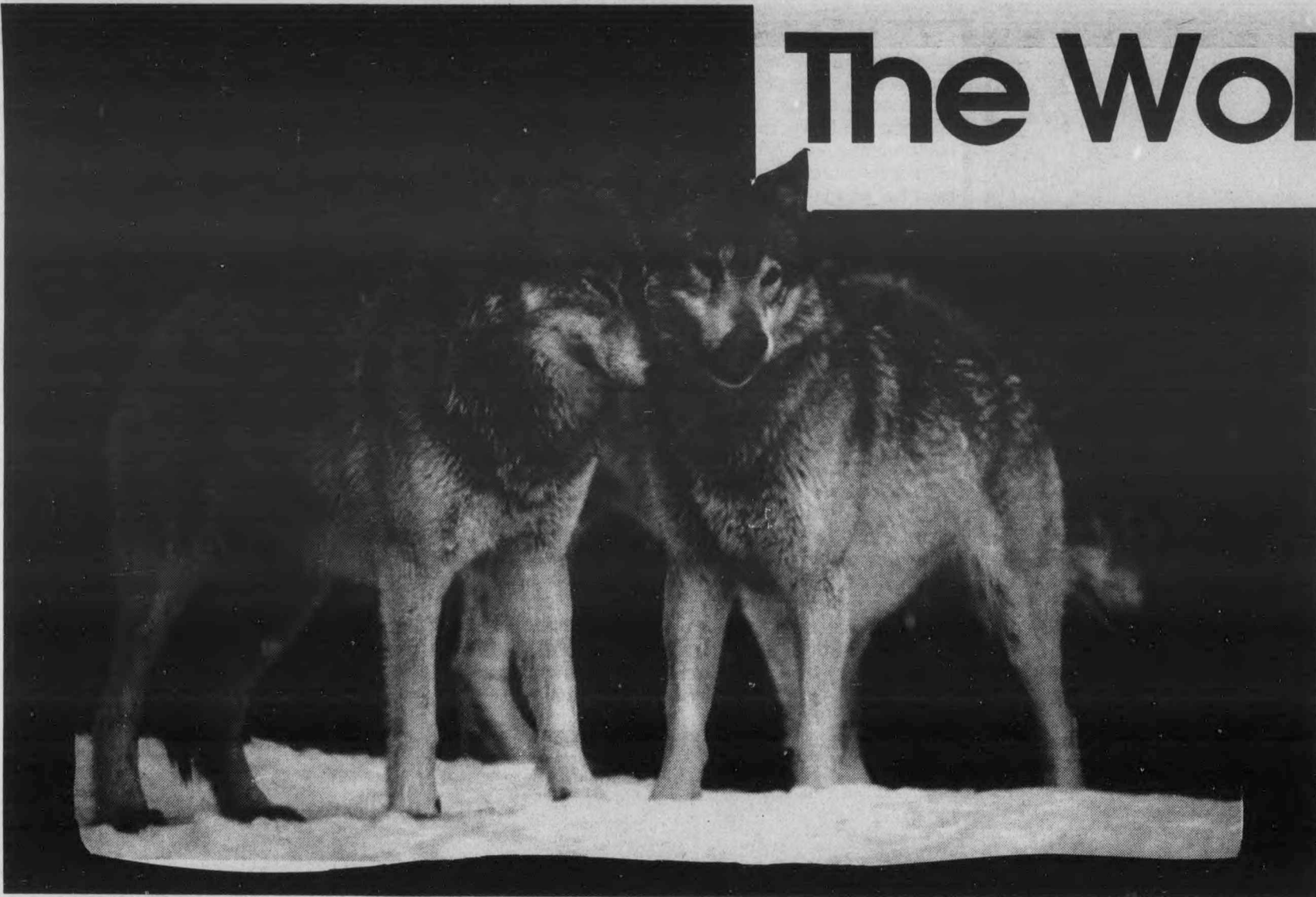
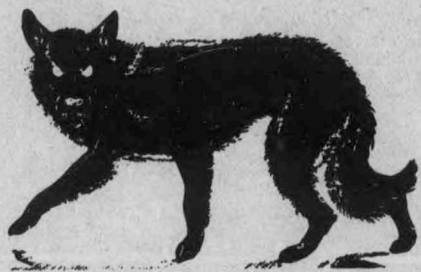


The Wolf: the



In Dante's *Inferno*, the wolf is introduced in the first canto as a creature of greed and fraud. As Dante descends into the depths of Hell, he visits progressively deeper circles in which each have a particular type of sinner condemned to a particular type of punishment. In the eighth circle of Hell, he meets the seducers, the hypocrites, the thieves and the liars - those guilty of "the sins of the wolf."



The beast within. The wolf has been unable to live down its demonic image.

No other animal known to humankind seems to have historically suffered such a reputation of ferocity, cunning and mystery that the wolf has. When its wild, untamed world collided with our civilized one, the wolf had to retreat, or be killed. *Canis lupus* (commonly known as the timber, gray, or tundra wolf) once was the most widely distributed land mammal of the world, roaming most of North America, Europe, and Asia. Nowadays, as the "taming" of the wild continues, the wolf is restricted to Northern North America, Greece, Spain, China and the U.S.S.R.

The most common reason for persecuting wolves has been to secure our economic investment of domestic animals. Wolves are carnivores, and when they became deprived of wild game such as buffalo or deer, they turned to the easier target of cattle and sheep. It seemed only logical that if one wanted to succeed as a rancher in North America, one had to kill wolves. The Fish and Game departments in the U.S.A. also killed wolves so as to sustain or increase the number of big game animals. This way we could hunt the big game instead. Additionally, wolves were hunted for their valuable pelts, or as trophies.

The wolf's ability to hunt wild game in a harsh environment is its means of survival, therefore, it will hunt the domestic animals suddenly introduced into its territory, and it will be fast, strong, and resilient to the elements. Since wolves hunt anything from mice to muskoxen, they are particularly adapted to run. The front legs are close at the chest, the knees are turned inwards, and the huge paws turn out. This allows the front feet to swing in, setting an exact path for the hind legs to follow, and leaving a single line of tracks. If necessary, an average 85 pound wolf can run 60 to 70 kilometers an hour. After its legs get the wolf to its prey, the mouth must next excel in strength. With 42 teeth, the wolf's crushing power is about 1500 pounds per square inch (a German Shepard's is about half that). This allows it to break open most bones and get at the marrow.

The wolf's luxurious coat, also an essential feature of its survival, consists of a dense, inner layer and long guard hairs which keep the under fur dry. Amazingly, it does not collect ice when warm breath condenses against it. The color of the fur ranges from almost pure

white to blond, brown, gray or black, depending on the individual, and often on latitude. The dark marking around the ears and eyes serve more of a social function than one of camouflage. The face features are emphasized for clear communication within the pack, making common body postures and facial expressions enhanced by shading in the fur. A dark spot on the tail marks the location of a scent gland.

Aside from the more pragmatic reasons for killing wolves, there are some deeper, more superstitious reasons. Like Dante, many people see the wolf as a beast to be feared, as a malevolent, insatiable and violent creature. This animal that killed stock and made people poor, that lived in the wilderness, that lived in a place that the Bible describes as a place without God, could only be symbolized as the devil in disguise. For example, what could seem more cruel and senseless than 42 dogs being killed at Goldstream Valley in Alaska one winter? The wolves did not harm any human, just the dogs. Biologists speculated that perhaps it was a hard winter and that the wolves were desperate for food. The Athabaskan Indians though, said that it could have been that wolves simply hate dogs.

What may seem irrational in the behavior of the wolves, could perhaps be explained by learning about the social structure a wolf pack usually maintains.

The size of a wolf pack usually ranges from 2 to 20 in number. The size depends on the amount of space free of

other packs, type and abundance of character of component wolves. There is a dominant "alpha" male and female (who breed), intermediate "beta" wolves, and a younger class of immature wolves.

The alpha female dominates the pack and prevents them from mating, but usually the alpha male dominates the males, and the alpha female. The alpha female decides where to den and where the pups are born for 5 to 6 weeks while she cares for her pups. This is an important decision because an error in location, may mean the starving of her pups.

The social hierarchy of the wolf pack is not rigid though; an alpha may only be an alpha for a short time for a reason. Since usually only one female breeds a year, the size of the litter will be related to the density of the wolves in the area. They respond to smaller litters. They respond to not breeding during a famine, and to the chance of survival.

The social relationships of wolves are complex, involving postural signaling, and social interactions.

The notorious, blood-curdling howl, which is a belief, do not occur more frequently than a great number of wolves howling at the same time. But the howls at a different pitch. They seem to be caused by restless or excited seasonal peak in the winter months. Another wolf can hear a howl at 10 miles.

Barks are used mostly as warning of danger, threat or as an assertion of rights in a challenge. Whines and high-pitched yips are used with greeting, feeding the pups, play, and submission.

Postural signaling usually plays a role because it is so clear and stereotypical that it rarely occurs. An alpha male maintains his tail horizontal with his spine, while a subordinate lowers its body, lowers its tail, and the animal shows passive submission by showing its mouth in a "submissive grin" or by a subordinate's attempt to lick the alpha's face. A wolf mouthing another's ear to us, is a friendly gesture. Similarly, wagging and face-licking occur after a fight or after a brief separation. A wolf surrounded by its eager subordinates is a sign of the pack's integrity. The alphas, being aggressive, are usually very territorial.

