Creature Corner+: Wolves

Intro (00:00)

Jordan: [upbeat music] Hi, I'm Jordan.

Kit: And I'm Kit.

Jordan: Welcome to Starry Time.

Kit: Asterisms edition.

Jordan: Where stars plus lines equals stories.

Kit: With an asterisk.

Jordan: In these episodes, we'll explore ideas, concepts, or people that didn't make it into the main show, or that we wanna talk about a little bit more.

Kit: In today's episode, we're going to go into Creature Corner to learn about real wolves before detouring into a discussion about our favorite or top fictional wolves and werewolves.

Creature Corner (00:40)

Jordan: Kit, this has been an exciting Creature Corner to put together, but before I start listing what I've learned, can you tell me what do you already know about wolves?

Kit: Well, I'm a well-documented lover of wolves. Uh, famously had a wolf poster in my childhood bedroom, which I have moved with me everywhere I've lived. It's currently in the room that I am, um, recording in. It's a very aggressive, like, wolf howling-

Jordan: [laughs]

Kit: ... in the Arctic with a full moon and then, like, another big wolf head. I'll, of course, post it on the socials this week. So, um, love wolves. But as I was getting ready to do this episode, I realized that most of my facts about wolves are a little bit basic. So I know that they travel, live, and hunt mostly, but not exclusively in packs. Uh, I know that there are different species of wolves, including the gray wolf. Um, I know there's a social hierarchy in wolf packs. Um, they've

historically had a very large natural habitat, so through the Arctic, Canada, US, acro- across Europe and Asia. Um, and it's gotten much smaller. Uh, in the US they were once endangered-

Jordan: Mm-hmm

Kit: ... but they aren't anymore. Uh, I know they are both cuter and bigger than you think-

Jordan: [laughs]

Kit: ... and that they can interbreed with dogs. And, and so I feel like I have a broad understanding, but not good specifics.

Jordan: Brilliant. I mean, the love that you feel is a fact-

Kit: [laughs]

Jordan: ... in it of itself.

Kit: Yes. [laughs] True.

Jordan: But the poster that you spoke of, uh, it's been with us for decades. Love it.

Kit: Mm-hmm.

Jordan: See it every time I come to visit. Uh, proves your wolf-

Kit: Mm-hmm

Jordan: ... credentials go deep.

Kit: [laughs]

Jordan: Deep.

Kit: I mean, there's only, there's only really two things that I kept from my childhood bedroom.

Jordan: Mm-hmm.

Kit: That was one of them, and the other thing is just a, a lamp that's shape- shaped like a jug-

Jordan: [laughs]

Kit: ... that, uh, we call jug lamp. [laughs] That's also very important to me. [laughs]

Jordan: I think there might be a constellation that's jug shape. All right, so here are some of the interesting wolf facts that I have learned. Um, the first thing I learned is about how they eat and how they've evolved, i.e., they can survive weeks without a major meal. We sometimes forget this, like even about apex predators, is that a lot of their time lions, wolves spend on the brink of starvation. So they can go-

Kit: Mm

Jordan: ... weeks and weeks and weeks, but their metabolism is adapted to this feast or famine existence. And when they do get a kill, they can eat many, many, many, many, many pounds of meat during a single feeding.

Kit: [laughs]

Jordan: So their ability to gorge, uh, when food-

Kit: Mm

Jordan: ... is available is one of their adaptations to, you know, don't always know when the next meal's gonna come from.

Kit: That makes sense.

Jordan: Yeah. So I wish I could do that as well.

Kit: [laughs]

Jordan: And like you said, wolves are highly social. Their society, if you wanna call it that, it depends heavily on individual recognition. So they can-

Kit: Mm

Jordan: ... each tell each other's identity and family num- members, and they use a variety of ways to kind of distinguish who's who and what's what. They fill out their MySpace profile with scent and vocalizations and appearance and behavior. But like you said, they're highly social animal, and these packs have long-term relationships with each other, which is one of the reasons why, if you didn't know, wolves were the first species ever domesticated by man. So long-

Kit: Hm

Jordan: ... before agriculture and cows and, and chickens and anything like that, we're looking at early wolf and human domestication all the way back to, as I said in the last podcast, like 30,000, 40,000 years ago. And it was because they have such a similar behavior to us that made them an ideal partner to live together. One of the things that is most important about them is they, A, hunted the same things that we did, so-

Kit: Mm-hmm

Jordan: ... we were gonna wind up in the same place in the same time-

Kit: Mm-hmm

Jordan: ... a lot. But-

Kit: Mm-hmm

Jordan: ... also they were highly social, cooperative, they cared for their young for extended periods, they communicate. They were a lot like us. But yes, at some point during the late Pleistocene, a population of wolves, uh, began becoming associated with human environment. But it wasn't so much that humans, you know, tamed a wolf. It was probably a long process, took thousands of years.

Kit: Yeah, I think people kind of think that, oh, it's like, well, you just, you could just catch a wolf now and it would be like a dog. And the reality is like domesticated dogs are different than wolves and that process of like transitioning from a wild wolf to a domesticated dog took a, took a long time. It's not just [laughs] wake up and a do- and a wolf becomes a dog.

Jordan: And then it becomes a Chihuahua and a Great Dane and a, and a Husky and a Greyhound.

Kit: Right.

Jordan: But-

Kit: Right

Jordan: ... what is kind of interesting thing is that like wolves became dogs without wolves disappearing. So it wasn't so much that, uh, the wolves were bred out of existence and only the ones-

Kit: Right

Jordan: ... cooperated with humans survived. So that's interesting-

Kit: Mm-hmm

Jordan: ... in and of itself. One last cool fact about the relationship between humans and wolves involves Yellowstone National Park.

Kit: Mm-hmm.

Jordan: Maybe you've heard of this before, um, but Yellowstone was established in the 1870s and gray wolves were still native there. But by the 1920s, like 130 some odd wolves had already been killed. And by the '40s-

Kit: Mm.

Jordan: ... uh, wolf packs had essentially disappeared. By the '70s they couldn't find any wolves whatsoever there.

Kit: Mm.

Jordan: After a lot of debate, in 1995 and in 1996, 31 gray wolves from Western Canada were relocated into Yellowstone and it kind of became this really interesting laboratory for ecology. I mean, it wasn't supposed to be-

Kit: Hmm

Jordan: ... any sort of a controlled experiment, but they found that because of the reintroduction of the wolf, it created what's called kind of a trophic cascade.

Kit: Hmm.

Jordan: That's something that just means the whole ecosystem works a lot better. The types of places-

Kit: Hmm

Jordan: ... where the elk are going to eat their plants has changed in relationship to where they're avoiding wolves. That allows plants to survive and thrive, like the willow and the aspen that wouldn't be able to do that. And wolves, they can feed an entire community. Like when a wolf kills an elk, you know, ravens-

Kit: Mm-hmm

Jordan: ... and magpies and coyotes and bears and eagles. So a wolf kill becomes kind of just like a, a loot resource that other animals can eat and use to survive.

Kit: Yeah, and I think sometimes, I think sometimes people forget the interrelationship, right? And so when we think about animals going extinct or disappearing, that it's not just the loss of that animal, which is obviously sad, but also the effects that it has on how the whole ecosystem develops and whether or not, you know, the plants are, uh, growing the same and what the other animals are doing and all of those kinds of things really highlights, I guess, the interconnection, uh, between, uh, sort of all things in the natural world, which is important.

Jordan: The last fact I'll leave you with is something that you talked briefly about, about how wolves travel and live. They travel a lot, like a lot, a lot. Like a wolf can walk up to 50 miles a day.

Kit: Mm.

Jordan: Which, you know, not bad.

Kit: Uh-uh. [laughs]

Jordan: [laughs] I, I can't get there quite yet. And just like the, what they call like their territory of a pack is also pretty huge. Like some of these packs have territories that are thousands of miles long. You know, the-America is 3,000 miles, so just imagine a wolf pack that's territory is a third of America.

Kit: Hmm.

Jordan: So-

Kit: Yeah

Jordan: ... they're spending a lot of time on the road, dispersed and traveling. But it moves through an extraordinary amount of space just in a single year.

Kit: Yeah, that's amazing. They are, they're covering a lot of ground and, uh, and they're just, they're beautiful, majestic, amazing creatures.

Jordan: We love wolves.

Fictional Wolves and Werewolves (08:16)

Kit: We do. [upbeat music] So now that we know a bit more about real wolves, it's time to talk about fictional wolves and werewolves. In our Myths and Retconstellation episode we did shout out some of our favorite lore and mythology related to wolves. So I think this time we're gonna focus a little bit more on wolves and werewolves in fiction, books, TV shows, and the like. So maybe a little bit more of specificity here than in our, uh, pop culture episode or in our Myths and Retcon episode. So I think we're gonna, we each sort of came up with the list of our sort of favorite wolves and werewolves, and maybe we can just alternate them and see where there's overlap and, and divergences. Does that sound good?

Jordan: Kit, that sounds wonderful. And I have a lot. I mean-

Kit: [laughs]

Jordan: ... the listener, you can just Google wolves in pop culture and the list is, it has its own Wikipedia page. It's exhaustive.

Kit: Yep.

Jordan: I mean, I think I have an entry for movies, TV shows, books, sports, any category. Um-

Kit: Wow.

Jordan: Yeah. But so my favorite appearance of wolf in pop culture is not so much a wolf itself, but the phrase Bad Wolf.

Kit: Mmmmm.

Jordan: From the first season of the reboot-

Kit: Mm-hmm

Jordan: ... of Doctor Who in 2005. And-

Kit: Mm-hmm

Jordan: ... there's a lot of spoilers I could tell you about season one, but suffice to say, Bad Wolf isn't actually a werewolf or even a wolf. But it is a revelation when you find out who and what Bad Wolf is, and Irecommend everybody go watch the Ninth Doctor.

Kit: The Ninth Doctor is famously my favorite doctor. [laughs] Um, you know, perhaps not the most popular opinion, but it is my firmly, truly-

Jordan: Mm-hmm

Kit: ... a truly felt, um-

Jordan: Mm-hmm

Kit: ... perspective on it. Yeah, great call. So my choice, the first thing I thought of comes with a little bit of a caveat, but I'll put the caveat towards the end, and I know this choice won't be on your list, 'cause I know you haven't watched this TV show, but it has to be Daniel Oz Osborne from Buffy the Vampire Slayer-

Jordan: Mm

Kit: ... played by Seth Green, love interest for Willow. Spoilers, I guess, for Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

Jordan: [laughs]

Kit: Um, and it comes with a caveat, because we know a lot more, uh, now than we did in the past about, uh, the creator of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, uh, and he seems like an unfortunate, uh, person to work for. And so with that caveat, I still think that the portrayal of this werewolf Oz, uh, by Seth Green in Buffy the Vampire Slayer, very important, very critical, um, uh, to, you know, a lot of different stories that, that come after it. The best comp for him is Avril Lavigne-

Jordan: [laughs]

Kit: ... during that period. Like [laughs] you know what I mean?

Jordan: Mm-hmm.

Kit: Just, like, sort of pop punk. I would put him in the. [laughs]

Jordan: I'm so happy we do this podcast.

Kit: [laughs] Um, so that's where I would... He's like, you know, he's a little eccentric.

Jordan: Mm-hmm.

Kit: He has to sort of learn how to manage his powers. He does very heroic things, but, um, you know, he's a sort of beloved character on Buffy and, um, and a werewolf.

Jordan: One of my next favorites takes your werewolf theme, of course. This time I'm going into the world of music, and I-

Kit: Mm-hmm

Jordan: ... will be choosing the song Werewolves of London by Warren Zevon.

Kit: Hmm.

Jordan: Think that song's really great. It's one of my-

Kit: Mm-hmm

Jordan: ... two choices in the song category, and if you have any songs, maybe we can just go through those now.

Kit: Well, I mean, it, this has gotta be your second choice, and I'm frankly appalled that it's not your first choice-

Jordan: Mm-hmm

Kit: ... which is Werewolf Bar Mitzvah from 30 Rock, a really, really funny Tracy Jordan, you know, singing this song. Werewolf bar mitzvah, spooky scary. [laughs] It's truly an iconic, uh, piece of, of music. Very funny. A really good bit. So I think that has to be definitely top of my music. I don't know. I've have... Do you have any other music choices?

Jordan: Yeah, I have one more. It's a song by a band called TV on the Radio. It's a song called-

Kit: Mm

Jordan: ... Wolf Like Me that came out in 2006. It's been featured in a lot of movies. I remember when it first came out, just, like, a very propulsive banger of a song that-

Kit: Mm-hmm

Jordan: ... gets you psyched up. I've always liked it.

Kit: Mm-hmm.

Jordan: And most recently, spoilers, was featured in the Spider-Man movie that just came out-

Kit: Oh

Jordan: ... and had a prominent role in one of the sequences there where they almost played the whole song, which is pretty cool.

Kit: Wow.

Jordan: So that was my second pick.

Kit: That sort of unrelatedly reminded me of when, um, Missy Elliott was, like, brought into a Super Bowl performance, and people were like, "Oh my gosh," like, "Missy Elliott," like, "Wow, this... She's so, like, she's so new and fresh," and, like, "We're... She's so lucky she got brought out by whoever the performer was."

Jordan: Mm-hmm.

Kit: And then everyone else was like, "No, no, Missy Elliott was famous, like, long before this person was famous." But anyways.

Jordan: Yep.

Kit: My next choice, uh, is Wolfsbane-

Jordan: Mm

Kit: ... who is a Scottish X-Men mutant who can transform into a wolf. She looks amazing.

Jordan: Mm-hmm.

Kit: Um, I gotta definitely rewatch Cold Comfort, the animated X-Men episode where she appears as part of X-Factor. She's also portrayed in the 2020 movie The New Mutants-

Jordan: Mm

Kit: ... uh, which we still need to watch. We haven't watched it yet, but, uh, I saw her, uh, come up on the wiki, and she just has a really cool look and vibe, and, you know, I'm always here rooting for, you know, X-Men content.

Jordan: Shout out to Wolfsbane. Do you remember which actress or actor plays? Is it Maisie or someone else?

Kit: Yeah, it's Maisie.

Jordan: Yeah, that checks out.

Kit: It's Maisie.

Jordan: That's-

Kit: Maisie Williams.

Jordan: ... that's how I would've cast it, so that makes sense.

Kit: [laughs]

Jordan: Speaking of Maisie, wolves feature prominently in Game of Thrones. Each one of the members of the Stark clan, who are as close to protagonists as you can get in this story, and each one of them has a dire wolf, which, in their mythology, is just a really, really, really, really big wolf. Speaking of Maisie, she has a dire wolf, um, named Nymeria, and her relationship, Arya's relationship with that wolf is one of the big parts of the series.

Kit: Yeah. I've famously never watched Game of Thrones. Too violent, too, uh, you know, incesty. Not for me. I tried reading one of the books. Just not, not for me, and it's okay for things not to be for everybody. I'd like to also shout out Loopy de Loop, which is a Hanna-Barbera cartoon. Loopy is a, a, a wolf from Canada. He is, um, has a sort of Québecois accent-

Jordan: Mm

Kit: ... and sort of, uh, reminds me of Pink Panther a little bit, sort of in that energy and that vein-

Jordan: Mm-hmm

Kit: ... of cartoon. So just a shout-out to Loopy de Loop.

Jordan: Shout out to Hanna-Barbera. I mean, I hope we're-

Kit: Mm-hmm

Jordan: ... one of the many podcasts this month who-

Kit: [laughs]

Jordan: ... remembers their greatness.

Kit: [laughs] Oh, listen we're talking here about de Lacaille. We're talking about Hanna-Barbera.

Jordan: We go deep. That's what you come here for.

Kit: Any other TV or movies, do you have other TV or movies you wanna shout out?

Jordan: I think the next thing I have is more in the sports world. But what do you have?

Kit: Well, the only thing in the sports world I could think of would be the mascot for the Minnesota Timberwolves, who I learned is named Crunch.

Jordan: [laughs]

Kit: And I was like, "What?"

Jordan: Mm.

Kit: And then I found out that it was inspired by the Crunch candy bar, which, uh, 'cause I guess Nestle was a, uh, a sponsor of the team at some point. I [laughs] uh, I didn't know that, so I learned that, and I do like the Timberwolves mascot. I like their, I like their whole, um, color scheme I like a lot. Not as much as the Hornets.

Jordan: Mm.

Kit: But, uh, in terms of it- it's aesthetically pleasing to look at and, uh, they've got a good, good, uh, logo and things like that.

Jordan: Took the words right out of my mouth.

Kit: I've got a book shout-out, and mostly this is just a book shout-out because I love this author. Um, so this is, uh, the second book in the Immortals Quartet. Um, uh, written... It's called Wolfspeaker. It was written by Tamora Pierce. Tamora Pierce is a very important author to me. She's, um, writes YA and middle-grade fiction. She wrote the Alanna series, and those books were just really important to me when I was growing up and- and so she has this book set in that world of her, I would say probably the Alanna series is her biggest sort of fantasy series, and set in the same world and there are, there are wolves in it and people that can talk to

wolves in this, uh, book called Wolfspeaker. So just a shout-out to Tamora Pierce. Uh, and yeah, you know those books that you read when you're young that, like, make you really enjoy reading and enjoy, in this case, reading fantasy and learning about how a book could be about something like that, could be about a different world that you get to immerse yourself in. So shout-out Tamora Pierce. I don't know. She rules. I also, hilariously, she came to my college to give a talk and, okay so, this, uh, we were all the target demo for her. so, like, people in the audience, it was packed. This, this place was packed, and she started out talking a- as if, like, she was extremely shy and extremely nervous. And then, like, midway through it was like, "Just kidding," [laughs] like totally-

Jordan: [laughs]

Kit: ... totally pivoted. It was, like, very charismatic and it was, it was very funny, so I was like, "Okay." I was like, "Cute." [laughs] I love that for you.

Jordan: Tamora Pierce. We love you.

Outro (20:56)

Kit: Well, if we missed your favorite wolf, uh, or werewolf, feel free to let us know over on our socials universeodon dot com backslash at starrytimepod, you can find us there. [upbeat music] This has been Kit.

Jordan: And Jordan.

Kit: Sisters who love stars and stories.

Jordan: And we'll see you next time.

Kit: On Starry Time. [upbeat music]