolves that carry the blood but who are not werewolves themselves. These people live as bridges between the normal, mundane world and the supernatural world of shapechangers. These "kin" are largely aware of werewolves and of the forces they fight, but are not truly part of the realms werewolves inhabit.

For the vast majority of human kin, the only trait they exhibit that marks them as different from the rest of humanity is the fact that they can see werewolves for what they are without becoming hysterical or catatonic. While they are no more immune than hunters are to the rational fear of seeing a mass of muscle, fur and claws, they don't suffer the mental collapse that most people do when confronted with such a sight. Similarly, kin are immune to the effects of seeing hunters' edges in overt use. They don't lose their minds in the presence of such displays, but knowledge of such miraculous powers in use

is still likely to frighten them. Kin's capacity to see werewolves and cope with edges does not confer any of the mental protection of second sight, nor any ability to spot a monster when it is magically concealed, however.

The immediate relatives of werewolves — whether human or wolf — register as *wrong* to hunters' second sight. Edges such as Witness, Illuminate and Discern that allow greater insight to the identity of monsters might show a hint of feral nature or provide glimpses of a family member's relationship with a werewolf — as parent, child or even brother or sister. Still, use of the sight and edges make it difficult for a hunter to determine exactly what a blood kin is. The subject seems to have been tinged by the supernatural, but not made an integral part of it.

For their part, most family members are aware of only the broadest aspects of werewolf society. Although many work to support full-blooded relatives, a lot of the most important secrets are reserved for werewolves alone. So, while kin might seem like a soft target for hunters seeking information, they can't usually offer any relevant insights. They might know that a colony is located somewhere in the region, but not where or how to find it. Kin could know the name of a local shapechanger leader, but not know what he looks like or where to find him.

RELATIVE POSITIONS

Many people who carry werewolf blood actively support the creatures' activities. Aware of the battles that werewolves fight, these people back their cousins in mundane ways: as aides, drivers, cooks and staff, on the battlefield with mundane weapons, or by using their places in normal society to obtain information or to campaign against certain developments. Indeed, unwitting hunters' first clue of supernatural interest in an event may be kin involvement. Human relatives are often best suited to infiltrating companies or organizations that werewolves regard as corrupt, and kin can commit acts of sabotage that the full-blooded would not have the patience to arrange. Extended family members also act as werewolves' eyes and ears and may investigate the same suspicious occurrences as hunters do.

But what about kinfolk who are unaware of their status, and of werewolves? Ties to their true kind have been severed over the generations, making these people think they're absolutely normal. Or maybe ancestors fled the family to find their own future, and descendants have grown in ignorance of their true heritage. Despite their denial of wrongdoing or association, these people still seem *wrong* to hunters' second sight. They claim ignorance of any knowledge of the supernatural and probably believe hunters to be insane. Hunters who push the issue may be reported to the police. And yet, hunters' questions may make these people reconsider gaps, inconsistencies or enigmas in their family histories, or they may re-evaluate recent strange events. Perhaps these lost kin even join inquisitive hunters to discover the truth about themselves.

Other "stray" kin are used as little more than breeders by werewolves. They may be married to normal people, folks with no knowledge of werewolves, yet they help conceive a baby of werewolf blood and raise it until its first shapeshift. While their knowledge of werewolves may be marginal and their involvement in werewolf society negligible, the act of birthing and raising the child of a werewolf marks these people as *wrong* or *off* to second sight.

And then there are kin who actively work against werewolves. They may turn against the supernatural for any number of reasons: an inherent revulsion for the way werewolves treat humanity, victimization, jealousy of full-blooded family. Some of these people work against shifters for their own ends, some for the good of humanity. This kind of kin makes a good potential ally for a hunter group that works against werewolves. The problem, as ever, is trust. Can the imbued put their faith in someone who is *wrong* to the sight? Some open-minded and curious hunters may be prepared to, but many are on the defensive from the start. On the other side of the equation, why should these kin trust hunters who, while apparently human, are capable of amazing feats that are in some ways less explicable than those of even werewolves?

KINFOLK — OPTIONAL RULE

In a very few, very rare werewolfkin, the shapeshifting blood runs strong enough that they gain access to a small amount of spiritual potency, allowing them to learn werewolf spells. These supernaturally endowed people should never appear more than once or twice in a chronicle, if you choose to allow them in your game at all.

They can have a maximum of two common werewolf spells from the **Hunter Storytellers Companion**. They may have up to 4 Rage with which to cast these spells (see **Hunter Storytellers Companion** p. 45).

OTHER SHAPESHIFTERS

Sutton couldn't shake the feeling of being watched. He'd been staring out from the second floor of a burger restaurant for the better part of an hour, and he still couldn't get rid of the feeling. Maybe it was just paranoia. He had to do something to put himself at ease, though, and the only thing he could think of was looking at the world that way. Maybe it would prove once and for all that he was getting himself worked up over nothing. He focused his will and felt the slight jarring dislocation that always accompanied the effort. Lord, how he hated it.

When he opened his eyes, they went wide with surprise. One of the crows on the building across the street was wrong. A bird, for Christ's sake! Was it giving him that feeling? Was it following him? What the hell did it want with him? There was only one way to find out. Abandoning his half-eaten meal, Sutton made his way downstairs and out the front door. Resisting the impulse to look back, he walked down the street and turned into an alley. He stopped and



listened, but what did he expect to hear? Flapping wings?

Saying a quick prayer, he reached into his coat and spun round. The crow sat on a pile of cardboard boxes, its head cocked to one side.

Sutton knew this would look ridiculous: "Okay, you feathered bastard, you want to tell me what you are and why you're following me? I have a gun."

The crow seemed to straighten and suddenly a young woman with raven-black hair sat across from him. "Put that thing away before you hurt yourself," she said, a touch of irritation in her voice. "We need to talk, Jeremy. It's hard enough without you waving that thing around."

Although by far the most common, werewolves are not the only shapeshifting monsters in the world. While the rest combined — with one notable exception — may not be as numerous as werewolves, they are still a very real threat, and some hunters have already faced them.

Encounters with these creatures are rare and the same is recommended in your game. These creatures represent the wider, deeper supernatural world that hunters get only the barest glimpse of after years on the hunt. Using too many different types of werecritters risks turning your chronicle into a freakshow or "monster of the week" game, which doesn't really do justice to the terror that even a "mere" werewolf inspires.

The following changers' access to spells (see the **Hunter Storytellers Companion**, p. 45) is the same as werewolves'. Some additional abilities are listed here, though. The breeds are presented in the order of hunters' likelihood to encounter them, if ever.

RAY-SHIFTERS

Rats are an everyday part of city life that most of us rarely, if ever see. In fact, the rats living in any city probably far exceed the human population. Living among this vermin are wererats, a race of shapeshifters devoted to keeping humanity in its place.

Wererats dwell in nests buried deep beneath any city, often in out-of-the-way and forgotten tunnels or rarely used parts of sewer systems. Like werewolves, these shifters seek to end the corruption of the natural world, but their methods are their own. They tend to commit devastating terrorist attacks on the symbols of human "modernization" — burger restaurants, office buildings, factories, bars and nightclubs. Ratmen delight in high body counts and massive property damage. When they aren't blowing things up, they're spreading virulent diseases to the human population.

The fact that more hunters haven't reported encounters with wererats probably comes down to one of two things: Rat-shifters are far better than even werewolves at staying out of sight; and few hunters survive encounters with these beings. The atrocities for which they climb to the surface to commit often number hunter opponents among their casualties.

Forms: 3 — human, rat-man, rat

Weaknesses: As werewolves

Special Abilities:

Direction Sense: It is impossible for a wererat to get lost underground.

Night Sight: Clear vision in anything but absolute darkness.

Alarm: A wererat in danger can warn others by letting out a high-pitched shriek that's inaudible to humans and to hunters with active second sight. The sound can carry for miles.

CAT-SHIFTERS

True to their mundane counterparts, werecats tend to be curious rather than aggressive; they seek to peer into the secret corners of the world and discover any supernatural forces at work against humanity. They might even find common cause with inquisitive hunters, assuming they can overcome their natural distrust of other supernatural — or *apparently* supernatural — creatures.

Werecats are fiercely solitary, proud and manipulative, and are not averse to putting on shows of force when they need to. They refuse to communicate with other werereatures, hoarding the knowledge they acquire for themselves.

Various breeds of werecat exist and are related to the world's big cats, but the differences are primarily in their appearance than in any inherent physical characteristics.

Forms: As werewolves: 5 — human, near-human, cat-man, giant cat, cat

Weaknesses:

Involuntary Shapechange: Werecats are temperamental, and stress can cause them to change forms spontaneously. Anytime an important roll fails or a botch occurs, roll Willpower (difficulty 8). If fewer than three successes are achieved, the creature shifts to a random, different form immediately.

Special Abilities:

Whiskers: In all forms except human, werecats have whiskers that sense vibrations and that allow them to "see" in complete darkness within a radius of about seven or eight yards.

RAVEN-SHIFTERS

While other shapechangers hunt, wereravens spy. Of all the shifters, they are the most likely to talk to other shifters — and perhaps hunters — to gather information. Their sacred duty is to spot the unnatural and corrupt in the world and to report it to the other

werereatures to be dealt with. On occasion, a wereraven notices people behaving strangely and turns to these hunters to do their work for them as an entertaining alternative to getting short-tempered cousins involved. Just as werewolves use their families to infiltrate and deal with human organizations, wereravens may find that hunters are capable of dealing with problems involving other humans or single supernatural creatures better than werewolves can. Imbued who seek communication with the supernatural might find raven-shifters willing to become regular contacts — but may also find them frustratingly secretive in turn.

Wereravens do not form families. New wereravens are created from normal humans or ravens by a mysterious ritual. The imbued cannot be turned into wereravens.

Forms: 3 — human, raven-man, raven. Wereravens almost never assume raven-man shape unless in extreme danger.

Weaknesses:

Gold: Gold is as lethal to wereravens as silver is to werewolves.

Smell: Wereravens cannot smell anything but the strongest of odors.

Special Abilities:

Sight: Wereravens have perfect vision, far better than humans, allowing them to see events on the ground clearly from the air.

Wing Slice: In raven-man form, these creatures can attack using razor-tipped wings, doing Strength +3 lethal damage. The attack is made by rolling Dexterity + Brawl (difficulty 7).

Eye Eating: A wereraven gains a person's last memories by eating the eyes of his corpse. The last five minutes of the deceased's life are experienced in clear detail. This power does not work on the corpses of hunters. The imbuing seems to prevent their very bodies from giving up information to the supernatural. The eyes of bystanders are "informative," however.

SHARK-SHIFTERS

What werewolves are to the wilderness, weresharks are to sea. Shark-shifters defend the purity of the ocean with a ferocity that even werewolves are hard-pressed to match. The predator part of their nature gives them an almost single-minded obsession with destroying those whom they consider corrupt — or merely intruding.

Like werewolves, weresharks often travel in groups and generally patrol the deeps. Some grow curious about the surface world, though, and individuals come ashore or linger around coastlines. They are most likely to be encountered in coastal areas and on ships.

Forms: As werewolves: 5 — human, near-human, man-shark, giant shark, shark

Weaknesses:

Inability to Stay Still: Roll Willpower, difficulty 6, for a wereshark to stay still for more than a few turns.

Earthbound: Weresharks cannot disappear into the spirit world as werewolves can.

Special Abilities:

Barbed Skin: Unarmed attacks made against weresharks (in all forms except human and shark) inflict two levels of lethal damage upon the attacker.

SPIDER-SHIFTERS

The idea of a giant man-wolf is frightening enough for most people. The idea of a giant man-spider is terrifying. Yet, these creatures exist and are among the most horrifying of werebeasts.

The werespiders are fiercely territorial loners, hunting humans and protecting sacred areas, usually semi-wilderness locales on the outskirts of human habitation. They often engage in feuds with others of their kind, seeking to prove who's most capable of defending particular territories.

Spider-shifters feed on human blood, and use it instead of Rage (see p. 102) to fuel their powers. Drinking a human dry provides up to 10 Blood points, which are used in the same way as Rage. A hunter could easily mistake one of these beasts for a bizarre form of vampire. Yet, the sight of a "human" dissolving into a horde of tiny spiders is enough to send even hardened imbued to the brink of insanity.

Forms: 4 — human, man-spider, giant spider, horde of normal spiders

Weaknesses: (Werespiders do not suffer extra damage from gold, silver or any other metal.)

Disappearing: Werespiders can disappear into the spirit world only when in "horde of spiders" form.

Special Abilities:

Multiple Eyes: The arrangement of multiple eyes around a werespider's head gives the creature superb peripheral vision. In any form except human, a werespider staring ahead can see in all directions.

Webbing: Werespiders can spin grotesque webs. One Blood point creates enough fiber to block an alley or envelop an adult human. The webbing can suffer four levels of lethal damage before it breaks. It soaks damage with an effective 7 Stamina. Three successes must be achieved in a resisted Strength roll to pull webbing apart by hand, and rolls for the webbing are made with an effective 7 Strength.

Poison: Werespiders can spit corrosive venom that does four levels of lethal damage on contact with any living target.

FOX-SHIFTERS

This rare breed of changer is found largely in Asia, although a very few have been known to travel to the West and other parts of the world. Like all other shifters, werefoxes fight the infection of the world, but their chosen weapons are less obvious. Fox-shifters spy, steal and use their wits to destroy the things they believe hurt the world. They are utterly deserving of the mundane fox's reputation for cunning and deceit.

Unlike many shapeshifting species, werefoxes are quick to cooperate with the other kinds. Indeed, the werecreatures

of Asia can be encountered working together, a harmony that western changers have yet to achieve — if, indeed, they ever can. They are also discriminate about the humans they kill, picking only the irredeemable and reprehensible and teaching others harsh lessons.

Forms: 5 — man, near-man, man-fox, giant fox, fox

Weaknesses:

Almost Orphaned: Each time a new fox-shifter is born, one of its parents dies.

Slow Healers: While werefoxes may soak all forms of damage, they may not use their Rage to heal themselves spontaneously. They heal at the same rate as hunters or normal people.

Special Abilities:

Magical: Fox-shifters are extremely attuned to the spirit world and have access to twice as many spells or rituals (see p. 106) as a werewolf of equivalent experience.

Odd: For some reason, fox-shifters do not induce the same catatonia in humans and hunters without active Second Sight that other changers do. Unless a werefox demonstrates its supernatural aspect overtly by using spells or shifting forms, people assume it to be a large animal or someone in a costume. Once a werefox proves to be supernatural, normal catatonia/hysteria rules apply.

RELATIONSHIPS

The various were-species are far from a universal, happy brotherhood. In fact, due to actions taken by werewolves in pre-historic times, when they waged war on rival shapeshifters, other changing breeds actively hate werewolves. Due to werewolves' vastly greater numbers, however, this hatred rarely erupts into full-scale warfare. As far as **Hunter** is concerned, the only significant result of this animosity is that werewolves are never encountered working with the othershifters, with the following two exceptions.

Wereravens have always maintained good relations with the other shifters. Likewise, their role as the eyes of skinchangers has made them too useful for the other breeds to spurn. Wereravens can be found working with werecreatures of all varieties, but the alliance is never an easy one — something hunters may be able to exploit. Wereravens often require payment for their services in terms of favors or information, or they could insist on certain behavior from other shifters, such as agreeing to work with hunters, perhaps challenging the individual changers' patience or tolerance.

In Asia, werecreatures have long worked together in a far more coordinated way than do shifters across the rest of the world. Groups of mixed breeds are actually more common there than groups of one breed in particular. This shifter diversity can make the hunt difficult for eastern imbued. Rather than deal with groups of creatures that largely think and act alike, they have to contend with an array of mindsets and capabilities all at once.

STORYTELLING WEREWOLVES

Sutton hated to admit it, but that bizarre bird-woman was right on the nose. The guy in the suit — “Peter Worthington” — was meeting with a local politician to get that land outside of town developed. The restaurant where they were meeting was out of the way and out of Sutton’s price range. But that didn’t stop him from walking in, sitting down and taking a good long look at the menu.

After ordering the cheapest thing he could find, Sutton looked over the other patrons. The man-beast he had seen before, Worthington, was there, and the only one in the room who seemed wrong. He and the politician, presumably, were talking animatedly. Things didn’t seem to be going Worthington’s way.

Then, to Sutton’s disbelief, Worthington began to change — right there in the restaurant. His clothes just seemed to disappear, fur sprang out of his body and his jaw elongated. Sutton felt the fear grip him immediately. He just wanted to sit there, to go unnoticed and hope desperately that the thing wouldn’t turn on him. He was vaguely aware of the screams and sobbing around him when he came to his senses and yelled, “Stop!”

The werewolf froze but its transformation was complete. The burning anger in its eyes was directed squarely at Sutton now. Still staring at the creature, he forced himself to his feet. He walked over to the politician, pulled him out of his seat, and physically dragged the unresisting man out of the

restaurant. Sutton kept his gaze fixed on the man-beast as long as he could.

The moment he was outside, he forced the politician against the wall and slapped him across the face. “Come on,” he shouted. “We have to go. Now!” The old man just gazed back blankly, drool running down his chin.

Shit! Now what do I do? Sutton thought.

So, you now know what werewolves are, how their society is structured and what their principal aims are. How do you go about using all that in your game? Here’s some guidance to help make the most of that information in your **Hunter** chronicle.

PORTRAYING SHAPECHANGERS

Werewolves are unique antagonists and powerful potential allies for the imbued. They have their own motivations, drives and agendas, some of which are pursued at the expense of regular folks and some of which actually seem to do the world and humanity good. Man-wolves may seem to be monsters, but that doesn’t make them unremittently evil. They operate under a gray morality rather than a black-and-white one, just as people do, and therefore demand that hunters measure them individually. That assumes, of course, that the imbued don’t automatically respond to shapeshifters’ existence with a shotgun blast.

To help you portray these creatures, bear in mind the following five conditions of their existence and manner.



• **Humans are inferior to werewolves.** Werewolves see themselves as a chosen species, set above humanity by their Mother, the planet itself. They treat their human kin as a subservient species. They consider the rest of humanity as even less than that. This arrogance is a fundamental part of the way they view humanity in general. As humans are believed inherently inferior, any powers such as hunters' edges are likely to be viewed as a sign of the corruption that werewolves oppose. After all, if people are beneath shapechangers, they must have acquired any inexplicable capabilities through deceit or alliance with the Wyrms. The powers were certainly not bestowed by the Mother. Once werewolves become aware of the potency of hunters' edges, some seek to investigate this new form of corruption, whereas others try to destroy the upstart humans outright.

• **The cause is more important than an individual werewolf.** Werewolves are fanatics. Very few of them can be turned from their objective of protecting the Earth by reason or negotiation. They fight a war their ancestors waged for generations. They have been indoctrinated to believe in the cause since their first change. They are absolutely certain that what they do is right and are prepared to die for the cause. Few werewolves throw away their lives carelessly, but they will sacrifice themselves to ensure that Gaia is preserved. Perhaps that potential for selflessness can be recognized and praised by Martyrs and other hunters willing to give their all for their causes.

• **Werewolves are warriors, first and foremost.** Whatever their inclination or bloodline, werewolves are fighters. Like the wolves to which they are related, they are primarily predators and believe in the power of superior force. If violence can solve a problem once and for all, they resort to it quickly.

• **Werewolves are intelligent.** The other side of the coin is the fact that werewolves are not mindless. They are superbly equipped to be violent when a situation demands it but also have a rational aspect. Such a human quality allows clever, forthcoming hunters the chance to establish a dialogue — as long as those chosen can prove that discussion is more advantageous to werewolves than carnage is.

• **Werewolves are part animal.** Being half-animal bears a lot more meaning than being aggressive. It means having powerful instincts and trusting in them. If intuition or senses tell a werewolf one thing and reason tells her another, she may be just as quick to rely on her instincts as on her intellect. Hunters might talk of a truce, for example, but the smell of their sweat might suggest a whole other intention.

The pragmatism of their animal nature can also compel werewolves to make ruthless decisions at which even hardened imbued would balk. They may let their own wounded or elderly die to fulfill a mission or to act on an opportunity to strike at an enemy. They might turn on allies — human or another species — if doing so furthers completion of a goal. They make decisions based on survival and victory, rather than on more

nebulous factors such as morality. It is by these severe means that changers keep themselves and their packs alive, and may ultimately save the world from taint.

CHRONICLE IDEAS

Werewolves make for complicated antagonists in a **Hunter** game. Their mixture of violent rage, savage fighting ability and passionate struggle for what they believe will be a better world makes them a challenge to deal with for all hunters. Even chosen who seek to understand the beasts run the risk of dying thanks to the slightest misstep or misstatement.

Here are some ideas for structuring stories or a chronicle around skinchangers.

COMMON CAUSE: MERCY

Stories with a Mercy-orientated theme are perhaps hardest to pull off with werewolf antagonists. Certainly, redeeming something that was born part animal seems like a foolish endeavor to a Storyteller who knows the being's true identity. It would be like trying to persuade a cat that it shouldn't stalk small animals. Doing so means going against the creature's very being, not just returning to its human roots. Even if a werewolf spent 12 years living as a human, it never truly was one; most adapt to their predestined roles as savage warriors with considerable speed. Hunters don't know any of that, though. The imbued could see beasts that harbor something human within, and which may be brought to the surface with enough time and understanding.

Granted, werewolves do not have to be purely violent creatures. Some can seek to bring the world to a peaceful state through gentle means of persuasion and education. They can be creatures of reason, and violence may not seem to be the best solution to every problem. But such consideration is relative among shapeshifters. No werewolf is pacifistic. Their very nature makes that impossible. People who stand in the way of werewolves' "gentle" efforts might be removed in less than peaceful ways. Yet, hunters who understand both the need to communicate with the supernatural and the need to respond aggressively to the most unrepentantly monstrous may find much in common with such werewolves.

A story that focuses on werewolf kin is another option. These people are caught between human and animal worlds. They may find the extreme brutality of their relatives, not to mention their condescension, intolerable. Can hunters convince such doubters to turn wholly to humanity?

The despised werewolf-born also offer possibilities for a story about understanding. Although they were never human, these outcasts' bitterness toward werewolf society might make working with hunters seem acceptable.

Plot Ideas

• A tainted werewolf has gathered a cult of kin and others of its kind to manipulate humans through perverse sexual relationships and by catering to profane tastes. In return for a "fix," followers, including some in local government, do what they're told. A group of

werewolves that tried to stop the cult failed. Only one attacker survived and is now forced to turn to newly discovered and strange humans for help.

- A werewolf's cousin has been ordered to bear his packmate a child. She's in love with a normal man, but is afraid to go against the wishes of her relatives. One of the characters discovers this *wrong* girl, who seems miserable — far from dangerous, to be sure. If the hunter can win her trust, she asks for help in winning her freedom.

PRIMEVAL FEAR: VISION

Werewolves' seeming connection to nature may fascinate inquisitive hunters. Whereas things like rots and vampires imply a separate, supernatural world that is somehow imposed on the natural one, werewolves suggest that nature and the supernatural are in some way intertwined. Questions arise, such as how nature can abide anything that is not inherently part of it? Or, if humans and shapechangers are both natural phenomena, can they work together against other monsters?

A chronicle based on a better understanding of nature and skinchangers focuses on aspects of the creatures that are comprehensible to hunters and compatible with their understanding of the natural world: breeding patterns, relationships with family, and heritage. Maybe with this common foundation, humans and werewolves can find common ground and a common goal.

Plot Ideas

- A hunter returns from a vacation in the country with her family. She's terrified. The nearby town seemed to be populated by people who were wrong, and she couldn't pinpoint why. Her group's curiosity is piqued, and they set out to learn what's happening.

- After a run-in with a werewolf on a city street, the hunters are approached by a man who claims to be related to the creature. He's been looking for a way to escape the hold of its kind for years and finds hope in the characters. He offers information in return for protection, but is he telling the truth?

HUMANITY'S STRUGGLE: ZEAL

Hunters now have the opportunity to do what their ancestors could not millennia ago: They can fight back against werewolves and free mankind from being victimized by another species. The theme of this chronicle echoes one of mankind's eternal battles: to protect itself from nature. Our cities, our homes and our medicine are all examples of our efforts to overcome and defeat Mother Nature.

Werewolves are a powerful expression of the danger that lurks in nature. Despite their roots in the supernatural, the creatures are tied to the natural world and identify strongly with it, not least in their hostility toward humanity and technological progress.

In this kind of chronicle, hunters are humanity's protectors against the very worst that nature has to offer.

Man has defeated nature by building cities, but its fiercest children still stalk us, and the players' characters know that such beasts are at large.

Plot Ideas

- Local businesspeople are disappearing or being found dead under suspicious circumstances. One of them was the current or former employer of one of the hunters. Investigation suggests that the victims were all involved in some sort of property deal. Someone or something apparently opposed it.

- An article in the newspaper about an after-hours accident at the local shopping mall suddenly reads, "THEY START THE HUNT." While investigating the scene, the hunters discover a shapechanger spying on the reconstruction. What does the creature want with the mall? What is the being looking for and how can the chosen stop — or help — it?

RULES

Sutton stared at the werewolf before him and knew he was a dead man. "One more step and I'll shoot," he said, trying to keep his hands from shaking.

The werewolf made some sort of noise. Laughing?

"I mean it," Sutton said. The werewolf ignored him and came closer.

"Stop right there," Sutton shouted, hoping to hell that the trick would work again. The werewolf seemed seized in its tracks and howled in frustration. Sutton emptied his gun into it and watched the thing collapse to the ground, blood pooling under it.

Still shaking, Sutton shoved the gun into his coat pocket, grabbed the elderly politician by his shirt and dragged the man to the passenger door of his car. As he rushed around to the driver's side, Sutton risked a glimpse back at the creature. It was on its knees and struggling to stand, its wounds closing even as Sutton watched.

Sutton was right. He was a dead man.

The uncanny capabilities of werewolves and other shapeshifting creatures make them truly formidable antagonists — or intimidating allies — in a **Hunter** game. Those powers are codified here, allowing you to create and portray changers quickly and easily. Some of these rules appear in the **Hunter** rulebook (p. 277) and the **Hunter Storytellers Companion** (p. 41), and have been expanded upon here.

HUNTERS AND SHAPECHANGERS

The average human mind refuses to acknowledge the existence of werewolves. Exposed to shapechangers in near-human, wolf-man or near-wolf form — or to the effects of werewolf magic — humans with low Willpower flee instinctively or collapse. Individuals with high Willpower witness everything but disregard it all. In either case, the human mind cannot comprehend what is seen, and it activates defensive measures. After the fact, the psyche even dresses up reality to protect itself. It's easiest to believe that a college student was playing a prank that

required him to wear a gorilla suit. Thus, hunter efforts to make humans see the truth are futile.

Hunters with Conviction active when exposed to a shapechanger in any of the three intermediate forms can deal with the creature normally. If Conviction is not active, a hunter behaves as a normal person, fleeing or refusing to accept the truth of the situation. The imbued also has trouble remembering the situation later. Werewolves in human and wolf forms are not offensive to normal people or unprepared hunters.

Legend and Hollywood holds that lycanthropy is spread through a werewolf's bite. Without informed knowledge or experience, hunters may assume this to be true. Why dispel the myth? Let them think they or their allies have become the enemy — at least until nothing actually happens. Lycanthropy is in fact genetic, not contagious. Then again, maybe hunters' imbued status is all that prevents them from changing, whereas bitten humans are werewolves in the making....

A hunter who looks at a werewolf with second sight can see a being that's "inhuman," "wrong," "off" or otherwise offensive by whatever means is appropriate to the character. He might have a momentary glimpse of a bestial or feral side to a werewolf in human form. A shapechanger in pure animal form, which to normal eyes looks like an ordinary wolf, also seems wrong or unnatural. Observation edges such as Discern, Witness or Illuminate can offer other insights according to the information that those powers tend to convey. A person may seem to breathe more like an animal than a human. It might smell like something out of the wild. Images of claws rending flesh might come to mind, or a blood-red aura might be apparent. As always, it's up to the individual hunter on how to interpret these signs and implications and to guess exactly what he's up against.

Similar insights are also gained about shapechanger cousins, those people who carry the blood of the race but who are not shifters. They can also stand out as "impure" and they may project faint feral signs or features. The same is true for people and wolves, often young ones, who are full-blooded changers but who have yet to undergo the first change. They may not know it yet, but these beings aren't quite human. The question is: How do hunters respond to beings that seem wrong but that are potentially unaware of their own supernatural condition? Can they be saved, destroyed or shown the light when they don't perceive their own true identity?

RAGE

Deep in every werewolf, rage burns over what the world has become. It's an inherent longing for a bygone age when humanity cowered in the shadows and the beasts ruled the world. Each new building, each square mile plundered for sprawling suburb is a gravestone for the world — and more fuel to stoke shifters' fire. This unquenchable

rage makes werewolves what they are. It enables them to change form, it gives them incredible speed, strength and resilience, and it is the vigor of their spirit magic.

Rage is also a game Trait, a measurement of how powerful changers are and what they're able to do. For all intents and purposes, it replaces Willpower's role in fueling capabilities, as proposed in *Hunter's* Chapter 9. Willpower is still used to help accomplish mundane feats that are performed by shapeshifters, just as it works for hunters. Rage is simply a reflection of what supernatural feats a creature can perform. Assume a Willpower range of 6 to 10 for most werewolves.

A werewolf has from 2 to 15 Rage points. This is the beast's permanent Rage rating. The actual number of Rage points it has at any given time increases or decreases, but never exceeds the maximum. Only the very young and inexperienced have as little as two points, whereas only the experienced, wily and battle-hardened have acquired 15. The average werewolf that hunters are likely to encounter has 8 to 10 points.

SPENDING RAGE

Rage is expended to do any one of the following.

- Regain a health level lost to bashing or lethal damage. One Rage point restores one health level, and only one level can be healed per turn. Doing so takes one action. Aggravated damage (see p. 104) cannot be healed this way.

- Gain an extra number of actions per turn up to a maximum of the werewolf's Dexterity rating in the form it currently assumes (see "The Shapes" sidebar). A werewolf with 4 Dexterity could therefore perform up to five actions in a turn: The one it is allowed automatically per turn, and one more for each Dexterity point it has. Each extra action gained costs one Rage point. Each action after the first must be dedicated to performing the same action as done in the first. Thus, a werewolf could slash with its claws multiple times, but it can't slash twice and then switch to a bite. Healing can be performed as an extra action, but each effort costs two Rage points: one for each extra action and one for each level healed.

- Change to another form. It costs one Rage point to switch to any of the other forms available to a changer. Werewolves are capable of assuming five different forms. It takes one full turn to complete any change; no other actions can be performed in that turn.

- Trigger werewolf magic. See the *Hunter Storytellers Companion* (p. 45) and "Rituals" (p. 106) for more details.

GAINING RAGE

Rage is a measure of a werewolf's fury, aggression and determination. A creature therefore gains Rage points when something happens that incites its anger. We're not talking about casual irritation here, but profound fury — the kind that can inspire a person to beat or kill another with his bare hands. Werewolves gain

Rage at your discretion, but here are some examples of circumstances when they might.

- The changer first sees the moon each evening. Werewolves believe the moon is their patron, stoking the flames of their anger to make them better warriors. Roll a die and divide by two (rounding up) to determine how many points are gained that night.

- When a werewolf enters combat (1 point).
- When a werewolf is personally ashamed, publicly humiliated or taunted (1 point).
- When a werewolf is faced in combat by an opponent wielding silver (1 point).
- When a werewolf botches an attempted action (1 point).

FRENZY

There's a terrible side effect to the Rage that burns within a werewolf. It can boil over and flood the being's rational mind with thoughts of bloodlust and carnage, throwing the creature into frenzy. Every time a werewolf gains any number of Rage points, roll a number of dice equal to its permanent Rage score. If four or more successes are achieved, the werewolf enters frenzy. The difficulty of the roll is determined by the phase of the moon, according to the following table. If you don't track the phase of the moon in your game, assume a difficulty of 8.

Difficulty Moon Phase

10	New
9	Crescent
8	Half
7	Gibbous
6	Full

A werewolf in frenzy is beyond reason. It has no time for talking or thinking. Instead, it changes into its man-wolf battle form and attacks anything in its way — hunters, other werewolves, defenseless people — whatever is within reach of its claws. Indeed, frenzy is so all-consuming that a werewolf's brain stops processing pain signals. The creature ignores penalties for lost health levels while in frenzy. Also, the difficulties of edges that affect the mind (such as Burden, Confront, Insinuate and Bluster) are increased by two when those powers are used on a frenzied werewolf.

A bloodlust episode lasts for one turn per each success achieved on the frenzy roll (it therefore persists for four or more turns). As soon as it's over, wound penalties apply again. Edges that affect the mind now apply normally against the creature, too.

A Willpower point can be spent to prevent a werewolf from entering frenzy. If the object, person or situation that triggered the Rage gain in the first place remains or persists, however, one Willpower point must be spent per turn to resist succumbing to frenzy. The decision to resist depends on the circumstances, on who could be hurt and on any possible repercussions of an outburst. For example, if a warrior werewolf could slaughter only the puny

humans around him in a bout of frenzy, he might restrain himself rather than let himself go, recognizing that no glory can be gained from the outburst.

INNATE CAPABILITIES

Werewolves have many inherent capacities that mark them as different from humans — and in some cases from natural wolves. Their Rage and shapeshifting are two. Here are a few others.

SENSES

Werewolves are predators, a product of their feral side. Like most predators, they rely on more than just their eyes to hunt. Their sight, hearing and smell are all remarkably honed, and far above the human norm.

In particular, werewolves are skilled trackers, using all their senses to stalk prey through almost any environment. Successful Perception + Alertness, Stealth or Survival rolls, depending on the conditions, are required to track. The rolls should be made each hour in urban environments and each day in the wild. The difficulty varies from 3 for a fresh scent in a wide-open field to 9 on the main street of a town at rush hour. If the subject suspects that he is being followed, Wits + Stealth or Survival rolls are made in a resisted and extended action, representing the target's efforts to cover his trail while the werewolf roots him out.

Werewolves' sense of smell and hearing is so acute that they ignore the blind fighting and fire rules (*Hunter*, p. 192) in the dark or when physically blinded. They are not able to automatically penetrate the Hide edge using their senses, though.

RESISTANCE TO DAMAGE

Werewolves can use their Rage to heal damage they suffer, as discussed previously. But they are also better able to take punishment than hunters are. The inherent resilience of their bodies allows them to soak most lethal damage as well as bashing damage done to them. Track both kinds of damage with a "/" rather than an "X."

As noted in "The Shapes" sidebar, certain types of werewolves cannot regenerate in certain forms: human-born ones in human form and wolf-born ones in wolf form. *Lethal damage suffered in those forms cannot be soaked, either, but it can be regenerated once a werewolf changes shape.*

DISAPPEARING

All werewolves have the ability to disappear from the physical world by stepping into the spirit world. To do so, spend two Rage points and roll permanent Rage against a difficulty of 9, or 8 if the werewolf is able to look into a reflective surface (a mirror, a clean window, still water or polished steel). Werewolves may take up to two other people or changers with them, but remember that hunters cannot be taken into the spirit world. Second sight and observation edges reveal nothing of where shapechangers go when they disappear.

The results of disappearing are determined with this chart. No other actions can be performed in the turn(s) in which a changer fades into the spirit world.

THE SHAPES

Werewolves can assume five different forms. Each has slightly different physical characteristics. Every form bar human and wolf invokes a virtual catatonic response in regular people who witness it, including hunters who don't have second sight and its protective capabilities active.

Note that shapechangers in near-human, man-wolf and near-wolf forms have pronounced teeth and claws. Attacks with these weapons inflict Strength +1 lethal damage upon hunters.

HUMAN FORM

When werewolves assume human form, they ostensibly seem like regular people, at least physically. Only second sight and observation edges such as Discern, Illuminate and Witness can allow hunters to see these "people" as something more or *other*. Human-born werewolves in this shape heal at normal human rates (lost health levels cannot be recovered by expending Rage points) but suffer no extra damage when attacked with silver weapons (also see "Resistance to Damage"). This form is the basis for all Attributes. Bonuses listed below for the other forms are applied to a being's ratings in this shape.

When werewolves change from human shape, they don't always tear up the clothes they were wearing and need replacement ones when they resume a human shape. Rather, their clothes and objects carried that are not intentionally kept in hand (or paw or jaws) disappear into the spirit world. They remain there and return to changers' bodies at will when human form is resumed. Typically, man-wolf, near-wolf and wolf forms preclude wearing of clothes.

NEAR-HUMAN FORM

A werewolf in this shape is best described as a brutish human, with an extremely hairy body that is

somewhat more bulky than could easily pass for human. Werewolves can go generally unnoticed in this form, but doing so requires heavy clothes, low light and a good bit of distance. Speech is difficult and is restricted to a guttural version of human language.

Strength +2, Stamina +2

WOLFMAN FORM

A creature in man-wolf form is its most terrifying, standing anywhere from eight and 10 feet in height, and is a veritable combat machine. Its physiology is a blend of human and wolf, looking like an upright crossbreed of the two, with a predominantly wolf-like head. The werewolf is capable of incredible speed and savagery in this form. It communicates through grunts and barks only.

Strength +4, Dexterity +1, Stamina +3

NEAR-WOLF FORM

A changer in near-wolf shape looks like an oversized wolf, roughly the same size as a small horse. It could be mistaken for a normal wolf only by people who are completely unfamiliar with the natural animals. It's a terrifying sight, whether it's recognized or not. Communication is reduced to wolf-like barks and the being cannot manipulate complex objects such as handles; it no longer has opposable thumbs.

Strength +3, Dexterity +2, Stamina +3

WOLF FORM

A creature in this shape is indistinguishable from normal wolves except through use of second sight and some observation edges. Wolf-born werewolves heal at normal human rates in this form (lost health levels cannot be recovered by expending Rage points) but suffer no extra damage when attacked with silver weapons (also see "Resistance to Damage").

Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Stamina +2

Successes Result

Botch	The werewolf fails to slip into the other world, remaining in the physical one. It may not attempt another crossing in this scene. Not even other werewolves or wercreatures can help it or bring it with them.
0	The werewolf fails to disappear. It may try again in the next turn or be taken across by another creature.
1	The werewolf fades from sight over three turns. It is impervious to mundane physical attacks in this time, but may still be affected by edges that affect minds and incorporeal targets as if the shapechanger were a ghost.
2	As above, but the werewolf crosses in two turns.
3	The werewolf crosses instantaneously.

WEAKNESSES

Although werewolves are potent and fearsome, they also suffer from some dangerous vulnerabilities. They are particularly susceptible to damage from two particular sources, fire and silver, which inflict what's called aggravated damage. This form of harm is even more detrimental than lethal damage, because it cannot be regenerated by spending Rage points. Only the passage of a great deal of time or some forms of werewolf magic speed up the healing process. Mark health levels lost to aggravated damage with an "X" on a werewolf's Health chart. That is, apply aggravated damage done to werewolves as lethal damage is applied to hunters. A Health chart full of aggravated damage indicates a dead shapechanger.

FIRE

Flames inflict horrible, slow-to-heal wounds on shapeshifters. The creatures can soak damage from fire,

however. The difficulty of soak rolls depends on the heat of the fire. Fire inflicts levels of damage per turn as detailed in *Hunter*, p. 208.

Difficulty Fire Type

3	Small fires: candles, cigarette lighters
5	Average fires: a torch, gas burners
7	Large, white-hot fires: blowtorch, heart of a large bonfire
10	Extreme heat: Liquid metal or rock, plasma

SILVER

Significantly more deadly to werewolves is their bane, silver. This metal in its pure form has such a powerful effect that even touching something made of it sends pain coursing through a werewolf, and causes the automatic loss of a health level to aggravated damage. Damage from silver cannot be soaked or regenerated by spending Rage points. A weapon made of pure silver inflicts the normal amount of aggravated damage for its type. If the damage roll fails, one health level is still lost for mere contact with silver. Unfortunately for hunters, imitation silver, silver-plated items or even silver mixed with other metals causes none of these effects.

Human-born werewolves in human form and wolf-born werewolves in wolf form suffer no special damage from silver beyond what such a weapon would normally inflict. The werewolf-born suffer aggravated silver damage in any form, including wolf and human.

MUTATIONS

Those cursed werewolves born of two full-blooded werewolf parents are subject to more than mockery from their peers and a weakness to silver in all forms. Each and every one of them is marked by some deformity, whether physical, mental or emotional, that makes them stand out, possibly among even regular people and wolves.

Those werewolves that give in to the corruption that most fight — the Wyrms — have it even worse. It doesn't matter whether they were human-, wolf- or werewolf-born, they all suffer multiple mutations, also drawn from the list below. Unlike the werewolf-born, the fallen among werewolves bear their deformities with pride, not shame.

ANDROGYNY

The werewolf displays both male and female sexual characteristics and organs. The difficulties of Social rolls are increased by one in all forms.

ANTHROPOMORPHIC BATTLER FORM

The creature's man-wolf form isn't distinctly lupine. It's as huge and frightening as normal. It just doesn't look wolf-like. Nothing about the creature immediately suggests werewolf — even in this shape — to a hunter viewing the creature with second sight. Observation edges might be more suggestive. The creature does not have claws in this form, reducing damage dice pools by two for such attacks. The difficulty of bite attacks is increased by one.

BALD

From the moment this werewolf clawed its way out of its mother's womb, it has been utterly hairless. As it grew, it developed neither hair nor fur. This bizarre appearance can usually be hidden in human form — unless an observer notices the lack of eyebrows — but is plainly obvious in all others.

The difficulty of Social rolls is increased by one in all forms except human.

BIG HEAD

The werewolf's head is twice normal size, looking out of place in every form. The difficulty of all Appearance and Manipulation rolls is increased by two. The difficulties of bite attacks in wolf-man, near-wolf and wolf forms are *decreased* by two and do an extra die of damage.

BLEACHED

A werewolf that suffers from this deformity was born an albino. Its skin is faintly pink, its eyes a blood red and its fur pure white. It burns easily in bright sunshine unless it takes care to cover its body. The difficulties of Perception rolls increase by two in bright light, and the difficulties of all Social rolls increase by one.

CRIPPLED NOSE

In werewolf society, to have no sense of smell is as bad as having no vision in human society. Scent is as much a part of these beasts' understanding of the world as sight is to us. This deformity leads to the werewolf being pitied as much as despised among its own. The pathetic creature fails all rolls that require a sense of smell, and the difficulties of all tracking rolls increase by two.

DEVIL'S MARK

As if to mark a werewolf as clearly tainted and unnatural, this one was born with two small horns that have since grown into those of a ram, stag, goat or similar creature.

The horns increase the difficulty of any Social rolls by three in any form in which the deformities are clearly visible. The horns can be used as weapons and do Strength +1 bashing damage.

DOGFACE

This mutation perpetuates a lupine aspect even when a creature assumes human and near-human form. Her face still has an extended snout and wolfish eyes. Appearance is always zero.

FERAL TALONS

The werewolf's claws are always visible, no matter what form is assumed. The effect is extremely disturbing in human form; the difficulties of Social rolls are increased by two unless the werewolf wears gloves.

FITS

The shapechanger is utterly unable to cope with failure. Whenever a roll is botched, make a Willpower roll, difficulty 8. Three successes are required or the creature falls to the ground, convulsing uncontrollably,

and loses control of its bowels and bladder. The fits last for the remainder of the scene.

HUNCHBACK

The werewolf's spine was twisted before it was born, and the deformity has only become worse with time. The creature now has the aspect of the classic hunchback, mixed with the appearance of werewolf. It is an unfortunate sight, even to others of its own kind. Worse, the condition actually impedes the creature's movement. The difficulties of Social and Dexterity rolls are increased by one.

LEATHER HIDE

This deformity results in the werewolf having tough, hard skin. The condition is difficult to hide in human form, and impossible to hide in all others as darkened, stiff skin and patchy tufts of hair are evident. The skin also smells and constantly itches. The werewolf's Appearance can never be more than 1, but it gains an extra die on soak rolls as its tough skin absorbs damage. The difficulties of rolls involving concentration are increased by one due to the constant itching.

MOONSTRUCK

The creature suffers the insanity traditionally associated with werewolves. Anytime it is in a stressful situation, make a Willpower roll, difficulty 8. Three or more successes are needed or the creature gains one of the derangements from the *Hunter* rulebook (p. 203) or from *Hunter Book: Wayward* (p. 82) for the remainder of the scene.

RUNT

Whether the werewolf was the smallest in the litter or he just stunted his growth by smoking at a young age, the creature is small. Wolf form is the size of a medium-sized dog, whereas wolf-man form is only about six feet tall. The difficulties of all Social rolls made toward other werewolves are increased by two.

SKEER HIDEOUSNESS

This mutation can manifest in many ways: festering boils on the face, half of the body covered with hairy moles, or brittle skin that cracks and bleeds constantly. Whatever the case, Appearance is zero in all forms.

SICKLY

Illness and disease are not concerns for most werewolves. Their immune systems are far stronger than those of humans. Not so for werewolves with this deformity. They catch every disease that they come into contact with. Although they usually fight it off in the end, their constant state of illness means they are less healthy than other werewolves. The creature has no Bruised health level.

SIGHTLESS

The werewolf was born with two empty sockets where its eyes should be. While this problem is worse in human form, remaining senses can compensate in other forms. The werewolf fails all rolls that require sight, although other senses allow it to move and fight, so the Blind Combat rules (*Hunter*, p. 196) do not apply unless the creature is in human

form. Also, for a werewolf suffering this deformity the difficulty to disappear is never lower than 9.

STUNTED LIMB

One of the werewolf's limbs has failed to develop properly, becoming little more than bones with a thin layer of flesh. The limb, while not quite useless, is much weaker than it should be. If the werewolf's leg is stunted or a beast afflicted with any stunted limb is in near-wolf or wolf form its movement is reduced by a third. The difficulties of Dexterity rolls that involve an arm are increased by two.

TAILLESS

Tails are not just adornments for wolves and werewolves, they play a role in communication and physical balance. In man-wolf, near-wolf and wolf forms, the difficulties of Social and Dexterity rolls increase by one.

RITUALS

Sutton awoke abruptly in the middle of the night, but that wasn't what struck him as strange. After his first time, he frequently woke from bad dreams — or couldn't sleep at all. But this time he was sleeping soundly. Disturbingly, the first thing that alerted him to trouble was a burning smell. Not the acrid wood smell of a house on fire, but something else. It sort of smelled like pot. But Sutton hadn't smoked any weed — not recently anyway.

Struggling out of bed, he opened the door to the living room and immediately spotted the small leather bag hanging from the lampshade. It was smoldering, and it sure as hell hadn't been there when he went to bed.

Then he heard the howls....

One of werewolves' greatest strengths, beyond even their shapechanging and inhuman capabilities, is their ability to work together. Unlike many predators that are essentially solitary or at least self-interested, werewolves are capable of working in packs, coordinating their efforts and backing up each other. Such cooperation doesn't apply only to stalking and fighting, though. They are also capable of pooling their supernatural powers to create effects that are much more potent and terrifying than their individual spells alone.

By gathering together and praying, sacrificing and making offerings to the spirits they worship, shapechangers are able to call on vast mystical forces. Most rituals require a minimum of three werewolves, one of whom must lead the ceremony and focus on it for the duration. If her concentration is broken, the ritual is ruined. Rituals are holy and spiritual affairs. Shapeshifters react violently and fanatically to anyone who interrupts.

The following rituals are available to werewolves in addition to the spells at their disposal (as detailed in the *Hunter Storyteller Companion*, p. 45).

HOW THEY WORK

Werewolves believe that by gathering in numbers and calling upon the spirits, they can be granted boons

that they could not achieve individually. They do their best to attract spirits' attention by making sacrifices, howling, singing, dancing and performing specific activities for each ritual.

The ceremonies are typically performed in holy places, usually those maintained or protected by changer colonies. Use of such sites isn't always possible or even desirable, though. A rite may require closer proximity to its focus or have detrimental effects on the surroundings. In these cases, the creatures spare a few of their number to watch over the ritual in progress and to protect it from external interference. Thin-blooded kin can also be used for such guard duty if they're available and amenable.

What do these rituals look like to hunters? The werewolf attendees certainly seem to be up to something mystical — something cultlike or even pagan. Rarely do the invoked spirits actually appear in the physical world, so the performing creatures probably seem directly responsible for any "magic" effects that result.

If hunters watch a ritual, describe its progress in some detail, conveying a build-up to some climax and a palpable hint of power in the air. As any onlookers have to be using second sight just to observe, they sense a significant *wrongness* to the whole scene. Rituals can be performed by changers in any form. Indeed, some rituals require chanting by a number of werewolves in different forms. Sacrifices of objects, animals or people is common. Many rituals demand bodily fluids — blood, semen, urine, feces or saliva — or other substances — ash, mud, plant extracts or paint — to anoint participants or to draw mystical symbols on the ground, trees or stones. Symbolic acts of sex or violence are used in some cases, and fire often features prominently.

The amount of time a ritual takes to perform depends on its intensity.

- Common rituals require at least 10 minutes
- Uncommon rituals require at least 30 minutes
- Rare rituals require at least an hour

When the requisite time passes without the ritual leader being interrupted, make the roll required for the rite.

Each werewolf taking place in the ritual that is seriously distracted for more than a minute — by entering combat, moving away from the immediate area of the ritual master or starting a conversation with someone outside the ceremony — adds one to the difficulty of the ritual roll. If the difficulty exceeds 10, the rite fails automatically, but the performance doesn't have to end prematurely. It can proceed if any participants are still involved. The werewolves and interfering hunters collectively learn whether the ceremony succeeds or fails at its climax.

If a ritual is performed out of hunter view, make the requisite roll assuming that all the preparations are made and performed correctly, or just decide the result based on the needs of your story.

COMMON RITUALS

RIYUAL OF AWARENESS

A werewolf can become so attuned to an area around her that she is aware of everything that happens there. The ritual master gazes intently into a bowl of water taken from a flowing source in the region and urinates on the ground in front of her. The other werewolves encircle her, growling softly.

System: Spend one Rage point for the ritual master and roll her Perception + Occult against a difficulty based on the table below. Each success allows the master to see one event happening within the area, as chosen by her. Events can be seen only as they happen. If the roll fails, she sees nothing. If it botches, she sees what she hopes or fears to see, not reality. The effects of the ritual last for one hour per success gained, and the master doesn't have to remain in the locale to know what goes on there.

Area	Difficulty
Small clearing	5
Meeting hall	6
Large house	7
Acre of land	8
Small Forest	9

RIYUAL OF CHANGING

Werewolves use this ritual to keep track of a child that one day may be one of their own. The ritual must be conducted at night within a month of the child's birth, even if that requires the baby being kidnapped from his parents. The child is "baptized" with ashes and werewolf blood while attendees cry out their joy at a possible new werewolf being born. Symbols are etched on the child's ears, nose, eyelids and tongue. The baby is then held up to the moon at the end of the ceremony and the werewolves howl to the spirits, asking them to look after the child. Thereafter, if the child is endangered, about to undergo its first change or moved a long distance, the ritual performers are alerted and intuitively know where to find the child. Hunters trying to protect or hide parents and their child from werewolves may find their every attempt mysteriously thwarted.

System: Spend one Rage point for the ritual master and roll Charisma + Occult (difficulty 7). The more successes achieved, the more information and detail the werewolves receive about any danger or significant change that arises for the child. The effects of this ritual can persist for years, usually until a child undergoes the first change or proves to be of impure blood.

RIYUAL OF FINDING

This ritual allows performing werewolves to track the location of a known object or person. Attendees must know the name of the person, have some part of an object sought or possess something from the subject's home or resting place. The ritual master fashions a dousing rod while other participants chant or howl to the spirits for guidance.

System: Spend one Rage point for the ritual master and roll Wits + Occult (difficulty 7). The ritual conveys a sense of where the subject can be found — approximate distance and direction — at the time of the rite's performance, but not its exact location. This ritual cannot be used to find a place.

RITUAL OF POWER

This rite can be conducted only in a werewolf holy place. Werewolves call upon the spirits to choose one of them as a champion. They then anoint the chosen werewolf (who must assume wolf-man form) with paint, blood and other substances. If the ritual is successful, the werewolf gains power for a particular mission.

System: Spend two Rage points for the ritual master and roll Wits + Occult (difficulty 7). A number of dice equal to the number of successes achieved are added to the chosen creature's dice pools when taking actions that further his mission. These bonus dice are all added to any applicable roll. The effect lasts for the remainder of the story or until the mission is completed. The mission must be stated clearly at the beginning of the ritual, and the goal must be achievable. "To slay a certain person," "to destroy a building and its inhabitants" or "to discover who threatens our holy place" are all valid examples.

UNCOMMON RITUALS

RITUAL OF FEAR

This ritual is used to punish and terrify humans who have offended shapechangers, either directly or by harming the earth, without killing the people immediately. Participants are able to harry and pursue victims for hours without those people falling into the normal catatonia that the creatures induce.

A bag of mixed herbs is lit and placed within 10 feet of a sleeping victim. If more people are in the vicinity, they can all be affected. The ritual itself is performed some distance away. The werewolves enumerate a subject's crimes while calling upon the spirits for vengeance. When the ritual is complete, the subject snaps awake and the hunt begins.

System: Spend two of the ritual master's Rage points and roll his Charisma + Occult (difficulty 7). If the roll succeeds, the subject can see werewolves (and only werewolves) for what they are for one hour per success achieved. If the victim is a hunter, she can see any werewolves without need of second sight or observation edges, but is denied the protection against mental and emotional attacks and body control that spending Conviction confers. Indeed, Conviction cannot be spent to gain second sight or to gain protection from the powers of any kind of monster for the duration of the ritual. A reflexive Conviction roll (*Hunter*, p. 133) might be made for a sleeping hunter to resist the effects of the ritual *before* it takes hold.

Victims of this rite are stalked and harried by rite performers, although any werewolf can stand before them without inducing mind-numbing fear. Whether a subject

is killed at the end of the hunt is up to the shapechangers involved. Once the ritual has been performed successfully, participating werewolves always have a sense of a target's location for the ritual's duration.

RITUAL OF PURIFICATION

This ceremony is performed to clear an area of what werewolves consider corruption. In essence, it drives supernatural influence from a place, potentially forcing ghosts and physical creatures from the vicinity.

Werewolves perform the ritual by marking a circle around the perimeter. Participants walk counter-clockwise it, waving branches, spilling blood and water from unpolluted streams, and howling.

System: Spend one Rage point for the ritual master for the land to be cleansed, and then an additional point for each person, creature or object within that area that specifically needs to be purified. Roll the ritual master's Charisma + Occult (difficulty 7). Any supernatural powers that have a prolonged effect or that are active in the area are terminated (other werewolf spells and hunter edges are not affected). Terminated powers can be used or renewed afterward in the area normally, but must be performed again.

Similarly, any supernatural creatures in the area (not including shapechangers, their kin or hunters) are subject to harm. They suffer one level of bashing damage for each success achieved in the roll. Possession victims are not harmed, but their controlling spirits are. People under direct supernatural influence such as vampires' blood slaves are affected (such people are not freed from supernatural control, though). A person who was once a possession victim or blood servant and who appeared wrong to second sight as a result now seems ordinary again. (These "liberated" people still cannot be imbued thereafter, though.)

The maximum area that can be cleansed is five yards, multiplied by the number of werewolves participating.

RITUAL OF TRAVEL

The ritual allows a group of werewolves to travel from one of their holy places to another natural area anywhere on the earth that's free of any signs of human influence. The effect can be used to escape quickly or to launch an unexpected attack. Participants focus on their destination and mission while the ritual master offers an enchanted stone to the moon. Each werewolf howls its own plea for a safe journey.

System: Spend three of the master's Rage points and roll her Wits + Occult (difficulty 8). If the roll succeeds, the ritualists disappear simultaneously and reappear at their chosen destination almost instantaneously. Only those participating in the ritual may travel in this way. Hunters can't join them; they're bound to the material world.

RARE RITUALS

RITUAL OF AGING

This is a more grievous version of the Ritual of Fear. It's performed on someone who has repeatedly



offended werewolves or the Mother Spirit but who has proved difficult to punish. Performers take evidence of the subject's crime — whether a bloody weapon, a victim's corpse, an accountant's report on environmentally destructive construction, or even a hunter's journal that describes his work against shapeshifters — and gather where the perceived crime occurred (or close to it). Then they ritually destroy the evidence and lay waste to the place.

System: Spend five of the ritual master's Rage points and roll her Manipulation + Intimidation (difficulty 7). If the roll succeeds, the victim ages one year per day until the ritual master lifts the curse or is killed. The *Respire*, *Restore* or *Rejuvenate* edges can be used to extend the victim's life. Each success achieved on such an edge roll staves off the ritual effects for one day. If a hunter gets four successes on a *Restore* roll, for example, the person she treats does not age at an accelerated rate until four days pass. Only one effort to delay the effects of this rite can be made on a single subject. Any other attempts with any other edges have no result. (Successive uses of *Restore* or *Respire* cannot prevent the subject's aging indefinitely, for example.) A hunter's active *Conviction* cannot protect him against or prevent the effects of this rite.

RIYUAL OF CONCEALMENT

This rite is used to conceal a werewolf holy place that is under active threat of discovery by humans — or hunters. The ritual master walks the bounds of the holy place while attendants mark the boundaries with urine, feces and clawed markings. Once the ritual has been completed, anyone attempting to find the place is probably lost, traveling in circles or completely losing their sense of direction. The werewolves can then pick them off at will. Effects of the ritual persist as long as the shapechanger community resides at or presides over the holy place, or until a new ritual is performed.

System: Spend 10 Rage points among the participants. Roll the ritual master's Wits + Occult (difficulty 7). Any participating werewolf may spend a Willpower point to guarantee a success. A Willpower roll (difficulty 6) must be made for anyone attempting to find the holy place. If that roll does not exceed the number of successes that the werewolves achieved, the person becomes hopelessly lost. Hunters with active *Conviction* make the roll at difficulty 4, instead. Another Willpower roll can be made for a lost person every three hours, but the difficulty increases by one each time. If she tries to leave the way she came, the difficulty is reduced by one for each attempt until it returns to the base level and the search has come to naught. One *Conviction* point has to be spent to gain the reduced difficulty each time hunters try to continue a search. Spending Willpower points does not gain intruders automatic successes on their search rolls.

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