

On Were-Creatures - Were-spiders

Overview:

Unlike were-sharks, who tend to be open with their lycanthropy due to their special requirements, were-spiders are generally more secretive. There are many elements that contribute to this, but chief among them is their poor reputation. Rumours about their tendencies abound, ranging from the fact that they're all fiercely self-serving femme fatales (patently false), to the idea that they spread their lycanthropy through tying up their victims and sucking the humanity out of them (misleading at best). The truth, as always, is much more complicated.

One thing that is true about were-spiders is that they display a rare lycanthropic trait in abundance. Namely, the fact that some lycanthropes have a gender presentation associated with them that does not necessarily match the pre-lycanthropy individual. This appears to be an added wrinkle to the process of contracting a were-creature infection, and seems to be somewhat randomly distributed across all subjects. Overall, perhaps 2% of all were-creatures find their shifted and lunar forms displaying different gender characteristics than their normal forms, regardless of the subspecies of lycanthrope they belong to. The impact this has depends on the individual. Some switch comfortably between genders depending on their form, others consider themselves the same gender at all times despite their physical presentation, while still others simply consider themselves gender fluid at all times.

Were-spiders, however, are an exception. While it is possible that examples exist with masculine shifted and lunar forms, they would at best be exceedingly rare. All the cases I've found have a feminine build while transformed, no matter their previous presentation.¹ While this trait is not responsible for their poor reputation, it does contribute to it by further obfuscating their identity. Stories abound of master thieves leading perfect double lives, relying on the significant visual differences between their forms to hide any connection.

Personality and tendencies:

There is a marked tendency towards dominating behaviour in were-spiders, and individuals feel an increased desire towards personal satisfaction the further their shift progresses. They are often thought of as being cold and calculating, with an ability to manage complex plans while masking their own intentions.

These aspects do not help their reputation.

As always, none of these traits are universal. Individual were-spiders can always self-correct away from them, in order to maintain a good standing. At the same time, alternate solutions exist to incorporate these traits comfortably into their lives. Aside from the prospect of living a

¹ The terms 'feminine' and 'masculine' here are crude, and don't entirely represent the reality of the situation. It's an issue I can certainly relate to, being myself a woman with what is often considered masculine genitalia. Likewise, even shifted were-spiders may sometimes have a penis, but they always also have a vagina, and their body typically features breasts and other curves typically associated with femininity

shadow life as a thief or spymaster, many were-spiders slip naturally into the role of brothel owners or professional dominatrixes. Still others simply work to find satisfaction in themselves, either withdrawing from society in general or on the occasions where their instincts get too overwhelming. In this way they can avoid the urge to entangle others in petty schemes, which no doubt makes for a much quieter life for all concerned.

Physical characteristics:

Fitting with their tendency towards secrecy, were-spiders exhibit almost no non-lunar alterations to their form. They tend towards being somewhat taller and thinner, while carrying themselves with a dancer's grace in their deliberate movements, but none of that is so expressive that it can be used to identify their condition. About the only physical trait that remains in their human form are notably sharper incisors, which can be hidden easily if needed. Beyond that, they exhibit an increased saliva production, and this fluid is also significantly more viscous than average. Again, it's not enough to pick a were-spider out from a crowd, but some disguises have reportedly been broken due to the want of a drink of water.

Their shifted form however sees a number of alterations. As mentioned above their body changes dramatically towards a feminine build, if it was not already. Subjects who currently lack them develop a vagina, and any with a flat chest develop breasts. At the same time their skin hardens over their hands, forming into a shining black exoskeleton 'glove' that extends upwards to their elbow. A similar development occurs at their feet, giving them 'socks' that reach almost to their shins. Both their fingers and toes become sharp, forming into claws that can find purchase in a wall just as easily as they can scratch deeply into an adversary. Their fangs become visible as they grow out beyond their lips, while at the same time their eyes become uniformly blood red. Notably, both their saliva and their genital fluids become distinctly thick, hardening in moments when separated from their body. This gives the were-spider a near-endless supply of quick-drying material with which to bind others, and they are instinctively skilled at applying this tool. Quite aside from any larcenous activities (houses being robbed while their inhabitants are securely bound in their beds is a sure sign that an unusually direct were-spider has passed through), this talent feeds a predilection for binding and restraint play in sexual situations, not to mention forming part of their unique method of spreading their infection.

A were-spider's lunar form is likely the most extreme of all known lycanthropic subspecies. At the outset of the full moon the subject is compelled to produce an inordinate amount of their binding fluid, which, unlike in their shifted form, sticks to themselves as well. This builds up rapidly, giving them perhaps no more time than a short conversation to prepare. Regardless of any attempts to delay things, eventually they will cocoon themselves completely, remaining dormant for a short time.²

² The vulnerability of this period goes some way to explaining the secrecy that were-spiders tend to operate under, especially given that they receive no more warning about the full moon than the rest of us. If you could suddenly be forced into complete immobility, you might also be inclined to make sure you have no enemies that know where to find you

This cocoon will twitch and grow, taking up enough space that simply concealing themselves in a cupboard is not an option. However, given a were-spider's proficiency with climbing, a popular approach is to make for an unlit corner of the ceiling, thereby both giving themselves room and avoiding attention. The cocoon will split open when the moon is fully risen, and the were-spider's lunar form will emerge.

From the waist up, they look largely similar to their shifted body, except now with the addition of a stiff corset made from another growth of their black exoskeleton. A cluster of smaller, secondary eyes surround their main ones, while their fangs develop into mandibles that can move independently outside their lips.³ Despite all that, if they were strategically concealed behind a table, a were-spider even in its lunar form could just about pass for a human. However, given the rest of the changes, it would need to be a very large table.

The lower body of a lunar were-spider consists mostly of a massive, arachnoid abdomen, from which emerge six chitinous legs, each tipped with claw tufts that allow them to walk comfortably even when hanging from the roof. Generally, those in this form are around 8-10 feet tall in total, with their bulbous rear easily 2-3 feet wide. There are spinnerets at the end of this abdomen, from which they can quickly produce a tremendous quantity of sticky silk.⁴ The were-spider's rear legs are adept at spinning and deploying this silk, so any subject pounced upon by such a lycanthrope is likely to find themselves immobilised in short order.

At the end of the full moon period, were-spiders have a characteristically unusual way of reverting to normal. Their whole exoskeleton stiffens dramatically, freezing them in place and forcing them to sleep as they undergo another metamorphosis. By the time the sun has risen this shell cracks open, and the were-spider steps out rejuvenated, once again in their human form. Their rear legs, abdomen and other altered elements crumble to dust within the course of the morning, while any remaining silk loses its adhesive properties. Should anyone remain restrained they are only able to get free long after the were-spider has departed, and with presumably little idea of the normal identity of their captor.

Transmission:

The tendencies towards restraint play a large part of how were-spider's spread their lycanthropy. When they have a candidate suitably restrained, a were-spider may follow their instincts and bind them still further. A short period of dedicated effort is sufficient for the lunar form to completely encase someone in their silk, and it is this cocooning that seems to trigger the infection to take hold. It seems possible for a were-spider to conduct the process while merely in their shifted form, but it is much harder. A lot more work is required to create enough silk to fully cocoon someone while lacking access to their lunar spinnerets, and as such this

³ Strangely, subjects seem to have no trouble talking in this form, even given what should be a substantial physical impediment. Apparently, a lisp would get in the way of making seductively threatening speeches, and so their mouth automatically compensates

⁴ Attempts to set up textile production using were-spiders have so far not panned out, with the mastermind in charge found stuck upside-down to the ceiling the next day. As far as I'm aware of, no were-spider has attempted the venture themselves, although presumably the marketing and distribution would be challenging to say the least

would tend to be something that would require active participation from their partner. I can quote no specific examples of this beyond rumour however, and this speaks to how the whole lycanthropic transmission procedure is frustratingly ill-established.

The chief reason for this is that it is rare. Many were-spiders are fiercely competitive, and the prospect of creating a new lycanthrope can feel more like creating another rival than a partner. While I'm sure there *are* examples of were-spider partnerships or more caring, deliberate reproduction, that is not what I was able to find. Instead most cases I uncovered were either travelling were-spiders looking to create cover in their wake, or extremely high-cost commission work that entailed binding (if you'll excuse the pun) agreements to move to a different region.

Accordingly, because I have such a small sample size, it's hard to tell exactly *what* is required for transmission. It's clear that bites or cuts are insufficient, as there are many cases where those frequenting a dominatrix were-spider's parlour come away with at least that much and no other ill-effects. However, while it's clear that a full-body cocoon is required, the few discussions I've had make clear that there's an array of instincts and urges that come into play that can be hard to separate. A were-spider may find it impossible to resist giving a completely bound prospect a quick bite, but is that necessary, or just another aspect of dominance coming into play?

In any case, the new were-spider emerges from their cocoon the next morning.⁵ Typically they are alone, and for the first time are confronted with their shifted form. This is often an especially dramatic difference for the reasons noted above, so the period of adjustment can be substantial. Based on the testimony I have gathered, my advice for any who find themselves in this situation - especially if it is unexpected - is to find productive outlets to channel their new instincts. Make yourself useful as a private investigator, or some other enterprise that can make use of your skills as you grow comfortable with them. At the very least, I would recommend taking up knitting.

Addendum - Case Study:

Much of this information came from correspondence with one particular were-spider, a librarian at an academic institution. Over the course of my research I realised this pamphlet would be enhanced with at least an overview of her specific story, and fortunately she consented to an in-person interview. Her only condition was that care was taken to obscure her identity, as she is not public about her situation. Accordingly, she will be referred to here as simply 'LS'.

The meeting itself was truly illuminating. Firstly, it was a reminder that even relatively minor emotional reactions can cause a shift in unprepared lycanthropes. As soon as I was ushered into her private office I noticed LS's eyes first widen then redden significantly, and by the time I shook her hand it was already encased in its black exoskeleton. Admittedly, the fact that she

⁵ If the cocooning is undertaken by a shifted were-spider it's possible it happened during the day, but even then emergence always happens the following morning. Whether this is because lycanthropic transmission it takes longer due to a weaker vector, or if the timing is instead linked to the sunrise is another thing we cannot yet establish

was prepared to discuss her condition may have made her more receptive to shifting, but it was still fascinating to observe in person. Whether the root cause was because she perceived me as a threat or a potential mate is something I politely declined to speculate on at the time.⁶

She did not wish to elaborate on the specifics of how she contracted her lycanthropic infection, beyond saying that she wasn't one of those initially Selected. I got the impression that while it was her choice, it was not well-planned. Instead it was something of a youthful indiscretion, or perhaps an impulsive choice she's since worked to reckon with.

Apparently, LS had always been very timid and shy. I can't describe her appearance too much for fear of exposing her, but suffice to say that in her non-lunar form she is somewhat small and non-threatening. These traits are very much not associated with were-spiders, and she intimated that she had been seeking to grow beyond her limitations by simply contracting that strain of lycanthropy. Upon doing so though, she found that personal growth is rarely that easy.

While she does have a powerful new set of instincts, they do not simply overwrite her personality. Even in her lunar form, when her urges are at their most demanding, she is still fundamentally her. She blushed in recounting this, but apparently the sight of a massive spider-bodied woman trying to psyche herself up enough to pounce does somewhat undermine the intimidation factor.

So instead, it's been a process. Channelling the were-spider's instincts for plotting more productively has led LS to develop an intricate organisational system for the library, deriving the same satisfaction from efficiency that others might have for some self-enriching scheme. At the same time, she's been working on allowing the aspects of her lycanthropy that she considers beneficial to shape her development. The advice about knitting above came from her, as she found that a useful early outlet.

Moreover, she is learning to put herself out there. The library she runs is quite spacious, giving her more than enough places to hide as she rides out her lunar changes, but increasingly she wants to grow beyond that approach. It's not that she intends to open a brothel (although she admits at times she's toyed with such thoughts, even if just as a private fantasy), but over time she's becoming more at ease with the power and control that can come from being a were-spider.

We were preparing to end the interview there when LS surprised both of us by extending an additional offer. If, perhaps, I was not too busy, maybe I could stay in town awhile longer, and we could meet up again on the next full moon. While neither of us could know when that was, she assured me she would leave the library door open, so that we could take advantage of the opportunity.

I asked her what opportunity exactly we'd be taking advantage of, and her cheeks blushed red as she looked away, chitin extending yet further up her arm as she fidgeted with her hair.

⁶ As an 8 foot tall, athletic snake-woman, I'm used to both reactions

"An... in-person demonstration?", she ventured eventually.

Reader, I could tell you I will update you on what I learn, but some things deserve to stay private. Suffice to say, if the next pamphlet is a little delayed, don't be concerned. I'm just a little tied up.

- Isobelle Carroway