Campaign Core:

Rise of the Red Moon

By Cal Ebethan

Introduction

Hello, and welcome to the second in the Campaign Core series by Ebethan Game Design! If this is your first time purchasing one of our Campaign Cores, let me explain to you how it works: These supplements provide you, the Game Master, with the general premise and structure of a campaign or campaign arc. The content provided is system agnostic, and intentionally left open-ended and malleable so that you may personalize the adventure to your heart's content and make it unique. You will notice that some chapters are split into different parts while others are not. This is because some chapters are easily self-contained, however others may have distinct objectives that are completed in roughly the same approximate beat.

The Lore

In a Time of Legends

In the tangled lineage of the gods, both good and evil, an abomination was born. This demon was a perverse bridge between the hunting instincts of the natural world and the cruelty and hungers of humans. He was the First Werewolf, and he spread his curse across the realms. To prevent this abomination from subverting the world into his own hunting grounds, the hosts of the gods imprisoned the First Werewolf on a barren red moon, alone and unable to slake his hunger. However, his curse lived on in the worlds he had already visited, passed from one to another by blood and bite and foul sorcery.

Today

The legends of the First Werewolf have all but disappeared from contemporary mythology, and his existence is little-known among regular academics and theologians. Instead, his legend, and the legend of the Red Moon, is shared between members of marauding packs of were-creatures.

Lately, such monsters have been spotted with increasing frequency, especially in the disputed territory of Grimmeran between the Siloron States to the West and the Alimep Dynasty to the East. While these resurgences are not uncommon themselves, what is uncommon is the behavior and composition of these wild packs: organized, almost uniform with no clear alpha, and with different were-creatures as members.

If there is any stock in rumor, then these monsters are not content with their typical pillaging and murdering. They leave their victims alive, sometimes taking people alive, tormenting and biting them, and letting them go. To the everyday folk, these changes are unremarkable, merely new exercises in cruelty by cruel monsters. But the discerning mind may see something more taking shape, a plot growing in the occult underworld, perhaps even an encroaching **Werewolf Invasion**.

Campaign Core Synopsis

The party wanders through Grimmeran and begins to hear various rumors. Tales of werewolf attacks and abductions can be heard coming from a couple of villages spread through the province. Grimmeran is heavily disputed between the two powers to the East and West of it, and there are stories aplenty covering topics from long-ago battles to war machines unearthed on a nearby farm. The party may even witness patrols from both Alimep and Siloron as they venture through the province.

The adventure begins in earnest when a werewolf pack attacks the village the party is staying in. The goal of the werewolves is to take villagers hostage to later infect with their lycanthropic curse. How successful the werewolves are depends on how well the players fend them off: they may retreat to their den with none, some, or most of the villagers as captives.

Pursuing the werewolves to their den, the party may note that this pack of werewolves is particularly well organized and devout. The pack even has its own symbol -- a wolf's profile in black against a red moon. They also uncover the intent of the werewolves to deliberately infect and release other people.

Following clues left in the werewolf den, the party begins to uncover a greater plot between werewolf packs, and come into conflict with other cells of this lycanthropic cult, trying the destabilize the region and create more werewolves. In time, they uncover the legend of the Red Moon and the First Werewolf, as well as reference to a spell: the Ritual of the Red Moon.

As their conflict with the Cult of the Red Moon continues, the party comes across more powerful and freakish lycanthropic monsters. These opponents wear moonstone amulets, and are able to control their

shapeshifting abilities. They may find allies in their war against the lycanthropes, discussed later on.

The party learns that the cult is attempting to perform the Ritual of the Red Moon, and makes their way to a hidden sanctuary of the cult. There, the Ritual of the Red Moon is performed at a temple devoted to the First Werewolf, and all of the infected lycanthropes in Grimmeran are forced into their shifted form and driven feral. The cultists who wear the moonstone amulets retain their minds, and direct the new feral horde in the conquest of Grimmeran, and the people who do not flee the onslaught are enslaved, killed, or systemically infected.

The party is forced to flee, either to the mystic Alimep Dynasty to the East, or the devout Siloron States to the West, and take part in the defense against the werewolf army. However it quickly becomes clear that conventional warfare will not see them through.

The party learns that the Ritual of the Red Moon needs to be maintained through a living conduit, a Vessel or Chosen of the First Werewolf, an apex predator. Their only chance of winning this war is to infiltrate Grimmeran, and its capital city of the same

name, and slay or subdue the Chosen. Upon doing so, the influence of the First Werewolf is ended, his disciples' power begin to wane, and those forced to change against their will regain control.

Incorporating Good Were-Creatures

While werewolves in the lore provided are closely connected to the demonic First Werewolf, not all were-creatures need be connected to this curse. Good-aligned, or at least non-evil, were-creatures may be the disciples of different nature gods or practitioners of shamanistic traditions. Consider how this might play a role in the story: they may serve as valuable allies, sources of information, or even quest-givers in this campaign core. Do they carry moonstone amulets that grant them control, like the cultists do? When the Ritual of the Red Moon occurs, how does it influence them? Is there any backlash against these communities early in the Campaign Core when werewolf attacks are increasing, or later after the Red Moon Ritual?

Altering Assets

If you enjoy the Campaign Core, but are not a fan of some of these assets, consider replacing them to suit your needs. For my home campaign, I wanted a region that was not well controlled, and created the St. Petersburg-esque Grimmeran, with an international struggle that matched its historic template. I also wanted to use a traditional creature and utilize its mechanics differently. Here are some suggestions on how to switch up the original recipe:

- Replace the Werewolves with Ghouls. A cult to a god of Undeath systemically infects and curses the populace, and the transformation is completed by means of a large ritual.
- Remove the political machinations, or alter them. The political conflict over Grimmeran is meant as a backdrop, but is not necessary to the plot as written.
- Accentuate the political machinations. Provide clues that indicate one of the neighboring countries is working with the Cult of the Red Moon. These may be false leads, or there may be plots, great or small, originating from these countries.

Adventure Hooks

This adventure is easy enough to start, especially if you are beginning with the werewolf attack on the village the party is passing through. However, there are alternatives that might suit your party and make the adventure more personal:

- **Favor for a Friend:** An ally from the party's past has either been injured in a werewolf attack or has grown concerned by the increasing frequency of the attacks, and has summoned them to Grimmeran.
- **An Ancient Evil:** A druidic enclave or tribe of good-aligned shapeshifters with which the party is connected has had visions of the encroaching chaos, and called the party for aid.
- **Investigators in the Making:** The authorities in Grimmeran, limited as they are by the influence of the neighboring countries, has enlisted the help of the party to stop the werewolf attacks.
- **Exterminators:** The party is enlisted by or connected to a group of monster hunters (either mercenaries or a devout order) and sent to

Grimmeran to investigate the frequent attacks.

- **Ghost Town:** Rather than being in the village when the werewolves attack, the party comes across the destroyed town after the fact, and track the werewolves to their lair.

Note: Both **Investigators in the Making** and **Exterminators** gives the party a steady stream of resources and information for a more structured campaign, but these elements can be added in later, as discussed below. The **Ghost Town** adventure hook, or the basic beginning of the adventure, allow you to make the quest personal by allowing an ally, friend, or relative of the party members to be captured.

Chapter One: Predator and Prey

Note: You may need to adjust or skip the first two paragraphs if you are running one of the alternative adventure hooks.

1. The adventure begins simply enough, as the party arrives in a small village within the Province of Grimmeran. Allow the opportunity for the players to get a feel for the region. The province has been disputed for several hundred years, well before the current argument between the Alimep and Siloron sovereignties. That history has made the people stoic and somber, and the land unsecure and in disrepair. Regarding history, the party may hear stories of long-ago battles, folk heroes, or even ancient war machines excavated on someone's farm. Be sure they also overhear rumors of werewolf sightings or attacks, though none have occurred close-by (yet).

As the party is winding down or making plans for their next step, the village they are staying in is attacked. The werewolves begin at the outlying homes and farms and move quickly through the village, biting, wounding, and kidnapping as many as possible. They will fight the characters if they put up any kind of defense, but are not interested in picking a fight they won't win for sure. However, depending on how the encounter goes, the werewolves may be inclined to capture at least some party members. In either case, the party soon find their way to the werewolf lair

Whether they are brought to the werewolf lair against their will, or deliberately follow the monsters there, the party makes their way to one of the province's many abandoned fortresses

where this particular pack of lycanthropes has established their base.

This is where they realize how well organized this pack is, and may begin to unveil their religious side with the discovery of the symbol of the Red Moon, and maybe by encountering a werewolf shaman or sorcerer. However, the meaning of the symbol is beyond them at the moment. The one revelation they have to have during this sequence is that the werewolves are willfully and intentionally inflicting their curse on other people.

2. As the party investigates more werewolf activity and the clues left in the previous den, they uncover more pieces of the puzzle, such as:

- The werewolf packs are working in tandem to some extent
- The packs follow the same ideology
- Some were-creatures are becoming more powerful, and retain control of their transformation

This investigatory path in Chapter 1.2 may take as long or as short as you wish. Below, I have outlined some example werewolf schemes and encounters, in case you are not sure how to proceed:

- The werewolves attempt to inflict their curse on someone influential.
- Werewolf attacks are plaguing a neighborhood in Grimmeran, the capital city of the province that shares its name. It turns out to be several werewolves taking turns hunting and infecting citizens.
- Investigating the symbol of the Red Moon draws the attention of the cult, which sends assassins after the party.
- Werewolves are attacking both Alimep and Siloron patrols, discouraging the already unenthusiastic soldiers from policing the province.
- Sizeable amounts of moonstone are being stolen, either within a town or at a mine. A cell of the werewolf cult is behind it.
- Livestock is being found dead in the fields, and it turns out to be an unwilling recruit of the werewolves.
- A village is blaming a nearby druid enclave for the werewolf attacks.
- (Re)use the adventure hooks provided: **Exterminators, Investigators in the Making,** and

An Ancient Evil all make suitable bridging points.

3. Chapter One ends when the players encounter a more critical, more religious cell of the werewolf cult. Here, the legend of the First Werewolf and the Red Moon are explained (although the party may have discovered bits and pieces before, this is where the story is filled in). According to the gospel of this cult, the First Werewolf would see a Red Moon rise above the mortal world, turning it into his own personal hunting ground.

Note: You have one of two notes to end Chapter One on: on the one hand, the party may not know how expansive the werewolf cult is, and believe that they have dealt them a crushing blow by this point. However, perhaps there are clues in this final den, or perhaps there have been enemies that survived or escaped, indicating that this is just the beginning of something much greater and darker.

Chapter Two: The Red Moon Rises

Depending on what note you ended Chapter One, the party goes into Chapter Two with one of the following assumptions: The werewolves are on the run and just need to be rounded up; or, the Cult of the Red Moon is still out there, and needs to be stopped. In either case, if the party is not already allied with some sort of organization, this would be a reasonable time to introduce those allies if you intend to do so.

The werewolf cult becomes far more organized in Chapter Two. They target particular individuals and places to inflict their curse upon. In addition to the potential events listed in Chapter One are the following:

- The cult attacks a prison, destroying the garrison, and afflicting the prisoners before they escape.
- A werewolf pack equipped with moonstone amulets occupy entire villages and cut them off from the outside.
- The werewolves attack roadside shrines and fanes to various gods, leaving profane scrawlings.

- The werewolves begin stealing magical items and magical components (for the Red Moon Ritual they are planning to cast).

In this chapter, the party should definitely encounter some exceptionally powerful werewolves, as well as discover the power of the moonstone amulets if they haven't already.

All of the werewolf activity in Chapter Two points to something big happening soon, and the party learns of the Ritual of the Red Moon. The party may come across the ritual site either by tracking the stolen moonstone and magical items, or by deducing the best location after finding a description of the spell somewhere else (though the party may find a copy of the ritual with another cell of the cult, that does not mean they know what the spell will do when cast).

Try as the players might to reach the ritual site in time, they fail to interrupt the spell. The moon, regardless of phase or visibility, becomes a glowing, blood-red celestial sphere. All were-creatures in the province, without a moonstone amulet to control it, are forced to transform, losing their control in the process. The grand plan of the Red Moon Cult is realized as the capital city and border towns fall within their control, and the populace must either, serve, turn, or die.

Note: If you prefer, you may end the campaign arc in Chapter Two by allowing the party to interrupt the Ritual of the Red Moon, thus thwarting the Red Moon Cult, at least for a time.

Chapter Three: Moon Madness

At the beginning of Chapter Three, the party is deep in the Grimmeran province, with a cult of werewolves and an army of feral lycanthropes on the loose. While they will most likely be forced to escape, there may be optional objectives they want to complete while doing so.

Optional objectives may be determined by the party's allies if they have any: rescuing comrades or friends, preventing certain items from falling into werewolf hands, et cetera. [**Author's Note:** In my home game, the party was working with authorities from the Siloron States, and their objective was to rescue the province's leadership and take them to the West].

Escaping may be as simple or as difficult as you wish it to be. Keep in mind,

werewolves typically have the instincts of a hunter, not a tactician, so while they can be dogged pursuers, they don't necessarily make the best watchmen or guards.

Whether Chapter Three takes several sessions or less than an hour, use it to show the tyranny and demonic influences of the Cult of the Red Moon: The disciples of the cult gain control of their transformation, and serve as vindictive wardens of this lycanthropic state. Individuals infected against their will are feral, used as an animal and tormented for amusement. Uninfected people (those that aren't killed) are enslaved, and are often forced to run in the werewolves' predatory games. Each night, the moon above Grimmeran has an eerie red glow to it.

If your game has more of a steampunk or dungeonpunk aesthetic, you could show evidence of the werewolves unearthing or discovering the buried or hidden warmachines talked about in Chapter One, adding artillery to the list of the lycanthropes' weapons.

Chapter Three ends once the party is officially out of lycanthrope-controlled territory.

Chapter Four: Wolves at the Door

1. Chapter Four opens on the party in either the Siloron States or the Alimep Dynasty, having escaped the lycanthropic horde taking over Grimmeran. Having reached some semblance of asylum, the main objective of the party should be to put a stop to (or at least defend against) the werewolf threat. Some of the quests involved in this portion, may include:

- Defending a border town or fort from a werewolf assault
- Securing silver weapons, or other means of fighting the werewolves
- Investigating suspected werewolf infectees
- Investigating various cures for werewolfism: both contemporary theories and old folk tales

For more of a political quest, you may consider the following obstacles:

- The party must sue for asylum for themselves and any allies
- Werewolf supporters and cultists infiltrate the new safe haven
- The party must decide what to do with refugees from Grimmeran, who may or may not be infected (this one

can play out well in Chapter 4.2 if you want it to).

2. However, it quickly becomes obvious that the werewolves cannot be fought like any traditional foe. The lycanthropes wear no uniforms, can infiltrate secure places, and are considerably stronger than most soldiers. Consider conveying this through a sudden, dramatic attack on the party's new safe haven, perhaps as a result of a betrayal by a previous ally, or resulting in an ally's death. The attack does not need to be a success for the werewolves, but rather a hit-and-run show of strength by the lycanthropes.

Disheartened, or more likely angered, the party must now pursue some other way of overcoming their foe. Quests for this portion may include:

- Hunting down cells of the werewolf cult for information
- Pursuing old werewolf legends and stories in hope of uncovering some kind of solution
- Reaching out to druidic or shapeshifter communities for assistance
- Visiting libraries, monasteries, and temples that may hold forgotten lore

- Searching for allies to help defending from the werewolves

The end result of this portion of Chapter Four is to learn that the Red Moon Ritual must constantly be maintained, by something called the Vessel (in fact, you may incorporate rumors of an apex predator werewolf lording over the city of Grimmeran from refugees and scouts). With this discovery, the party must now find a safe way to the center of Grimmeran and end the Red Moon Ritual.

Chapter Five: The Hunters

The party has exhausted other means of dealing with the werewolf threat, and every delay or change in plan has prolonged the danger that they, their friends, and their allies have been threatened with. Now the characters must march into the heart of the lycanthrope controlled region of Grimmeran to end the werewolf apocalypse.

Like other finales in the Campaign Core series, the design will be left mainly to you, with some suggestions and notes on how to do things.

The first thing to be considered is the approach. This will be the deadly journey into Grimmeran. They will

undoubtedly run into lycanthropes during this course of the adventure, but not try not to bog down the adventure by having them fight their way through an army. By this point, the party has had their fill of werewolves, and has their sights set on one in particular. And remember that this is where the lycanthropes are most complacent, and that the party is well-adapted to their foe at this point.

Along the approach, describe the lycanthrope regime, similar to what you did in Chapter Three. By now the werewolves have had time to settle into the role of "occupying force." Do they maintain their monstrous forms permanently to better exert control? Is their control ruinous and dystopian, controlled by their savagery and cruelty? Or is it surprisingly organized, driven by their pack mentality? If the party wanders near towns and villages, describe the plights of the villagers, if any remain. You may also describe the operations of the werewolves; fortresses and war-machines are plentiful in Grimmeran as pointed out before, do the werewolves make an attempt to salvage these things for their own ends?

The next, and trickiest part, is getting into the werewolf-controlled city of Grimmeran, specifically to where the Vessel resides. Both aspects of a werewolf's dual nature are obsessed with dominance, and the elite of the Red Moon Cult are likely to set up their base within the temple of an enemy god, or a political seat of power. There are a couple of avenues in that you can provide your players, but you may be able to make your own depending on what changes you make to the story and setting:

- **The party sneaks their way in.** Straightforward, simple, and dangerous if they make a mistake. This can easily get them past the outer defenses of Grimmeran (remember, werewolves are hunters, not watchmen), but may not serve them so well in the lycanthropes inner sanctum.

- **The party fights their way in.** While not exactly subtle, this is not necessarily the worst plan, especially if the party is well equipped and bring strong allies with them. However, this plan might work better if they sneak past as many obstacles as possible first.

- **The party takes secret tunnels into Grimmeran.** A modification of

option 1. If you adhere to the lore that Grimmeran was the subject of many battles and conquests, it is easy to explain underground paths and networks that may allow easier access than the surface. This option works well in combination with others, also.

- **People within the city help the party gain access.** Although it might get them closer to their goal, a potential issue here is whether this impromptu ally's agenda will blow the party's cover before they can strike the Vessel.

- **The party talks their way in.** If the party has a shapeshifter as a member or ally, they might be able to pass themselves off as subjects of the Red Moon regime, though it will be up to you how easy or difficult it is to pass as followers of the cult. Another option here is for the party to act as non-lycanthrope subjects, but this route has even less guarantee of safety or access to where the Vessel resides.

Note: As I'm sure you can see, there are many more ways into Grimmeran than we have listed here. The methods available to your players will largely depend on how you write and structure your finale, and to some extent on how previous episodes of the campaign transpired. The journey, as it were, writes the destination, which is where the players find themselves now.

The final scene of our adventure is the confrontation with the Vessel of the Red Moon. As stated above, the Vessel likely makes their den in an opulent or culturally significant building towards the center of Grimmeran, the better to oversee their hunting grounds. The flavor of your final scene may be determined by your design of your Vessel.

- You may embrace the occult aspects of the Cult of the Red Moon, and make the Vessel a practitioner of dark magic.

- On the other hand, the Chosen of the First Werewolf should be an apex predator, their shapeshifting abilities extremely powerful, and disturbingly unstable.

- Perhaps they are perturbingly human in their appearance and intellect, but still possessed of the raw physical strength of their mutated form.

If this confrontation turns bloody, it should be dramatic. Consider letting the fight spill out into the open, the Vessel corralling and pursuing the players like predator and prey in the wild. If the encounter takes place in a single area, make the party feel as though they have cornered a dangerous animal whose ferocity grows in tandem with its frustration.

If you are concerned about whether other were-creatures intervene during this fight, you may incorporate them into the battle. But if that does not suit you, keep in mind that a were-creature's pack mentality insists they obey a strong alpha, and that the party's deeds so far may have earned a little trepidation in the hearts of their foes.

When the Vessel is defeated, the Red Moon Ritual ends. Those that were forced to transform revert back, although the process is painful and horrendous. Lycanthropes devoted to the Red Moon lose the bolstered strength it granted them, and their shapeshifting ability is stunned for a time. The sudden withdrawal of the Red Moon may drive the werewolves away in panic, or at least give the party a chance to escape to safety, but that's your call.

Without a Vessel to follow, there is no clear hierarchy or cohesion among the ranks of the lycanthropes, leading to dissolution and defeat. Although large packs may still rove the countryside, none rival the former might of the Cult. The political struggle for Grimmeran continues, and may soon reach a boiling point. And there is sure to be fallout for those afflicted with lycanthrope against their will, and for benevolent shapeshifting communities. The party will have to decide their next step as well, and whether they will play a part as the future of Grimmeran unfolds, as they are now **The Saviors of Grimmeran, Heroes of the Werewolf Invasion.**

Note from the Author: This is where the Campaign Core: Rise of the Red Moon ends. I hope you've enjoyed the schemes of the Red Moon Cult, and that you've found something to keep those *dogged* adventurers busy. Be sure to *sniff out* other products from Ebethan Game Designs, there will be more Campaign Cores in the works, and I promise they won't end with dog puns, this was a one time, thematically-driven thing. Promise.