The Black Woods

Purpose

My goal in putting together these rule changes was to make adventuring feel more arduous and difficult, something that a lot of other people have already done (and probably better) in alternative rulesets like *Darker Dungeons*. However, for my campaign I thought it'd be fun to try my hand at my own set of "gritty" rules. This document is a first draft, since I've had absolutely no chance to playtest this yet. I hope you all enjoy being my guinea pigs.

Character Creation

Ability Scores

For this campaign, characters should be created using 3d6. For those who are especially interested in capturing the often strange stat arrays of early D&D charatcers, feel free to do 3d6 down the line (optionally with one swap) but I expect most players will roll up 6 numbers and arrange them however they want. Later I might try to make a standard array thats retuned to give a similar level of power to 3d6 characters, but thats not a priority, since I think the randomness is a lot of the fun of character creation

Classes

Theres nothing in these rules that technically makes them impossible but for personal reasons I'm banning sorcerers, monks, and (for now) any classes not in the core rules.

Races

Feel free to use any race! The lore for this setting will be created as you play by your decisions, so anything can fit in. The only changes (so far) are to races with darkvision. Those who are listed as having darkvision get 30 ft. dim-light vision instead, and those with superior darkvision get 30 ft. darkvision instead. Barring magical sight, nobody is capable of discerning colors in darkness even with darkvision.

Proficiencies

For the purposes of this campaign, the proficiency system (for both weapons and skills) is significantly overhauled. Your character does not have a proficiency bonus, instead proficiencies have levels. At character creation you get 1 level in the non-weapon proficiencies given by your class and background as usual, but when you level up and would normally gain an increased proficiency bonus, you instead gain more points to put into either leveling up existing proficiencies or gaining new ones. Skill proficiencies grant a bonus of their level+1 to relevant checks, and can be leveled up to level 5.

Weapon Proficiencies work slightly differently. Like non-weapon proficiencies, they also have levels, but you don't get

Table 1 Weapon Proficiencies		
Class	**Initial**	**Levels**
Fighter	4	3
Paladin	4	3
Barbarian	3	3
Bard	2	4
Cleric	2	4
Druid	2	4
Ranger	2	4
Rogue	2	4
Warlock	1	6
Wizard	1	6

them as you usually would at character creation. Instead, each class starts with a number of weapon proficiency points according to table 1. You also gain additional weapon proficiency points as you level up, 1 every time you gain the number of levels in the levels column of the table. The bonuses for each level in a weapon proficiency, as well as the number of proficiency points required for each level, are shown in table 2.

Table 2 Weapon Proficiency Levels		
Level	Hit Mod	Points
Unskilled	-2	0
Basic	0	1
Skilled	+2	2
Expert	+3	3
Master	+4	5
Grand Master	+5	8

At character creation, only Fighters and Paladins are allowed to put more than one proficiency point into a single weapon, and even then may only put 2. Gaining the ability to use a shield requires a weapon proficiency point, as does gaining the ability to dual wield.

Tool proficiencies use the same level system as weapons instead of the one for skills, but skill proficiency points you gain later can be used on tool proficiencies. Saving throw profincies are completely unmodified from the base game

Equipment

Among parties I've played with in fifth edition, there's a tendency to simply take the default equipment for one's background and class, and then forget that one even has it. Who can even remember what's in an explorer's pack? To counter this, all players should use the rules for purchasing starting equipment with GP for your class instead of taking the provided starting equipment. Keep in mind, we'll be using the variant encumbrance rules which can be found on page 176 of the PHB. Spellcasters cannot start the game with an arcane focus (though they may find one on their adventures), so you should buy any components necessary for your starting spells.

Religion

All characters, not just clerics, should have a deity that they worship, unless they are specifically not devoted to any god. This campaign doesn't take place in the forgotten realms, so I encourage you to create your own deity to worship, but you can also take one from the PHB or from real mythology. There is a sheet on page 39 of the 2nd Edition *Complete Priest's Handbook* that may help you in fleshing out your character's faith. Some of it itsn't applicable but its a good starting point. You are also highly encouraged to talk with other players and attempt to collaborate on creating faiths, so that we don't end up with a weird "one person, one god" situation.

Languages

By default, you can speak, read, and write your primary language, and can speak common but are not literate in it. For each point of intelligence you have, you can become literate in another language, and if you have a negative intelligence modifier then you are illiterate in your primary language.

Adventuring

One of my goals with these rules is to make travel, survival, and exploration more interesting than they are in normal fifth edition, as I've always found these parts of the game really underdeveloped.

West Marches

This campaign will ideally be run as a "West Marches" campaign. This means a

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few things. Firstly, there is no single party. There will hopefully be many more players than it would be practical to play with at once, and this is by design. Instead, the players form parties amongst themselves which change with every adventure. I'm hoping that cliques won't form, but in order to make sure they really don't, it's against the rules to adventure with the same party 3 times in a row. At least 2 people must be different in order for it to qualify as a different party.

Secondly, there is no single time to play. Whenever a party decides they want to play and I'm available, I will DM a session for that party. This presents some problems for keeping records of in game time, but I think i've figured out a satisfactory solution to that.

Finally, there is no single overarching plot. There may be recurring villains and some larger quests, but the story of the campaign is fundamentally made of self contained quests. Despite this, the world is persistent. The players will change the world around them and time will pass as long as people are playing.

The Map

Unlike in many other campaigns, it is a tradition in a West Marches campaign for the players to draw their own map collaboratively based on verbal descriptions from NPCs rather than having the DM show them an accurate map of the world. If players are really not interested in doing cartography for themselves, I can draw the map but I'd much prefer that at least one of you take up the role of cartographer.

Also unlike many other campaigns (including other West Marches campaigns) I don't have a map of the world I've prepared before hand. I have some ideas, but fundamentally I'll be improvising the world as you all explore it. I think this is rather risky, but I'm hoping it produces something interesting.

Journey Mechanics

For making long travel from place to place more interesting, we'll be using the journey rules from *Darker Dungeons.* These rules are complicated so I will not rewrite them here*.* However we're also adjusting the resting rules somewhat. *Darker Dungeons* lengthens the long rest time to 1 week, but leaves the short rest time at 1 hour. However, we will be using a 1 week long rest and an 8 hour short rest.

Combat

We will be using the lingering injury rules from page 272 of the DMG. You take a lingering injury when a critical hit is scored against you, or when half your health or more is dealt to you and reduces you to 0 hit points.

You won't be making your own death save rolls during combat, and wont be able to see the outcomes of the death saves either. Hiding this from the players is meant to make treating an unconscious person seem more urgent.

Finally, we will be adding an option to sprint on ones turn. In exchange for one's entire turn, including bonus action and reaction, you can move 5 times your speed, but only in a straight line.

Downtime

Character Progression

Gaining levels in this campaign isn't as simple as gaining sufficient XP to level up and then changing your character. Instead, your character must train for some time in between adventures in order to level up, and spend experience and gold in the process. The amount of XP required to advance to each level is in table 3, and the training time and costs are in table 4.

Training always requires a mentor. A mentor may either be an NPC, or a PC who

Table 3 Level Progression XP			
Level	**XP Cost**	**Level**	**XP Cost**
1-2	300	11-12	8,680
2-3	420	12-13	12,150
3-4	590	13-14	17,010
4-5	820	14-15	23,810
5-6	1,150	15-16	33,330
6-7	1,610	16-17	46,660
7-8	2,260	17-18	65,330
8-9	3,160	18-19	91,460
9-10	4,430	19-20	128,050
10-11	6,200		

Table 4 Level Advancement Cost					
Level	**Time**	**GP per week**	**Level**	**Time**	**GP per week**
1-2	1	15	11-12	6	115
2-3	1	20	12-13	6	165
3-4	2	15	13-14	7	202
4-5	2	20	14-15	7	295
5-6	3	25	15-16	8	370
6-7	3	35	16-17	8	536
7-8	4	37	17-18	9	687
8-9	4	55	18-19	9	990
9-10	5	64	19-20	10	1,280
10-11	5	94			

has a higher level than you in a particular class or skill. In the case of a PC mentor, the gold cost of training is up to that player instead of being what is given in the table, but the time requirement is the same. The only exception to this is class training for warlocks, whose patron is the only one capable of mentoring them.

Improving weapon proficiencies also requires training, and the cost and time requirements for this training are given in table 5. Unlike training to level up, training to improve a weapon proficiency has a chance to not succeed. The chance to succeed based on your current skill and the skill of your mentor is given in table 6. Skill and tool proficiencies can be trained as part of leveling up instead.

Crafting Items

We're going to be using the *Xanathar's Guide to Everything* rules for crafting magical items and spell scrolls, as well as the *Darker Dungeons* rules for

Table 5 Weapon Advancement Cost		
Level Sought	**Time**	**GP/week**
Basic	1	100
Skilled	2	250
Expert	4	500
Master	8	750
Grand Master	12	1000

Table 6 Weapon Advancement Difficulty					
Student/Mentor	**Basic**	**Skilled**	**Expert**	**Master**	**Grand Master**
Basic	60%	80%	95%	99%	99%
Skilled	1%	50%	70%	90%	95%
Expert		1%	40%	60%	80%
Master			1%	30%	50%
Grand Master				1%	20%

creating potions. If there is something you want to make that isn't covered by these rules, then feel free to ask me and we can probably work something out

Rumors

Between adventures, you can ask (over DMs) for a set of rumors. If there's some topic you want to focus on, such as an area or a certain type of item, then I can tailor them to your request, but I can also just give you general rumors. Rumors serve as the basis for putting a party together for an adventure and so you are encouraged to share your rumors with others, but they are given to you in private so that if you want you can hold back information from other players. Note that not all rumors are necessarily true, as not every NPC is trustworthy, but even if they don't lead you to what you expect, they'll always lead you to something interesting.

The World

A key part of adventuring in a campaign like this is changing the world around you, so you're encouraged to do exactly that. Ultimately, the hope is that your characters will be the ones to drive the story forward, and to create and do interesting things.

Building

One of the most significant ways your character can leave a mark on the world of course, is to build some great structure. Clerics can build a temple or church, Wizards can build themselves a laboratory, and virtually anyone can build a castle. As word of your deeds spreads, you might begin to attract followers, and with enough of these a town can begin to spring up around your stronghold.

The first step in building a structure is to determine the production modifier based on the workforce you have available to you and the the construction site. Tables 7 gives production modifier values, but for more detail on what these values are meant to represent you can ask me, or check out *The Castle Guide,* a second edition book that I am using for construction rules. To obtain the production modifier for your structure, find the relevant production modifier in each category and multiply them all together. *As stated in the rules, you may also add a further production modifier of 1.50* for building ornate structures (such as the interior of a church or a great palace)

The next step is to determine what modules are relevant to your structure. While *The Castle Guide* is meant specifically for castles, we will be applying the same rules for any structures a player

Table 7
Production Modifiers

Climate	Modifier	Social Structure	Modifier
Arctic	4.00	Nomadic	2.50
Sub-Arctic	2.50	Semi-Nomadic	1.75
Temperate	1.25	Primitive Agricultural	1.25
Moderate	1.00	Agricultural	1.00
Sub-Tropical	1.25	Advanced Agricultural	0.75
Tropical	1.50		
Geography		**Worker Skill**	
High Mountains	4.00	Very Poor	3.00
Moderate Mountains	3.00	Poor	2.00
Low Mountains	2.00	Average	1.00
Foothills	1.50	Good	0.75
Rolling Hills	1.00	Very Good	0.50
Plains	0.75		
Ground Cover		**Worker Morale**	
Jungle	3.00	Very Poor	3.00
Dense Forest	2.00	Poor	2.00
Light Forest	1.50	Average	1.00
Scrub	1.00	High	0.75
Grassland	0.75	Very High	0.50
Barren	1.50		
Desert	2.00		
Swamp	2.00		
Resources			
Distant and Poor	2.00		
Distant and Good	1.50		
Near and Poor	1.25		
Near and Good	1.00		

wants to build. Select modules from the table on page 54 of *The Castle Guide*, add up their costs, and then multiply both the time and gold costs by your production modifier. Note that the time is not the actual time required, but the time (in weeks) required for one person to build such a structure. While it isn't entirely accurate, the actual time required will be this time divided by the number of workers you have working on the project. Note the heights of certain modules, as building taller walls or towers requires purchasing multiple modules.

The next step is recruiting workers. The base gold cost as calculated in the previous step assumes that one is paying a workforce large enough to finish the project in one year. In order to calculate only the cost of the castle itself you must divide the total work time by 52, multiply by 10, and subtract from the gold cost. This is the cost in gp of your project, and you may recruit workers from among whatever population is available to you however you want. 10 gp per week is assumed to be the base rate for paying a human laborer, but other PCs might offer their aid at their own rates, or you may be able to get monsters to assist for something other than money (e.g. doing a favor for a local ogre chieftan who then offers his services in building your castle), and of course you yourself may contribute to the project. Heroes and monsters are often able to accomplish far more than a normal laborer, and so I will give you a value in laborers that these characters count as. The rulebook specifies that you may not cut laborers to more than 2 years of work for a project, but this seems arbitrary to me so I'm throwing it out.

Now that you have a plan and a workforce, you must calculate when it is actually possible to do work on the project, no laborer is going to be productive in an arctic winter after all. To do this, multiply the production modifiers from ground cover and climate, and divide 52 by the result, rounding up. This is the number of weeks each year that your workers will actually be able to work.

With that, you have a plan, costs, a workforce, and a timeline for the construction of your structure. This may be extremely short as in the case of simply building your character a house, or it may be very long as in the case of an ornate palace. Either way, have fun making your mark on the world and be creative in your designs. If you have anything you want to add that isn't covered by the rules (which could of course potentially be a lot) ask me and we can work something out.

Class Rules

Wizard

Specialization

Rather than choosing a specialization at 3rd level, wizards must now choose a school of magic at first level. The schools of magic, along with their relationships to eachother are shown in the diagram below. The primary effect of your specialization is in the process of learning spells, described in its own section, however in addition to that there are some rules related to your spell slots. Specifically, one of your spell slots at each level can only be used for a spell of your chosen school.
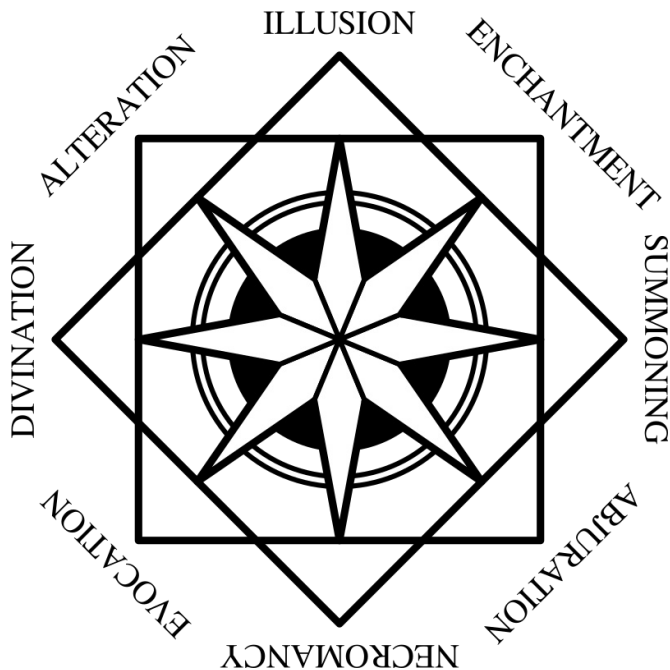
Learning Spells

Like all other spellcasting classes, wizards can learn spells from their mentors when leveling up (as long as the mentor knows the spell), but wizards may also attempt to learn spells from scrolls and tomes that they may find in the world.

Attempting to learn a spell takes 2 hours and 25 gp per level of the spell, and requires the wizard to make a DC 15 intelligence check. For spells of your own school, you have advantage on this check, and for those adjacent to your opposing school you have disadvantage. If the check is failed, then you may try again the next day, but must pay the materials cost again. Wizards are unable to learn spells of the school opposing theirs.

Spell Research

With sufficient resources and time, wizards are able to research new spells. To research a spell, the player will have to come up with an idea for a new spell and discuss it with the DM, who will then make adjustments necessary to balance the spell to the level that the player thinks it should be. The player will be told about the

adjustments, and if they still think the spell is worth having they will begin the research process in game.

Researching a spell takes 2 weeks and 200 gp per level of the spell and requires access to a laboratory or other suitable research environment. At the end of this period, the wizard makes an intelligence check as they would for learning a spell (note that they do not have to pay the gold cost associated with learning a spell). If they succeed, they have succesfully researched the new spell. If they fail, they must wait a week before trying to learn the research spell again.

Spells that are researched do not count toward the limit on spells known, so even if the roleplay incentive of getting to make your own spell is not enough for you, you may still want to research your own spells.

Bard

Spellcasting Focus

Instead of being able to use any instrument as a spellcasting focus, you must find or create a magical instrument. Note that this is not magical in the sense of arcane magic, but more in a folkloric sense.

Spell Errata

Chill Touch

Make a melee spell attack against the target. The effects on a succesful hit are the same as the normal effects of chill touch.