

Dragonshards

Lycanthropes and the Purge

By Keith Baker



In Eberron, the alignment of a lycanthrope is not linked to her animal form. A werebear can be evil and a werewolf can be good. Lycanthropes carrying an evil strain are some of the most terrifying creatures on Eberron: While a natural werewolf may wear a human shape, she is a born predator who takes joy in spilling human blood. Those afflicted by the disease suffer a dramatic change in personality, regardless of the alignment of the victim before and after the curse. As a result, lycanthropes of all types have always been feared. Under the best circumstances, the bite of a lycanthrope means a loss of identity; in the worst, it can make a good person into a vicious killer.

For an afflicted lycanthrope, this mental transformation is permanent. Even the strongest will crumbles before the supernatural power of the disease -- and only magical effects such as *miracle* or *atonement* can restore the former personality of the victim. A natural lycanthrope cannot be cured; the disease is a part of her body and soul, and it cannot be stripped away. The lycanthrope born into evil may find the strength to become good, but she will always feel the predator in the back of her mind, urging her to prey on the weak and innocent.

The origin of lycanthropy remains a mystery that defies even divination; *commune* and *legend lore* produce cryptic and often contradictory statements about moons made flesh and the darkness within. The sages of Arcanix and the Library of Korranberg have produced many theories, tracing the disease to the daelkyr, the Gloaming, manifest zones bound to Lamannia, or ancient druids. A more exotic theory comes from the Eldeen Reaches. A number of shifter tribes believe that the moons of Eberron are powerful spirits that watch the world below. These shifters maintain that the shifter race is not descended from lycanthropes: Rather, the first lycanthropes were formed from shifters. According to this legend, the moon Olarune sought to create guardians who could protect the world of nature; reaching down from the sky, she touched a handful of chosen shifters, granting them the power to fully assume animal form. But the moonspeakers say that a thirteenth spirit is in the sky -- a dark moon that hides its face from the world. This darkness corrupted Olarune's gift, infecting many of her chosen with madness and evil. Or so the tale is told. Shifters with these beliefs have hunted evil lycanthropes for centuries: they simply lacked the resources to eliminate the threat. While these hunters are a minority among the shifters, as a race the shifters have no great love for lycanthropes. A shifter community may take risks to shelter a good lycanthrope, but no sensible person would knowingly welcome an evil werewolf into his home.

While no one knows how lycanthropy began, most know of the purge that almost brought it to an end. Around 800 YK, the power of the curse began to grow. The scholars of Aundair sought an answer in planar conjunctions or the influence of unknown fiends, while deep in the Eldeen Reaches shifter moonspeakers bemoaned the growing power of the unseen moon. Evil lycanthropes -- always the most numerous of the shapeshifters -- became even more vicious, and many good and neutral lycanthropes were corrupted and drawn down to the darkness. Afflicted lycanthropes gained the ability to pass the curse to their own victims, allowing lycanthropy to spread with terrifying speed. By the early years of the ninth century, packs of werewolves were roaming across western Khorvaire and wererats had established warrens beneath the greatest cities of the age. Farmers lived in fear of wolves that walked like humans. What was once a superstition used to frighten children was now horrifying reality.

The Purge

The templars of the Church of the Silver Flame had fought shapeshifters in the past. But the heart of the Church of the Silver Flame was in the nation of Thrane, far from the traditional Eldeen haunts of the lycanthropes. As the death toll mounted in Aundair and Breland, the cardinals grew increasingly concerned and the templars began to take a more active role in the defense of the western lands. The puritan scholars of the Silver Flame began to study their enemies. A number of factors colored this research:

- The subjects of study were evil lycanthropes. Good lycanthropes were rare and reclusive to begin with, and many had fallen prey to the growing power of the curse. As a result, the puritans quickly assumed that all lycanthropes were inherently evil.
- Many priests noticed the similarity between the hybrid forms of the lycanthropes and the common form of the rakshasa, and asserted that lycanthropes were demons or would become true fiends in time.
- Curing lycanthropy is a difficult challenge. Natural lycanthropes cannot be cured, and an afflicted lycanthrope can be cured only if it wants to be; the shapeshifter can always choose to fail the associated Will saving throw. The first priests who sought a cure decided that it was impossible; only in the last decades of the purge did a band of more moderate and moral priests prove that it could be done.

In addition to this flawed research, the Keeper of the Flame had an agenda of his own. Jolan Sol saw the situation as an opportunity to strengthen the influence of the Silver Flame in Aundair. In 832 YK he proclaimed that the curse of lycanthropy corrupted the soul itself. This announcement spread fear throughout Breland and Aundair and strengthened the resolve of the armies of the Flame, who ventured west with the goal of eradicating the plague from the face of Eberron.

The battle was long and brutal. Today, many assume that the lycanthropes were hunted prey, fleeing from the overwhelming force of the Church of the Silver Flame. Little could be further from the truth. The typical wereboar is far deadlier than the average templar of the Flame, and even if the soldier defeats his prey, one good bite is all it takes to transfer the curse and create a new wereboar. Evil werewolves infected entire villages, and wererats took great pleasure in infecting templars, imprisoning them until the curse took hold, and then sending them against their former allies. Clever lycanthropes fanned the puritans' paranoia toward the shifters, and these mistrustful folk massacred hundreds of shifters before someone could prove to them that shifters did not carry the curse. While some of the shifters later fought alongside the templars, many have never forgiven the Silver Flame -- and, indeed, humanity -- for these deaths.

As the tide slowly began to turn in the favor of the Church of the Silver Flame, the challenge became one of finding the lycanthropes hidden among human and shifter communities. Here again, many puritans acted with overzealous aggression, harming the innocent in their desperate quest to eliminate the remaining shapeshifters. Ultimately House Medani produced dragonshard foci that could detect lycanthropes and guide the templars to the true foe, and this heralded the end of the purge. By 880 YK, the Church of the Silver Flame withdrew its forces from the Eldeen Reaches, claiming that the threat of the curse had finally been eliminated.

Lycanthropes in the Modern Age

Today, the balance of power within the Church of the Silver Flame has shifted toward the moderates, and many feel shame and regret for the actions of their predecessors. While the evil lycanthropes needed to be stopped, the paranoia and zealotry of the age led to the death of innocents. However, it did accomplish one goal: The Silver Flame did gain many supporters as a result of the purge, and Aundair is the stronghold of the puritan faction in the modern age. The puritans refuse to see the purge as anything but a triumph; most have been raised on tales of the horrors of the early ninth century. They feel no shame about the deaths of non-evil

lycanthropes or afflicted victims who might have been cured; in the eyes of the puritans, lycanthropes are monsters -- and the duty of the templar is to defend the innocent from evil, not to feel pity for monsters.

While the Church of Thrane no longer follows Jolan Sol's doctrines, the church continues to hunt shapeshifters in the present day. Jaela Daran has ordered templars to subdue lycanthropes whenever possible and to accept the surrender of any lycanthrope, so that the shapeshifter can be cured or exiled to Lamannia. However, if a lycanthrope does not cooperate, the templars use lethal force. This is covered under provisions in the Code of Galifar; the templars of the Church are authorized to defend the people of the Five Nations against supernatural threats, and a lycanthrope who willfully maintains his condition is seen as intentionally endangering others. The puritans of Aundair are infamous for ignoring Jaela's edicts, and most Aundairian templars show no mercy when dealing with lycanthropes.

While cardinals and Keeper maintain that lycanthropy is a threat, rumors have spread regarding exceptional lycanthropes who have been allowed to remain on Eberron. Some say that the Church captured a werebear who had been fighting aberrations in the Eldeen Reaches, and that the Keeper of the Flame released him into the wild after hearing his tale. Some Aundairian puritans spread gossip that declares that Jaela herself is a lycanthrope; if the tales hold truth, it could be that the Silver Flame selected her to attempt to heal the damage done in its name. Between common prejudice and the need to settle things with the Church, Eberron is a challenging setting for lycanthropic PCs. But the persecuted hero who must struggle with his own dark impulses can be a fascinating protagonist, and such a character can certainly find a place in Eberron.

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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