



Rise of the Wolf (Wereworld)

By Curtis Jobling

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A thrilling series for Ranger's Apprentice fans!

Imagine a world ruled by Werelords--men and women who can shift at will into bears, lions, and serpents. When Drew suddenly discovers he's not only a werewolf but the long-lost heir to the murdered Wolf King's throne, he must use his wits and newfound powers to survive in a land suddenly full of enemies. Drew's the only one who can unite the kingdom in a massive uprising against its tyrant ruler, Leopold the Lion. But the king is hot on Drew's tail and won't rest until he's got the rebel wolf's head.

"Game of Thrones for the tween set." —School Library Journal

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for the Wereworld series:

Rise of the Wolf

“Jobling’s debut initiates a sure-to-be-long series of Wereworld tales, pure fantasy adventure with plenty of horror in the mix...this will find broad appeal among lovers of adventure fantasy, especially those mourning the end of John Flanagan’s *Ranger’s Apprentice*.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“[A] rousing gory heroic fantasy...there are plenty of brutal fights for action lovers, and the quest has some stirring moments. Give this series opener to fans of Flanagan’s *Ranger’s Apprentice* series.”—*Booklist*

“In this thrilling middle-grade debut, first in the Wereworld series, British author/illustrator Jobling (the designer of the *Bob the Builder* TV series) creates a memorable new setting in which were-creatures rule...a thoroughly enjoyable adventure that makes particularly inventive use of its shape-shifter elements and mythology.”—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“Even reluctant readers should enjoy *Wereworld* as the first in a new series...as a fantasy world it is superior to *Eragon*, and pure fun.”—*The Times* (London)

“The nail-biting pace and plot turns will keep the reader wondering exactly how Drew will resolve it all...there is enough romantic heat, girl power, and vulnerable tough guys to guarantee interest from the *Twilight* crowd.”—*BCCB*

“This first book in the series hits all the bases for a fairy tale with fangs...this will be a popular book, particularly for the young sword and sorcery fan contingent.”—*Library Media Connections*

“Assured and lively enough to captivate with its strong world building and approachable language...will draw followers to the sequel like Drew to a damsel in distress.”—*VOYA*

“Can he write it? Yes, he can!...a good mix of the traditional pre-industrial society with shape-shifters, and looks like it could be the start of a very fun ride.”—Geek Dad on *Wired.com*

Rage of Lions

“Give Jobling a... hand for crafting a sequel that’s even more lurid and action packed than the opener.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“*Game of Thrones* for the tween set...”—*School Library Journal*

Shadow of the Hawk

“Plotlines and were-creatures proliferate ...there’s enough spilled blood and shape changing here to appease the most demanding fans of either.”—*Booklist*

About the Author

Curtis Jobling is best known as the designer of the BAFTA-winning BBC show *Bob the Builder*. He is also the creator/director/producer of Nickelodeon’s *Curious Cow* animated shorts and the author and illustrator of

several picture books. He resides in Warrington, United Kingdom.

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VIKING

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To my pack:

*Andrew, Evelyn, Scarlett, and Constance,
and mummy wolf, Emma. We made it!*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THERE ARE A FEW people who've played their part in my writing of *Wereworld*, either knowingly or unwittingly, so it's only right that I briefly mention them now.

I fell in love with storytelling via a misspent youth engaged in role-playing games, more often than not running the things. Thanks to all the guys I've gamed with down the years, in no particular order (and I'm bound to miss someone): "our kid" Mark, Andy J., Big Stu, Doctor Andy, Kinnon, Jesus Joe, Nick, Wayne, and all the gang from art college who stayed up playing *Cthulhu* when they should have been partying, including Ian, Bru, Ed, Ron, and Sparky B. Of course, my folks thought I was studying when I was at college as opposed to pulling all-night gaming sessions, so I also need to mention the incomparable and always supportive Kath and Mel.

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One last thumbs up to Ian—the man who gave a name to the series: *Wereworld*. Cheers, buddy!

Curtis, September 2010

PART I

AUTUMN, COLD COAST

PARTING WORDS

DREW KNEW THAT there was a predator out there.

He looked out over the barley field, mottled shadows racing across it, and the crops swaying rhythmically as storm clouds flew by overhead. Behind him his father and twin brother continued to load the wagon, backs bent as they hauled sacks of grain onto the wooden boards. A heavy gray shire horse stood harnessed to the front, tugging with its teeth at tufts of grass it found at the base of the tethering post. Drew stood on the roof of the rickety old toolshed, scouring the golden meadow for a telltale sign, of what he wasn't entirely sure.

"Get your idle bones down off that shed and come and help your brother," shouted his father. "We need to get this loaded before the rain hits."

"But Pa, there's something out there," Drew called back.

"Either you get yourself down from that thing or I come over and knock you down," Pa warned, pausing momentarily to glare at his son.

Begrudgingly, Drew searched the barley field with narrowed eyes one last time before jumping down onto the muddy, rutted surface of the farm's yard.

"I swear you'd rather do anything than a bit of hard work," muttered his father, hefting a sack up to Trent.

Drew snatched up his own load, struggling for purchase against the rough hemp as he hoisted it up to his brother. Their father returned to the barn to haul out the remaining grain destined for the neighboring market town of Tuckborough.

Tall, broad, blond-haired, and blue-eyed, Trent was the very image of Mack Ferran. Shorter and slighter in build than his brother, with a shock of black hair that tumbled over his finer features, Drew was an exact opposite in all aspects. Though the twins were now on the verge of manhood, Drew knew it would be clear to the most casual observer which of the two had eaten the bigger portions of porridge at the Ferran breakfast table. But, different as they were, they were as close as any brothers could be.

"Don't mind him," said Trent, taking the weight of the sack and dragging it across the wooden boards. "He just wants to be off so he can get to market on time." He slammed the bag down as Drew pulled forward another to the foot of the wagon. Trent rarely had any trouble believing Drew—if his brother said something was amiss when they were in the wild, nine times out of ten he'd be correct. "What do you reckon it is?" he asked.

Drew paused to glance back at the fields surrounding the Ferran farm. "Can't say. A wildcat? Dogs maybe? Possibly a wolf?" he guessed.

"At this time of day, so close to the farm? You're mad, Drew. I'll grant you it might be wild dogs, but not a wolf."

Drew knew he wasn't mad. Trent might have been strong, athletic, and a natural horseman, but he knew little about the wilderness. Drew, on the other hand, was a born outdoorsman and with this came the gift of an innate understanding of the countryside and the creatures within it. Since his first trip out into the fields as a boy with his father, he'd taken to shepherding with an uncanny ease. He found he was completely in tune with the animals, his senses seeming to match theirs. From the smallest field mouse to the largest (and,

thankfully, very uncommon) bear, Drew could usually recognize their presence readily, be it from the reaction of the other animals or the tracks and signs they left behind.

But today's feeling vexed him. Something was out there, watching them, stalking them, but it was unfamiliar. He knew it sounded crazy, but he could pick up the scent of a predator when the air was clear. This had proved invaluable on many an occasion, saving several of the family's sheep and cattle. Although today was blustery, there was still the faint hint of a creature that was out of place, foreign to these parts. A large animal was out there, looking in, and it irked Drew that he couldn't figure out what it was, much less spy it.

"You think it's the thing from last night?" asked Trent.

That was exactly what Drew had been wondering. For the last few nights Drew's shepherd watch had been unusual. The sheep had not been themselves, and all the while Drew had been consumed by an awful sense of foreboding. Ordinarily the sheep would be very receptive to his commands and calls but, bit by bit, they had become more erratic. This had coincided with the waxing of the moon, which often spooked the animals and had even caused Drew to grow ill with worry. It wasn't a pleasant sensation, the feeling of being stalked by a predator in your own backyard.

Toward the end of last night's watch he'd gathered and penned the majority of the flock and picked up the stragglers that had wandered farther afield. Only one had remained—the ram, naturally—and it had managed to find its way up onto the bluffs that towered over the coast below. The Ferran farm was situated on a rocky promontory of land that reached out from the Cold Coast into the White Sea, cut off on almost every side by the rock walls that surrounded it. He'd found the ram in a state of panic.

It had bucked and started, throwing its head back in fear. Drew raised his hands, which should have calmed it down, but it had the opposite effect. Shaking its head from side to side, mouth open and gulping at the salty air, the ram had backed up a step. Then another. Pebbles had tumbled over the cliff edge, dislodged by frantic hooves, as it struggled for purchase. One moment it was there, an eye fixed on him in stricken terror, the next it was gone, disappearing off the cliff.

Drew had scrambled the remaining distance to the edge, white-knuckled fingers clutching the earth as he peered over. A hundred feet below, heaped in a broken mass, the sheep lay unmoving, its life dashed away on the sharp rocks.

As the moon shone down Drew had looked about, convinced he wasn't alone, sure beyond reason that whatever had startled the animal was still nearby. He'd raced home through the sickly moonlight, heart thundering, not stopping until he'd hit the farm's front door with an almighty crash. Now, on this stormy morning, Drew had the same familiar feeling. He'd be keeping the sheep penned in tonight, close to the farm where he could keep an eye on them.

"Drew!" His father pointed in the direction of the remaining sacks that were lined up outside the heavy timber doors of the barn. "Get a move on. I want to get to Tuckborough while there's still daylight, lad." Drew trudged to the barn, speeding up when he caught sight of his father's glower.

His mother, Tilly, stood on the doorstep of the farmhouse, drying her hands on her apron.

"Try not to be hard on him, Mack," she said as her husband approached, reaching out and brushing the sweat-soaked hair from his brow. "He's probably still raw from what happened to that ram."

"He's still raw?" said Mack incredulously. "It's not him who has to fork out for another animal. If I don't get

there before noon, the best on show will be gone to some other bidder.” He saw his son dragging the last two sacks across the farmyard to the wagon. “If you tear those sacks, then it’ll come out of your wages, lad!” he shouted.

Tilly had to bite her lip, mother’s instinct telling her to jump in and defend the boy, but she thought better of it. Mack’s mood was bad enough without one of their rows darkening it further.

Drew stopped to throw one of the sacks over his shoulder, looking back to his parents, who stood talking beneath the farmhouse porch. His father was pointing his way, his hooked thumb gesturing, while his mother shook her head. A few choice words to her husband and she walked indoors in annoyance. The boys’ father looked back toward them, shaking his head wearily before following his wife indoors. Drew trudged over to the wagon.

“Are they arguing again?” asked Trent, positioning the final sack and binding them to the timber hoardings with a heavy length of rope.

Drew nodded, aware that the words his parents had exchanged were probably about him. It always seemed to be about him. It felt as though they were keeping something from him, but he didn’t know what.

Times were undoubtedly changing at the farm, and Trent was biding his time before he finally left home to join the military. Under duress, their parents had agreed to their son’s constant badgering to allow him to become a soldier, something he’d wanted to do since childhood. As a matter of routine, their father had trained both his sons in skill at arms from an early age, teaching them things he’d picked up himself a long time ago. Mack was a member of the old king’s Wolfguard, and there were very few places across the continent of Lyssia that he hadn’t visited. With Leopold the Lion on the throne, it was a very different monarch Trent would serve if he pursued his dream. This part of the Seven Realms was a changed place from days gone by. Leopold ruled with an iron paw, and it was rumored that many of Lyssia’s people had fallen on hard times. Their father would mutter that the Lionguard were now little more than glorified tax collectors, a shadow of their former selves. He had done his parental duty in basic self-defense, with both boys now proficient with a sword, but there was only so much he was prepared to teach.

Regardless of his own skills, Drew had no desire to travel to Highcliff with his brother and join the Lionguard. His home was on the farm, and he felt no need to see the world. He knew his mother found his homebird nature heartwarming and loved the fact that her young boy would always be around. Drew suspected that his father found his lack of ambition disappointing, but the old man never spoke of it if he did. It seemed that his father had written him off at a young age, and if he were to stay around here for the rest of his life then so be it. After all, as Mack Ferran often said, another pair of hands was always needed on the farm, so the boy was good for a few things. It was as close to a compliment as he was likely to get.

Straining against his harness, the great gray shire horse kicked his hooves into the earth, keen to be on his way. He threw his head back and took a couple of forceful steps, almost causing Trent to fall off the back of the wagon.

“Whoa there, Amos,” called Drew, slapping his hand against the wooden side. The horse relented, stepping back gingerly and dipping his head by way of an apology. “He wants to set off,” said Drew, looking up at the gathering storm clouds. “Can’t say I blame him.”

Trent jumped down, and Drew followed him indoors to say farewell. They found their parents standing in the kitchen, embracing.

“Right, then,” said their father. “I guess we’re ready. Trent, get that basket off the table, lad. It’s our lunch in

there.”

Trent picked up the basket and sidled past, back to the front door and the waiting wagon. They always took it in turns to accompany their father on the road to market. Tuckborough was some ten or so miles away from them, the nearest spot of civilization. By horse it was a brisk gallop, the coast road skirting the edge of the Dyrewood, weaving one way and the other along the cliff top past bays. By wagon it was a far slower affair. With a number of shops, watering holes, and other more diverting interests, it was usually a welcome break from mundane life on the farm. Come autumn, however, it was decidedly less enjoyable. Cold winds and sleeting rain seemed to instinctively appear on market days. Even the prospects of a sly sip of ale with their father or a flirtation with a pretty girl proved lean enticements.

Their mother cleared up the breakfast pots from the kitchen table. Drew reached up and unhooked his father’s heavy hooded cloak from its peg, handing it to him as he made for the door.

“We should be back around nightfall, depending on the road and weather,” Mack said as he fastened the brass clasp of his cloak under his chin. “You may want to see about keeping the flock a little closer to the homestead today. After yesterday and all, yes?”

Drew nodded his agreement as his mother squeezed by, looking to say her good-byes to her other son. Beyond the doorway, a light rain had started to fall.

“Try not to lose any more of them. And look after your ma,” his father added as she passed.

The old man patted his hip, checking his hunting knife was at home in its sheath. Drew handed his father’s longbow to him before picking up the quiver of arrows that lay at the foot of the stairs. He’d rarely had to use any of these weapons on the road, certainly not in recent years anyway. There had been a time, when the boys were toddlers, that bandits had stalked the coast road, and bows and blades were a necessity for travelers. Eventually the local farmers and road traders had come together to form a makeshift posse that dispatched the brigands. Those who weren’t slain or hanged in Tuckborough had fled to pastures less feisty. Now the most dangerous encounter they might face would be a boar, big cat, or wolf. Still, old habits died hard for the ex-soldier. Trent followed his father out into the drizzle, wrapping his scarf tightly about his face and pulling up the hood of his cloak.

They both climbed into the cart, and Drew followed them to pass up the quiver of arrows. Amos gave a whinny of excitement, feet stepping in anticipation, aware that they were about to be off. Drew stepped up to pat the horse’s nose with an open hand, but the beast pulled back, uncharacteristically arching his neck with a nervy snort. Clearly the horse was also on edge, and Drew guessed he was picking up on the same unsettled atmosphere.

“Gee up,” called Mack Ferran, snapping the reins in his hands and spurring the old shire horse on. With ponderous footsteps the horse stepped out, pulling the great long wagon behind him. Drew stood clear of the vehicle, the huge wheels cutting up the mud as it went. As the drizzle slowly turned to a downpour and a storm rumbled overhead, the wagon disappeared into the rain.

2

THE GATHERING STORM

THE AX HOVERED briefly in the air, poised for the drop, its blade glinting in the lantern light. With a thunderclap and a simultaneous flash of lightning, it flew down, cracking the log in two. Drew returned the ax to its bracket on the barn wall, picked up all the firewood from the floor, and set off back to the farmhouse

through the sleeting rain.

Once his father and Trent had left, the day had been one of the most miserable Drew had ever experienced. The storm had been relentless, windowpanes rattling and shutters clapping as rain and wind battered the farm. The yard was a quagmire of mud and water, great dirty pools clogging the ground underfoot. He could hear sheep bleating from their shelter beyond the barn, where he'd moved the flock earlier in the day.

Hoping his bad luck with the animals was behind him, Drew had been disappointed to find the hex still firmly over his head. The sheep had proved skittish and unpredictable, almost impossible to herd when he took them to the field. A week earlier the flock had come to him when he called, happily gathering around him. Now they were different animals, the arrival of this invisible predator leaving them edgy and out of sorts. After trying to coax and cajole them for an hour, he had eventually turned to shouting to scare them into obeying his commands, something he'd never needed to do before. All the while he'd watched over his shoulder for any clues as to what was out there. By now there was no doubt in his mind that, whatever it was, it was something to be afraid of.

A day alone with his thoughts had not been the best remedy for Drew's mood, which was darker than ever. Whatever had upset the sheep had also played havoc with Drew, leaving him sick and fevered, and unable to eat his supper earlier. Elbowing open the front door, he stumbled into the hall, shaking the wet cloak from his shoulders and hopping about on one foot then the other, kicking off his boots. Barefoot and shivering, he trotted into the living room, where his mother sat knitting in the armchair by the dying embers of the fire. He tipped his armful of kindling and wood into the scuttle on the hearth with a noisy clatter, placing a couple of pieces on the coals of the fire. Crouched on his haunches, Drew remained at his mother's feet, hands held out toward the fire.

"How are you feeling, son?" asked his mother, putting down the needles and wool. She leaned forward, stroking his damp hair affectionately. She laid the back of her hand against his forehead, checking his temperature. He knew it was up.

"Not too bad, Ma," he lied, fighting back the cramps that rolled and shot through his belly. He looked up at the mantelpiece. Below his father's Wolfshead blade was a brass carriage clock. It was almost half past ten in the evening, well beyond the time that his father and Trent would normally be home. He had to assume that they had fallen foul of the weather.

Standing, he managed to smile to his mother. "Do you fancy a brew, Ma?" he asked, making for the kitchen. A hot drink seemed to be the only thing he could keep down at the moment.

"That would be lovely," she called after him. Filling the kettle with water he placed it over the big old stove. Whereas his brother clearly followed in his father's footsteps, Drew took after his mother, sharing her peaceful demeanor and easygoing nature. He always figured his mother must have been wasted in her youth as a scullery maid in Highcliff serving the king; her sharp mind and quick wit could have made her a great scholar if the opportunity had been there for her.

Leaving the kettle on the stove, Drew wandered back into the sitting room, settling cross-legged on the rug by the fire.

"Still not hungry?" his mother asked, concerned again.

"No, can't eat anything, Ma. Sorry," he replied, aware that his mother had spent hours preparing the evening meal earlier. Unable to eat, he had lain in his bunk in his bedroom, leaving his mother downstairs to eat her meal alone. The table still remained set, the cutlery for Pa and Trent laid out, plus his own.

“There’s no need to apologize, my dear,” said his mother. “I know how it is when you feel ill.” She looked intently at him, as if reading his thoughts. “And I hope nothing else is troubling you.” She put a reassuring hand on his shoulder. “I know you didn’t mean to lose that sheep.”

Drew nodded. It was true he’d been worried about that, but now something else was disturbing him. He’d attempted during the day to unravel what had been going on with his parents’ heated arguments, but his mother had proved adept at dodging his subtle lines of questioning. Although she’d provided no answers she had, however, revealed some clues.

To his relief, it didn’t appear to be his fault. He knew his father was annoyed at the loss of a prize-winning ram, but his mother had just made it clear that he had done nothing wrong, and he believed her. She would sooner stay silent than tell a lie to either of her boys. Nor was it something that stemmed from a disagreement between his parents. Whatever it was, the clues suggested that it had something to do with the flock’s strange behavior, but that was all he could work out. With his father dismissing his theories earlier, Drew was surprised to find out that he also thought something was wrong.

Drew was pulled back from his thoughts by the rapid *rat-tat-tat* of the rain on the windowpanes, making it seem as though the glass might shatter at any moment. Picking up another log, he threw it into the fireplace. The flames leapt high, the fire burning hungrily now, spitting, hissing, and popping. Drew walked across to the huge bay window. Over the storm he could hear his sheep bleating, wailing with worry. Should he go outdoors to check on them? Surely they’d be safe in the paddock? The moon, full and bloated in the night sky, broke through the storm clouds, casting an eerie light over the farmyard.

Drew suddenly felt the fever take him anew, as never before. A wave of dizziness washed over him as the blood rushed from his head. He grasped the heavy curtain with a trembling hand to stop himself from falling. His breathing rasped in his chest, labored and shallow, as rivulets of sweat rolled down his face and into his eyes. Drew wiped his forearm across his face and his sleeve came away sodden, clinging to his flesh. What kind of illness could have this effect on him?

He fixed his eyes on the moon, trying to focus, trying to clear his head of the painful sensations that now assaulted his body. His skin crawled, a fevered itch spreading its way over every inch of his flesh like wildfire. Nausea assailed him, his chest heaving, his lunchtime meal threatening to make a break from his stomach. The world turned around Drew, spinning on the bright white axis of the moon. Focus on the moon.

Focus on the moon.

His body seemed to calm, the pains passing as quickly as they had come. His flesh cooled; the sickness passed. Outside the rain was subsiding, gentle now and almost tranquil. The sheep had quieted, suddenly calmed. Drew released his grip from the curtains, putting his hand to his clammy throat and massaging it softly. The peace he felt was unnatural, unnerving.

His mother rushed over. “Are you all right, Drew?”

“Not really,” he replied. “I feel ill. I think it’s the sheep being in distress. I’m picking up on it, and there’s nothing I can do.”

His mother chewed her lip, her brow creased as she stroked his cheek.

“Ma,” asked Drew, taking a deep ragged breath. “What’s wrong with me?”

“Nothing, my love. Nothing at all.”

Her face looked so sad, Drew thought, her frown aging her before his very eyes.

He smiled.

“I know there’s something you’re not telling me, Ma,” he said, then, as she started to protest, “Please don’t deny it. I’ve seen you and Pa. There’s something you’re keeping from me. I know I’m right, but hear me out. I need to say this. I just want you to know that I trust you. Whatever it is, whatever you and Pa are worried about, I know you’ll do the right thing. I just hope, whatever it is, there’s something I can do to fix it.”

Users Review

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