

Cycle of the Werewolf Study Guide

Cycle of the Werewolf by Stephen King

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Plot Summary

Cycle of the Werewolf is one of Stephen King's shorter horror novels and the book is beautifully illustrated by noted comic book artist Berni Wrightson. The straightforward plot follows a year in the life of a small town in Maine as, on the night of each month's full moon, its residents are terrorized by a werewolf who turns out to be one of their own.

The story opens on a cold night in January as a blizzard shuts down Tarker's Mills, Maine. Railroad flagman Arnie Westrum is waiting out the storm in a small wooden shack when he hears an animal apparently trying to enter the building. In moments, a huge wolf breaks down the door and kills Arnie, thus setting off what will be a year-long cycle of terror and death.

The following month, the wolf's victim is a spinster, and her death is followed by that of a drifter, a young boy, a church custodian, a café owner, the town constable, a librarian, and various animals. As the months go by, rumors spread that the killings are the work of a werewolf, but the town's residents aren't sure what to believe and seem powerless to stop him.

Only one person actually sees the creature and lives to tell about it. He is Marty Coslaw, a 10-year-old boy who is confined to a wheelchair. On the Fourth of July, Marty creeps out of bed after his family is asleep to shoot off some forbidden fireworks and he is confronted by the wolf. Thinking quickly, Marty uses firecrackers to shoot the wolf, which puts out his eye and drives him away, saving Marty's life.

Several months later, on Halloween night, Marty rings the doorbell of Rev. Lester Lowe, the pastor of Grace Baptist Church. When he sees the reverend wearing an eye patch, Marty immediately realizes that he is the werewolf and begins sending him a series of anonymous notes. Marty's knowledge of his identity confirms Rev. Lowe's suspicion that something is terribly wrong with him. Over a period of time, he has noticed that on some mornings, he wakes up scratched and bruised with his clothing torn and traces of blood on his hands and lips, but he has no memory of what transpired the night before. Once he realizes what is happening, he takes the advice in one of Marty's notes and begins going outside the town on nights when there is a full moon, ensuring that he will kill only animals rather than people. However, he refuses to act on Marty's admonition to kill himself, believing that he is a man of God and that if God is displeased with him, He will bring him down in time.

In the meantime, Marty convinces his uncle that his tale about the werewolf is plausible, and on New Year's Eve, the two wait for the wolf to appear. Just before midnight, the werewolf does indeed come after Marty, but the boy is armed with a gun and two silver bullets which he uses to kill the wolf. As he dies, the wolf transforms back into the figure of Rev. Lowe. As the new year begins, the town is freed from its terror.



Chapter 1, January

Chapter 1, January Summary

It's winter in the small Maine town of Tarker's Mills and a blizzard is raging. The streets are deserted and railroad flagman Arnie Westrum is trapped in a small signal shack several miles outside of town because large snow drifts have blocked the train tracks. As Arnie plays solitaire and waits for the storm to end, he hears a sound he believes to be the wind. Soon he realizes that the noise isn't the wind after all, but something or someone scratching at the door and whining. He assumes it's a dog looking for shelter and considers letting it into the shack, but a vague sense of fear causes him to hesitate. There have been strange omens in Tarker's Mills recently and Arnie feels uneasy.

Soon the whining turns to snarling and the creature outside begins banging heavily against the door, eventually splintering it. It is a large wolf with fierce yellow eyes. As the wolf continues to force its way into the shack, Arnie grabs a pick and swings it at the wolf in a desperate attempt to defend himself. The sound of screams mixes with the howling of the wind.

Chapter 1, January Analysis

From the first time he hears something outside the door of the railroad shack, Arnie Westrum is afraid. Unnamed omens of evil have been present in the town recently, so although logic tells him that the sounds are probably coming from a dog looking for shelter from the storm, in his heart Arnie knows that he is facing something much more menacing. Although he has a sharp ax, he has little chance to defend himself because the wolf breaks down the door and there is no opportunity for Arnie to escape from the small wooden building. There is strong foreshadowing and the reader is left with a feeling of dread as the chapter ends with a warning that "the cycle of the Werewolf has begun." The author also uses irony in having Arnie seek shelter in the shack where he is safe from the threat of the storm, but not from the wolf.



Chapter 2, February

Chapter 2, February Summary

Stella Randolph, an overweight single woman who owns the Set 'n Sew shop in Tarker's Mills, is dreaming about love. It's Valentine's Day and each year, she sends herself a Valentine, pretending the cards come from celebrities like Paul Newman and John Travolta. Stella is the object of ridicule in town, but she longs for love and romance, and spends a great deal of time imagining what that would be like.

As she's daydreaming, Stella hears someone scratching at her window. At first she thinks it's a man she sees from time to time in town, and she believes that love has finally come to her. As she opens the window to let him in, however, she realizes it is not a man, but a wolf. As she remembers how Arnie Westrum was killed a month earlier, the wolf enters the room and crouches over her as she lies on her bed. Stella closes her eyes and prepares to die.

Chapter 2, February Analysis

Stella Randolph is a lonely woman who dreams only about meeting a man and falling in love. Even though she has never experienced it, she believes she knows what love is and she imagines what it would be like to be touched by a man, especially on the most romantic night of the year. Stella's dreams of love are so out of touch with reality that she sends herself Valentines cards from movie stars, so it isn't surprising when she hears someone at her window and immediately assumes it's a man who has come to make love to her. Even when she realizes that her visitor is actually a wolf who has killed before, she is more curious than horrified, and her last thought is that love is like dying. This chapter introduces the theme that appearances can be deceiving, as Stella thinks the figure in the window is a man and even when she realizes that it is a wolf, on some level she continues to pretend it is a potential mate and whispers "lover" as the wolf kills her. The chapter also brings in the romantic idea of small town life that belies the dark secrets and evil that exists there.



Chapter 3, March

Chapter 3, March Summary

On the night of the March full moon, the winter's last blizzard is howling through Tarker's Mills. The town's residents are going about their business, including Milt Sturmfuller, the local librarian, who is at home with his wife, Donna Lee, whom he regularly abuses. The storm causes tree limbs to break, sounding like gunshots, and soon the electricity goes out, leaving the town in an eerie darkness. As the storm subsides, the town remains in the dark because the roads are too slick for linesmen to travel, and soon a loud, continuous howling is heard. Everyone in town hears it, including Constable Neary, grade school principle Ollie Parker, the Sturmfullers, and an unidentified boy in a wheelchair, but no one can tell where it's coming from.

The following day, a linesman who is repairing the downed power lines finds the body of an unknown drifter. The man's body is frozen and his hands are raised as if trying to fight off an attacker. The body is surrounded by the pawprints of a wolf.

Chapter 3, March Analysis

The town of Tarker's Mills continues to be portrayed as a dark place filled with secrets and foreboding. Milt Sturmfuller has been terrorizing his wife for more than a dozen years, but only a few people suspect that anything is wrong and no one knows the truth. The author depicts the town as small enough for everyone to know each other, but people mind their own business, don't ask questions and presumably don't want to know about or acknowledge any unpleasantness.

Likewise, the people of Tarker's Mills seem unwilling to acknowledge the fact that an evil presence is among them. Although the townspeople are scattered in their own homes, riding out the last storm of the year, all of them hear the sounds of the howling wolf that permeated the town. Everyone is gradually becoming aware that a wolf is savagely killing people — two of the town's residents and now a drifter — but no one is willing to talk about it or begin to take action, just as they turn a blind eye to the plight of Donna Lee Sturmfuller. The chapter also contains significant foreshadowing, including the mention of a boy in a wheelchair, who will become one of the story's most significant characters.

The book's various themes are played out in this chapter, including the contrast between good and evil in the person of Milt, who appears to be a mild-mannered librarian, but actually beats his wife with no provocation. The Sturmfullers are also examples of appearances that are deceiving.



Chapter 4, April

Chapter 4, April Summary

Spring is finally coming to Tarker's Mills, but the happiness that would usually accompany the warming weather is hindered by the fear that is growing among the residents. Rumors that a werewolf has been responsible for the recent deaths are causing a low-level but growing fear. Jokes that the town drunk, who is enjoying a bender, will be the next victim are not considered funny, and barmaid Elise Fournier is considering leaving town because she is afraid of the wolf.

Eleven-year-old Brady Kincaid is flying his new kite on the town common. He gets so distracted that he lets time slip away and soon realizes that he is now alone on the green and is late getting home for dinner. Brady has laughed off the werewolf stories his classmates tell, but feels a growing sense of fear as he realizes that it's getting dark and a full moon is rising. As he hastily tries to wind up his kite string, the wolf appears and begins to chase him while holding Brady's kite in one hand. The next day, Brady's headless and disemboweled body is found on the town green, his kite clutched in his dead hand.

Chapter 4, April Analysis

The book's blood and gore escalates as the people of Tarker's Mills finally begin to realize what is happening in their town. True to form, however, they don't want to face the situation head on, preferring to whisper about it and make grim jokes, with at least one resident planning to leave town. Like the adults, young Brady Kincaid has not taken the threat especially seriously and allows himself to stay too long on the town green, flying his kite, until he realizes that a full moon is rising and he might be in danger. The author continues to build the reader's growing dread as Brady's fate becomes clear, and for the first time the victim is a child who dies a horrifying death.

The theme of good and evil is strongly at play in this chapter as an innocent young boy becomes the wolf's latest victim. The author also uses symbolism as Brady's kite is in the form of a frightening vulture, also foreshadowing the predatory beast that will attack the boy. The town square, a place where children play and war veterans are honored, becomes the site of a horrible murder.



Chapter 5, May

Chapter 5, May Summary

Rev. Lester Lowe, pastor of the Grace Baptist Church, has been preparing for the church's annual Homecoming Sunday. It's an important event because it's the only day of the year when the church is filled with worshippers. The night before Homecoming Sunday, Rev. Lowe has a terrible dream in which he is preaching his sermon with a force that is unlike his usual bland delivery. The topic of the sermon is "The Beast Walks Among Us," and in it, he tells the congregation that Satan is everywhere in Tarker's Mills — in the drug store, at the bus station, in the local restaurant. As the dream continues, Rev. Lowe notices that all the members of the congregation are turning into werewolves. As he tries to scream that "the beast is everywhere," he becomes aware that his own voice has become a snarling sound and he sees that he himself is turning into a werewolf.

Rev. Lowe is relieved when he awakes and realizes that he's only been dreaming, but when he arrives at his church the next morning, he finds the dead body of custodian Clyde Corliss. With horror, Rev. Lowe realizes that none of this is a dream.

Chapter 5, May Analysis

As members of the community continue to try to deny the reality of the werewolf, it becomes increasingly clear that something horrifying is happening. In the beginning, Rev. Lowe is skeptical about the werewolf that the "old codgers" have been whispering about, but eventually realizes that the wolf is all too real. In his dream, he sees specific members of his congregation - piano teacher Violet MacKenzie, deacon Cal Blodwin, science teacher Elbert Freeman - turn into violent werewolves and begin tearing each other apart, signifying that there is the possibility of evil in everyone in Tarker's Mills and that the werewolf could be anyone among them. The theme of his sermon - the beast walks among us - also is indicative of the fact that the evil is living in the very midst of the town and coming into contact with everyone who lives there.

The author uses foreshadowing by having Rev. Lowe's voice turn into a snarling sound, as he will later be revealed to be the werewolf. The contrast between good and evil is also strongly depicted in this chapter, which takes place in a church and the main character is a pastor — both presumably the epitome of good. There are also examples of appearances that are deceiving, such as the mild-mannered Rev. Lowe who has violent, murderous dreams, also foreshadowing the eventual revelation that he is actually capable of great violence.



Chapter 6, June

Chapter 6, June Summary

Alfie Knopfler is in his empty restaurant, the Chat 'n Chew, polishing the counters of the town's only café. The warm, moonlit summer night reminds him of the night he lost his virginity in the back seat of his car. There are no customers because this is the night of the full moon and the people of Tarker's Mills are now afraid of the werewolf, but Alfie knows his customers will return in the morning. He is considering closing the café early, getting some beer and going to the drive-in movie when the door opens and a customer comes in.

The customer is someone he knows - someone everyone in town knows - although the person typically only comes into the restaurant in the morning.

Alfie thinks that the customer looks ill, and as he turns to get a cup of coffee, he sees the person's reflection in the shiny coffee urn. He watches in horror as the customer's face and body grow and take on the form of a wolf. Realizing he is face to face with the beast that has been terrorizing the town, Alfie tries to defend himself, but the beast attacks him viciously. The last thing he sees is moonlight.

Chapter 6, June Analysis

Six months into the werewolf's year-long cycle, the people of Tarker's Mills are now too afraid to come out on the night of the full moon. They've come to recognize the pattern, because Alfie is confident that his customers will return to the café as usual in the morning once the threat has passed. In an ironic twist, the only person who is unafraid to come out is revealed to be the werewolf himself. Alfie is the first person to learn who the werewolf is, but has no time to tell anyone or even fully process the information before he becomes the latest victim. In this chapter, we see a number of contrasts, including the pleasant, unremarkable face of the customer transforming into the terrible face and body of the werewolf. In addition, the warm, fragrant summer night that brings back good memories from Alfie's past turns to horror as the wolf materializes in his café. Although the chapter is written carefully to avoid revealing whether the wolf is male or female, we get a number of details about the customer's clothing and the keys and change that jingle in the pants, showing that this is a very normal person under other circumstances.



Chapter 7, July

Chapter 7, July Summary

Ten-year-old Marty Coslaw is terribly disappointed that the town's Fourth of July fireworks have been cancelled. Marty is unable to walk and uses a wheelchair, and he looks forward to the fireworks all year. His mother tries to explain the wisdom of cancelling the event, his father tries to assure him that next year's fireworks will be twice as good, and his 13-year-old sister Katie expresses delight that, finally, Marty doesn't get everything he wants.

Marty understands the reason the fireworks have been cancelled. Everyone in town is afraid of the Full Moon Killer. Although people assume that the killer is a person, there are whispered rumors that it is really some kind of supernatural creature, perhaps a werewolf, but Marty doesn't believe that.

Marty is thrilled when his Uncle Al secretly gives him a package of fireworks and firecrackers. Al warns him to set them off only after the rest of the family has gone to bed and to avoid lighting the ones that made noise. Marty goes to bed early and patiently waits until everyone in the house is asleep, then quietly gets into his wheelchair and slips outside. He begins lighting some of the fireworks and is delighted to have his own Fourth of July celebration, but as one especially bright red one lights up the yard, he sees the werewolf on his lawn. It walks upright and seems to have some human characteristics. The beast comes toward Marty and is reaching toward his throat its somewhat human-like hands when Marty lights a packet of firecrackers and throws them in its face. The wolf howls in pain and runs away.

Marty's family hears the noise from the firecrackers and runs to see what is happening. Realizing that Marty has survived an attack by the Full Moon Killer, his parents send him to stay with relatives in Vermont for the rest of the summer in case the beast comes back for him. Marty is deeply happy that he looked into the face of the beast and lived, and he considers this the best Fourth of July ever.

Chapter 7, July Analysis

In the book's longest chapter, the reader meets young Marty, the only person to survive an attack by the werewolf. An earlier bit of foreshadowing comes back around as the identity of the boy in the wheelchair is revealed. Marty's intense disappointment at the cancellation of the annual fireworks stems from his frustration at the way he is treated by his family. The author provides a number of contrasts in this chapter, including his mother's brusque way of speaking to him as opposed to his father's overly enthusiastic manner and his sister's resentment because his disability draws attention and favoritism. In the aftermath of the wolf's attack, though, Marty sees their real feelings toward him as their fear strips away their normal approach to him.



Marty's dismay at the cancellation of the fireworks turns to elation when he is able to stage his own celebration with the fireworks provided by his uncle, who will return to play a major role in the resolution of the story. His uncle is an important person in Marty's life because he seems to understand the boy better than his parents do and serves as a conspirator. Marty's encounter with the werewolf leaves him not frightened, but rather filled with joy because he has survived and turned this into the best Fourth of July of his life. This foreshadows events to come as Marty confronts the beast that has terrorizing his town.



Chapter 8, August

Chapter 8, August Summary

The men of Tarker's Mills are gathered in the town barbershop on a hot Saturday morning in mid-August. Everyone is on edge because tonight the moon will be full. Constable Lander Neary has everyone's attention as he discusses his theory about the killer. Neary does not believe that there is an actual werewolf or any kind of animal among them, but rather a seemingly normal person - perhaps someone they all know. He goes on to say that this killer might not know what he's doing, but he's an animal on the inside and a normal person on the outside, and when the moon gets full, he kills someone.

The other men bring up the case of Marty Coslaw, who has given a deposition to the state police about what he saw. He described a "beast" about seven feet tall, naked, and covered with dark hair, with big teeth and green eyes, and emitting a foul smell. He also said the beast had claws that looked like hands and he had a tail. Neary is frustrated that as a small town cop, he has been unable to interview the boy himself, but he thinks Marty's description is an exaggeration prompted by an overactive imagination.

However, when he read Marty's deposition, Neary failed to note one important thing. Marty said the firecrackers had hit the side of the beast's face and possibly put out his left eye. If Neary had paid attention to this comment, he might have realized that one person in the town now wore an eye patch.

Neary assures the other men that he will solve the case with good police work, but a few hours later, the werewolf snatches him out of his truck and kills him. Before he dies, Neary pulls at the creature's face, hoping to pull off a mask, but he sees that Marty's description was correct, including the human-like hands.

Chapter 8, August Analysis

Constable Neary prides himself on being a student of psychology even though his high school grades were poor and he focused mostly on football. Nevertheless, he is convinced that he knows exactly what the killer is and how Marty came up with his description. His explanation is that everything goes back to psychology. The killer is a person who has a split personality, cannot control his urge to kill during a full moon, and perhaps does not even know he's doing it. This foreshadows information that will come to light as the identity of the werewolf is revealed. Neary also believes that Marty's description of the beast is based on psychology. He thinks that Marty heard stories about werewolves at school and because he had so much time to sit around in his wheelchair, his imagination conjured up the image he described to the police.

Neary prides himself on being good at his job and insists that good police work will solve the crime. However, his instincts as a cop are hindered by his resentment at not

being given proper respect by the state police. He is angry that he has not been allowed to interview Marty, but in an ironic twist, he did not pick up on an important statement Marty made in his deposition. If he had paid enough attention and done the simple police work he talked about, the identity of the killer would have been obvious. This foreshadows how the killer will eventually be identified.

Again the author uses the theme of good vs. evil as the town's only law enforcement officer, who has a duty to protect the town's residents, becomes a victim of the werewolf. The theme of appearances that are deceiving also comes into play as Neary's confident attitude about his ability to understand psychology and his ability to use good police work to catch the beast are the very things that lead to his death.



Chapter 9, September

Chapter 9, September Summary

Summer-like temperatures linger into September and the people of Tarker's Mills are afraid as the next full moon nears. Milt Sturmfuller has beaten his wife again, this time so badly that she has to be hospitalized, but she backs up his story that her injuries came from a fall.

On the night of the full moon, the moon is hidden by thick clouds, but the beast still feels its pull. Around 2 a.m., farmer Elmer Zinneman hears his pigs squealing. As the squeals turn to screams, Elmer grabs his rifle and starts to go outside despite the protests of his wife, Alice. As he is about to leave the house to investigate, Elmer hears another sound - a wolf-cry that also sounds somehow human, and he stays inside instead. One by one, the pigs stop crying and when Elmer looks out the window, he sees something running into the darkness, but he is unable to identify it.

The next day, Elmer finds that, as he expected, all of his pigs have been slaughtered. His brother comes to see what happened and the two men notice that the tracks look like those of a wolf, but they also look oddly human. They agree that the people of Tarker's Mills must stop living in denial and prepare to find and kill the beast, but they agree that it would be better to wait until November when there might be snow on the ground, providing better tracking.

Chapter 9, September Analysis

Just as the existence of the werewolf is becoming more real to the residents of Tarker's Mills, it is also becoming more real to the reader. The omniscient narrator becomes important as we get our first small glimpse into the mind of the werewolf, learning that, despite the fact that the moon is hidden by clouds, the beast still feels its pull. At this point, however, we don't know what makes the wolf attack animals this time rather than a person as it has done in the past. This will become important later when Rev. Lowe comes to terms with what he has become and, acting on Marty's suggestion, begins leaving town on the night of the full moon to avoid killing anyone.

Nine months after the first attack, the people of Tarker's Mills are finally coming to grips with reality. Tensions rise as the night of the full moon approaches and even though apparently no person lost his or her life this month, it has become clear that something must be done. As the chapter ends, the author uses language that establishes an ominous tone as the Zinneman brothers agree to wait until November to act, even though they realize that it's likely that someone else will die before they can catch and kill the creature.



Chapter 10, October

Chapter 10, October Summary

The people of Tarker's Mills are somewhat relieved because the October full moon has come and gone and no one was killed. Four deer were found slaughtered in much the same way as Elmer Zinneman's pigs had been, but many residents believe that the killer was simply a drifter who has now moved on.

However, on Halloween night, Marty is trick-or-treating with his father when he learns the identity of the werewolf. Since he confronted the beast in July, he has believed that his firecrackers put out one of the creature's eyes and he is convinced that one day, he will see a one-eyed man and will know that he is the werewolf. It finally happens when he knocks on the door of a house and a man with an eye patch answers. It is Rev. Lester Lowe, the pastor of Grace Baptist Church. Marty's father asks about his eye and Rev. Lowe says he had a benign tumor and had to have the eye removed, but Marty recognizes a vague similarity between the human face and that of the wolf. He realizes that he has not seen Rev. Lowe before now because he attends the local Catholic church rather than the Baptist one. Marty falls asleep wondering what to do about his discovery.

Chapter 10, October Analysis

The book's theme of good and evil comes fully into focus in this chapter as it is revealed that the werewolf is actually the town's mild-mannered and respected Baptist minister. The contrast between the two personas couldn't be more clear. As Marty's vigilance in looking for a one-eyed man finally pays off when he knocks on the door of Rev. Lowe's home, another theme - that of the dichotomy of small towns - also comes into play. Even though Tarker's Mills is a tiny town and everyone knows each other, there are still fundamental differences between its people. The fact that Marty is Catholic has prevented him from running into Rev. Lowe before because he does not attend the Baptist Church. Marty is also aware that he is viewed as a child whose word cannot be completely trusted, so he does not consider taking his information to an adult, but ponders what he himself might do about what he has learned. The chapter ends on an ominous note as October turns into November and another full moon approaches.



Chapter 11, November

Chapter 11, November Summary

On a cold November afternoon, Rev. Lowe watches a large group of men drive out of town in their pick-up trucks. All are carrying guns. This same scene has occurred for the past few nights as the full moon approaches, but while some of the men are really just looking for an excuse to go into the woods, drink beer, tell jokes and shoot at squirrels and crows, some are very serious about hunting down the beast.

Rev. Lowe is feeling trapped, but not by the men with rifles. He has been receiving letters, written in a childish handwriting. The first said, "I know who you are" and the most recent, which arrived in today's mail, says "Why don't you kill yourself?" Rev. Lowe doesn't know who has been sending them because the attack on Marty has not appeared in the newspaper, he doesn't listen to town gossip, and he doesn't remember what happens when he is in his beast-like state.

However, he has known for a while that something is wrong with him. On mornings when the moon is full, he feels amazingly good and strong, then the feeling dies away until the next full moon. He has also noticed muddy and torn clothes, unexplained scratches and bruises, and even traces of blood on his hands and lips. He ignored all of those disturbing signs until he awoke on July 5 to find that his eye was gone, and at that point he had realized that he was the beast.

Since then, he has heeded the advice in one of the notes and gone outside the town boundaries on full-moon nights so there would be only animals to kill. However, he does not think it's necessary to kill himself, as the last note admonished, because he is a man of God and does good work, and the Book of Job teaches that evil also serves the will of God.

On this night, though, he does not go into the woods, but drives to Portland, where he encounters Milt Sturmfuller and kills him. Milt routinely tells his wife he is going out on business, but instead goes to Portland to meet his girlfriend. By coincidence, Rev. Lowe checks into the same motel where Milt and the woman are staying, and when Milt goes out to his car to get a bottle of Bourbon, the beast rips off his head.

The following day, Rev. Lowe reads about the murder in the newspaper, but tells himself that Milt was a bad man and that he has served God by killing him. He also decides it's time to find out who is sending him the letters and perhaps silence him forever. He decides to begin listening to town gossip, hoping to learn more.

Chapter 11, November Analysis

For the first time, we are able to get into the mind of Rev. Lowe and discover what he knows and how he feels about it, and the book's theme of good and evil comes fully into



play. It is clear that Rev. Lowe isn't an inherently evil man, but he also is able to justify what he is doing to some extent by thinking that doing evil can serve God in some ways, even pointing to specific parts of the Bible that supports this. He also justifies his actions by thinking that he didn't ask for this; it's just something that happened to him. He also believes that the people who are hunting him are the real animals. He believes that if God is displeased with his actions, He will bring him down in time. However, as the chapter comes to a close, Rev. Lowe is edging ever closer to evil, deciding to find out who is sending the letters and silence him permanently.



Chapter 12, December

Chapter 12, December Summary

The last full moon of the year falls on New Year's Eve and again Tarker's Mills is experiencing a blizzard. As midnight nears, Marty is sitting in his wheelchair watching television with his Uncle Al. On Marty's lap is a gun containing two silver bullets.

Al had not been to visit his sister's family for several months because Marty's mother was furious with him for giving Marty fireworks back in July. Several weeks earlier, however, Marty had called his uncle and asked him to visit. As the two drove around town, Marty told Al about the events of July, including the identity of the werewolf and the fact that he had sent several notes to Rev. Lowe. He also revealed that he had signed his name to the last two notes, but Rev. Lowe had not responded or contacted Marty's parents about it. Marty believes this is proof that Rev. Lowe is indeed the werewolf and his uncle could not totally disagree. When Marty asked Al to get him a gun and two silver bullets, his uncle hesitated until the boy asked how he would feel if the beast killed Marty during the next full moon.

After the rest of the family has gone to bed on New Year's Eve, Al and Marty sit in the living room and wait. Just before midnight, the werewolf appears, and he is exactly as Marty had described him. Marty calmly raises the gun and shoots the beast, telling Rev. Lowe that he's trying to set him free. The wolf is injured and angry, and when he lunges again, Marty kills him with the second bullet, bringing his terrified parents into the room to investigate the commotion. Al comforts Marty when he begins to cry, and the blizzard rages outside as the new year begins.

Chapter 12, December Analysis

The story comes full circle with the year ending much as it began, but this time it is the werewolf who is killed and peace is restored in the town. Marty has found an advocate in his Uncle Al, who is seen as somewhat irresponsible by Marty's parents because of his sports car, carefree ways and the recklessness of giving fireworks to a child, but in the end, he is the one person to whom Marty can turn for help.

All of the book's primary themes come back into focus in the book's last chapter. As the werewolf falls after Marty shoots him, he knocks down a Currier and Ives painting, symbolic of stereotypical small town life in the United States. We learn that after her husband's death, Donna Lee Sturmfuller has moved to either Boston or Los Angeles, much larger and presumably more dangerous cities, but in fact less dangerous than the small town in which she had been secretly abused. Clyde Corliss' brothers cash their food stamps in another town to avoid scrutiny by the people in Tarker's Mills, although everyone already knows their business. Many things change and many things remain the same.

The theme of good and evil also comes back around. As the werewolf dies, his physical appearance reverts to that of the mild-mannered Rev. Lowe, including fingernails that have been severely bitten out of nervousness.

In a further moment of symbolism, the TV screen shows the New Year's Eve ball dropping in Times Square, ringing the old year out and the new one in, just as Marty kills the werewolf. The year's last blizzard again symbolizes the howling of the werewolf who has terrorized the town.



Characters

Marty Coslaw

Marty Coslaw is a 10-year-old boy who lives in Tarker's Mills with his parents and 13-year-old sister. Marty is confined to a wheelchair but demonstrates no obvious self pity. Mature beyond his age, he is very aware of — and annoyed by — his parents' disparate treatment of him. His mother is always brusque when she speaks to him in an effort to avoid coddling him, while his father, a coach, is enthusiastic to an over-the-top degree. Marty looks forward to the town's Fourth of July celebration each year, so his extreme disappointment when it is cancelled leads to a series of events causing him to confront the werewolf, survive the attack, learn the wolf's real identity and eventually put an end to his town's terror.

Rev. Lester Lowe

Rev. Lester Lowe is pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Tarker's Mills. He is a quiet, mind-mannered, somewhat ineffectual man who harbors a horrible secret, even from himself. Rev. Lowe's fate is foreshadowed when he has a terrible dream in which he is preaching an uncharacteristically fiery sermon about a beast living among the residents of Tarker's Mills. In the dream, as he is telling the congregation that the beast could be anyone in town, his parishoners turn into werewolves and begin tearing each other apart. Eventually Rev. Lowe comes to the realization that he is the werewolf and although he tries to minimize the damage by leaving town on the night of the full moon, he continues to maintain to himself that he is a good person and a man of God. However, even the persona of Rev. Lowe has an evil component and his decision to eliminate Marty and the threat he poses leads to his inevitable demise.

Arnie Westrum

Arnie Westrum is a tall, lanky railroad employee who becomes the werewolf's first victim. He is aware of omens of evil that have been present in Tarker's Mills, so he has a healthy fear when he hears what he hopes is a dog scratching at the door of the railroad shack, but is unable to defend himself when the werewolf breaks down the door and attacks him.

Stella Randolph

Stella Randolph, a pudgy woman who runs a shop in Tarker's Mills, is a virgin who has unrealistically romantic dreams about finding love. After mistakenly thinking the creature at her window is a man, she becomes the wolf's second victim.



Milt and Donna Lee Sturmfuller

Milt and Donna Lee Sturmfuller are residents of Tarker's Mills. Milt is the town librarian and regularly abuses his wife, Donna Lee, although no one in the town fully realizes it. When he travels to Portland to meet his mistress at a motel, he is in the wrong place at the wrong time and is killed by the werewolf.

Brady Kincaid

Brady Kincaid is an 11-year-old boy who becomes a victim of the wolf after he loses track of time while flying his kite and is alone on the town green as the full moon rises.

Alfie Knopfler

Alfie Knopfler is the owner of the Chat 'n Chew, the town's only cafe. Alfie falls victim to the beast and is the first person to see the werewolf transform and learn its true identity, but is killed before he can tell anyone.

Constable Lander Neary

Lander Neary is the town constable. He believes that the killer is a disturbed individual who might not be able to control himself, and that good police work will reveal the truth. He becomes the creature's seventh victim.

Elmer Zinneman

Elmer Zinneman is a farmer who lives 12 miles outside of Tarker's Mills. All of his pigs are slaughtered by the werewolf, but his own life is spared when the sound of the wolf's howls causes him to stay inside rather than go out to investigate the noises he hears.

Uncle Al

Al is Marty Coslaw's uncle, who buys him the fireworks with which he injures the werewolf and later provides the gun and silver bullets with which Marty eventually kills him.



Objects/Places

Tarker's Mills

This is a small town in Maine where a werewolf is terrorizing and killing residents during each month's full moon.

Pick

This is a type of ax with a long handle and a head with two sharp ends

Tarker's Brook

This is the area of Tarker's Mills where the werewolf's third victim, a drifter, is found by a linesman repairing downed power lines.

Town Common

This is a public square in Tarker's Mills. Young victim Brady Kincaid's body is found leaning against the square's War Memorial.

Vulture

This is an elaborate kite shaped like a vulture.

Grace Baptist Church

This is a church located in Tarker's Mills, where Rev. Lester Lowe is pastor and the body of the church custodian is found.

Chat 'n Chew

This is the only café in Tarker's Mills, which is frequented by the werewolf and where the beast kills owner Alfie Knopfler.

Stan's Barber Shop

This is the gathering place for the men of Tarker's Mills.

Silver bullets

Held by mythology to be the only way to kill a werewolf, these were the weapons Marty uses to kill Rev. Lowe.



Themes

The Contrast Between Good and Evil

The contrast — and the struggle — between good and evil is a classic theme in literature and it's the primary theme of *Cycle of the Werewolf*. With a single exception, the people of Tarker's Mills are portrayed as good, hard-working, God-fearing people who continue to go about their daily routines in the face of an evil presence among them.

The theme is most clear in the contrast between Marty and the werewolf, and the two sides of Rev. Lowe. Marty, as an innocent child, is inherently presumed to personify goodness, but he is also confined to a wheelchair, making him an even more sympathetic character. Marty is written as being accepting of his situation and remarkably tolerant of the wide-ranging treatment he receives from various members of his family. His mother is brusque — an overcompensation to avoid coddling him — while his father is overly jolly and exuberant and his sister resents what she perceives as special treatment he receives because of his disability. Midway through the book, Marty confronts ultimate evil when the werewolf who has been terrorizing the town tries to attack him and only his quick wits and maturity beyond his years saves his life. From that point forward, there is an ongoing dance between the good Marty and the evil creature as Marty identifies the wolf, tries to convince Rev. Lowe to stop killing and, when he is unable to do so, takes matters into his own hands.

The theme comes through even more forcefully in the character of Rev. Lowe. As a pastor, he is presumed to stand firmly on the side of good, but to his horror, he eventually learns that he is the werewolf who has been killing the town's residents. Even in the face of this knowledge, however, Rev. Lowe insists that he is a man of God and that even evil serves the will of God.

The Dichotomy of Small Town Life

The dichotomy of small town life is a common theme in books and movies in which small communities are portrayed as both quaint, idyllic havens and places where secrecy, darkness, and even evil exist. *Cycle of the Werewolf* takes place in Tarker's Mills, a tiny town in rural Maine that is within easy driving distance of Portland, but is painted as being remote and somewhat cut off from the rest of the world.

The town has many qualities that appear in stereotypical views of idyllic small-town life. Everyone knows each other and the men of the community routinely gather at the local barbershop for haircuts and local gossip. There is a town square where children fly kites on warm spring days, complete with a statue honoring war veterans. The town has one restaurant, two churches, a library, a patriotic Fourth of July celebration, and apparently only one police officer.



However, Tarker's Mills' idyllic facade hides a dark side that its residents either don't see or don't acknowledge, another common occurrence with regard to small-town settings. Milt Sturmfuller has been physically abusing his wife for a dozen years, but only a few people suspect that anything is wrong and those who do suspect simply look the other way. When the town's peaceful existence is shattered by a series of violent, mysterious murders, several months pass before anyone takes action and for nearly a year, the topic is spoken of only in whispers. The town's residents prefer to turn a blind eye to anything unpleasant or distressing rather than recognize and address a problem.

Another common feature of this theme is the presence of evil within a small town that otherwise seems perfect. The book also follows a well-worn formula of having a mysterious person or animal — in this case, a bit of both — gradually and systematically pick off the town's residents. This goes hand in hand with the book's other primary theme, the contrast between good and evil.

Appearances Can Be Deceiving

Not everything is as it appears to be in Tarker's Mills. Milt Sturmfuller, the seemingly mild-mannered librarian, physically abuses his wife. A 10-year-old boy in a wheelchair turns out to be the only person capable of figuring out the identity of the werewolf and ultimately killing him. The town's only law enforcement officer overlooks the single piece of evidence that could identify the werewolf. And most strikingly, the pastor of the Baptist church is actually a werewolf who kills a number of the local residents, including the custodian of his church.

Style

Point of View

Cycle of the Werewolf is told from the point of view of an omniscient and third-person narrator. The narrator observes events as they occur, but also offers insights into the thoughts and feelings of the characters as well as events that have taken place in the past. Since most of the chapters feature just one character, and a different character in each, the narrator is able to give the reader a glimpse into the thoughts of a number of people at the moment they realize what is about to befall them at the hands of the werewolf. The most important use of the omniscient third-person narrator, however, is the ability to provide insights into the mind of Rev. Lowe as he gradually realizes what he has become and struggles to come to terms with it.

Setting

The novel is set in the fictional town of Tarker's Mills, Maine, a tiny community within an easy drive of Portland, yet rural and isolated. The setting is important to the book because the werewolf's victims all know each other and have similar, yet different lives and perspectives. The town is portrayed as a somewhat idyllic place with stereotypical small town qualities — a barbershop where the men gather, a single police officer, and a town square — yet some of the residents harbor terrible secrets. The setting also gives the author an opportunity to use the common literary device of having the likeable residents of a small town face a source of evil that is living among them. The only scene that is set outside Tarker's Mills takes place when Rev. Lowe travels to Portland only to encounter a fellow Tarker's Mills resident and kill him.

Language and Meaning

The book is written in sparse and straightforward language. Chapters are very short — many only two or three pages — so the author must tell the story in a very efficient way. The tone is ominous from the beginning, with thinly veiled foreshadowing of terrible events that are to come.

Even though there are relatively few words in the book, the vocabulary is rich and varied with many references to small town life and people.

In an afterword, the author tells readers that he realizes he has taken considerable liberties with the lunar cycle by setting the full moon on certain days that we associate with particular months. For example, in February the full moon falls on Valentine's Day and in July it falls on the fourth.

Structure

The novel takes place over the course of one year and is divided into twelve chapters. Each chapter covers one month, beginning with January and ending with December, and each is set on the night of that month's full moon. Most of the chapters are very short, particularly in the beginning, telling the story of one character's demise in just two or three pages.

The structure is unusual in that the main characters are not introduced until later in the book — Rev. Lowe in chapter five and Marty Coslaw in chapter seven. The importance of Rev. Lowe isn't immediately evident, as the chapter in which is introduced at first seems like every other preceding chapter.

The book is easy to read and the plot moves quickly. The author also manages to fit a surprising amount of vivid description and character development into a very short book.



Quotes

"Something inhuman has come to Tarker's Mills, as unseen as the full moon riding the night sky high above. It is the Werewolf, and there is no more reason for its coming now than there would be for the arrival of cancer, or a psychotic with murder on his mind, or a killer tornado" (Chapter 1, January, p. 14).

"The cycle of the Werewolf has begun" (Chapter 1, January, p. 16).

"Later, no one will be able to say where the sound came from; it was everywhere and nowhere . . . Others hear it as well. One of them is a boy in a wheelchair" (Chapter 3, March, p. 31).

"At school, he has laughed at his schoolmates' fanciful tales of the werewolf they say killed the drifter last month, Stella Randolph the month before, Arnie Westrum the month before that. But he doesn't laugh now. As the moon turns April dusk into a bloody furnace glow, the stories seem all too real" (Chapter 4, April, p. 38).

"The Beast might be sitting next to you at a band concert or having a piece of pie at the Chat 'n Chew no Main Street" (Chapter 5, May, p. 45).

"His customer, someone he sees every day, someone everyone in Tarker's Mills sees every day, is changing" (Chapter 6, June, p. 54).

"And while his parents stewed and wondered about his psyche, and if he would have complexes from the experience, Marty Coslaw came to believe in his heart that it had been the best Fourth of all" (Chapter 7, July, p. 71).

"Now this guy, I think he's like that. I don't think he knows what he's doing when the moon gets full and he goes out and kills somebody. He could be anybody - a teller at the bank, a gas-jockey at one of those stations out on the Town Road, maybe even someone right here now" (Chapter 8, August, p. 77).

"Then the clouds grow thicker, and the moon disappears...yet it is there; the tides twenty miles out of Tarker's Mills feel its pull and so, closer to home, does the Beast" (Chapter 9, September, p. 88).

"But it is the werewolf. Marty knows, and not just because the man is wearing an eyepatch. There is something else - some vital similarity in this man's human face to the snarling face of the animal he saw on that silvery summer night almost four months ago now" (Chapter 10, October, p. 98).

"I am a man of God and I will not kill myself. I do good here, and if I sometimes do even, why, men have done evil before me; evil also serves the will of God, or so the Book of Job teaches us; if I have been cursed from Outside, then God will bring me down in His time. All things serve the will of God" (Chapter 11, November, p. 111).

"The claws melt magically away to fingernails...fingernails that have been almost pathetically gnawed and bitten" (Chapter 12, December, p 126).

Topics for Discussion

Discuss the concept of good and evil. Is it possible for both traits to exist in the same person? Do you think Rev. Lowe is primarily good or evil? Does one always triumph over the other?

Discuss the relationship between Marty and his family. Why do his mother and father take such different approaches in their treatment of him? How does his sister show that her outward attitude isn't indicative of her true feelings for him? Why is his uncle so important in his life?

In what ways are secrets an important part of the novel? Name at least three characters who are keeping important secrets. How do their secrets affect the lives of other characters? How do they affect the outcome of the story?

The novel is set in a very small town in rural Maine. What are some of the town's best qualities? What are some of its worst? How might the book be different if it were set in a large city?

Discuss Rev. Lowe. Is he really a "man of God" as he claims? Compare and contrast his human persona with that of the werewolf. Include small details as well as the more obvious points. Do you think he feels remorse for his actions once he realizes what he has done? Why or why not?

How do appearances play a role in the book? Name at least three examples in which a character's appearance is deceiving. Are there also situations that are not what they initially appear to be?

Discuss Constable Neary. Why does he fail to notice an important part of Marty's deposition? How does his personality contribute to his mistake?