That’s a killer!

Lycanthrope

by Norman E. Hartman

“I tell you, Norm, there really are such things as werewolves!”

“You’re crazy, Ed. And even if there were any, how would you go about proving it?”

We were at it again, Ed and I. The same old favorite of his. Lycanthropy, the ages old belief that a man or woman could turn into an animal. According to Ed the kind of animal depended on the cultural background and ancestry of the person involved.

“A lot of people believe in witchcraft and werewolves, more every day if you believe what you read in some of these magazines. Why, I heard just the other day about a book that tells you how to do all sorts of things like summoning demons and casting spells. It’s supposed to be as accurate as possible, even giving the reasoning behind each part of the spell as it goes along.”

“You believe everything you read in those crazy magazines of yours, Ed. If we had a copy of that book I’d soon prove to you that those spells won’t work by actually trying them out.”

“I’ll just call you on that! The book review in *Playboy* said that it’s being reprinted in England and tells where to send for it. It’s twenty-five bucks and it’s going to be a good investment for me because if the spells work you’ll be the one who pays for the book!”

“It’s a deal! You look up that book review and I’ll type up the order.”

The letter ordering one copy of Van der Camp’s *Witchcraft in Central Europe* went out in the next day’s mail, and Ed and I spent the next few weeks reading up on necromancy and related subjects in the library at State U. We kidded the librarian into letting us read some volumes from shelves normally closed to any but accredited researchers. The books were old and dusty, some of them in archaic English, but while they were very interesting in places none of them was very much help to a couple of beginners.

Then the book finally arrived. It was all that we had hoped for, and then some. It gave complete formulas, rituals, and incantations; correct times for gathering and processing ingredients; and most important the right phases of the moon to the minute necessary for reliable results. In order to give the spells a proper trial we had to follow the book’s instructions in every minute detail, so it was some time before we were ready but at last we were prepared. The materials were at hand and we had rehearsed the rituals and incantations until we knew them by heart.

“Are you sure you want to go through with this, Ed? There’s no telling what you might turn into if the spell should really work.” I was really uneasy. The logic behind the spell seemed so logical, somehow.

“Of course I want to go through with it. I didn’t spend my money and come this far just to turn around and quit. Just think, I might become a lion or a tiger or an eagle. Anyway, no matter what I turn into I’m sure to be able the make the proper ritual motions in order to return to my original form.”

“Yeah, but what if you can’t? Remember, these spells were devised back in the days when people lived close to the soil. They were supposed to change people into forms that represented the major destructive forces of their times. In Europe and England they tried to turn into wolves and vampire bats, while in Scandinavia it was were-bears. In Malaya and India it was were-tigers and snakes, but in Africa it was were-hyenas, buffalos, and leopards. In each case it was the creature that took the greatest toll of the common people’s life and property,” I reasoned with him. “We have different fears these days than back in the Dark Ages, and different things to menace our daily lives.”

“And what if we do? Those old fears are ingrained into the heredity of mankind by a million years of fleeing in terror from animals fiercer and stronger than they were. What they feared then, we still fear today. I would be scared to death of a wolf or a bear, even though I’ve never met one face to face.”

It was a cold, windy night. A sickly gibbous moon gleamed fitfully through rents in the ragged clouds. We traced interlocking pentacles in the raw dirt of a new grave, lit the Coleman stove and began to concoct the unholy brew called for by the book.

“You’re sure that you really want to go through with this?”

“For the last time, YES!”

We hastily mumbled the incantation. Ed picked up the saucepan of evil-smelling liquid and quaffed it at a single gulp. There was a flash! A crash! An opaque cloud of smoke!

When people admire my new sports car I tell them that it’s European, custom-made, . . . but where in Hell am I going to get spare parts?