



Black Heart Enterprises



# The CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF

*Curse of the Werewolf sculpture by Joe Simon; buildup by Matsugoro; profile layout by David Fisher.*

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Profile



The Werewolf of London (1935) movie poster



Lou Chaney as The Wolf Man with makeup creator Jack Pierce



Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman (1943) Poster art



I Was A Teenage Werewolf (1957)



Oliver Reed in The Curse of the Werewolf (1961)



Michael Jackson's Thriller Video (1983)

Poster art for The Howling (1981) and American Werewolf in London (1981)



Left to Right: Jack Nicholson in Wolf (1994), Underworld, Rise of the Lycans (2009), and Benicio Del Toro as The Wolfman (2010)

## A Century of Cinematic Lycanthropy

The *Werewolf* (1913) was directed by Henry MacRae who directed over 100 films and was the very first werewolf film. It was an 18-minute silent film exploring Native American legends about people who turn into wolves and assume human form at will. A real wolf was used in the film's transformation sequence. Unfortunately, the film was lost in a fire in 1924. *Wolf Blood* (1925) is another silent film in which a logger is attacked by loggers from a rival camp and left in the woods to die. A wolf's blood transfusion saves him but when word gets out, others fear that he is some kind of man-beast. He starts to go insane, hallucinating that he is part of a pack of ghost wolves running through the woods. Eventually, he is saved by his woman's love.

*Werewolf of London* (1935) is Universal Pictures first werewolf film but what is most memorable is the werewolf make-up designed for actor Henry Hull by make-up legend Jack Pierce. Hull objected to Pierce's original werewolf concept but the actor and the artist settled on a distinctive design that allowed more of the actor's facial features to show through. *The Wolf Man* (1941) was Pierce's and Universal's second and most successful effort in lycanthropic cinema. Jack Pierce's original werewolf concept, unacceptable to Hull in *Werewolf of London*, became Lon Chaney, Jr.'s signature character and cinema's most recognizable werewolf. Chaney returned to the Wolf Man role and to Jack Pierce's makeup chair for four more films, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943), *House of Frankenstein* (1944), *House of Dracula* (1945), and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948).

Films involving the evils of science, adults, and rock n roll were the perfect exploitation medium in the '50s. Mix those three ingredients, a smidgen of mad doctor, and stir in one bitter juvenile simmering in the rage of adolescence and you have one monster of a recipe for horror. *I Was A Teenage Werewolf* (1957) was the product of that recipe and makeup artist Phillip Scheer impressively transformed actor Michael Landon into the teen werewolf with a series of facial prosthetics.

*The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961) was produced by a British film company, set in Spain, and based on a novel which was set in France. The book's author was a black-listed, Jewish American whose father placed him and his siblings in a Methodist orphanage and then sent them to Vienna, Austria where they had a Catholic governess. The film's protagonist was a young Spanish man played by a blue-eyed British descendant of Russian nobility. Despite all of the confusing geographics, ethnicity and heritage, the film's producers achieved cinematic success by blending werewolf conventions (man to wolf transformations, blood lust and late night feelings), superstition, and the impact of true love on inner demons. The story had more depth and intelligence than the typical horror film but, most importantly, the monster was cool. Hammer Films' veteran make-up artist, Roy Ashton's work and Oliver Reed's characterization created one of cinema's most memorable werewolves.

The 1970s were disappointing for werewolf films as studios focused on films in which "the devil made me do it" like *The Exorcist* (1974) and *The Omen* (1976) or in which nature went wild and folks got eaten as in *Willard* (1971), *Night of the Lepus* (1972), and *Jaws* (1975). But the 80s would more than make up for the 70s. The werewolf designs and transformation effects in *The Howling* (1981) and in *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), by Rob Bottin and Rick Baker, respectively, set new standards in werewolf movie transformations. These films gave the sub-genre new blood and other respectable werewolf films followed. *Wolfen* (1981), *The Company of Wolves* (1984), Stephen King's *Silver Bullet* (1985), and even the music video, Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (1983), with Rick Baker again masterfully doing the makeup effects, capitalized on the renewed popularity of werewolf films and all of these paid homage to classic werewolf media.

*Wolf* (1994) was the '90s most significant offering to the sub-genre, a mainstream film with mega-star Jack Nicholson and other big names in a tale about what might happen if a big city book editor became a werewolf. Fans of werewolf films could have predicted that he'd get hairy during a full moon, urinate on his rival's shoes, chase wild animals and bite folks who have it coming to them. The Rick Baker/Jack Nicholson collaboration on the werewolf makeup effects were appropriately understated and as suited to the film as the work of the predecessor tandems of Pierce and Chaney and Aston and Reed but the film was more thoughtful and less horror than the films werewolf fans love.

The new millennium started with a number of additions to lycanthropic cinema, the most impressive of which are *Underworld* (2003) and its two sequels, *Underworld: Evolution* (2006), and *Underworld: Rise of the Lycans* (2009). The creature designs and transformation effects are reminiscent of those seen in the '80s but the films provide an interesting and refreshing take on the werewolf mythos, intelligent lycanthropes who shapeshift at will and strive to destroy their blood-sucking oppressors.

And, last but not least is *The Wolf Man* (2010), Universal's long-awaited big-budget return to its lycanthropic roots. Rick Baker's creature effects were the highlight of the film which was well-received by audiences and the critics.

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