# Summary

Prepare yourself for West Marches: Timecurse a persistent world using 5e rules. Originally envisioned by [Ben Robbins](#) it's described like this:

> *1) There was no regular time: every session was scheduled by the players on the fly.*
>
> *2) There was no regular party: each game had different players drawn from a pool of around 10-14 people.*
>
> *3) There was no regular plot: The players decided where to go and what to do. It was a sandbox game in the sense that's now used to describe video games like Grand Theft Auto, minus the missions. There was no mysterious old man sending them on quests. No overarching plot, just an overarching environment.*

Drop in for one session, or follow along the rich development of the world over an epic campaign. This is sometimes described as "sandbox play." We're aiming for a beginner-friendly game that nevertheless rewards long-term play and system mastery.

I'll play the part of the referee, a neutral arbiter of the rules. I'll help ensure that every aspect of the world reacts to your actions. There are no predetermined outcomes or scripts. Your effectiveness is limited only by your creativity, mastery of the D&D ruleset, and the luck of the die.

In Timecurse, you are a group of travellers with a mysterious illness. Occasionally, you'll simply disappear and reappear weeks later with bruises and sore muscles. A Tinker has led you to his native Archipelago he believes is connected to the illness. Discover the rich history of the islands and uncover its secrets. Pirate hoards, reluctant monsters, and demonic rituals. Fill in your own map of the world, and spread your deeds among your fellow players for XP.

# What to Bring

- What you must bring
  - Nothing.
- What you may bring
  - A complete character sheet that I can look at. If you don't bring a completed character, you can choose a pregenerated one.
  - Choose a pre-generated character from [here](#) or using some other source or method.

# What to Read

- What you must read
  - Nothing
- What you may read at your leisure
  - [The 5e Player's Handbook](#)
    - This provides the core ruleset for the game and tells you how to create your player character.
  - [A guide to the Isles- What Greg has told you](#)
  - [A West Marches Retrospective](#)
    - This is a medium-length retrospective on a two-year 5th edition West Marches game played by a group of twenty-something people. It talks about what they valued about the game and what they learned from it.

# Links

[Pregenerated Characters](#)
[The Player Map](#)

# Rules Differences from D&D 5th Edition

## Summary

We'll use some particular rules to adapt the game better to play in a persistent world with overland travel. Most of these rules are taken from groups experienced in West Marches play. I'll stick close to the "Core Rules", meaning the Player's Handbook, the Monster Manual, and the Dungeon Master's guide. These will be the same for the player characters.

- Leveling Up
  - Instead of gaining XP through killing monsters and completing quests, you'll accomplish feats in game. Tell other players in the community discord about the situation and gain levels. Borderline cases will be decided by how well you relate the feat and how it's received by your fellow players. (See Below.)
- Actions
  - The GM will only "call rolls" for saving throws and as the result of a direct action. This is to encourage skillful play and make the game more reactive to the player's choices.
- Treasure

- ○ Using Blackball's rules for treasure. Based on gold instead of rarity. Interesting/fun magic items appear more often.
- **Overworld Travel**
  - ○ We're using Travel rules particular to the module. (See Below.)
  - ○ You move up to two "hexes" per four-hour watch. (Slower races don't slow down the party)
  - ○ Exploring, Foraging, Sneaking moves at half-speed.
- **Food and Water**
  - ○ Marching without water adds one level of exhaustion.
  - ○ Each day after the first of missing food adds a level of exhaustion.
- **Random Encounters**
  - ○ Random encounters are highly variable, based on real in-game time. If you explore and travel especially slowly, you will spend more time/resources against random encounters.
- **Resting**
  - ○ Standard rest rules. Long rests are interrupted by keeping watch, or by any encounters or activity.
- **Inventory**
  - ○ You have a number of item slots equal to your strength score.
  - ○ Slots may fit a number of small items like coins or arrows.
  - ○ Large items like armor or bedrolls require two or more slots.
  - ○ A day's food and a watch's worth of water take up a slot each. I.e. food and water matter a lot.
- **Purchasing Items (See Below)**
  - ○ You can purchase all gear in the Player's Handbook in any town.
  - ○ Any item listed in the DMG *might* be found in a major town. Spend a watch searching for it. If you cannot find it, trying again is impossible for the current session unless you go to a new city. (Difficulty is based on rarity)
- **Crafting**
  - ○ Acquire crafting formulas from craftsmen throughout the world.

# Leveling Up

At the start of each session, each player declares a *goal* for that session. Each goal is associated with 1, 2, 3, or 4 XP. If you achieve your goal, you get your XP. If you don't, you don't. Additionally, the *party* declares a goal for the session. If the party achieves its goal, each member gains 1 or 2 XP depending on the goal.

When different players choose the same goal, the goal must be completed once for each player with the same goal. Players can also split XP from more difficult challenges. If two players choose to "Solve a problem plaguing a town or city", they can split the XP between the two if this task is completed.

## Personal Goals

Gain one XP when you-
- Defeat a worthy opponent (or opponents) (CR at least 1 higher than your level).
- Uncover a secret. A secret is some fact that has been intentionally hidden or obscured.
    - Discover a secret passageway or buried treasure.
    - Discover someone is secretly a werewolf.
- Save an NPC's life or Cure them of an affliction.
    - Save three loggers being ravaged by harpies.
- Steal something valuable (Over 400 gold) and take it back to the Slick Eel.
    - Commander someone's sailing vessel.
- Confront an absurd opponent (CR at least 3 higher than your level).
- Convince an NPC to sponsor you or your group in the completion of some service or quest. (At least 500 gold). This is **not** like being hired as a mercenary. You need to be aware of someone's problems and make a specific proposal.
    - Convince Percival to sponsor a quest to end the spider infestation of the Felknor woods once and for all.
    - Recruit some lumberjacks to replace those who fell at the hands of the Harpies.

Gain two XP when you-
- Defeat a major opponent or adversary (CR at least 3 levels higher).
- Confront an unstoppable opponent (CR at least 5 levels higher than you).
- Solve a town's major problem.
- Get someone to swear allegiance to you.
- Uncover a secret related to the Timecurse
    - Find the location of Essera
    - Discover who sabotaged the Beacon
    - Figure out how Greg constructed the Timestone

Gain three XP when you-

- Defeat an unstoppable opponent (CR at least 5 levels higher than you).
- Achieve a title such as "knight of the lions", "slayer of mages," "Best damn cook of Hilltop," that will precede your arrival.
- Conquer a major landmark, a city, castle, etc. (Become the Beastmaster of Overass Forrest, the heir of Skelbar, etc.)

Gain four XP when you-

- End piracy.
- Tear the boundary between two planes wide open.
- Discover something that affects the historical legacy of the Taldic mages.

## Party Goals

The party can gain one XP if they-

- Choose a major keyed location that no one has yet visited. (The town of Hightop, The Manor on the Isle of the Dead, The Ruins of Skelbor) Go there.
- Recover a treasure bundle. (At least 400 gold worth of items and coins.)
- Uncover/Explore at least 5 locations. (Discover the keyed feature of at least 5 hexes.)

For the party, a two XP goal can be…

- Discover 8 or more new locations. (Discover the keyed feature of at least 8 hexes)
- Recover a treasure hoard. (At least 4000 gold worth of items and coin.)

To claim your XP:

- Complete your task.
- Make it back to the Slick Eel before the Timecurse affects you.
- Tell the other players about what you accomplished.

# Overworld Travel

## Keeping Watch (Perception)

By default, players will keep watch. This gives them a chance to detect any enemies or ambushes that might befell the party.

## Navigation (Survival)

- The day is divided into six watches of four hours each.
- A standard party traveling at full speed moves two hexes per watch.
  - Some conditions may force you to move at half speed, quarter speed, etc. These conditions are usually cumulative.
    - Encumbered
    - Level Two Exhaustion
    - Night-time
    - Foraging and/or Exploring
    - River Crossing
    - Storm

| Terrain Type | Navigation Target Number |
|---|---|
| Hills, Plains, Tundra | 12 |
| Forest, Swamps, Mountains | 15 |
| Dense Forest, Jungle | 17 |
| Deserts | 20 |

| Conditions | Modifiers |
|---|---|
| Hail, Rain, Sleet, Snow | +2 |
| Fog or any kind of Storm | +5 |
| Heavy Fog, Blizzard | +10 |

  - Terrain can also reduce speed
    - Forests, Hills, Swamps (Off-Trail): Half-speed
    - Dense Forest, Jungle (Off-Trail): Quarter-Speed
    - Mountains (On-Trail): Half-Speed
    - Mountains (Off-Trial): Quarter-Speed

- You can march for two watches a day. After that, you must roll to avoid a level of Exhaustion. (DC 14, 18, 22, etc.)
- When you travel in a direction or towards a known spot, you have a chance of veering off your target.
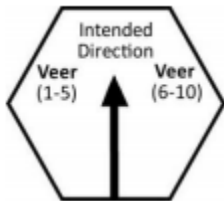
If anyone in the party has any bonuses for an attribute or skill related to this navigation check add this to the D20 die roll. This check ought to be made by the referee in secret. If the party fails the roll they become lost. When the party becomes lost they veer away from their intended direction of travel. Roll 1d10 and consult the diagram to the left.

## Foraging (Survival)

When traveling ordinarily each member of a party will need to use up a day's worth of food and water. Hunting and foraging can enable the party to provide enough to sustain them without burning through their resources. However, foraging slows the party's movement by half.

Any player that decided to forage for food and water have them roll against a target number of 15 (or 18 if in the desert) to recover food for the day.

## Exploring (Perception)

In general, when traveling through a hex the party will automatically discover the keyed locale only if it lies along the path that they are traveling or is clearly visible for miles (e.g. a tower on a high cliff). Otherwise make a perception check.

## Sneaking (Stealth)

You can sneak up on any enemies.

# Inventory

- We're using simplified encumbrance rules inspired by sandra. Think of "size" instead of "weight."
  - You can carry a number of "basic items" equal to your strength score. Basic Items can be:
    - A pouch of 250 coins/gems.
    - A quiver of arrows (twenty).
    - A typical weapon (bow, sword, lance, etc.)
    - A kit.
    - A day's rations.
    - Enough water for a "watch" (4 hours of marching).
    - Everything in PHB - "Adventuring Gear" between 1 and 10 pounds.
    - A musical instrument

- ■ A set of tools
- ○ Access to the following items is assumed.
  - ■ Tinderbox
  - ■ Backpack
  - ■ One set of Armor (worn)
  - ■ A set of clothes (worn)
- ○ Each item is accessible or inaccessible
  - ■ Accessible items are visible, can become damaged, etc.
- ○ Some items may require multiple slots such as bedrolls, tents, or carried armor.
- ○ Double your load for "encumbered".
- ○ Triple your load for "heavily encumbered".

## Purchasing Items

- ● All items listed in player's handbook are available for purchase.
- ● Otherwise, you can seek out a special item once per day. Roll on the following table based on its rarity.
  - ○ 1d6 for a common item
  - ○ 2d6 (take lowest) for uncommon item
  - ○ 3d6 (take lowest) for rare item
  - ○ 4d6 (take lowest) for very rare item
  - ○ 5d6 (take lowest) for legendary item
- ● Cities adjust this number.
  - ○ Hightop (+0)
  - ○ Everill's Beacon, Pirate's Cove (-1) (+0 when a ship comes into port)
  - ○ Cliffside, Three Trees, Swiftriver, Tham's Cove, Hedron, Arransfirth (-2)
- ● Roll Outcomes
  - ○ (1) Item is unavailable.
  - ○ (2) Item is available via a quest. (Add to the loot of nearby treasure). The merchant sells information about the item's location (same price as item).
  - ○ (3) A seller is available at a nearby or remote location. (Referee chooses a location within three hexes for the seller.) There is a strict time limit of availability. (1d4 days + 1d6 -1 watches).
  - ○ (4) A seller is available at a nearby or remote location. (Referee chooses a location within three hexes for the seller.)
  - ○ (5) Item is available for purchase.
  - ○ (6) Item is available for purchase.

# Advice and Strategy



Over a few sessions, I've been able to see how a few different groups approach the game and seen what was or wasn't effective. Here's a few observations.

- Top Suggestions
  - Focus on some broad goals for your session.
  - Don't dwell on any particular content for too long. There are **very few direct puzzles**.
  - Focus on positive incentives over negative incentives. You have a lot more control of the former. Negative consequences are mostly random.
  -
- The single most important component to success is party coordination. To move forward, the party needs to be in agreement. To reach agreement, the party needs everyone to be engaged and communicating. Over four hours, this can be a bit stressful. Here's some tips.
  - Reach agreement on *broad goals* first.
  - Use a procedure to make party decisions (direction of travel, roles, etc.)
  - Not all decisions are equally important.
  - Suggested order of priorities:
    - Bring Water

- Be ready for a random encounter
- Keep enough time to retreat to the Eel (Usually thirty minutes)
- Manage Exhaustion. Don't go past level 1.
- Keep some gold or valuables handy. They will be useful in a variety of locations.
- Be prepared.