Setting and Atmosphere

## Setting

The setting for the West Marches is comprised of two things, the town and the surrounding lands. The town is much like the towns of the old wild west. A frontier, a border town between civilisation and the wild. The lands that have been tamed and feral. The lands around the town are the Wild Unknown. Great plains, deep cravases and hauting barrows. The woods crawl with unspeakable horrors and the swamps are best not spoken of. This is what the people of the town have at their doorstep, always creeping forth trying to reclaim the land as its own.

## Atmosphere

The atmosphere or mood of the WM is an important part to nail down early as it will affect your choice of everything from monsters to player goals. Try to make sure the atmosphere you go with is one you have room to be creative in. Don't create an atmosphere with a strict set of emotions that don't allow for anything else. Even in the darkest of time characters find time to share a joke around the fire. Inversely sometimes the funnest things can be the most sombre.

*Man goes to doctor. Says he's depressed. Says life seems harsh and cruel. Says he feels all alone in a threatening world where what lies ahead is vague and uncertain. Doctor says, "Treatment is simple. Great clown Pagliacci is in town tonight. Go and see him. That should pick you up." Man bursts into tears. Says, "But doctor...I am Pagliacci.”*

-Watchmen, Alan Moore

There are lots of themes that can create a whole range of different atmospheres. Some can meld well with the WM, some can’t without a lot of work, but here are a few that can be made to work instantly.

* Alice and wonderland - Strange/Uncanny/Happy/Dark/Silly/Fantastical
* Wild West - Lonely/Gritty/Tense
* Grimm’s Fairy Tales - Strange/Dark/Silly/Fantastical/Scary
* Classic D&D
* Sci-Fi

## Drawing the Line.

Stephen Lumpkins West Marches is grim dark with an overpowering feeling of strange and otherness. This works incredibly well for his WM however it might not be for you or your players. Having a NPC go to a witch to get a potion to turn them into a bear is normal for D&D, but having them get the potion so they can mate with a bear is a whole other kettle of fish. If you do decide to go with grim dark and strange keep your players in mind don't try to creep them out for its own sake, use the uncanny and the weird to explore their characters and the world. If you know for a fact that a player has had close experience with something traumatic for example or anything that might upset the player rather than the character do not include it. However much you want the wounded wretch to be in your game if she is not appropriate for the players you have, don't place her in the world. At the end of the session if your player haven't enjoyed or been compelled by the game because you went too far, then you need to change that for next time. Grim Dark and strange is not for everyone and it is certainly not the safest choice. Our suggestion would be ask your players in private to give you a line, one that you will not cross so that you know how far you can go with the weird and wicked. It may also help to get a small list of common phobias checked so as not to inadvertently freak out one of you players. Things like slugs and snails or spider are the sorts of things that some people feel ill or panicked even hearing described so if you have a player with phobia best just to not include whatever it is.