

Canursines

(Blame [Penny Arcade](#).)

Wolves. That turn into bears. As has been said in the aftermath of many a catastrophe: “It seemed a good idea at the time.” Or “Well, the *principle* was sound.” That’s a popular one, too.

Still, you could see the arguments in favor. Interstellar colonization programs are tricky things. Or ‘nigh impossible’ So, when magic finally came back into the world, the civilizations that survived *that* particular cultural state change were eager to use thaumaturgy to cut as many corners as they could. In this particular case: since intrepid colonists on the Last Frontier would need a reliable ecology for their new home, it was considered smart to send one along with them.

It was also considered smart to reduce the ship’s life support burden by taking genetic samples of two species and ah, *overlaying* them on top of each other. To use the most notorious example of the process: take a grey wolf. Magically infuse it with the DNA pattern of a brown bear. When you get to your destination, decant the bear DNA pattern into an evocation chamber, and boom! You have a

brown bear that you didn't have to transport all the way from Earth.

The problem was that cutting corners is just as bad an idea in spellworking as it is in, say, engineering. In this particular case, nobody realized that the wolf would still have a bear DNA pattern inside of it. Or that the pattern would be passed down to the wolf's descendants. Or, worst of all: that the wolf would be able to temporarily access the pattern itself at moments of great stress. Like, say, a planet-wide environmental crisis in the colony's tenth year.

Fortunately, things could have been worse (add that to the list of post-catastrophe sayings). The colonization agency had at least not thought to overlay prey species with predators, and the colony's domestic animals could be cleansed of the pattern easily enough, not that chickens that turned into ducks were all that much of a problem. And not every animal can access their imposed patterns.

But the newly-terraformed wilderness out there is full of wolves that turn into bears, snakes that turn into crocodiles, deer that turn into hippos (for *that* one, it's a damn good thing for the colonization agency that curses have to respect the light speed barrier), and any other

number of malignant magical time bombs. Standard colony practice is to regularly sweep the areas around settlements with spells that eliminate the overlay. This keeps things like canursines rare in civilized lands, but there's an entire world out there, and nobody knows what's going on in the darkest woods. There's already been reports of things like half-bobcat, half-lion hybrids breeding true. What if the process continues? Imagine the havoc if they start cross-breeding, too. Nobody wants to see half-bears, half-owls running around. There really needs to be oversight, here.

And that's why the various colleges and mage's academies have been training magical specialists in outdoor survival, animal wrangling, and general combat. Given human cultural history and the historical demographics of magic-users it was probably inevitable that these specialists would be called 'rangers:' and, honestly, it's a fair description anyway.

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