

# Better Zombies

Stop pretending you like zombies in 5th Edition; nobody likes zombies in 5th Edition.

How does this unkillable, non-lethal teddy bear fit the shape of zombies we know from movies? Where's the zombie that sprints down the freeway like in *28 Days Later*? How about the zombie whose bite causes you to hide the wound so your friends don't decide to put you down like *The Walking Dead*? Hey D&D, where's our zombie headshots?

This PDF holds the solution: a new zombie stat block with modular features help our mate fill the roles we all recognize from classic horror.

## Alternate stat block

The zombie's base stats remain largely unchanged, with the exception of increasing its hit points to 24. But its traits and abilities are being replaced.

Instead of the *Undead Fortitude* trait, zombies get the *Undead Regeneration* trait.

**Undead Regeneration.** A zombie that appears dead may later rise and pursue its foes. If a zombie's hit points are reduced to zero, it falls unconscious rather than being killed outright. However, if the zombie is felled by a critical hit or has suffered radiant damage in the last hour, it perishes as normal. Otherwise, the zombie regains 1 hit point at the end of every hour thereafter until fully healed.

Instead of the regular *Slam* attack, zombies must begin with a contested *Latch On* attack, then follow up with a *Gnashing Bite*.

**Latch On.** As a special attack, the zombie tries to latch onto a target within 5 feet using the grappling rules. Instead of being grappled, the target is "latched-onto" if the zombie's check succeeds, as described below. If the check succeeds by 10 or more, the zombie immediately makes a *Gnashing Bite* attack against the target as part of the same action.

**New Condition: Latched-onto.** This alternative to the grappled condition halves the target's speed, and the zombie can't drag the target. Additionally, the subject can attempt to escape all latched-on zombies with a single grapple check. Each zombie opposes the escape attempt with its own Strength (Athletics) check, losing its grasp on the subject with a failure.

**Gnashing Bite.** Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target that the zombie is Latched-onto (see above). Hit: 3 (1d4 + 1) slashing damage and the target must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or contract the Gift of Dead Lord disease.

**New Disease: Gift of Dead Lord.** A creature that dies while infected immediately rises as a zombie with 1 hit point.



## Modular Traits

Below are a series of traits you can use to modify your zombies. For best results, apply only a single trait to each zombie and try to give different traits to each creature.

You can choose your traits manually during your session prep, or you can roll for a random trait for each zombie at the start of combat.

### AMBUSER

*Something grabs at you, seemingly from out of nowhere, the last vestiges of its magical disguise fading to reveal a zombie that was laying in ambush.*

The zombie begins the combat magically disguised as something else, like an inanimate piece of the terrain or a living creature who appears to be unconscious or bound. If it hasn't moved on any prior turn of the combat, and it succeeds on its Latch On check, the ambusher can make a Gnashing Teeth attack as part of the same action. If this follow-on attack hits, it inflicts an additional 1d4 damage.

### ASH-TONGUED

*Crumbles of ash fall from the creature's mouth, its tongue disintegrating more with each clack of its gnashing jaw.*

Damage inflicted by Gnashing Bite can't be healed until the target completes a long rest.

### BOUNDING

*The monster's legs are quivering with tension, spring-loaded by a tangle of unnatural tendons and muscle.*

The zombie can jump up to 15 feet in any direction as a bonus action. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

### FRENZIED

*The slavering creature's lips stretch, revealing a row of sharp, elongated teeth. Its neck juts forward, and it seems to be leading with its bite rather than its hands.*

The zombie can use its Gnashing Bite attack without the Latch On prerequisite. If it hits with this attack, it latches on automatically. If it misses this attack, the creature falls prone and loses all its unused movement for the turn.

D20	TRAIT	DIFFICULTY
1	Ambusher	Medium
2	Ash-Tongued	Deadly
3	Bounding	Medium
4	Frenzied	Medium
5	Brutal	Hard
6	Dread-Lit	Medium
7	Drowned	Easy
8	Empowered	Hard
9	Martial	Easy
10	Plunging	Easy
11	Pulsing	Hard
12	Reeking	Easy
13	Rushing	Easy
14	Screeching	Easy
15	Sludgy	Medium
16	Spectral	Medium
17	Spell-Stealing	Medium
18	Three-Armed	Easy
19	Tunneling	Medium
20	Wall-Crawling	Easy

### BRUTAL

*This hulking creature is swollen with physical strength, its powerful arms elongated to the point of dragging its massive knuckles along the ground.*

Double this zombie's hit points. It can make Latch On attacks at a range of 10 feet, dragging its target 5 feet toward it on a success.

### DREAD-LIT

*This creature appears as a dark patch of negative space, absorbing all sources of natural light into its blackness.*

The zombie cannot be illuminated by light from cantrips and from nonmagical light sources. While in this state, attack rolls against the zombie have disadvantage and it has advantage on Stealth checks.

### DROWNED

*This bloated zombie is covered in barnacles with seaweed is tangled in its clothes.*

The zombie has a swim speed equal to its walking speed and it has advantage on checks to use (and maintain) Latch On while it and the target are in a body of water.

## EMPOWERED

*Like lord of undeath, the zombie's fleshless skull sprouts two curling horns. Waves of dark energy flow between this zombie and its undead allies.*

Once per combat, the zombie can use its action to heal all zombies within 60 feet (including itself), for 1d6 + 2 hit points. Each affected zombie also gains advantage on its first saving throw to resist a Channel Divinity effect within the next hour.

## MARTIAL

*Despite its shambling gait, the monster's arms move with the grace it had in life, swinging a weapon through pure muscle memory.*

The zombie wields a martial weapon, preferring to attack with it using the normal weapon rules. As a reaction it takes in response to being hit by a melee attack, the zombie can "parry," adding +4 to its AC, potentially turning that hit into a miss.

D4	WEAPON	ATTACK	DAMAGE
1	Mace	+3	4 (1D6+1)
2	Longsword	+3	5 (1D8+1)
3	Pike	+3	6 (1D10+1)
4	Greataxe	+3	7 (1D12+1)

## PLUNGING

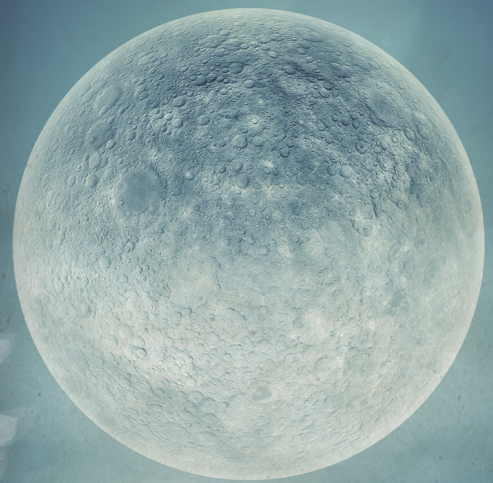
*This zombie has webbing beneath its arms and long limbs designed to absorb impact.*

The zombie begins combat in a tree, atop a building, or upon some other high perch. On its turn, the creature can use an action to leap up to 30 feet horizontally, falling onto a target below that point. Calculate falling damage for the zombie but reduce the fall distance by 30 feet for damage calculations. If the zombie has 1 or more hit points after the fall, it does not become prone and instead makes a Latch On attack against its target as part of the same action, rolling with advantage.

## PULSING

*The monster's blood can be seen pulsing and swirling beneath its bulging blisters, each filled with gritty liquid and threatening to burst.*

The first time the zombie takes piercing or slashing damage, every creature within 15 feet of it must succeed on a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d4 necrotic damage. Undead creatures are immune to this damage.



## REEKING

*As you get nearer, the monster's stench becomes palpable. The reek of it twists your innards into knots.*

A creature must succeed on a DC 6 Constitution saving throw the first time it comes within 10 feet of the zombie or it becomes poisoned. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on it with a success. The creature can also spend its action to retch violently, ending the effect automatically.

## RUSHING

*Moving with incredible speed, its head scans like a dog looking for something to chase.*

As a bonus action, this zombie can move up to 20 feet toward a hostile creature that it can see. If a hostile creature that the zombie can see uses the Dash action, this zombie can use its reaction to move up to 20 feet immediately after that creature's turn, but only to move toward the Dashing creature.

## SCREECHING

*The monster emits a high-pitched scream that echoes in the air.*

The zombie has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks related to hearing and it has 30 ft.-blindsight based on echolocation. If this zombie is not surprised when combat begins, no other zombie is surprised.

## SLUDGY

*The creature's flesh is made of muck and mud and slime, leaving soiled footsteps in its wake.*

When a creature hits the zombie with a melee weapon, the attacker must succeed on a DC 11 Strength saving throw or be disarmed; the weapon sticks in the zombie's sludgy flesh and can't be removed until the zombie dies.

## SPECTRAL

*Parts on the zombie's body aren't connect by flesh, but instead some kind of spectral force.*

The first time this monster is hit in combat with a nonmagical weapon attack, the attack misses instead; the zombie becomes incorporeal to avoid that blow. Additionally, this creature can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain but it takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

## SPELL-STEALING

*The zombie is waving its hands in some halting, clumsy mimicry of arcane gestures.*

When targeted or affected by a damaging spell of third level or lower, the zombie gains the ability to cast the same spell once within the next hour, without using spell slots. The stolen spell functions as normal except that it inflicts (only) 1d8 damage of the spell's regular damage type.

## THREE-ARMED

*The zombie has somehow acquired an extra arm, perhaps by mutation or having stolen one from a fellow zombie. Whatever the case, the third arm seems very grabby.*

The zombie has advantage on its checks to apply and to maintain the Latch-On condition. While Latched-On, the zombie's extra arm tries to rummage the victim's pockets, as though searching for something; as a bonus action, the zombie moves one of the target's un-held items (like something from a pouch or pocket) to the ground in that location.

## TUNNELING

*The creature has massive claws at the end of its fingertips*

The zombie has a burrowing speed of 20. It is automatically hidden while burrowing and it starts the combat in a burrowing state. The zombie prefers to attack from a burrowing state so it gets advantage on its attempt to Latch On, bursting from the ground.

## WALL CRAWLING

*The zombie scrambles with alarming dexterity along the ground, seeming to defy gravity on some obstacles.*

The monster has a climbing speed equal to its walking speed. It can move up, down, and across vertical surfaces and upside down along ceilings, while leaving its hands free to grab victims.

## Credits

**Writers:** Randall Right, Matthew Perkins

**Steel Patrons:** JauntyJay, Erin McKee, Kyle Pietrovito, Humberto Hoffmann, Aclian Lore, xFreshyJx, Justin Rossman, William Bond, Jill Potter, krishna chivukula, Phillip Brown, David Dyer, BlackbirdofTx, Paul S, Kyle Somers, Steve Yahner, Luke Hermann, Craig Savage, Brian Smith, Platypulogist, SonOfSofaman, The 2nd most Epic Wizard from Mt. Skullzfyre

**Everything Else:** Matthew Perkins

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