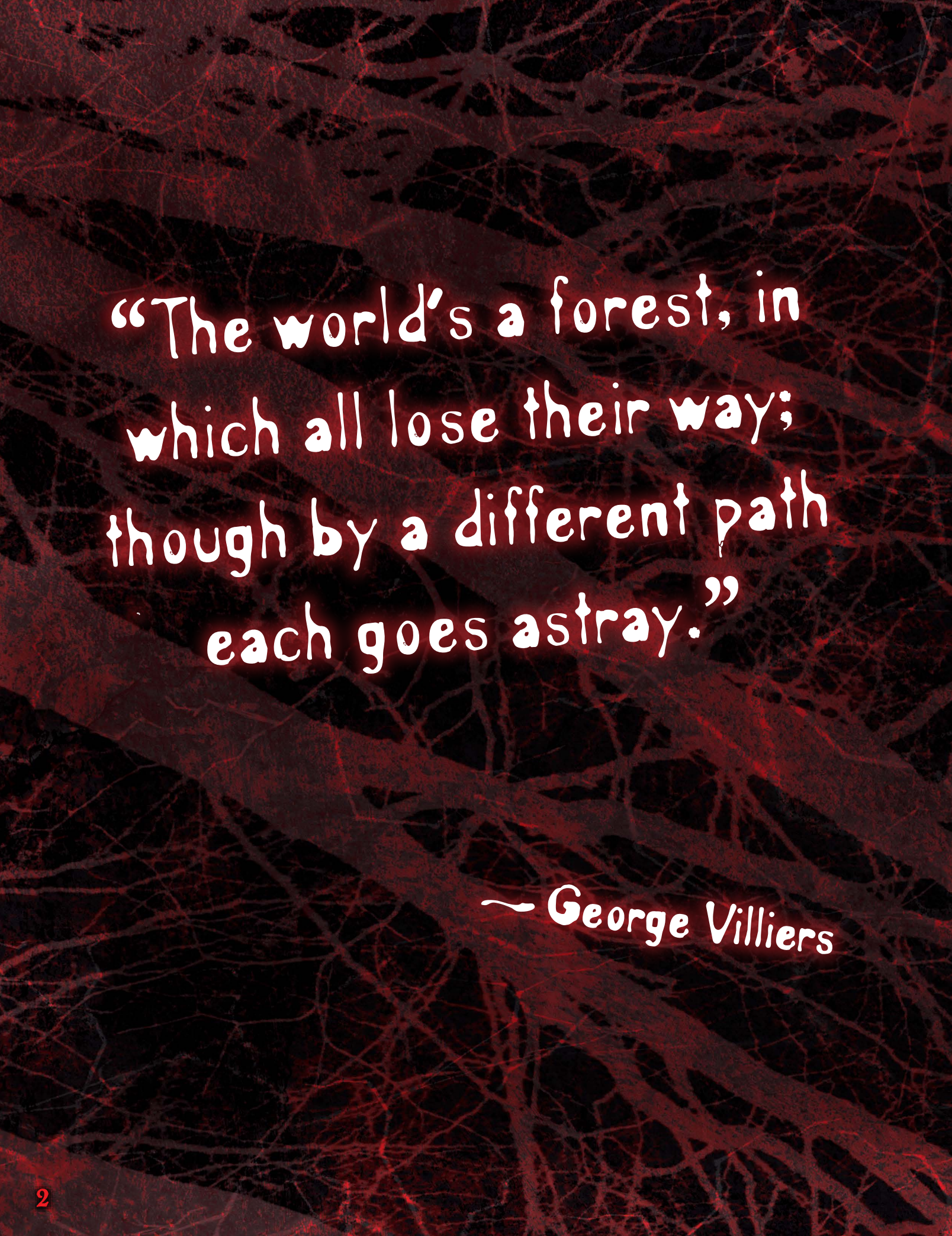


ENTERING THE WOODS

DARKEST SYSTEM INFORMATION
FOR PLAYERS



“The world’s a forest, in
which all lose their way;
though by a different path
each goes astray.”

— George Villiers

INTRODUCTION

You have this guide because you're about to undertake the task of entering the Darkest Woods. It isn't going to be easy, but it is going to be fun.

The GM has a guide of their own. However, you will get to discover those secrets for yourself through exploration and investigation. This guide, then, is just going to help you ready your character and introduce you to the Darkest Wood's idiosyncratic mechanics. You see, the woods are so vast and so all-encompassing that it has its own system for handling task resolution, combat, and everything else that comes up in the game. We call this the **Darkest System**. When you read this guide, you'll also learn about the **Darkest Die** that you roll with each action, which dictates the escalating actions of the house itself. You'll learn about the ever-increasing **Dooms** that might begin to weigh you down, but the crux of it is that you'll choose to carry that burden.

MORE STORY THAN MECHANICS

The **Darkest System** is fairly simple, so that at no time will it get in the way. Roll some dice and add your **Rating**. That's how you do everything. Except that in truth, even that simple mechanic isn't really the crux of the experience. Perhaps more than in many other games, the focus is on things that happen to and can affect the characters without mechanics.

The Darkest Woods is about character, not character sheets. Go in with an open mind, a willingness to go along with the mood, and be ready to answer questions about your character that you've maybe never considered before. Characters that survive The Darkest Woods come out deeper and richer. But some don't come out at all.

Get into the spirit of things. This is a horror-themed adventure, heavy on mood and atmosphere. You'll have more fun if you aren't resistant to these things, and you'll help everyone else have a better time if you do as well.

THE DARKEST SYSTEM

Rather than being designed for a specific game system, the Darkest Woods has its own internal system called the Darkest System. The Darkest System is easy to use and understand, though likely quite different from the system(s) you use most of the time. This is intentional. Because the Darkest Woods experience isn't about stats and numbers, it's about mood and story. The characters will almost certainly leave the woods with some permanent changes that are going to affect any ongoing campaigns.

The Darkest System is identical to what was referred to as the House System in the Darkest House. If you already know how that works, you can probably skip this whole chapter until you need to reference it.

Some gamers might balk at how simple the system is. They want more granularity and robust options in their game. I understand. But the Darkest System does two things:

1. It allows both players and GM to really focus on the story and the mood.
2. It tells the players in a very overt way, "Things are different here." It makes that statement in a language all players will understand, in a tone they will all hear: via game mechanics that govern how their character works. Thus, if the game's mechanics are the laws of physics for your game, the laws of physics work differently in the Darkest Woods.

I know many of you will say, "I don't want to change. My group likes the system we're used to." And if that's your desire, well, okay. Games are meant to be enjoyed and you should do what you want. Use your system as normal. But all the inhabitants and challenges in this product have Darkest System Ratings. The great thing is, the rules for conversion work both ways. The simple stats you'll get in the Darkest Woods will be enough for you to convert to your group's favorite game system.

Thus, your 5e characters can tromp around in the Darkest Woods using the stats they're used to, and the challenges they face will have familiar resolution mechanics. And you can still convert PCs and NPCs from other campaigns into the Darkest Woods using the simple conversion methods and then into your current system, using the Darkest System as a sort of "Rosetta Stone" of game mechanics.

If this is the case, the GM should figure a way to at least incorporate the **Darkest Die** (page 15) and characters acquiring **Dooms** (page 17) into their system of choice.

THE HOUSE SYSTEM

Those familiar with the Darkest House will note that the Darkest System is the same as the House System. We just changed the name because calling the system in the woods the "House System" seemed wrong. Likewise, the "House Die" became the Darkest Die.

EVERYTHING HAS A RATING

Imagine everything in the world was rated on a scale of 1 to 10. 1 is the worst, and 10 is the best. The worst door in the world is maybe a light curtain, while the best door in the world is a titanium vault door. All other doors fall somewhere in between, so that an interior door you have in your house is a 3, while an exterior door on your house is probably more like a 5. A really sturdy iron door might be an 8.

And when I say everything, I mean everything. Not just objects but actions, characters, creatures, and entities.

Usually, if an object has a Rating, that Rating is used to determine the difficulty of an action. In other words, the difficulty of doing something to the object is its Rating. If you're trying to break something with your hands, breaking a piece of dry spaghetti is a Rating 1, while breaking a vault door is a Rating 10. In this case, you're not really rating the objects, you're rating the action of breaking them, and judging how hard it would be. A lock with a Rating of 5 is harder to pick (or jimmy, or force) than a lock with a Rating of 3. The object determines the Rating of a task involved in overcoming it.

And of course, creatures, inhabitants, and entities in the woods have Ratings too. When engaging with creatures, inhabitants, and entities in the woods, their Ratings determine the Rating of the task involved in opposing them. Attacking a foe with a Rating of 3 is a Rating 3 task.

In general, higher-rated characters are more likely to succeed, but higher-rated tasks are harder to accomplish.

The GM will provide the Ratings of the NPCs and the things in the game. You just need to worry about your Rating.



CHARACTER RATINGS

Here's where the conversion part of all of this comes in. Because you can insert existing characters into the Darkest System, and if they enter the Darkest Woods, you should.

Most RPG systems have some kind of ability scores, various skill scores, offensive and defensive values, and so on. As mentioned earlier, the Darkest System simplifies all of that into a single Rating, on a scale of 1 to 10.

Fortunately, many games already have a numerical rating in the form of levels or ranks or what have you. This is handy because you can compare the character's level to the maximum level attainable to figure out where they might fall on a 1-10 rating scale. So if your system rates characters on a scale of 1 to 20 levels, just cut the level in half and you have the Rating.

The following chart can help with this process. If the original system has numerical levels or tiers, use the most appropriate column to approximate this level to a Darkest System Rating. If the original system has numerical skill ratings but not levels (or anything similar to levels), take the general average of the character's skill scores on the scale similar to one of the columns to approximate a Darkest System Rating. So, if the system has percentile scores for skills, take a general average of the truly useful skills and look at the 1-100 column to get an approximate Rating.

CHARACTER RATING CONVERSION TABLE

Darkest System	1-20	1-4	1-6	1-100
1	1-2	1	1	1-10
2	3-4	1	2	11-20
3	5-6	2	2	21-30
4	7-8	2	3	31-40
5	9-10	2	3	41-50
6	11-12	3	4	51-60
7	13-14	3	4	61-70
8	15-16	3	5	71-80
9	17-18	4	5	81-90
10	19-20	4	6	91-100

If the original system uses points of some kind to build a character, use the number of points a player would need to build the current character and compare it to the number of starting points and a maximum (or a high but realistic number). For example, if characters start with 150 points, and could get as high as, say, 500 points, but the character in question was probably built with about 200 points (about 40% of 500), we would call that a Rating of 3 or 4.

No matter what system you're using, if you're not sure which number to use between two different conversion results, use the lower one. When in doubt, round down, not up.

If the original system doesn't have anything like these numerical values, you'll have to just approximate like you would with anything else. On a scale of 1 to 10, where does the character fall in terms of ability, skill, prowess, toughness, and so on? If you're still unsure, make them Rating 4 and just keep going.

All of this requires a hefty dose of attention and logic. Because evaluating Call of Cthulhu characters by comparing them to all characters in that game and evaluating all 5e characters by comparing them to all characters in that game are two very different processes. The toughest Call of Cthulhu character is likely not the equivalent of even a moderately tough 5e character. And yet, a really tough 5e character is not the equivalent of a moderately tough Champions character.

So, sometimes you'll want to compare the character to the broad range of the world they come from. A highly skilled cybernetic-enhanced street samurai from Shadowrun might be the equivalent of a vampire from Vampire, but exist in a very different context than a Gumshoe investigator (on one end of the spectrum) or a Mutants and Masterminds character (on the other end).

Consider these rules of thumb:

1. If the character is basically a "real world" human, or very close, their maximum Rating is 4.
2. If the character is basically a superhero or the equivalent, their minimum Rating is 5.
3. If the character is a heroic fantasy character, an enhanced science-fiction character, or has any sort of paranormal abilities, their Rating can be anywhere from 1 to 10.
4. No matter what system you're using, if you're not sure which number to use between two different conversion results, use the lower one. When in doubt, round down, not up.

SMALL MODIFICATIONS

Now, a single Rating might not fully model a character. A character might be Rating 3, but they're so good at stealth that they're a Rating 4 when sneaking quietly. A character who has vast mental powers but is relatively frail might be Rating 5, but only a Rating 4 when it comes to physical activities. Feel free to make as many such exceptions like this as it seems like the character needs, but you'll rarely want to give them an adjusted Rating that is more than one away from their main Rating.

WHAT ABOUT MY STUFF?

A sword is a sword is a sword. A laser pistol is a laser pistol is . . . you get the idea. A character entering the Darkest Woods brings whatever they have with them at the time.

Armor and defensive equipment can modify a character's defense Rating or confer Boons (page 16) to defense rolls. In the case of a physical attack, the target's Rating can be increased by armor: +1 for light armor like leather or something that offers only partial covering, or +2 for most other armors.

They might find a way to make use of some lock picks, a bag of tools, or a handheld scanner, but that's really all narratively driven. This character conversion is much more interested in the character, not their belongings. In the end, the weapon doesn't matter as much as the warrior wielding it.

Do keep in mind that there's no contact with areas outside the Darkest Woods, so radios, communicators, cellphones, netlinks, etc. don't work. In fact, they are pretty dangerous.

WHAT ABOUT ALL MY SPELLS, MAGIC ITEMS, AND SPECIAL ABILITIES?

At the discretion of the GM, abilities, spells, and magic items may be represented in the Darkest System mechanically and/or narratively. Any ability that allows a character to do something special, like fly, turn invisible, see through barriers, or control minds, works just as it usually would. Those kinds of things are more narrative than mechanical.

Some special abilities may increase a character's specific Rating. For example, a character may have a supernatural defense acting as quasi-mental armor, increasing their Rating by 1 or 2 when avoiding mental attacks or shock.

Any ability that makes a task easier is a **Boon** (page 16). So if you have a strength-enhancing ring and you try to tip over a heavy bookcase, you have a Boon on that action.

Abilities that inflict damage or unwanted conditions on an opponent are handled like any other attack. In the Darkest System, a character rolls to affect a target or targets just like they would a typical attack—regardless of their original system's having the defender roll saving throws, resistance, or what have you.

If spells or special abilities normally have some limitation on usage, such as "Use three times per day," they keep that limitation. If they have a cost in terms of stats, power points, or something of that kind, either just bring those points (or whatever) over to the Darkest System or simply assign them a reasonable number of uses. If they cost the user something in terms of stamina or mental well-being, treat the cost as a **minor wound** (page 19).

You're going to be doing a lot of adjudication here. Remember that this is a narrative conversion more than a mechanical one. Narratively, the character should be able to do what they could do before, and their powers should work like they did before (unless the woods alter them—we'll get to that later, too). Do what seems reasonable at the time and don't dwell on it too long. In a narrative conversion, the overall feel is far more important than the particulars.

You might be tempted to grant someone a modification to their Rating rather than giving them a Boon. Changes to a character's Rating should only come when you are initially converting the character. Circumstances should always result in **Boons or Banes** (page 16).

OKAY, BUT WHAT ABOUT HIT POINTS, ATTRIBUTES, SAN SCORE, SPEED, MOVES . . .

Obviously, every game system is going to have its own way of doing things, but the Darkest System already tracks how you make **attacks** (page 24), how you suffer **damage** (page 19)—both physical and mental—how you **resolve tasks** (page 5), and so forth, so any mechanics dealing with such things don't need to be brought over. It means you don't need health or hit points, Armor Class, and a lot of other things that the original system uses.

If something happens that is stat-related or task-resolution related (including combat), use the Darkest System.

MONEY

Some characters in some rules systems won't care about money. Others will care about it a lot. In the Darkest Woods, you won't find any currency, but the value of important things is given in dollars should the PCs try to loot the place. In another system, 1 dollar might equal 1 silver piece, 1 gold piece, 1 credit, .83 Euros, or whatever you want.

LANGUAGE

All characters can understand all languages and can be understood in the Darkest Woods. Don't worry what language anyone speaks or what language the journal pages, letters, and other writings found in the woods are written in.

PC RATINGS AND THE DARKEST WOODS

If the PCs are mostly Rating 1 or 2, they should be prepared to move stealthily through the Darkest Woods and run when most of the dangers reveal themselves.

PCs of Rating 3 to 6 will be greatly challenged in the woods, but stand a decent chance to make it out alive.

PCs of Rating 7 or higher are powerful enough to take on the Darkest Woods head-on.

CONVERTING CHARACTERS BACK

Once the PCs leave the Darkest Woods, you'll want to convert them back to your system of choice. More than likely, players can just pull out their old character sheets. The only things that might have changed would be:

1. Character has wounds. While you can try to convert this to hit points, stress, or whatever damage mechanic the game has, it might be easiest to just say that the character should rest a week or so to recover from the whole harrowing experience.
2. Character has some kind of lingering curse, trauma, or similar affliction—including the effects of Dooms—upon leaving the woods. These are very likely more narrative than mechanical. Convert them to your system if need be, but the effects should be more meaningful to the story than to a character's stats.
3. Character gear has changed. Maybe they lost some things, or used some expendable supplies. Just cross them off the original character sheet. Simple. And if they gained some things, like treasures or whatnot, add those to the character's original sheet. Most of the magical treasures in the Darkest Woods were designed so that they don't really have mechanical effects, but instead narrative ones. There are a few that add a Boon, and this should just be converted to some minor bonus (+1 on a d20, for example).
4. Characters gained experience. If your game uses some kind of experience system to track character advancement, consider escaping the Darkest Woods to be a major accomplishment. Advancement toward the next level, rank, tier, etc. (if applicable) should be significant. If characters advance by improving their skills or increasing abilities in some other measurement, this advancement should also be significant. Let the characters (and the players) be proud of what they have survived.

HOW ABOUT AN EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CONVERSION?

Let's take a Cypher System character and convert them. We'll use Tacha, a Swift Explorer who Works Miracles. If you're not familiar with the Cypher System, that means pretty much just what it sounds like—she's swift, she's capable, and she can miraculously heal people. Tacha is tier 2 (out of 6). She comes from a modern fantasy setting.

Right off the bat, we look at the 1–6 column of the **Character Rating Conversion Table** (page 6) and see that as a tier 2 character she's either Rating 2 or 3. Let's start with Rating 2.

Now let's see if there are things we need to know other than her Rating (we certainly expect that answer to be yes). Her Might and Intellect Pools are mostly in the normal range (nothing extremely high or low) so we'll ignore those. She's Swift, giving her better initiative and running abilities, and it's right there in her character sentence, so we'll give her a Rating of 3 for all things having to do with speed. Further, as an Explorer, she's trained in swimming and climbing. We'll give her a Rating of 3 for both of those things as well. She's also skilled in geography, and while she certainly doesn't have any chance of knowing the geography of the mysterious Darkest Woods to begin with, that skill might enable her to better understand the woods as she gets to know it, or find her way back to a place she's already visited. We give her a Rating of 3 for geography as well.

Tacha has some special defensive and offensive abilities that make her better at combat. Rather than figure in all these rather involved abilities, we'll just lump them all together and say she's a Rating 3 for attacks and defense. She also wears **light armor** (page 7), so we'll give her Rating 3 for resisting damage too.

She can heal people with her touch and alleviate unwanted conditions such as diseases. Since the Darkest System is all about Ratings and—hey, what do you know—**wounds and conditions** (page 19) have Ratings just like characters do, we'll say that for every wound or unwanted effect that is on a creature, Tacha can use her **action** (page 13) to try to get rid of it. She'll just make a roll, using her Rating and the Rating of the wound or effect. These things normally cost her Intellect points to use, but that's a stat we're not converting, so instead, we'll say she can only try to use her power once per wound or effect. That puts a nice manageable limit on it without having to track points or anything.

Tacha's got a couple of special items: one that allows her to see through solid matter for a limited time and one that creates an area with reduced friction, making it really slippery. We'll just keep those as-is, and refer to the descriptions of those items when we need them, as neither involves game mechanics much—they're both actually pretty narrative.

So now we have Tacha, who is Rating 2; Rating 3 for swimming, climbing, swiftness, attacks, defense, and resisting damage. She can heal and remove unwanted conditions. Done.

SKILLS	1	2	3	4	5	6
Initiative						
Balance						
Running						
Swimming						
Climbing						
Geography						

SKILLS	1	2	3	4	5	6
Initiative						
Balance						
Running						
Swimming						
Climbing						
Geography						

HOW ABOUT ANOTHER EXAMPLE OR TWO?

This time, we'll use Arduk, a dwarf fighter from 5e. He's 5th level. He comes from a traditional fantasy setting.

Level 5 in a system that goes from 1 to 20 converts to a Rating 3. That's our baseline.

His Constitution score suggests that like lots of dwarves, he's tough. We'll give him Rating 4 for resisting wounds. He's also got low Dexterity and very low Charisma, so we'll say he's only Rating 2 when it comes to things requiring nimble hands or acrobatics, as well as anything having to do with interacting with others. His skills suggest he should also be Rating 4 for perception and athletics. (There are some very minor bonuses he has to fairly inconsequential skills, so we're going to ignore those—they're all just wrapped up in him being Rating 3, basically.)

In addition to his high Constitution (which, as mentioned earlier, gives him a Rating 4 for resisting wounds), Arduk wears **plate armor** (page 7), which adds 2 more to his Rating. It means that for **resisting wounds** (page 20) he's actually Rating 6 (wow!).

He's got some abilities that give him a bonus to his Armor Class (that's defensive) and add to some combat maneuvers, so like with Tacha before, we'll lump all these together and decide he's Rating 4 for attacks and defense. He can see in the dark, too, but that doesn't require any conversion. It just works the same. Also, he's got a shield and his warhammer is magical, so both attacks and defense will get a **Boon** (page 16) when the player rolls.

All in all, Arduk is Rating 3; Rating 2 for anything involving dexterity or charm; Rating 4 for perception, athletics, attacks, and defense (and attacks and defense have a Boon); and Rating 6 for resisting damage. Done.

NAME *Arduk*

GENERAL TRAITS

DOOM ☐ OVERALL RATING **3**

WOUNDS

MODIFIED RATINGS

Resisting Wounds: 6 *Athletics: 4*
Dexterity: 2
Charm: 2 *Attacks: 4*
Perception: 4 *Defense: 4*

SPECIAL ABILITIES

See in the dark

BOONS/BANES IN EFFECT

Shield: defense Boon
Magical warhammer: attack Boon

EQUIPMENT

Now, what about Arduk's companion, Stevin, a 5th-level half-elf sorcerer?

Well, looking at the **Character Rating Conversion Table** (page 6), they also have a baseline Rating of 3. They're great at interacting with people (20 Charisma and similarly high scores in related skills). We'll say they have a Rating of 4 for social actions. They've also got a +7 stealth score, so let's give them Rating 4 for that as well. Of course, their hit points and physical attacks are fairly low, so we probably should make them Rating 2 when resisting damage and avoiding physical attacks.

As a sorcerer, they've got spells and spell slots. Regarding spell slots, we should just use the system as-is. They can cast each level's spells in the Darkest System as often as they could in 5e. But let's go through them all and see how the Darkest System would handle them.

- ★ **Witch bolt:** This is a magical attack that uses the base Rating of 3 when cast. If it hits, Stevin can continue to use their following actions to continue inflicting the same damage.
- ★ **Magic missile:** This is a magical attack (using their Rating of 3) that doesn't miss. They just roll the damage die against the target when it's cast.
- ★ **Shield:** Since this is a very short-lived but potent defense, I would say Stevin gets a Boon to defense rolls and their Rating is increased by 1 on the turn it's cast.
- ★ **Invisibility:** Works as written.
- ★ **Levitate:** Works as written.
- ★ **Fireball:** This is an attack (using their Rating 3) that can affect a bunch of targets in an area. Since this is a potent attack spell, I'd also say that the attack and damage rolls get a Boon.
- ★ **Dispel magic:** Casting this is a significant **action** (page 13) and is resolved as a task using their Rating and the Rating of the magic they're trying to dispel.

So that's Stevin: Rating 3, Rating 2 for resisting damage and evading physical attacks, Rating 4 for social tasks and stealth. And they can cast their listed spells as described. Done.

NAME Stevin

GENERAL TRAITS

DOOM ☐ **OVERALL RATING** 3

WOUNDS

MODIFIED RATINGS

Social Interactions: 4
Stealth: 4
Resisting Damage: 2
Evading Physical Attacks: 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Witch Bolt, Magic Missile
Shield: Boon to defense, plus defense rating increased by 1 for 1 turn
Invisibility, Levitate, Fireball
Dispel Magic: significant action

BOONS/BANES IN EFFECT

Shield: defense Boon
Fireball spell: attack and damage gets a Boon

EQUIPMENT



TAKING ACTIONS AND ROLLING DICE

Whenever PCs do anything significant where the outcome is in question—attack with a knife, shoot a gun, persuade an NPC to help, try to bash down a door, leap over a pit, figure out the historical significance of an item—the action is resolved with a roll.

To resolve an action, the player rolls two six-sided dice (2d6), adds the dice together, and then adds their character's Rating. In order to succeed, they need to beat the given target number, which is always 7 plus the Rating of the task.

Let's look at an example: let's say a task has a Rating of 3, which means the target number is 10. If the PC has a Rating of 3, then they need to roll a 7 or higher on their 2d6 roll in order to succeed. This means the character—or in fact, any character facing a challenge with a Rating equal to their own—has just over a 50% chance to succeed. If the same character tries something with a Rating of 5, the target number is 12 and they're still just adding their Rating (in this case 3). So now they need to roll a 9 or higher. That's a much lower chance to succeed (just over 25%, actually).

If a task is rated 6 or more above a character's Rating, it is impossible. For example, if the aforementioned Rating 3 character attempts a task with a Rating of 9, they need to reach 16 ($9 + 7$), and that would mean they would need to roll a 13 on 2d6, which isn't possible. The player might have a chance if they called upon the woods for help and used a **Darkest Die** (page 15), but they should know that the task would normally be impossible before they even try.

Likewise, any task rated 6 or more lower than the character is impossible to fail. A Rating 9 character attempting a Rating 3 task can't fail, because the lowest they can possibly roll is a 2. The idea here is that characters can routinely handle tasks well below them in Rating, but some tasks are too difficult for them to even have a chance of success.

THE PLAYER ALWAYS ROLLS

In the Darkest System, players do all the dice rolling. That means that when a player wants to affect an object or an NPC (pick a lock, punch an enemy, sneak past a monster), they roll with the target number determined by the Rating of the object or the NPC.

If something is trying to affect a PC, the player also rolls. So if a foe casts a spell on a PC, attacks them physically, or tries to fool them with an illusion, the GM doesn't roll to see if the NPC succeeds. The player rolls to see if the PC resists, dodges, or sees through the deception. The PC is always the active character, never the passive one. If the PC leaps over a pit, the player rolls for the jump, but if a boulder tumbles down the hill, the player rolls to get out of the way.

This is important because of the **Darkest Die** (page 15) mechanic. The GM should never roll to determine the actions of the woods—the players should. The players in the Darkest Woods need to engineer their own doom.

Of course, that means that if an NPC has a **Boon** (page 16) affecting their action, the player rolls as if the PC has a Bane. Likewise, if a NPC has a Bane affecting their action directed against a PC, the player rolls for their character with an additional die as a Boon.

This method of playing also leaves the GM to focus more on the story.

Should two NPCs act against each other, or an NPC attempt an action not opposed by a PC, simply look at the NPC Ratings. Highest Rating always succeeds. A Rating 7 NPC always breaks open a barrier with a Rating of lower than 7. Ties (equal Ratings) always go to the defender (the one not initiating the attack or action).

THE DARKEST DIE

But wait. Something in the woods is always watching. The woods' presence is always felt. It cannot be ignored. This means that every time a player rolls the dice for an action (not damage), they also roll an additional, special die. This is called the Darkest Die. If the Darkest Die is the highest die rolled, regardless of whether the character succeeds, the woods acts just as if the character had made a transgression. It's definitely not good.

Usually, the Darkest Die has no effect on whether or not the character succeeds. It only determines if the woods act.

There is one exception, however. If a character is desperate, they can “call upon the woods” for aid, either consciously or subconsciously. If a character does this, the Darkest Die is added to their normal result. There is no limit to how many times a player can do this, but when they use this option, two things happen.

1. There's a transgression event. It's bad.
2. The character gains a **Doom** (page 17). Dooms always come back to haunt a character.

The two regular dice can be the same color or not, size or not, etc., but the Darkest Die should be significantly different from the other dice. The most obvious choice would be to roll a die darker in color for the Darkest Die, like a dark blue or a black.



BOONS AND BANES

Sometimes, circumstances make accomplishing things easier. Sometimes, they make them harder. These circumstances are called Boons and Banes, respectively.

Boons can come from getting help from a friend, having a particularly good tool, fighting a distracted opponent, and so on. Anything that helps or makes things easier for the PC to succeed is a Boon. Having a Boon means you roll an additional d6 and discard the lowest die.

Banes are anything that makes actions or tasks more difficult, like thick fog, a serious injury, a creature clinging to your arm, and so on. A Bane means you roll an additional d6 and discard the highest roll.

The Boon or Bane die doesn't need to be distinguishable from the normal dice, but it does need to be distinct from the Darkest Die.

You never roll more than three dice (not counting the Darkest Die) when taking an action. Thus, multiple Boons or Banes do not give more than one additional die. But, it's still important to keep track of how many Boons and Banes a character has for any given action, because Boons and Banes cancel out. If a character faces a Bane due to circumstances, but wields a sword that grants a Boon, the player just rolls their regular 2d6 when attacking with the sword. However, if in addition to the Boon from the sword, the character has a Boon from a magic spell, the player rolls an additional die, because the Bane cancels only one of the two Boons that is affecting them.

As an example, consider **Arduk and his magical warhammer** (page 11). Let's say he has a Boon for all attacks. If he is fighting in thick fog, it's hard to see, so he also has a Bane. The Boon and the Bane cancel out, meaning he'll roll 2d6 and the Darkest Die to attack in this scenario.

If Arduk has a magic spell cast upon him to improve his attack with that warhammer, he now has two Boons. Boons do not stack so this doesn't have any additional effect normally, but when he is in thick fog (or affected by any other type of Bane), he still has a Boon, because the Bane cancels one of the Boons, but not both. So he rolls an additional d6 and discards the lowest result.

Because the players always roll, that means that Boons and Banes applied to NPC actions reflect that the player rolls an additional die when resisting the NPC's action. However, in this case, an NPC Boon means the player rolls the extra die and discards the highest die, because the NPC has an advantage. An NPC Boon is essentially a PC Bane. Similarly, an NPC with a Bane means the player discards the lowest die, acting just like a Boon. Since Boons and Banes cancel each other out, that means that if an NPC with a Boon (a PC Bane) acts against a player with a Boon, they cancel out.

While it might be tempting to grant someone a modification to their Rating rather than giving them an extra die and discarding the high or low roll, circumstances should always result in Boons or Banes. Changes to Rating should typically be made only when you are initially creating/converting the character.

DOOMS

When a character gains a Doom, the GM should make a clear and obvious note of it. If possible, the player should show their ongoing Doom tally, so that all can see it. The feeling of increasing danger as Doom tallies rise should become palpable during the game.

When a wounded character falls **unconscious** (page 22) and then checks to see if they eventually **die from a wound** (page 22), they must subtract their Doom total from the roll. Fortunately, each time the character's Doom tally affects them in this way, they can remove one Doom from their total.

Players can also choose to lower their character's Doom total by 1 by spending a Doom. In this situation, they give the GM permission to do something terrible.

Finally, characters leaving the woods with Dooks (see below) are not in the clear.

Spending a Doom

Players can choose to lower their PC's Doom total by 1, essentially "spending a Doom," as it were. In this situation, they give the GM "permission" to do something terrible. This could be a horrific vision (that inflicts a mental wound), an attack by a ghost or other inhabitant of the woods, a vital piece of equipment breaking at an inopportune time, some beneficial magical effect ending early or malfunctioning, and so on.

The only guidelines are: it must be significant, bad for the character, and the GM can "inflict" this upon the character or characters whenever they wish. In other words, the GM doesn't need to use the spent Doom right then. The GM can even accumulate a few of them for some truly awful set of circumstances to befall the group.

Leaving the Woods with Dooks

Use the following table to find the appropriate lasting Doom effect, or make up something new that is of equal significance. These Doom effects are cumulative, so someone with a lingering haunting might also have horrific dreams. Once a Doom effect is determined, a character loses all their Dooks.

LASTING DOOM EFFECTS

Dooks	Effect
1-2	Terrible nightmares and night terrors
3-4	A lingering haunting, with some spirit or spirits plaguing the character's life until they are somehow exorcised
5-6	A physical malady, such as a limp that impedes quick movement, a back injury that flares up at the worst times, or a prominent—perhaps even animate—and disturbing scar; OR a mental malady, such as post-traumatic stress syndrome that incapacitates in moments of fear, a terrible paranoia, or a serious and lengthy bout of depression
7	A wasting disease that slowly but inexorably rots and withers the character's body into a horrific, almost impossible living corpse (and eventually kills them). Only serious and prolonged medical attention can save them, and there will likely be lasting effects even after that.

EVERYTHING IN TURN

When PCs act, if time matters, they all act in turn, along with the NPCs. The Darkest Woods area descriptions state whether the NPC acts first. Otherwise, assume the PCs act first. In this case, on their turn, the characters can each perform one action—make an attack, move about 30 feet (10 meters), use a special power, grab an item, hide behind a bush, and so on. Anything that could be done in about 10 seconds or so can be done on a turn, but don't worry about keeping careful track of time. Just make sure everyone gets a turn.

TASK RESOLUTION SUMMARY

When a character attempts any task, they compare their Rating with the task Rating.

1. If the task's Rating is 6 or more lower than the character's Rating, they automatically succeed.
2. If the task's Rating is 6 or more higher than the character's Rating, they automatically fail.
3. In all other cases, the player rolls 2d6 and adds their Rating. Their goal is to roll equal to or above 7 plus the Rating of the task, as determined by their opponent or the obstacle they are attempting to overcome.
4. If a character has a **Boon or a Bane** (page 16), they roll an additional die (so 3d6 in total). If the Boon is in effect, they use the two highest rolls. If a Bane is in effect, they use the two lowest rolls.
5. Anytime dice are rolled for an action, the **Darkest Die** (page 15) must be rolled. The Darkest Die has no effect on success or failure, but if the Darkest Die is higher than either of the other dice, regardless of any other outcome, **the woods acts** (page <?>).

So in effect, a character always rolls three dice (with the exception of damage rolls), or four if there is a Boon or Bane in effect.



THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO GET HURT

Rating even determines health and toughness, both mentally and physically. Because of the woods' nature, the Darkest System distinguishes between **physical harm** (page 20) and **mental harm** (page 21). Mental harm could be spiritual, emotional, or intellectual in the same way that physical harm could be a bleeding wound, a concussion, or a broken bone. It's all grouped together and abstracted.

That said, even though all damage is abstracted mechanically, narratively the GM is encouraged to describe the wounds—physical and mental—with as much detail as seems appropriate.

CALCULATING DAMAGE

To calculate damage, you roll 1d6. This is called the damage die. You add the attack's Rating to the result. Then, you subtract the Rating of the victim, with **modifications** (page 7).

If the result is a positive number, the victim suffers a wound with a Rating equal to the result.

If the result is 0 or less, the victim suffers a scratch, a glancing blow, a graze, or something similar—but this has no mechanical effect. They're more or less unharmed.

Thus, each wound has a Rating:
 $1d6 + \text{attack Rating} - \text{defense Rating}$.

You never roll the Darkest Die when rolling damage, but damage can have a Boon or a Bane.

Because players always roll the dice, this means that not only does a player roll the damage die when they make a successful attack, they also roll the damage die when they fail to dodge or resist an attack made against them.

In this case, they roll a damage die, add their foe's attack Rating, and then subtract their own Rating for resisting attacks to see if they get hurt.

Again, in the Darkest Woods, players bring about their own downfall.

Mental damage works exactly the same way. Obviously, such wounds aren't about being scratched or hurt, but being affected by shock, fear, trauma, or instability (and eventually, unconsciousness or even catatonia).





PHYSICAL DAMAGE

When a PC or NPC is struck in combat, falls from a height, is burned with fire, or anything else that would cause bodily harm, calculate physical damage.

Out of combat, there might not be an attack roll if the danger is something like a fall, choking fumes, and so on. The player just rolls the damage die and adds the attack Rating and then subtracts their own Rating to see if their character is affected. If it seems like an attack, though, such as a falling rock, treat it like an attack and confirm a hit before determining damage. Either way, the GM determines the Rating of the attack. A fire might have a Rating of 4, for example, while a particularly hot or raging fire would have a Rating of 6.

A Few Sample Ratings for Physical Dangers

Danger	Rating
Fire	4
Raging fire/lava	6
Fall	1 per 5 ft (1.5 m)
Falling heavy object	4
Falling massive object	8
Intense cold	3

Some game systems give more powerful characters the ability to withstand more damage, while others grant them the ability to avoid damage instead. (And some give them either or both.) A “tough” character’s Rating is higher for comparing to a damage die. A character skilled at dodging attacks might instead have a modifier to their Rating for defending against attacks. So you can tweak these Ratings to give the feel to which you are accustomed.

MENTAL DAMAGE

Damage to one's mind or soul is less straightforward to envision, but it's handled in exactly the same way as damage to one's body. A terrible shock, a blast of psychic energy, or a horrific experience can all inflict mental damage.

The supernatural inhabitants of the woods routinely use powers to affect and attack the minds of others. That's pretty straightforward.

Shock and horror depend on context. If the PCs come from a realistic setting where ghosts and monsters are rare, encountering the ghosts of the Cavern of Memories, for example, might be a terrible shock even though they're not dangerous. But if the characters hail from a world where spirits and the supernatural are common, the shock might be nil, except for the character who recognizes each ghost. That's going to be disturbing to any character.

The encounters presented in the Darkest Woods have shock/dismay value target numbers already provided for you; however, the values presume the PCs have some experience with the supernatural. For PCs with little to no knowledge of the supernatural, it makes sense to increase the Rating of the mental attacks related to shock/dismay, at least at first, as those characters are more likely to be affected by the experience. Even with those provided, the GM can rule whether the danger presented by the shock/dismay is appropriate to the PCs' original context.

Obviously, mental "armor" is far less common than physical **armor** (page 7), but some characters might have some kind of supernatural defense adding +1 or +2 to the character's Rating to avoid mental attacks or shock.

A Few Sample Ratings for Mental Dangers

Danger	Rating
Experiencing something creepy	2
Experiencing something terrifying	4
Witnessing a friend's death	6
Experiencing something utterly impossible	7



ACCUMULATING DAMAGE

A wounded character always has a **Bane** (page 16) for each **wound** (page 19) sustained. But remember that Banes do not stack and their effects are not cumulative. Having multiple Banes only matters when it comes to canceling the effect of one or more Boons.

Players should keep track of wounds sustained, and the Ratings of each wound. Every time a wounded character sustains a new wound, they must roll as they would with any task, against the Rating of their most grievous wound (regardless of when it was sustained). If they fail, they fall unconscious or are otherwise completely unable to act due to their injuries.

An unconscious (or similarly debilitated) character with a wound rated higher than the character must, a minute or so later, roll against the wound with the highest Rating. The player must also subtract the number of Dooms the character has gained up to that point. If they fail the roll, they bleed out and die. As a rule of thumb, the amount of time before they must make that roll should be “about a minute.” In truth, the GM should call for that roll when it feels most dramatic. And if the unconscious character receives any medical attention before that moment, they don’t need to make the roll. The unconscious character need only make this roll once, and loses 1 Doom if they survive.

Both physical and mental attacks are handled this way. However, mental wounds are tracked separately from physical wounds. Mental and physical wounds don’t relate to each other in any way. A character doesn’t die from mental injuries, but instead becomes catatonic or enters some other, equally debilitating state.

Normally, the woods brings nightmares and fitful rest to anyone who **sleeps** (page <?>) within it. To keep things simple, this doesn’t happen when a character is knocked unconscious from wounds. The woods only attack when a character is rendered unconscious in a different manner—such as from a magical effect, a drug, etc.—or chooses to go to sleep.

HEALING

Hurt characters should rest. When a character takes no actions, sits or lies down (or leans on a tree or something), and is in no immediate danger for at least a few minutes, this is considered resting. There is no limit to how many times a character can rest.

When a character rests, they roll for each wound they currently bear, with the Rating of each task equal to the Rating of that particular wound. Success means that the character recovers from that wound and can now ignore it. Failure means the wound remains, and the character cannot try to recover from that wound again by resting until 24 hours have passed. So, if a character fails to recover from a wound, they'll have to note when they can try again. Hopefully for the character's sake, this won't happen too often because not only does this increase the danger of future combats (where that wound will come into play again), it also means that's a Bane they won't soon be rid of.

Medical attention, such as aid from a character with some sort of skill and appropriate equipment like bandages, allows a wounded character to attempt to recover from a wound that they failed to heal without having to wait 24 hours. Further, the healer can use their Rating to roll to overcome the wound's Rating rather than that of the wounded character (if the wounded character is unconscious, you must use the healer's Rating).

Magical healing often just works, completely erasing one wound, usually starting with the lowest-rated wound a character has. In this case, highly advanced tech devices, such as a tissue knitter or something like that, are no different than magical healing.

The Darkest System is likely more deadly or dangerous than many systems (and perhaps less deadly than a few) because it has such a high degree of randomness. A powerful character might drop unconscious after just two hits with a bad roll. Likewise, a character might shrug off many wounds. A tough character may find the effects of one truly debilitating wound just won't ever go away. Wounds and healing are not as predictable as a linear, arithmetic progression like a hit point tally. This is intentional.

BUT THAT'S NOT HOW IT WORKED BEFORE!

While the Darkest System makes things simpler and in some ways more dangerous or difficult for the characters, it isn't the intention to take away the fun or hurt a character concept. There are many game systems out there, and unexpected things can happen when converting one to another. Your GM will have to handle this on a case-by-case basis, but remember that, for example, the Darkest System might make a character more fragile than normal, or more susceptible to harm from mental attacks, and this is intentional.



SUMMARIZING ATTACKS AND DAMAGE

PC Attacking

1. When a player makes an attack, they roll 2d6 and add their Rating. Their goal is to roll equal to or above 7 plus the Rating of the opponent. **Boons and Banes** (page 16) may mean rolling an extra die, and players must also roll the **Darkest Die** (page 15).
2. If successful, the player then rolls the **damage die** (1d6—see page 19) and adds their Rating. Then, they subtract their opponent's Rating. The result (if positive) is the Rating of the wound the NPC sustains.
3. If the wound sustained has a Rating of more than 3 above the NPC's own Rating, they die immediately. Otherwise, they die when they have sustained wounds with Ratings totaling at least 3 times the NPC's Rating.

NPC Attacking

1. When a player is attacked by an NPC, they roll 2d6 and add their Rating, hoping to roll equal to or above 7 plus the Rating of the opponent to avoid the attack. Just like before, Boons and Banes may come into play, and players must also roll the Darkest Die.
2. If not successful, the player then rolls the damage die (1d6) and subtracts their Rating. Then, they add their opponent's Rating. The result (if positive) is the Rating of the wound the PC sustains.
3. If the PC is already wounded and they sustain a new wound, the player must roll against the Rating of their most grievous wound. If they fail, they fall unconscious or are otherwise completely unable to act due to their injuries.



EXAMPLE OF ATTACKING IN PLAY

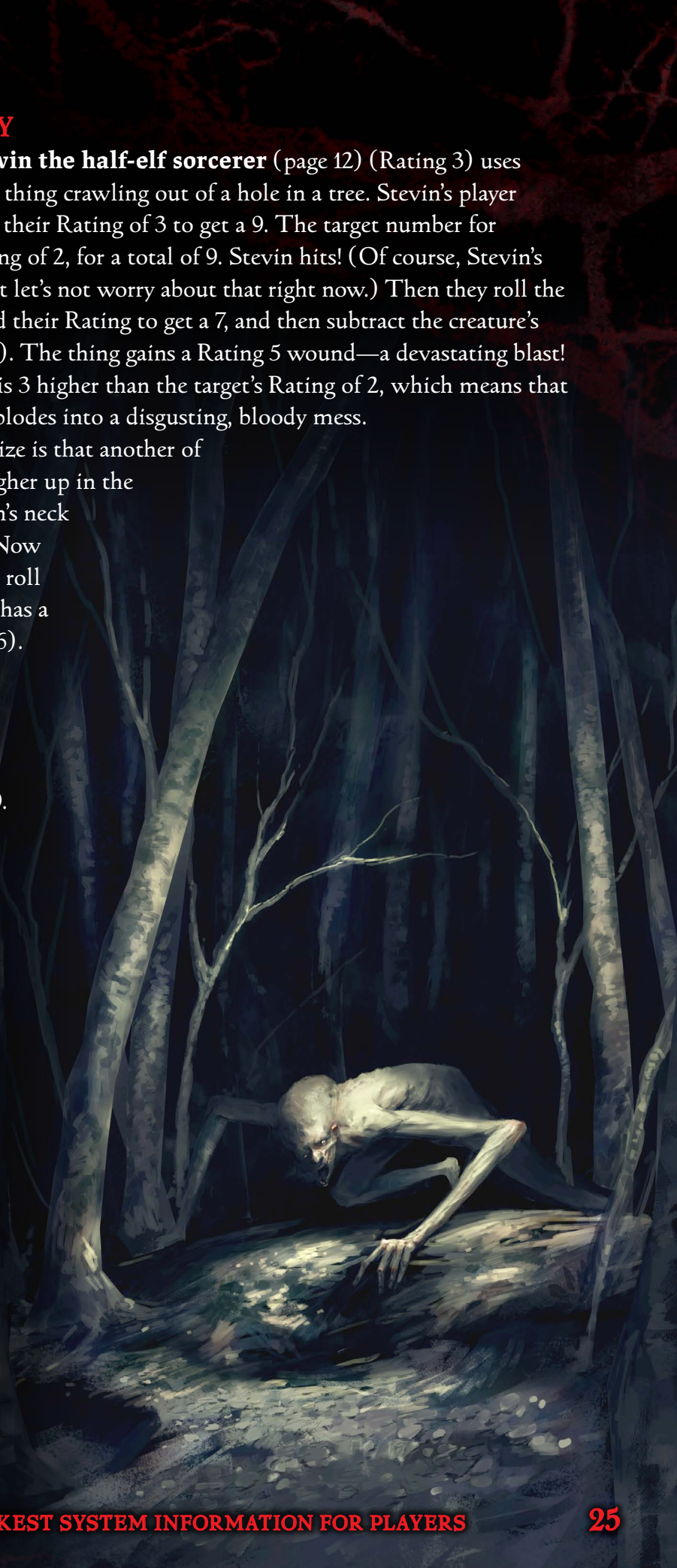
While exploring the Darkest Woods, **Stevin the half-elf sorcerer** (page 12) (Rating 3) uses a witch bolt spell to attack a horrific fleshy thing crawling out of a hole in a tree. Stevin's player **rolls 2d6** (page 13) and gets a 6. They add their Rating of 3 to get a 9. The target number for the attack is 7 plus the horrific thing's Rating of 2, for a total of 9. Stevin hits! (Of course, Stevin's player is rolling the Darkest Die as well, but let's not worry about that right now.) Then they roll the **damage die** (page 19), and get a 4, and add their Rating to get a 7, and then subtract the creature's Rating to get a 5 (4 plus 3 minus 2 equals 5). The thing gains a Rating 5 wound—a devastating blast!

So devastating, in fact, that the wound is 3 higher than the target's Rating of 2, which means that it is an automatic kill. The fleshy thing explodes into a disgusting, bloody mess.

However, what poor Stevin doesn't realize is that another of the creatures has squirmed out of a hole higher up in the tree. It attacks by dropping down on Stevin's neck with a **Boon** (page 16) from the surprise. Now Stevin's player has to roll for defense. They roll 2d6, but because the attacking fleshy thing has a Boon, the player rolls with a **Bane** (page 16). That means they roll 3d6, discarding the highest die. They roll a 4, a 1, and a 6. Discarding the 6, they get a 5 total and add their Rating of 3 to get 8. Because the creature's Rating is 2, its target number is 9.

That's not good enough to defend, so now the player must roll to determine damage. They roll 1d6, and get a 3. They add the fleshy thing's Rating of 2 and the total is 5. They're not good at resisting damage (they're a bit frail), so their defense Rating for this action is only 2. 5 minus 2 is 3, so Stevin sustains a Rating 3 wound on their neck. Ouch!

If that same creature had dropped down on the neck of Stevin's dwarven friend **Ardurk** (page 11), who's tough and wears plate armor (Rating 6 for resisting damage), he would have shrugged off the damage as nothing but a minor irritant—the creature just couldn't significantly pierce that armor.



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