

THE EXPANDING WILDERNESS



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The Expanding Wilderness

Introduction

The 'Expanding Wilderness' (also called the Devouring Wilderness) is a region where the rules of biology and magic have been altered in such a way that organisms can rapidly grow in size. Because of this rampant growth most of this region is covered in jungle, though there are ruins of several civilizations.

This setting exists primarily for comics, stories and role-plays focussed on growth and weight gain, but there are options for transformation as well. It is designed to survive creatures growing to immense size, though this canon is of course only limited to the author's canon.

This PDF was created for those who seek to do role-plays in the setting, write stories, or those who are simply curious about the world where several stories and comics have taken place. Should there be more interest, I can expand on this little PDF.

History

Hundreds of years ago, a kingdom was suffering minor economic problems due to food shortages and environmental problems affecting their harvesting season. The king ordered his country's mages to invent a solution, and they ran wild with the rather vague wording, resulting in a project of immense scope, power, and cost. At first, the mages sought to increase the rate at which plants grew, using magic to improve the soil. It soon became clear much more powerful effects could be created, allowing plants to grow in a matter of minutes instead of months, by creating a magical field in the soil that altered the local laws of biology and even physics. In order to manage cost, this field itself was made to be self-replicating, so that it would spread to the edges of a tract of farmland after a small part of it was 'seeded'. During the final days of the project, the self-replication proved uncontrollable, and the field expanded out of the laboratory and started spreading wildly, eventually covering the entire continent.

The initial expansion of this magical field went unnoticed - the magical field itself was undetectable. However, plants started growing rapidly and rampantly, forcing their way through, over, and around buildings. The disruption of the plant growth was devastating enough, but soon after came the creatures that fed off the plants. Giant herbivorous insects rampaged through the streets of the kingdom's cities and over what was once its farmland, and soon carnivorous species followed.

During the first days of the jungle (also the last days of the kingdom) most of the animals affected were invertebrates, but eventually the magic worked its way up the entire food pyramid.

Most humanoids were devoured or fled, but a small number underwent transformations, becoming hybrids of what they were and something else, or became something else entirely. For most such affected, there was no mental change due to the transformation itself, but the madness of the jungle found its way into the minds of many regardless.

The jungle expanded until it reached the fortress city of Grezoria, which sat (and still sits) on a sliver of land that connects two continents. The city had powerful magical defences, which blocked the spread of the magic field powering the jungle's rules, and to this day it is the only thing preventing the jungle's spread to the other continent. The magical field extends for hundreds of miles into the oceans, leading to similar conditions underwater, but it is unable to spread further underwater.

All nations aware of the jungle's nature forbid their citizens from travelling to it, and knowledge of the exact nature of what happens there has been destroyed wherever encountered, though rumors persist.

Rules of the Jungle

The magic field that powers the jungle accelerates biological processes and alters the biology of all involved. Matter consumed is absorbed almost instantaneously, at almost no loss, while energy is provided to organisms that are for whatever reason unable to feed. The magical field was meant to protect crops from diseases, and any organism in this magical field will be nearly impervious to disease. Plants grow to an immense size within minutes, but there is a maximum, after which they 'merely' regenerate damaged parts. Animal life is not limited in size, and will continue to grow indefinitely, given enough food. The biology of affected animal life is permanently altered, resulting in accelerated growth, eternal youth, vastly improved health, regenerating abilities, and extremely efficient metabolisms requiring relatively little food. Should an organism leave the magical field they will no longer enjoy accelerated growth, but all other effects are lasting.

Given enough food, organisms can reach maturity in minutes. However, the gestation of eggs and embryos is only briefly accelerated, reducing the total gestation time by half, but not eliminating it, while leaving the organism pregnant. What instead tends to happen is that organisms mate multiple times and become

pregnant multiple times (there is no upper limit). Should an organism be unable to contain its progeny the magical field that powers the jungle will provide nutrients and energy to expand the body as well as continue the gestation.

Most animal life simply grows into enormous (and often obese and muscular) versions of themselves, but humanoids are affected differently. Most humanoids will have their health improved, ailments such as poor eyesight, chronic injuries, birth defects, and others will be cured within the first day. However most will not grow larger. A small number will change into other creatures, at which point they will grow like the other animals in the jungle. If a humanoid retains parts of their humanoid body (such as a face, a head, or their torso) those parts will remain their original size even if the rest of the body grows larger. The offspring of hybrid creatures is almost all of the 'pure' creature type, while a small number are of the hybrid type. With subsequent generations, the family lineage becomes purely of the creature type, and intelligence is often lost.

Most of the jungle's animal life is not sapient, but sapient versions of every type of creature exist, and there are even sentient plants. Because life in the jungle tends to be short and violent, there are few proper cultures to be found, and those cultures that survive tend to focus on avoiding the jungle and its violence rather than growing larger. None of the original nations that inhabited the area have survived, but the few small cultures that exist within the jungle draw their knowledge from books recovered from the ruins of these lost civilizations.

Every once in a while, a creature grows particularly large and becomes a threat to the entire jungle. At this point a defense mechanism activates that sends flying fortresses towards the creature, which then 'trap' the creature in an extra-dimensional stasis field. This defense system has the power to return these creatures back to the world (at a smaller size if needed) but this has not yet happened; a vast collection of trapped creatures has accumulated over the years. A small number of creatures has avoided this fate by hiding underground, or leaving the jungle before they could be caught. The trapped creatures are held in stasis crystals six feet tall and three feet across, regardless of the size of the creature inside. The facility is housed in a pocket dimension, which can be reached through a hidden door in every flying fortress. Hundreds of powerful golems, each of which is immune to magic, patrol this facility.

One of the lost civilizations in the jungle possessed magical warp gates through which they could travel to similar gates on other worlds. These gates are maintained by the magic that powers them, but demons have taken over the controls and now use them for their evil schemes. Periodically, these gates are used to abduct unsuspecting victims from other worlds, often in large numbers, and warp them to a random location in the jungle (where they often meet a grisly fate). The survivors of such groups can be absorbed into local communities,

and/or transform into hybrids or other creatures, and in a few cases manage to escape the jungle.

The magical field is weaker underground, resulting in much slower growth rates the deeper one goes. This fact is used by communities that seek to avoid fast-growing predators, and establish small enclaves in caverns and underground ruins.

Races and Factions

Most creatures are invertebrates such as insects, spiders, and worms, and almost all are non-sapient. Vertebrates are less common, and a larger but still small percentage are sapient. Exotic and mythical creatures such as dragons and gryphons are rare and almost always sapient. Creatures that are a hybrid of humanoid and animal (such as spiders or ants with human heads) are extremely rare, except in areas where humanoids have been introduced into the jungle.

Ant/Spider hybrid (including Human hybrid)

This species existed as an unrelated magical experiment meant to produce expendable soldiers for the kingdom. Superficially, they resemble hairless spiders, but their internal biology is drastically altered, making their exoskeleton even tougher but also more flexible, gaining an internal skeleton, extremely efficient lungs, a mammalian nervous system, as well as a host of other changes. Unlike spiders they possess a head, which in some cases features a human face. Those specimens with human faces have retractable fangs. Prey can be either swallowed, or drained with the fangs - the fangs possess a magical power that lets them drain a victim of its entire mass, even bones, until only skin remains.

This species can function both as individuals and as a hive-based society. The vast majority of this species are males, which are rarely sapient and do not grow past the size of an elephant; Fewer than one percent are female, and most of those are sapient, and can grow indefinitely.

Males can be workers or warriors, and warriors often have alterations that improve their fighting prowess, such as the ability to spit acid or combustible liquid, tougher exoskeletons, or oversized (non-retractable) fangs.

Beast People

This species did not exist on the continent before the incident that created the Expanding Wilderness, and those few scholars who have investigated the matter believe they were warped into the jungle somehow, afterwards.

Beast people resemble humans with small claws on their hands and feet, small fangs, pointy ears, and a modest tail. Their bodies are partially covered in slick fur, leaving their face, belly, hands and feet, the underside of their tail, and the inner thighs bare.

Only the females of this species grow past eight foot tall, becoming quadrupedal as they grow, while their neck and tail grow longer and thicker, resulting in proportions not unlike those of a fat dragon. Their

faces gradually grow into thick muzzles with oversized, sharp teeth.

Guardians

One of the lost civilizations used remote-controlled guardian animals to defend holy sites. These creatures are controlled via a magical amulet that lets the user see what the creature sees, and give instructions. The control system does not allow the guardians to feed on their own; they must be ordered to do so. The creature can not disobey the user, but the amulets are limited in power - should the creature grow too powerful, it may break free of control and the amulet will explode, leaving the user mildly singed. Some guardians are sapient, but most are not - Unless specifically instructed to be quiet, a sapient guardian can lie or give its user harmful suggestions.

Various 'Monstrous' Humanoids

Creatures such as nagas, centaurs, harpies, and mermaids are relatively common in the surviving communities. When they feed, the humanoid parts of their anatomy does not grow larger while the rest of them does, resulting in wildly disproportionate bodies. Some such beings end up changing into something different, but related instead: a naga might become a full snake, a centaur might become a full equine, a harpy might become a full bird. In such instances, they retain their intelligence. Those creatures that have an alternate form, such as werewolves, will only see their true form grow in size, while their humanoid 'disguise' form remains unchanged. Sometimes a 'monstrous' humanoid gains the ability to shift between two shapes; for example a harpy might turn into a giant bird who can assume a human disguise. Shifters such as werewolves and were-bears always have one humanoid disguise (usually human), and one 'true' form, which is usually an anthropomorphic of 'feral' animal. Most communities of such beings exist underground or in fortified city remnants, where they try to avoid the bloodthirsty chaos of the jungle.

Undead

Several lost civilizations used undead in some capacity, and when the jungle overturned their societies, the undead gained a 'freedom' of sorts. Mindless undead are usually controlled by magical devices, liches, or vampires, which have a theoretically limitless supply of living beings to turn into more undead. The undead themselves do not benefit from the magical field that powers the jungle in any way however, so while they will not likely run out of reinforcements, they are a weak force on the surface. The undead primarily roam underground ruins and crypts, only sending raiding parties to the surface if there is something important to be looted. Small numbers of mindless undead are sometimes spontaneously spawned on the surface by the mere presence of the vilest of arch liches underground, but those pose little threat to most surface creatures. Should undead be devoured they will not in any way benefit the creature that eats them. The primary antagonist of undead forces are the communities of humanoids that live underground, where the

communities tend to have the upper hand, though the undead can replace losses much more easily.

Vertebrate ferals

Most animals are non-sapient, but a small percentage possess human-level intelligence. It is impossible to determine conclusively at this point whether these creatures are descended from sapient humanoids turned into ferals physically, or from ferals who spontaneously gained sapience due to the jungle's effects. Sapient ferals often are subtly different in proportions and anatomy, suggesting they are a slightly different 'breed' from the 'pure' animal one, suggesting they were humanoids who were turned into these creatures. On the other hand, most sapient ferals speak at least one humanoid language, sometimes with no apparent way to have learned it, suggesting the magical field is responsible.

Sometimes ferals gain special powers such as gravity manipulation or slowing prey, or even the ability to assume human form. This may lead to situations where it becomes hard to tell exactly what a creature is. A feral bear who gains the ability to assume human form will be indistinguishable from a were-bear. Sapient ferals are not per se going to be human-like in their behavior or values; they may have very different opinions and views, even if they are of comparable intelligence.

Demons

These creatures are hatred made flesh and only wish to cause as much pain to as many people as possible. They do not benefit from the magical effects of the jungle, but instead use their ability to tempt sapient beings to goad them into harmful actions. Also some are magically skilled and use their knowledge to secretly manipulate the warp gates buried in the jungle to warp large numbers of unsuspecting victims from other worlds into the jungle to be devoured.

They range in power from weak to very powerful, but they are of finite size and magical ability and can not grow larger, limiting the overall threat they pose. While not individually powerful, they can not be killed permanently killed, instead they are sent back to Hell when destroyed, after which they may make their way back to the realm of the living over a period of years or decades, using the same damaged warp gates as openings between worlds. They sometimes form alliances of convenience with undead, but treachery is to be expected. Their primary enemy is anything sapient - they still enjoy tormenting simple animals but not nearly as much. Their limited power means they move primarily through underground ruins, crypts, and caverns; on the surface they would be quickly killed. Demons instantly burn into ash when killed and provide no nourishment when eaten. Additionally, the magic field of the jungle has a strong aversion to demons and will 'punish' those who make deals with demons by diminishing their benefits from feeding, sometimes to the point of removing the benefits entirely. (The consequences of permanently altered biology, if applicable, remain in effect.)

Flying fortresses

One of the lost civilizations built flying fortresses as weapons of war and coercion. Many of these fortresses remain scattered across the continent, now having gained a very limited intelligence and will of their own. The fortresses seek to remove threats to the continent by trapping them in stasis crystals in a pocket dimension. Most fortresses still have a small garrison of golems, but those are not being replaced, and few fortresses have enough to still mount offensive operations of any kind. The fortresses, like the golems, are enchanted to automatically self-repair, but once destroyed, these constructs can not re-assemble. Ancient factories exist in some of the ancient ruined cities, which could be re-activated by someone with the correct codes. However, any golems they produce would immediately become part of the collective that controls the fortresses, golems, and the pocket dimension that holds the stasis crystals.

Outwardly, the flying fortresses are perfectly 'normal' fortresses, especially if they are landed. Their interior however is a jumbled mishmash of crystalline structures and smoothed, almost organic patterns. This unusual structure is the result of the magical processes that produce the fortresses; they are built as normal fortresses, after which they undergo a magical transformation.

The fortresses have no offensive weapons, but have defensive towers that can project rays of fire and lightning up to several hundred feet away. Golems will defend them from intruders, and a small number of fortresses have large numbers of golems which they can rapidly deploy. The outer layer of the fortresses is still the original stone blocks they were built from, but the interior mesh of materials is much stronger, making a flying fortress far tougher than a normal fortress would be - more than strong enough to survive a hard crash.

Environments

Most of the continent is covered in jungle, largely tropical. However, different biomes exist where the rules of survival may be slightly different.

Jungle Floor

This is the most common terrain, and the most violent. Creatures of various kinds are locked in a constant battle for survival, where minor scuffles quickly attract unwanted attention. Most common here are insect, mindlessly attacking each other, keeping their own population in check. This is also the main battleground for hives of spider/ant hybrids, where queens attempt to outmaneuver each other and capture more territory (and feeding grounds). The dense foliage means little light reaches the ground, but plants grow rampant regardless. This area is one of the richest feeding grounds, provided one is not afraid of giant insects, and one likes the idea of eating them.

Treetops

The jungle trees grow to hundreds of feet in height, often within minutes of being cut down. Flying creatures

dominate here, and such creatures tend not to grow to particularly large sizes. Because this area is relatively inaccessible, and predators tend to be small (by the region's standards) it is relatively safe for those who life there - except when something grows to large enough size that it can feed directly on this height. This is the area where flying fortresses tend to hover when they are not chasing potential threats to the jungle, if one wants to gain access to such a fortress, chances are they will need to find a friendly harpy or bird.

Rivers and Lakes

The magical field is inconsistent in water; it requires soil to propagate after all. As a result, growth rates of fish and aquatic plants vary wildly between areas, making some areas key hunting grounds and others (relative) safe zones. Fish tend to not grow to immense sizes, but aquatic insects can become frighteningly large.

Columns of water (waterfalls and waterlifts) flow down and up from the lakes, into subterranean lakes below. Nonsapient animals tend to avoid these water columns but sapient creatures use these to move between the surface and underground realms.

Swamps

These are the domain of patient ambush predators, which tend to grow more slowly because of the reduced feeding rate, but can be much harder to avoid due to their stealthy nature. Leeches (and leech-women) are by far the most dangerous predators in this area as they are able to feed (and grow) extremely rapidly. However their relatively soft bodies make them easy prey themselves unless they manage to grow to truly immense sizes. Entire herds of herbivorous animals sometimes vanish into the treacherous swamps, leaving no trace of their existence.

Ruined Cities

The ancient lost civilizations built many cities all over the continent. Now, they are mere ruins, covered in rampant plant growth. Vines and trees have burst through floors, walls and ceilings, while wooden doors, window frames, and furniture have become gnarled masses of growing plant matter. Only areas protected by magic - such as mage colleges, temples, prestigious libraries and mansions of the nobility remain intact. The surrounding areas are usually littered with carnivorous plants, which tend to keep out larger predators. Groups of survivors - especially new arrivals to the jungle - tend to form communities in the ruined cities, until they find better, safer locations. The old civilizations left behind magical knowledge, tools, and weapons, which can be of value to the survivors - despite the dangers, adventuring parties are sometimes sent to the cities to recover them.

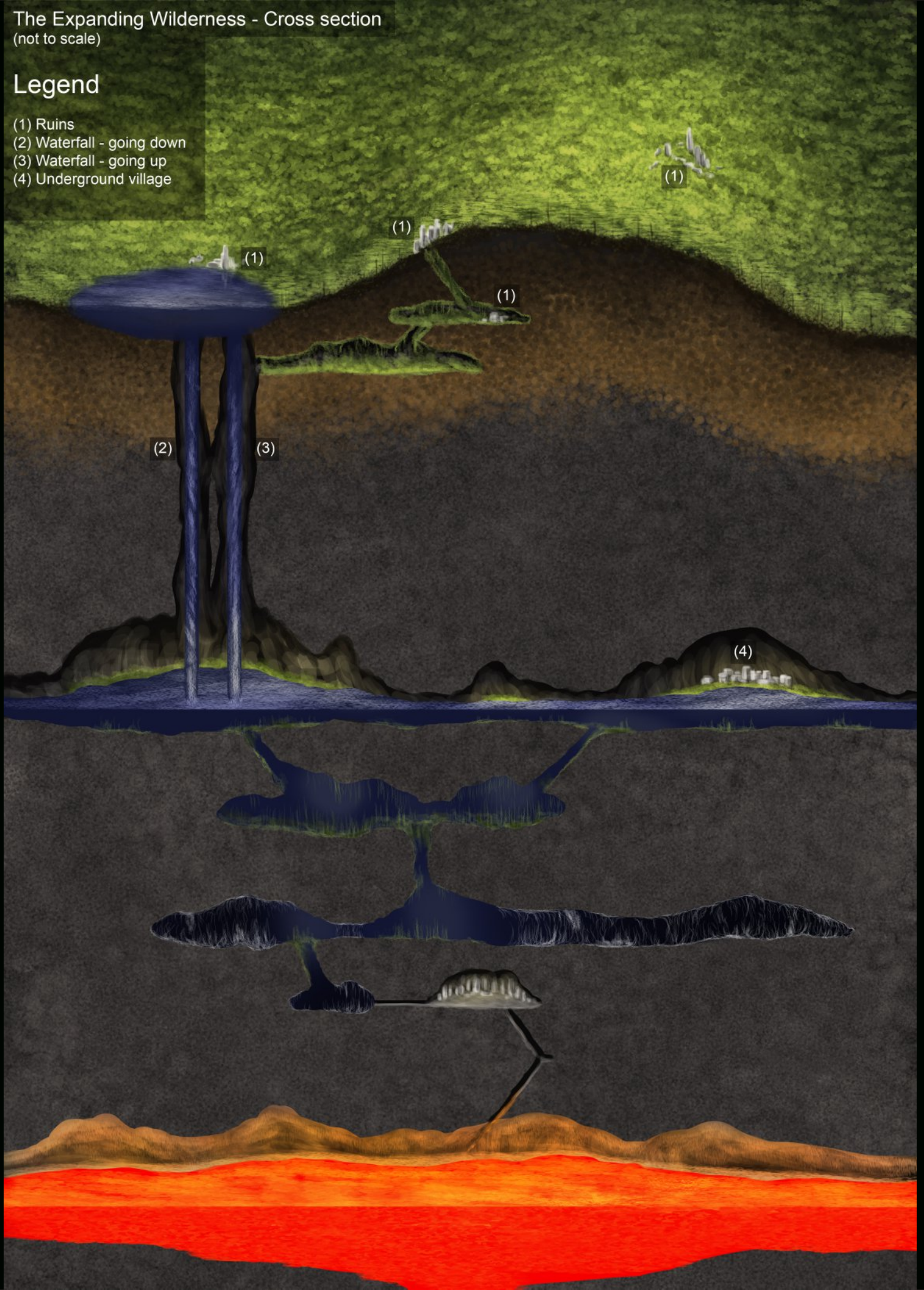
Underground Caverns

An entire underground ecosystem exists, stretching for countless miles in all directions and linking to the oceans in several places. The underground caverns have their own lakes and rivers, and plant life. Artificial suns exist in many locations, operating on the same

The Expanding Wilderness - Cross section (not to scale)

Legend

- (1) Ruins
- (2) Waterfall - going down
- (3) Waterfall - going up
- (4) Underground village



day and night cycle as the surface world. Because the magical field is not as strong underground, the growth rates of creatures is not enhanced nearly to the same degree here, though other effects still apply. Because life is relatively safe and sane here, groups of survivors have settled in the caverns and formed communities, sometimes in underground ruins, but sometimes building new villages from scratch. Pillars of water flow up to the lakes on the surface, granting a passage to a more deadly area.

Deeper down still are areas without light, where alien life thrives. This alien life is not edible by most 'normal' creatures, and cannot survive outside the deepest darkest areas. Furthest down are underground magma lakes and ruins that predate the lost civilizations on the surface by thousands of years. In those lowest regions, portals exist through which demons enter the mortal realm - these portals are sustained with energy flowing from the warp gates on the surface.

Recent Events/Plot Hook Ideas

For unknown reasons, the demons manipulating the warp gates have drawn in ships from several worlds, crashing them against the continent's shores and stranding the crews and passengers in the jungle. The survivors have formed small enclaves along the coast where they attempt to endure the jungle, while undead are slowly marching towards them through the underground tunnels.

Elsewhere, the spoiled son of a wealthy and powerful nobleman in his hubris ordered the crew of his personal flying castle to take a shortcut over the Expanding Wilderness. Two hundred miles inland, the castle was attacked by giant flying insects and crashed into the side of a mountain. The flying insects eventually lost interest as their casualties mounted and better feeding opportunities presented themselves. The castle itself remains mostly intact, but the crew took heavy casualties. Now the noble son is left with a small number of unhappy servants and his personal collection of exotic creatures.

An entire apartment building with all its inhabitants (most of whom did not get along) was warped into the center of one of the ancient cities. Unusually, the majority of these inhabitants started changing, but only a small number started changing into 'normal' creatures such as reptiles, mammals, and mythical beings. The majority started changing into horrific quasi-demonic, troll-like creatures. A battle for survival erupts within the building as neighbours who previously would argue, now fight tooth and nail.

A group of survivors from another world have been relatively successful in setting up their village on an island close to the coast. The island is clear of the worst of predators, and growing food has proven remarkably easy due to the magic field. Clueless about the nature of the magical jungle and what roams there, the settlers continue their lives in blissful ignorance even as strangers start arriving from the mainland. These new visitors appear human, but unbeknownst to the settlers, are actually shifters such as were-bears, were-dragons, and other creatures.

