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00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:05,120

villages of eastern France. Church bells are a reassuring reminder that all is well.

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00:00:07,280 --> 00:00:10,360

But four centuries ago the bells had another meaning.

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00:00:13,240 --> 00:00:17,240

In 1573, terror stalked the land.

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00:00:20,000 --> 00:00:26,840

A rumor swept through the village that a monster was prowling the countryside, devouring women and children.

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00:00:30,000 --> 00:00:32,000

The villagers were killed.

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00:00:39,000 --> 00:00:45,000

Three villagers who started the beast swore it had the features of a local man named Gilles Gognet.

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Gognet, a poor, hungry recluse, was arrested and brought to trial.

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But his crime was not murder or cannibalism.

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He was accused of being a werewolf.

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00:01:01,000 --> 00:01:09,000

A flesh-eating wolf disguised as a human is a legend of evil as old as time.

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But Hollywood would reinvent the myth and transform a man into a wolf man.

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Whenever the moon is full, so the story goes, the demon within takes hold.

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Triggered by a curse or a magic potion, wolf-like hair begins to grow and with it the urge to kill.

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Today the werewolf remains one of our most enduring myths. But did they really exist?

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00:01:44,000 --> 00:01:47,000

Ancient books record thousands of alleged cases.

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00:01:48,000 --> 00:01:53,000

This one contains the story of the most notorious werewolf of the 16th century, Gilles Gognet.

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In it, his accusers testified they saw a wolf man.

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00:02:00,000 --> 00:02:03,000

But did they see a wolf who looked like a man?

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00:02:04,000 --> 00:02:06,000

Or a man who looked like a wolf?

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00:02:07,000 --> 00:02:10,000

This is not Hollywood makeup. The hair is real.

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Each year, Robert's International Circus tours Mexico, delighting audiences young and old.

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Most of its performers are unknown, but no other circus in the world has an act like the Gomez Brothers,

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00:02:27,000 --> 00:02:30,000

built as the wolf boys.

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00:02:33,000 --> 00:02:41,000

People know them as the wolf boys, but I also present them as the most famous Mexican kids in the world, Danny and Larry.

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Circus owner Roberto Compa and his son Mundo took Danny and Larry out of a carnival when they were boys

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and trained them as trapeze and trampoline artists.

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Born with a rare medical condition called hypertrichosis, thick, soft hair completely covers their faces, even their eyelids.

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00:03:02,000 --> 00:03:15,000

Well, I've had this hair for 18 years, and I think if I didn't have it, no one would recognize me.

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00:03:15,000 --> 00:03:21,000

It's because of my hair that everybody notices me. But then again, I have no choice.

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00:03:22,000 --> 00:03:28,000

Danny and Larry are unique. They're the sixth generation of their family to inherit hypertrichosis,

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which simply means excess body hair.

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00:03:33,000 --> 00:03:36,000

In all other respects, they're perfectly normal and healthy.

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00:03:38,000 --> 00:03:42,000

Larry and Danny's family isn't the only one to ever live with a strange condition.

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In fact, similar cases of this genetic abnormality have shown up all around the world.

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This Burmese family suffered from the same condition and could only earn a living in the circus.

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In Austria, a cast that was owned by Petrus Gonzales contained portraits on the wall,

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00:03:59,000 --> 00:04:03,000

which document one of the earliest known cases from the 1500s.

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00:04:03,000 --> 00:04:10,000

Petrus Gonzales married a woman who was perfectly normal, but records show their children all inherited his wolf-like features.

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Could 16th century werewolf, Zil-Gonye, have been misunderstood too?

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Modern evidence may show us another reason why Gonye behaved like a werewolf.

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When Truth or Scare continues.

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Don't go away! Discovery kids will be right back after these messages.

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When suspected werewolf, Zil-Gonye was arrested.

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He was presumed guilty and tortured until he confessed the details of his crime.

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16th century law set forth the telltale signs of a werewolf, and Gonye fit the description to a T.

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There was one more crucial piece of evidence against him.

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00:05:01,000 --> 00:05:06,000

A jar of strange ointment found with him when he was captured.

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In his testimony, Gonye said he made a pact with an evil spirit he encountered in the forest.

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The spirit gave him a magic potion to rub over his body.

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00:05:16,000 --> 00:05:21,000

It was this potion he said that transformed him into a werewolf.

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00:05:27,000 --> 00:05:30,000

Who he met in the forest and why is unknown.

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00:05:30,000 --> 00:05:35,000

But if his trial were held today, the magic potion would be a real one.

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00:05:36,000 --> 00:05:41,000

The potion could be explained, and James Duke would be called to testify.

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Duke thinks Gonye may have been ill and gone to a witch for treatment.

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00:05:46,000 --> 00:05:54,000

Apparently they didn't have real doctors in, and a witch with someone who through experience knew the healing power of the plant.

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Duke is an expert when it comes to the healing power of plants.

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He's not a witch, but he knows how they may have used plants to make powerful special potions.

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A botanist with the United States Department of Agriculture for nearly 30 years,

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00:06:10,000 --> 00:06:14,000

he traveled the globe learning the secrets of foculars and witches,

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00:06:14,000 --> 00:06:17,000

a practice that's changed little in 400 years.

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00:06:17,000 --> 00:06:21,000

She would talk to you just like a doctor today, get an analysis.

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00:06:21,000 --> 00:06:25,000

After she'd figured out what was wrong, she'd probably go get some of her dried herbs

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00:06:25,000 --> 00:06:29,000

or maybe go into the forest and pull up the right herbs. They knew which herbs did what.

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00:06:29,000 --> 00:06:33,000

A witch needed a sensitive tongue and strong nerves.

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00:06:33,000 --> 00:06:37,000

Modern pharmacists use accurate scales to fill a prescription,

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00:06:37,000 --> 00:06:44,000

but witches relied on trial and error, using smell and taste to judge the potency of plants.

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00:06:44,000 --> 00:06:49,000

A bitter taste or slight burning sensation meant the herb was strong.

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00:06:49,000 --> 00:06:53,000

It was a high-risk game of guesswork for both the witch and the patient.

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00:06:53,000 --> 00:06:56,000

Nobody really knew the strength of these things.

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00:06:56,000 --> 00:07:02,000

One, we might cure your convulsions, another might be ten times as strong and potent,

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00:07:02,000 --> 00:07:07,000

and might actually cause convulsions, another could be closer to fifty times more potent

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00:07:07,000 --> 00:07:14,000

and might kill you. So without careful measuring, you don't know the potency of a medicinal plant.

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00:07:14,000 --> 00:07:20,000

Some of the herbs witches used contained mind-altering chemicals that could cause sinister symptoms.

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00:07:21,000 --> 00:07:27,000

If you apply the concoction that your witch had fixed for you, it just might cause you to hallucinate.

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00:07:27,000 --> 00:07:32,000

And among the hallucination possible, one might be to imagine that you're a wolf.

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Did a witch's potion turn Gilgonye into a werewolf?

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00:07:44,000 --> 00:07:49,000

The salve was put on the skin because if you took it early, it would taste bad,

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00:07:49,000 --> 00:07:55,000

and sometimes it would make you sick. So rub it on the skin, it gives you the chance to enter the skin.

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Sometimes it gets in the bloodstream faster that way. You bypass the nausea and the vomiting,

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00:08:00,000 --> 00:08:03,000

and sometimes you have the side effects quicker.

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00:08:03,000 --> 00:08:09,000

What witches couldn't control was the impact of their concoctions on the psyche of their patients.

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00:08:10,000 --> 00:08:16,000

The sensation of turning into a monster who could kill could be like falling under a horrifying spell.

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00:08:16,000 --> 00:08:20,000

A scary as it sounds, there are people who still use these witch recipes.

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00:08:20,000 --> 00:08:27,000

They live in the rainforests of Peru. They're called curridero. Duke has been studying these modern medicine men for many years.

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00:08:27,000 --> 00:08:34,000

My shaman in the forest, instead of turning into a wolf, he turns into a jaguar, and he likes it,

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00:08:34,000 --> 00:08:36,000

and he returns for his own sake.

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00:08:36,000 --> 00:08:39,000

It is a communion with the gods.

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00:08:42,000 --> 00:08:47,000

Was convicted werewolf, Gilgonye, a victim of a witch or a witch?

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00:08:47,000 --> 00:08:52,000

I think it's a very good idea to have a good relationship with a witch.

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00:08:52,000 --> 00:08:56,000

I think it's a good idea to have a good relationship with a witch.

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00:08:56,000 --> 00:09:00,000

I think it's a good idea to have a good relationship with a witch.

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00:09:01,000 --> 00:09:07,000

Was convicted werewolf, Gilgonye, a victim of a witch or a prisoner of his own brain?

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00:09:07,000 --> 00:09:14,000

After four centuries, a link may have been found between mentally ill patients and the legend of the werewolf.

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00:09:18,000 --> 00:09:20,000

When Truth or Scare returns.

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00:09:23,000 --> 00:09:27,000

Don't go away. Discovery Kids will be right back after these message.

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00:09:27,000 --> 00:09:29,000

Kids, where it's your world.

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00:09:31,000 --> 00:09:40,000

Confessed werewolf, Gilgonye testified that a magic ointment had turned him into an animal with a lust for blood.

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00:09:40,000 --> 00:09:43,000

The courts found him guilty of being a werewolf.

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00:09:43,000 --> 00:09:45,000

But was he?

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00:09:48,000 --> 00:09:54,000

Four centuries later, a witness would come forth to testify that werewolves like Gilgonye

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00:09:54,000 --> 00:10:03,000

may not have been perpetrators of dastricly deeds, but prisoners of their own minds.

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Chief psychiatrist Harrison Pope of McLean Hospital in Massachusetts was interested in finding out more about mycanthropy,

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00:10:14,000 --> 00:10:18,000

a mental illness that causes people to believe they're animals.

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00:10:19,000 --> 00:10:30,000

Among the various patients that we saw here at the hospital, there were some who had visible barking, growling, crawling on all fours,

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00:10:30,000 --> 00:10:34,000

feral posturing lying on the ground or under the bed.

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00:10:34,000 --> 00:10:45,000

It is a fascinating phenomenon that so many of the patients believed that they were wolves or dogs out of a choice of thousands of possible animals.

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00:10:45,000 --> 00:10:54,000

Now, what it is in the human brain that causes people to choose this particular type of delusion, we do not know.

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00:10:57,000 --> 00:11:03,000

To try and discover the origins of lycanthropy in the brain, Pope and other experts used an MRI.

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00:11:03,000 --> 00:11:08,000

Also in the temporal lobes, you can see there is a large degree of atrophy.

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00:11:09,000 --> 00:11:18,000

Behind the eyes on either side of the skull are the temporal lobes, which play a primary role in sound, smell and memory.

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00:11:20,000 --> 00:11:27,000

Irritation of certain spots in the temporal lobes can cause hallucinations such as imaginary odors or voices.

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00:11:28,000 --> 00:11:31,000

In most people, they appear full and healthy.

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00:11:32,000 --> 00:11:40,000

But in some psychotics, they are shrunken, causing abnormal electrical signals, called complex partial seizures.

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00:11:42,000 --> 00:11:49,000

Associated with these seizures are what psychiatrists call fixed delusions, such as the recurring nightmare of being a wolf.

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00:11:50,000 --> 00:11:57,000

Gilles Gagnier allegedly attacked nine other people before he was captured.

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00:11:58,000 --> 00:12:03,000

If so, his behavior could have been the result of a fixed delusion that he was a werewolf.

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00:12:04,000 --> 00:12:07,000

Could a temporal lobe seizure have been the culprit?

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00:12:08,000 --> 00:12:18,000

Gagnier suffered from severe malnutrition, something as simple as a lack of vitamin B6 in the diet could be the cause of seizures in the temporal lobe.

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00:12:19,000 --> 00:12:29,000

Could it have actually been something that Gilles Gagnier ate that turned him into a werewolf?

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00:12:30,000 --> 00:12:34,000

We'll learn how a batch of bad bread may have turned one man terribly mad.

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00:12:39,000 --> 00:12:41,000

When truth or scare returns.

122

00:12:42,000 --> 00:12:48,000

Don't go away. Discovery Kids will be right back after these messages.

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00:12:48,000 --> 00:12:50,000

Discovery Kids, where it's your world.

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00:12:56,000 --> 00:13:03,000

In France, four centuries ago, the case of accused wolf men, Gilles Gagnier, caused a sensation.

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00:13:04,000 --> 00:13:09,000

Each day, as more sorted details of his crime became known, outrage turned to obsession.

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00:13:09,000 --> 00:13:13,000

We still don't know exactly why Gagnier attacked his fellow villagers.

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00:13:13,000 --> 00:13:16,000

One thing we do know is that he was not alone.

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00:13:22,000 --> 00:13:28,000

Between 1520 and 1630, the jails housed a constant flow of accused werewolves.

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Over 30,000 were tried in France alone.

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00:13:32,000 --> 00:13:38,000

Most were poor pitiful rejects of society.

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00:13:38,000 --> 00:13:45,000

They denied they were werewolves, but judges used torture if necessary to obtain a confession.

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00:13:45,000 --> 00:13:51,000

Gagnier and others gave in after their bodies were battered and their wills were broken.

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00:13:51,000 --> 00:13:57,000

Once the verdict was in, mercy was granted in the form of an execution.

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00:13:58,000 --> 00:14:02,000

The law required that they be publicly burned alive at the stake.

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00:14:04,000 --> 00:14:10,000

For a fleeting moment in the 16th century, it seemed the devil had been let loose and the world had gone mad.

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00:14:13,000 --> 00:14:19,000

Mary Matossian of the University of Maryland thinks it may be as simple as a case of spoiled bread.

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00:14:20,000 --> 00:14:25,000

An expert on the witch hunts that plagued colonial America in the late 1600s,

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00:14:25,000 --> 00:14:31,000

she noticed a startling similarity to the epidemic of werewolf trials in Europe.

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00:14:31,000 --> 00:14:35,000

Eventually, a pattern began to emerge.

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00:14:35,000 --> 00:14:41,000

Werewolf trials seemed to occur during or after extreme cold spells in regions seen here in blue,

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00:14:41,000 --> 00:14:44,000

where rye was a staple of the diet.

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00:14:45,000 --> 00:14:52,000

We compare areas where rye was grown with places where witchcraft trials and werewolf trials were common.

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00:14:52,000 --> 00:14:56,000

We can see that they overlap to an amazing degree.

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00:14:59,000 --> 00:15:06,000

Matossian came upon a reference to a fungus called ergot, a medicinal of folk medicine used in childbirth to speed up contractions.

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00:15:06,000 --> 00:15:10,000

Ergot infects ears of rye when winter is extremely cold.

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00:15:10,000 --> 00:15:13,000

Ergot seemed harmless enough.

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00:15:13,000 --> 00:15:18,000

Still, she decided to consult George Bean, a colleague at the University of Maryland, and an expert on fungus.

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00:15:18,000 --> 00:15:21,000

Matossian was in for a big surprise.

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00:15:21,000 --> 00:15:25,000

Bean revealed that ergot is a powerful hallucinogen.

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00:15:28,000 --> 00:15:33,000

The symptoms of ergot poisoning read like a horror story, muscle spasms.

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00:15:34,000 --> 00:15:40,000

Uncontrollable fits and hallucinations of being bitten or pecked by some sharp invisible force.

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00:15:41,000 --> 00:15:47,000

Those are the kind of symptoms that people who seem to be bewitched

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00:15:47,000 --> 00:15:54,000

and people who are believed to be werewolves or think they are werewolves tend to display as well.

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00:15:54,000 --> 00:16:00,000

The symptoms of ergot poisoning read like a horror story, muscle spasms.

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00:16:00,000 --> 00:16:05,000

Matossian believes that if ergot can induce the hallucination of being a werewolf,

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00:16:05,000 --> 00:16:10,000

it could also cause a whole village to believe they'd seen a werewolf.

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00:16:14,000 --> 00:16:17,000

The evidence is compelling.

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00:16:17,000 --> 00:16:22,000

In the 16th century, the scene was set for the appearance of werewolves.

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00:16:23,000 --> 00:16:28,000

In the 16th century, the scene was set for the appearance of werewolves.

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00:16:29,000 --> 00:16:34,000

In the Jura Mountains in France, winters were harsh and the snow was deep.

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00:16:37,000 --> 00:16:43,000

As it melted, it flowed into the valleys, flooding the lowlands and destroying the sensitive wheat crop.

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00:16:43,000 --> 00:16:47,000

But the rye, which is hardier, survived.

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00:16:48,000 --> 00:16:52,000

If the summers were hot, conditions were perfect for ergot.

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00:16:56,000 --> 00:17:01,000

Most accused werewolves and their accusers were the poor and downtrodden.

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00:17:01,000 --> 00:17:07,000

As a result, for more than a century, generation after generation of unsuspecting peasants

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00:17:07,000 --> 00:17:13,000

were consuming rye bread and suffering convulsions and delusions caused by ergot poisoning.

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00:17:14,000 --> 00:17:19,000

The hallucinations of werewolves produced by ergot were stark and vivid.

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00:17:21,000 --> 00:17:24,000

People clung to the only explanation that made sense to them.

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00:17:24,000 --> 00:17:29,000

Demons were afoot and those who consorted with them deserved to die.

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00:17:33,000 --> 00:17:40,000

Ergot poisoning vanished in the modern age with the introduction of official grain inspections in the United States and Europe.

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00:17:41,000 --> 00:17:50,000

For Gilles Gagnet, Matossian's astonishing testimony that food could kill would come 400 years too late to save him.

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00:17:55,000 --> 00:17:59,000

The people of France are still haunted by the ghosts of werewolves.

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00:18:02,000 --> 00:18:05,000

Real wolves were exterminated in Europe centuries ago.

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00:18:05,000 --> 00:18:13,000

But the primal fear of the wolf man still lingers as it did 400 years ago when Gilles Gagnet was led to the stake.

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00:18:16,000 --> 00:18:22,000

Consumed by mass hysteria, the villagers looked on as the charges were read against him.

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00:18:22,000 --> 00:18:27,000

Beyond a reasonable doubt, Gagnet was a werewolf who had committed a vile and brutal murder.

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00:18:28,000 --> 00:18:32,000

DOOMED by the power of myth, he was sentenced to death.

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00:18:37,000 --> 00:18:44,000

Today, the life of Gagnet and thousands like him would have been saved by the expert testimony of modern science.

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00:18:44,000 --> 00:18:46,000

He could have been poisoned.

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00:18:48,000 --> 00:18:51,000

Or he could have been mentally ill from malnutrition.

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00:18:52,000 --> 00:18:56,000

Even bread tainted with a tiny fungus could have been to blame.

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00:18:58,000 --> 00:19:06,000

Once in a blue moon, someone is born who bears an astonishing resemblance to a wolf, but is perfectly healthy.

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00:19:06,000 --> 00:19:11,000

We'll never know for certain what made people believe Gilles Gagnet was a werewolf.

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00:19:11,000 --> 00:19:15,000

But thanks to modern science, we finally have a few ideas.

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00:19:15,000 --> 00:19:22,000

We may never have all of the answers, but the wolf man it seems will always live on in our imaginations.