

## On Were-Creatures - Introduction and Were-sharks

I doubt anyone is unaware of the Selection, so an overview of it may seem redundant. However, one thing I have learned is that publishing must always keep in mind the future reader, one for whom our current situation is not so inescapable. So, with that in mind, let me start this series with some context.

At some point within the past few years, the Crown of Vol'Surtoth was unearthed. Evidently the Crown had some power of wish-fulfilment, albeit one tempered by its own inclinations. This ancient artefact of Old Magic was virtually unknown outside of scholarly circles, but somehow it was retrieved from its hidden temple and - after passing through a frustratingly untraceable series of hands - wound up in the possession of the leadership of Candle Cove. Given that this town is ruled by the Guild, a notoriously expansion-focussed clan of wererats, it is unsurprising that the results were impactful.

What the wererats intentions were exactly is still unclear, but some conclusions can be drawn from the results. On the first full moon of the new year, an event now known as the Selection took place. This was heralded with a flash above Candle Cove bright enough to be visible almost everywhere else on the continent, followed by an echoing thunder that seemed to ring from all sides. Following this unexpected announcement, a small amount of the population suddenly underwent a change.

Exact numbers are hard to quantify, given the sample size we are dealing with and a common reluctance to come forward. But the best estimates say that around 1-5% of the population found themselves immediately and irreversibly afflicted with a novel form of lycanthropy<sup>1</sup>. We can assume that the Candle Cove Guild planned to seed wererats throughout the world, and indeed this particular type of lycanthropy has become the baseline against which others are measured (that said, I am sure they were *not* intending these new wererats to set up their own, competing Guilds, resulting in a series of maddeningly complex political relations). However, even with wererats being most common, in total they are dwarfed by other subspecies of lycanthrope resulting from the Selection. With each strain appearing to have its own method of spreading to non-Selected individuals, our world has suddenly become a lot more complicated.

As one of the leading scholars in the realm of morphological creatures, I was soon approached to begin a study of this topic. Accordingly, I aim to publish a series of pamphlets detailing the specificities of lycanthropy so far observed. Each subspecies has its distinct traits and tendencies that are worth popularising - both for public knowledge and in service to any of those who are harbouring misconceptions about their own situation. It is also worth clarifying the exact methods of transmission, in order that steps can be taken to avoid accidental infection.

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<sup>1</sup> technically the term 'lycanthropy' refers to werewolves specifically, rather than a generic term for all were-creatures. However, my preferred term of 'animanthropy' has yet to receive recognition beyond academic circles, so I am using the more popular term for the sake of clarity. Likewise, while 'wererats' are common enough to be written without the hyphen, newer were-creatures are not so lucky

Finally, it is worth noting that all of this will necessarily be dealing in generalities. While it is my belief that the Selection chose strains matching the personality traits of their subjects, and that the lycanthropic infection provides instinctual reinforcement of certain tendencies, this conditioning is not total. Among creatures intelligent enough to be self-reflective, biology is never destiny. Having sharper teeth does not require you to eat only meat, for example. While the majority of wererats are, shall we say, enthusiastically social, it is entirely possible to meet ones that are more reserved. Likewise, in areas where certain traits have a negative perception individuals may deliberately act against their inclinations. Quite simply, people will always be different, even when faced with pressures to conform to a type.

Nonetheless, I believe this information is worth publishing, even if only to educate those dealing with these unexpected changes. I know how hard it can be to find your body reshaping to a radically different form, as well as having to discover new ways of getting about the world. If even one newly-minted were-shark knows enough not to panic when an unexpected full moon catches them far from the nearest body of water, then these pamphlets will have served their purpose.

## **Were-sharks**

### **Overview:**

Perhaps we should begin with the subspecies that prompted this discussion, were-sharks. These were, I have heard, among the most surprised at the outset of the Selection, given they found themselves suddenly incapable of walking. It is also particularly unfortunate that one of the legacies of the Mage Wars in our distant past is that the lunar cycle is impossible to predict.<sup>2</sup> This means that many were-sharks relocate themselves near bodies of water at their first opportunity, so that they can benefit from their shift rather than finding it distressingly limiting.

Given their heightened difficulties, were-sharks provide a useful example of the overall lycanthropic cycle. On the average day, they are mostly indistinguishable from the rest of the population, with only a few key features tending to mark them out. When notably excited, threatened, or aroused their bodies tend to shift further, settling somewhere between their 'normal' and 'lunar' forms. However, on the night of a full moon, they are forced into the most extreme version, which they inhabit until at least the following daybreak - although this time period can allegedly be extended if they engage in particularly strenuous activity.

### **Personality and tendencies:**

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<sup>2</sup> it is rumoured that the leadership of Candle Cove have developed an accurate method of predicting full moons, at least for the period of the upcoming 14 days. Even if this is true, they do not seem inclined to share their work, so for the common person the phases of the moon remain like the rest of our weather, with little more than educated guesses being valid beyond the next day

Many were-sharks exhibit a preference for independence and self-sufficiency. That's not to say they can't be loving and affectionate partners, more that it might be hard for the average person to keep up with them. Given their unique needs they're less likely than most lycanthropes to be secretive about their condition, at least to those close enough to notice them disappearing into the water so frequently. That can lead them to be more brash and boastful than most, including physical challenges and daily sparring the relationships they have with others.

### **Physical characteristics:**

Physiologically, the were-shark strain of lycanthropy has one of the milder non-lunar impacts on its recipients. There is a tendency towards more angular features; shorter hair, rougher skin, together with more pronounced webbing between their fingers and toes. Their most notable physical trait is their near-universal perfect teeth, which swiftly regrow from any loss or damage. They are also normally very strong swimmers, although it's hard to tell if this is innate or merely the result of considerable practice. Relatedly, they're often quite physically fit, although again this could be either due to their lycanthropy or their inclination towards exercise.

When underwater, faint gills become visible on the back of the were-shark's neck. Their effectiveness in this state varies by individual; some can breathe comfortably for as long as they wish, while others only rely on it for emergencies, likening the experience to 'drinking' air through far too long a straw.

### **Forms:**

In their 'shifted' forms, were-sharks are able to traverse both land and water, albeit not as effectively as in their apex forms. Typically in this midway form their skin becomes grey, cartilaginous and rough, while their head narrows slightly to a more streamlined appearance. A fin frequently appears between their shoulder blades, and webbing extends completely between their fingers and toes. Most notable however is the shark tail that extends out from their spine, growing slightly longer than their legs and quickly becoming strong enough to give guiding propulsion underwater. On land their muscles are strong enough to extend and move this tail with effort, a fact that several adversaries have learned to their surprise when it hits them in the face. In this form their gills are visible at all times, and all subjects report they can breathe air and water without complaint.

The 'lunar' form of a were-shark is more specialised. Their legs meld with their tail entirely, leaving them all but incapable of traversing the land. However, their muscles are perfectly aligned for swimming, and as such they can reach truly incredible speeds underwater. While they do not lose the ability to breathe air entirely it does prove more troublesome, giving them yet more incentive towards inactivity if their change should catch them away from a suitable body of water. Likewise, their general appearance becomes less human, with any hair melding with their increasingly shark-like head. They are still recognisable as more than simple sharks, but they do present a startlingly quick silhouette as they glide through the water. To make matters worse, most were-sharks report difficulty in talking in this form. Some blame it on their mouths not wanting to form words, others on simply having too many teeth, while a few admit that conversation just feels too indirect. While were-sharks are no more inherently dangerous

during the full moon than they are at any other time, few people would be able to win a fight underwater with one in their lunar form should they wish to pursue it.

### **Transmission:**

All lycanthropes instinctively know how to spread their particular infection. This is not information that is arrived at consciously, there is no pamphlet that arrives upon your doorstep as soon as you become a were-shark.<sup>3</sup> Rather, in the same way that all creatures have an idea of how to procreate, so too does lycanthropy come with a set of urges that, if followed, result in another lycanthrope.

Fortunately for their intended recipients, the transmission vector for were-sharks is surprisingly gentle. Bites and scratches are both non-infectious, and indeed no casual or aggressive contact carries any unusual risk. Instead, transmission occurs during something like an elaborate kiss.

The were-shark will take their intended partner to a body of water, deep enough that they can both be comfortably submerged. Once immersed there will generally be enough physical stimulation to excite the were-shark into their shifted form (if not already in that or their lunar form), at which point they will pull their partner into a deep embrace. The resulting kiss will be long enough that the subject needs to breathe, and yet the were-shark will not let them free. Instead they will hold them closer still, pressing their mouths together and essentially breathing through their gills for both of them. Whether due to this sensation or the lack of air, this will cause the prospective lycanthrope to drift into unconsciousness, after which the original were-shark will leave them on the shore to recover. Once they awaken their body will have subtly altered to take on the non-lunar aspects of a were-shark, and their own lycanthropy will have firmly taken hold.

Whether the two stay together or part ways is up to the individuals themselves. Nonetheless I would advise that if anyone finds themselves beguiled by an aquatic encounter before waking up dazed and confused, your tongue pricked in your mouth by unexpectedly sharp teeth - find a way to invest in beachfront property. You'll thank me later.

- Isobelle Carroway

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<sup>3</sup> Unless, of course, my publishing budget and information gathering abilities increase dramatically