

Werewolves

During a full moon, strange things happen to those who have been cursed with lycanthropy, or so the legend goes. Lycanthropes, or werewolves, have been the stuff of nightmares and spooky stories for thousands of years but, luckily, they are nothing more than a legend.

The first appearance of werewolves in literature seems to have been in 1800 BC in the epic poem, The Epic of Gilgamesh. In the story, Gilgamesh refuses to marry a woman because she used her magical powers to turn a previous man into a wolf.

There are also references to werewolves in Ancient Greek mythology. In the Legend of Lycaon, the son of Pelasgus angers Zeus by serving him a meal made from the remains of a sacrificed boy. Zeus responds by turning Lycaon and his sons into wolves.

Throughout the centuries, many evil people have claimed to be a werewolf as a way of explaining their actions. In 16th century France, two murderers named Pierre Burgot and Michel Verdun claimed that they had a potion that turned them into wolves. They argued that it was these wolves that had murdered their victims. The only known way to kill a werewolf was to burn them at the stake, and both men paid the price for their crimes.

During those superstitious times, anybody claiming to be a monster of any sort was immediately believed. This meant that stories grew and spread, and the legend of the werewolf gained power.

It didn't help that people were prepared to believe almost anything that explained horrible things. In the 1400s, a wealthy farmer named Peter Stubbe was blamed for the gruesome murders of many of the citizens of Bedburg in Germany. When he was eventually captured, the men who hunted him claimed that they watched him transform into a wolf and back again. He said that he had a magic belt that gave him the powers to do this. Unsurprisingly, no such belt was ever found.

Different legends explain lycanthropy in different ways. Some say that they are cursed creatures and have no control over when they turn into a wolf. This is often triggered by the full moon in many stories. Other stories say that werewolves are created when people wear magical furs or enchanted objects. In these tales, the people have more control over when they transform into a snarling beast. Some other myths and legends create werewolves whenever somebody is bitten by a cursed creature.

Strangely, there may be some truth to the idea of werewolves being created by a full moon. During a study carried out in an Australian hospital in 2009, they found that a quarter of instances of extreme patient aggression towards staff happened during a full moon. Maybe the people were in pain or confused, or perhaps the legends aren't so far-fetched, after all.