

OBSIDIAN APOCALYPSE: WORLD OF THE UNDEAD



LPJ9262



HISTORY

WHERE THE HISTORY OF THIS WORLD OF THE UNDEAD DEVIATES FROM THE HISTORY OF THE OBSIDIAN APOCALYPSE

100 YEARS Ago

The meteor struck, and spreadspreading its necromantic energies. The ecological catastrophe began.

A new kind of undead rose soon after the meteor strike, when the Nightwall fell. At first, the shambling figures seemed just like any other zombie.

When the undead rose from the Tomb Cities of Shaan, the warrior-kings of the past attacked their servants and warriors, who had risen as shambling zombies. The zombies pinned them, wore them down, and tore them apart.

75 YEARS Ago

Over the next twenty-five years, the shambling zombies spread out from Shaan. Anywhere they gained even a toehold, their numbers exploded as most every death added to the horde.

Even the outsiders and other extraplanar beings arriving on Abaddon weren't spared from the zombies. By the time Zebadiah arrived on Abaddon, vast hordes of zombies roamed the world and destroyed anything they could not convert into another shambler.

50 YEARS Ago

Most mindless undead were destroyed by the shambling zombies, while the most intelligent learned to stay away from them. A group of surviving undead under the vampire Calix Sabinus built a kingdom of walled settlements, which offered protection from the shambling hordes for refugees in return for enslavement.

Zebadiah led a wing of celestials against this kingdom. His attack did tremendous damage to the mortal and undead armies under the vampire's banner. Calix Sabinus was severely injured, but Zebadiah was defeated and brought low. Sabinus had his mortal mercenaries chain Zebadiah's broken and tortured form above the gates of their capital.

10 YEARS Ago

Here and there, the living who avoided the shamblers gathered in the ruins of Abaddon and began rebuilding their lives. With one eye constantly on the lookout for undead hordes, they began raising fences and walls.

Sabinus' undead kingdom still contains ghettos of Harrowed within, and slave trade between the walled settlements bustles as it did in years past.

The Exalted are welcome in most mortal settlements. Loose alliances of Exalted-centered settlements wage petty wars against the walled settlements of the undead kingdom and their slave traders. Ironically, these attacks strengthen the vampire's hold over the lesser undead nobility by uniting them against the assaults.

Now

As Calix Sabinus struggles to hold his kingdom together, Lykians swell the ranks of mercenaries in the armies of the undead, the free settlements, and the Osirians.

The Khymer rise again in their old bodies.

The Spirit Books trains psionics, searching for the most efficient ways to use psionics against the undead.

THE SHAMBLING HORDES

Surviving scholars—few and isolated as they are—have asked why the shambling zombies exist and why they behave the way they do. The scholars argue that, left to their own devices, the shamblers would wipe out all life on Abaddon; they ask, “Who benefits?”

Because the Obsidian Veil prevents even the gods of death from being involved in events on the Material Plane, not even they would benefit from such a world. A few suspect that some unknown force is behind the shambling zombies. It hides, some scholars say, biding its time until the balance between the living and undead tips enough to make it all-powerful; only then will it rise from hiding to rule the new world of undead.

A paltry few believers look for that force, hoping to destroy it and turn the tide against the shambling hordes.

OTHERS

When the true nature of the shambling zombies became obvious, the dragons attacked them with elemental weapons, but even dragons grow fatigued. The younger dragons and those caught resting or unaware were pinned and torn apart by the endless zombie hordes. Over time, the dragons realized that the shamblers seemed to be learning their scents, letting the zombies track down the dragons' nests and destroy their eggs. The surviving dragons withdrew to isolated lairs, now only coming out to hunt what little food survives.

Even the most powerful titans and giants couldn't stand in the way of the horde. Although their great strength and martial prowess make them fine combatants, their size leaves them vulnerable to being surrounded and pinned by the shamblers. Even worse, giants who die while infected by shambling rot rise as shambling zombies themselves. The titans just get torn apart.

For the most part, humanoids are on their own in their fight for survival.

RULES

Traits, feats, and other rules for a world of shambling undead

DREAD

A world of undead is a terrifying place. The constant threat of discovery by mobs of shambling zombies erodes the confidence of even the most gallant adventurer.

For each day spent outside a safe place, a character must make a DC 5 Wisdom saving throw. This DC increases by 1 each day. Any bonus to a saving throw or immunity against a fear effect applies to this save, such as the halfling brave trait or the paladin's aura of courage class feature. A character that fails the saving throw becomes frightened.

A particularly terrifying event may trigger an additional saving throw, prompted at the GM's discretion.

A character remains frightened until they reach a safe place and complete a long rest, after which they are no longer frightened and the saving throw DC resets to 5.

FEATS

These feats are for characters adventuring in this world of shambling zombies.

BEACON OF HOPE

Your presence improves the state of mind of your companions and bolsters their morale.

Prerequisites: Charisma 13 or higher, Channel Divinity class feature or Lay on Hands class feature

- If you succeed on a Wisdom saving throw against an ongoing, escalating effect like dread, reset the DC of that check to the original value for yourself and allies within 30 feet. Using this feat does not count as a consecutive check for the purposes of increasing the DC of dread effects.
- You may expend one use of Channel Divinity or Lay on Hands to allow yourself and all allies within 30 feet of you to make an immediate Wisdom saving throw against any existing fear effect. Using this feat does not count as a consecutive check for the purposes of increasing the DC of dread effects (see above).
- At 9th level, a successful saving throw initiated by your Beacon of Hope feat removes the fear condition, including all of those brought on by dread, in all affected creatures. Using this feat does not count as a consecutive check for the purposes of increasing the DC of dread effects.

INDOMITABLE BRAVERY

When the constant threat of danger wears other down, you grin and stay focused.

Prerequisites: Wisdom 13 or higher

Increase your Wisdom score by 1, to a maximum of 20.

You gain advantage on Wisdom saving throws against fear effects.

SLIPPERY FIGHTER

You know useful tactics against grapplers and shambling zombies.

You are proficient in your choice of Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics).

As a reaction, you can swap positions with a creature you have grappled.

When you move a grappled creature, your speed is not halved.

THICK-SKINNED

You resist attacks that weaken your life force.

You gain advantage on saving throws to resist attacks that lower your hit point maximum.

You gain advantage on any saving throw to avoid having one of your ability scores reduced.

TRAITS

These are background traits for Undead World.

For more information on introducing character traits, see **Obsidian Apocalypse Chapter 4: Infernus Risen**. In brief, a character can choose up to two traits at 1st level as part of character creation. In addition, if a character selects a drawback trait, they can then choose an additional trait over and above the normal number.

The GM has final say as to whether characters may gain character traits and, if so, how many.

FOUNTAIN OF LIFE

You are of uniquely hearty stock, and recover losses to your hit point maximum more rapidly.

If your hit point maximum is reduced, a short rest restores a number of points up to your proficiency bonus.

You may not combine this trait with the undead bloodline.

FREEBORN

You were born in one of the free settlements, not under the whip of the undead.

You gain a +1 to Wisdom and Charisma saving throws against charm spells and effects, such as *charm person*, *command*, and *dominate person*.

You may not combine this trait with the undead bloodline.

LIGHT-SENSITIVE [DRAWBACK]

Born under the ash clouds of Abaddon, you find bright sunlight troublesome.

You suffer a -1 on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight when you, the target of your attack, or whatever you are trying to perceive is in direct sunlight.

SLAVEBORN

You were born in an undead-ruled settlement, rather than one of the unprotected free settlements.

You gain a +1 bonus on Deception, Intimidate, and Persuasion checks against undead creatures.

SPELLS

These are new spells for your Undead World campaign.

BLIND UNDEAD

1st-level abjuration

Casting Time: 1 Action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You steal the ability of an undead creature to see or hear living creatures. The target must make a Wisdom saving throw or become blinded and deafened with regards to living creatures for the duration of the spell. Undead creatures with an Intelligence of 6 or lower automatically fail this save. If an intelligent undead fails this save it cannot see or hear living creatures, but it can still deduce their presence from other clues, such as footprints left in the dust or if the creature comes under attack.

This spell does not affect other sensory perceptions such as smell, blindsight or tremorsense.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, you can affect two additional undead creatures in range for each slot level above 1st.

HAVEN FROM UNDEAD

3rd-level abjuration

Casting Time: 1 Action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (3-foot-diameter circle of powdered silver)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

A 10-foot-radius sphere emanates from the creature you touch. All living creatures within the area of effect are invisible (as per the spell *invisibility*) to undead. Undead with an Intelligence of 6 or lower cannot enter the area

of effect, whereas more intelligent undead must make a Wisdom saving throw to enter the warded area.

Alternatively, you can use the area of effect to trap undead within its confines. When you choose this option, an undead creature with an Intelligence of 6 or lower cannot leave the area of effect, while a more intelligent undead can only leave if it succeeds on a Wisdom saving throw.

SETTLEMENTS

Some settlements that defy the undead hordes.

EBON ARBOR

CE Village

Qualities: Decadent, Eldritch

Demographics: Magical

Government: Magical

Population: 125 (80 drow, 20 orcs, 15 humans, 10 other)

Notable NPCs

- Umbral Lady Eildianna Shadowskin (CE female drow wizard 7th)
- Arbormistress Xyrlove Woodsoul (NE female drow druid 7th)
- Blademaster Horeak Dewshining (CE male drow fighter 5th)

The cataclysm destroyed most drow settlements. Some may survive in isolated pockets deep beneath the surface world, but we cannot know. A clan of drow that escaped the collapsing underworld founded Ebon Arbor. They took over the ruins of a surface village and set about building a home for themselves.

The most interesting feature of Ebon Arbor is its palisade, which their druids have managed to grow from sickly saplings into an almost-impenetrable wall. Trees are rarer than hen's teeth on Abaddon. Growing them required intense effort, around the clock, from every available spellcaster. The living walls of Ebon Arbor would be a tourist attraction if anyone dared travel for such trivial reasons.

While the drow do take slaves, the population of the village is all free citizens. The drow rule from the top of the social hierarchy. The orcs serve as the backbone of the militia. Other races do the mundane work that keeps the village standing and fed. When they need more workers, the drow lead orc patrols to kidnap what they need.

Most of those who visit the village do so seeking the arcane secrets of drow magical traditions, hoping for some spell or information to turn against the hordes of shambling zombies.

HANNAH'S REDOUBT

LG Small Town

Society +1

Qualities: Academic, Defensible, Hallowed (can only be dispelled in small areas)



DEMOGRAPHICS

Government: Theocracy

Population: 1,750 (850 humans, 375 elves, 250 dwarves, 100 orcs, 50 halflings, 25 gnomes, 100 other)

NOTABLE NPCs

- Great Protector Thernys Serpenthelm (LG female cleric 5th), leader of the town
- Cardinal General Cruhorn Rosebloom (LG male elf paladin 8th), leader of the military
- Bishop Emeritus Tholannan Under-the-Veil (NG dwarf cleric 3rd), leader of the religious college
- Elder Brother Pantumal Taletreader (LG human cleric 3rd/fighter 3rd), leader of the Azure Flames (see the Organizations section, below)

Hannah's Redoubt was a frontier castle before the apocalypse. Located on a rocky bluff above a river, it contained a garrison, a keep, a chapel, stables, and enough artisans and peasants to keep everyone fed and everything working.

After the world changed but refused to end, Hannah's Redoubt grew. People flocked to it, as they thought it defensible, and the military put those people to work. They built more walls, farmed more fields, and raised more houses.

The dense population of living flesh drew shambling zombies. Though deprived of any contact with their gods, the among the military and refugees found ways to focus their beliefs and use their magic to defend the town.

Still, they were relatively few in number, and every person who fell to the shambling zombies rose again as one of them.

Finally, an Exalted cleric, Thernys Serpenthelm, sacrificed herself to hallow the town and its surrounding fields.

Thernys is not dead. She lives in a column of blue flame in the central courtyard of the redoubt's keep. She no longer eats, drinks, or sleeps, but appears to be immortal.

Her miraculous sacrifice drew other clerics and paladins to the redoubt, strengthening it against the hordes of shambling zombies.

SANGVILLE

LE Large Town

Qualities: Cruel Watch, Racial Enclave (vampires), Royal Accommodations

DEMOGRAPHICS

Government: Dynasty

Population: 3,500 (1,000 humans, 800 elves, 750 gnomes, 500 dwarves, 100 vampires, 350 other intelligent undead)

NOTABLE NPCs

- Lady Quiiries Deville (NE female vampire sorcerer 9), ruler of Sangville
- Lord Belgeon Deville (LE male vampire fighter 10), consort to Lady Quiiries
- Marshal Yengold Deville (LE male vampire fighter 7), commander of the Sangville military forces
- Master Sigisdottir Deville (CE female vampire fighter 9), head of the slave market

Widespread inflation increases the purchase price of high quality or luxury items, such as jewelry, fine clothes or food,

entertainment, weapons, and all magical items available in the settlement by +10%.

Sangville is one of the walled enclaves ruled by undead. The Deville dynasty of vampires rules the town with an iron fist.

Living beings within Sangville have sworn their fealty to the Devilles. In return, the vampires marshal their forces against the shambling zombies. The fact that Sangville has grown to a large town is evidence enough that they are successful fighters.

In addition to undead soldiers, the Devilles actively encourage good-aligned clerics to reside in their city and help in the fight as well as construction of good-aligned temples. For more information, see the Shambling Wardens in the Organizations section.

Living beings in Sangville face varying treatment, depending on their master. Favored slaves are all but free in any case, and some others are pampered like pets. The rest work hard and hope to escape notice. It is a hard life, but it is a life.

THE NIGHTFALL GAMES

Sangville hosts the Nightfall Games, a horrific competition that pits citizens, living and undead alike, against shambling zombies. The events held include hand-to-hand combat, mounted combat, foot races, wrestling, and more. These games are held each time the Nightwall falls and are a source of great civic pride.

Living slaves are given a holiday to attend the games, which explains why the living love the games so much—that, and the rewards. Winning an event can mean freedom for a living competitor, proclaimed by the Devilles. Practically, though, freedom usually means choosing another, hopefully kinder, master. No undead employs freed slaves, and living elsewhere means finding an open city of the living, likely under siege from armies of shambling zombies.

Undead competitors can win social or political rank, promotions in the Sangville militia, an additional allotment of slaves, or other—darker—prizes.

Shambling Wardens often compete to win further resources or privileges for their militia, including freed slaves to labor or vow service to them.

SCHYMIERTOV

CE Small Town

Qualities: City of the Dead, Desecrated (can only be dispelled in small areas)

DEMOGRAPHICS

Government: Overlord

Population: 350 (170 ghouls, 75 gnolls, 50 wights, 30 ghaunts, 25 other undead)

NOTABLE NPCs

- Bloodspiller Navigashix (LE wight), leader of the town

- Fleshchaser Dmitry (CE ghoul), leader of the military
- Whip Sergei (CE ghaunt), torturer and enforcer
- Mouth Neriskan Swordheart (CE female barbarian 2), diplomat and emissary

Schymiertov was once nothing more than the necropolis of a great city. After the meteor fell, the pandemic of ash and rise of the shambling zombies led to the residents either dying or leaving. Their necropolis fell into the claws of Navigashix, a wight.

Navigashix had no need to fight the zombies, because it found that the undead armies of post-apocalyptic Abaddon had no interest in other undead. The shamblers only attacked ghouls, skeletons, and others if they attacked the shambling zombies or their prey. Therefore, Navigashix avoided them until the shamblers wandered off in search of living beings to kill and convert.

Since that time, a small tribe of gnoll survivors moved into the ruins outside the former cemetery. The gnolls scout for the undead and occasionally hunt live prey for those undead who require living flesh. The gnolls also conduct trade expeditions to other refuges.

WOLF'S KITCHEN

NE Village

Qualities: Free City, Prosperous

DEMOGRAPHICS

Government: Overlord

Population: 150 (75 humans, 40 elves, 20 hobgoblins, 15 other)

NOTABLE NPCs

- Boss Hannibal Raine (LE male human fighter 8), leader of the village
- Advisor Oolastine Wolfsbane (NE female elf cleric 5), chief advisor to Boss Raine
- Captain Carstine Pegasdottir (LE female hobgoblin fighter 6), leader of the town military

Wolf's Kitchen survived the apocalypse because it was so small. The villagers were able to build a simple wall around the center of the village, and the small population required fewer fields and animals to feed itself than did other, larger towns.

However, its small size also made it vulnerable to the first desperate and brutal gang of thugs that came along. Those thugs took over Wolf's Kitchen and imposed their own ideas of law and order.

The current boss, Hannibal Raine, seized authority by murdering the previous boss and installing his hobgoblin allies as the town militia. He has since opened trade with both Sangville and Hannah's Redoubt, bringing prosperity to his allies and the rest of the village.

Wolf's Kitchen is an open city where anyone is welcome, as long as they do not interfere with the boss and his cronies. All sorts of trade goods pass through the village, and it is a safe place to rest and recuperate—as long as you do not have anything the boss wants.

UNDEAD ORGANIZATIONS

Allies and opponents for your Undead World campaign

AZURE FLAMES

Alignment: NG

Headquarters: Hannah's Redoubt

Leaders: Pantumal Taletreader, Zanlamman Tumblebelly, Otirry Jadehorn

Prominent Members: Leohorn Helitalon, Shalannan Orchunter, Shaice Hollysword, Norfalcon Rushboar, Loraatis Silversgleaming

Structure: Religious Order

Scope: Regional

Resources: Minor magic weapons and armor, plus some potions and scrolls

After Thernys Serpenthelm's self-sacrifice to save Hannah's Redoubt, a few priests and warriors formed an order devoted to protecting her. The Azure Flames believe they have a special understanding of the world through their communication with Thernys Serpenthelm.

The Azure Flames control access to Thernys Serpenthelm. Those who wish an audience with the guardian of Hannah's Redoubt must petition the Azure Flames.

STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

The Azure Flames revere Thernys Serpenthelm as their ultimate leader. However, she is often distracted, paying attention to something beyond mortal perception. As a result, the order elects an ecumenical leader, currently Pantumal Taletreader.

Otherwise, leadership is determined by expertise and fluctuates depending on the priorities of the order.

GOALS

The Azure Flames initially sought only to protect Thernys Serpenthelm in her column of blue flames. Their vision is beginning to expand as they develop dogma and a system of beliefs.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

No one really understands Thernys Serpenthelm. Some think her miraculous transmogrification has given her some contact with the gods. Others think she is becoming the first in a new generation of deities. A few fear that she is in touch

with whatever force ruined Abaddon and is becoming its avatar on this world.

As a result, most people think the Azure Flames are pompous, self-important, and judgmental. No one wants to do anything about it yet, because the order focuses on guarding the town's savior. Before the Azure Flames can start espousing dogma or taking more control of the town, they will have to demonstrate some authority.

HOLD BREAKERS

Alignment: CN

Headquarters: Wolf's Kitchen

Leader: Alukain Latekin

Prominent Members: Rangers and barbarians dedicated to scouting, hunting, and learning about shambling zombies

Structure: The Hold Breakers hold authority based on their deeds. The group has no organizational structure.

Scope: National

Resources: Minor magic weapons, armor, potions, scrolls, and other items. Hold Breakers know and can train others in feats like Indomitable Bravery and the Slippery Fighter tree.

Hold Breakers are warriors who study shambling zombies in order to better defeat them. Any effective techniques the warriors find are shared, both amongst themselves and outsiders.

STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

Alukain Latekin is a powerful ranger who masters each technique the members develop. He also maintains an archive of information about the shambling zombies. He became leader by winning a competition of skills.

When a group of Hold Breakers gathers for a mission, they generally hold a wrestling match to see who should lead if a single leader becomes necessary. If the members of a particular group are known well for specific skills, then leadership rotates through the groups according to which skills the mission calls for moment to moment.

GOALS

The Hold Breakers do not believe they can change the nature of Abaddon to wipe the shambling zombies from existence. Rather, they believe that the shamblers can be defeated and eventually overcome. Their goal is to develop and spread fighting techniques that will turn the tide.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Most people, if they had to describe the Hold Breakers in a single word, would choose "effective."

Being a Hold Breaker means that people initially respect you as a skilled warrior. The lack of structure and organization means that some Hold Breakers are unpleasant people, so the initial respect can quickly change based on the individual.

SHAMBLING WARDENS

Alignment: LG

Headquarters: Sangville

Leaders: General Brenys Undershadow, Supply Captain Kriskain Gnollcloak, Training Captain Koix Oreborn

Prominent Members: Captain Graril Greensleeves, Captain Yengeon Littleknight, Captain Jamfire Oaklord, Captain Daveak Acidhorn, Senior Sergeant Udotumal Celestialine

Structure: Military

Scope: Regional

Resources: Wealthy (enough minor magic weapons and armor to equip every warden, with a few additional medium magic weapons and armor; minor magic items created by the Shambling Wardens, e.g., potions). Shambling Wardens know and can train others in the Beacon of Hope feats.

The Shambling Wardens are a group of militant clerics, paladins, fighters, rangers, and druids who use the resources of the Deville dynasty to protect the town's living inhabitants and fight the shambling horde.

Although such an alliance goes against everything that good clergy stand for, the members of the Shambling Wardens are living beings, too. They needed a place to sleep and to recuperate from battle. They needed resources. They needed to understand how to continue as they did before the apocalypse, but without the support and aid of their deities. The Devilles offered safety and resources, asking nothing in return except that the Shambling Wardens used their powers against the shambling zombies.

The Shambling Wardens have a voice in the dynastic counsel halls. They can bring anything they see as an abuse of power or as unusually cruel before the Devilles for judgment. What they cannot do is cut down Devilles or their allies in the streets.

A NOTE ON SPELLS

No one in Sangville may cast spells or use abilities that specifically harm undead within the city walls—including turning undead with the Channel Divinity class feature. Any member of the Deville dynasty has the authority to kill an individual who violates this law.

Spells or abilities that can also harm undead, such as *fireball*, face normal restrictions, meaning the individual responsible must face trial before any execution occurs.

STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

The basic unit of the Shambling Wardens is the squad. A squad consists of four wardens and a sergeant. A watch consists of four squads, with a captain leading the fourth squad instead of a sergeant. Four watches comprise an order, with a general leading the fourth watch instead of a captain.

Leadership of squads and watches is determined by seniority. The order as a whole elects a general from the captains.

GOALS

Ultimately, the Shambling Wardens seek to reverse the effects of the meteor and put down all the shambling zombies.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Within Sangville, Shambling Wardens are seen as heroes. They risk their lives daily to protect the town from the horde.

Outside Sangville, people do not understand how such good people could ally with vampires. They know the Shambling Wardens do good, but also see them as traitors to all living beings.

SOULSEEKERS

Alignment: NE

Headquarters: Sangville

Leaders: Thersaadi Hollysharp, Flahanna Windsailor, Walgold Catseye

Prominent Members: Horril Dodox, Belvin Arboshate, Thomorn Bushranger, Yrix Pinebone, Jamgretor Millstone

Structure: Criminal Gang

Scope: Regional

Resources: Each gang has a few minor magic items, including weapons and armor.

The Soulseekers were created in an attempt to coordinate the slave market, encouraged by the vampire masters of places like Sangville.

Soulseeker gangs are recognized as legitimate businesses in vampire-controlled territory. Local militias protect them, and they are welcome within town walls. These protections are important to the gang, as it keeps greedy or impoverished vampires from enslaving the slavers.

STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

A slavery ring that wants to join the Soulseekers receives horses, wagons, identification, and an assigned territory in which to hunt for slaves. In return, each gang must pay a percentage of its sales to the local leadership. The local leadership passes a percentage of its take to the Soulseeker leadership.

GOALS

The Soulseekers have no goals except wealth and survival.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Perception varies according to the gang controlling the local territory.

Some Soulseekers take slaves by force: raiding villages, murdering anyone too old or infirm to serve, and then burning the village down. Obviously, the public perception

of these gangs is that they are criminals who should be driven away, jailed, or executed according to local law.

Other gangs, though, act as trade caravans. While conducting trade, they compare the local state of things with that in the nearest vampire-controlled settlement. They talk about the safety enjoyed by those under vampire rule. They persuade locals to join the caravan and live in the vampiric strongholds. These gangs are seen as potentially dangerous, but useful for commerce and information.

MONSTERS

A new breed of zombie for a new world

SHAMBLING HORDES AND ZOMBIE PACKS

Individually, a zombie poses little threat to an experienced adventurer, let alone a party of adventurers. Once characters gain a few levels, an encounter with such weak undead can become a dull, grinding scene with little suspense or inherent danger.

A common trope of anything having to do with zombies involves a zombie horde or pack—an overwhelming number of endless undead. In theory, such an encounter sounds exciting and dangerous. In practice, however, such a fight can bog down with too many die rolls and a slow attrition of hit points.

One way to make zombie and skeleton hordes more threatening is to focus on grappling the characters rather than inflicting damage. Here are several things to consider for such encounters.

- **Grapple attack.** Give zombies (and perhaps other types of undead) a special grapple attack such that when the creature hits, it does damage and grapples its target automatically. As an action, the undead can pin the grappled target, thereby restraining it.
- **Strong grapppler.** The zombies impose disadvantage on a restrained target's Strength ability checks and saving throws—either in instead of or as an alternative to this effect on Dexterity.
- **Multiple grapplers.** When more than one zombie attacks a target, give advantage to each attacker.
- **Overpowering grapple.** Give the zombie or other undead grapppler a good Strength (Athletics) score for grappling, or treat its Strength score as +2 or even +4 higher for purposes of the target's escape DC (which is 10 + the monster's Athletics modifier).
- **Bonus to attacks.** Remember that attacks against a restrained creature have advantage, while the restrained creature suffers disadvantage on their attacks, as well as Dexterity saving throws.
- **Forced movement.** A grapppler can move, drag, or carry the grappled creature. Consider expanding this option

to allow the grapppler to knock the grappled creature prone. Alternatively, there is nothing quite as horrific for adventurers as watching one of their comrades dragged away from the party and out of reach.

SHAMBLING ZOMBIES

Once slain, virtually any living creature can rise again as a shambling zombie. Such a creature possesses some of the traits it possessed in life, in addition to some new abilities. To simulate a creature risen as a zombie, you can apply the following changes to any corporeal fey, giant, or humanoid creature.

- **Alignment.** Change to neutral evil.
- **Creature type.** The creature's type changes to undead.
- **Armor Class.** The creature's AC decreases to 8.
- **Speed.** If the original creature had a fly speed, it retains this mode of movement.
- **Damage immunities.** The zombie gains immunity to poison damage.
- **Condition immunities.** The zombie gains immunity to the exhausted, frightened, and poisoned conditions.
- **Senses.** The creature gains darkvision 60 feet.
- **Abilities.** Increase the creature's Strength by 2, but lower their Dexterity by 2. The shambling zombie's Intelligence score becomes 6; if the original creature's Intelligence was lower than this, it retains that score instead. Its Wisdom score becomes 10.
- **Challenge.** Increase the base creature's Challenge rating by +1. If the creature has a Challenge rating of less than 1, it becomes a Challenge 1 creature.
- **Attacks.** The shambling zombie gains a special slam attack that does bludgeoning damage based on the zombie's size:

Size	Slam Damage
Fine	1
Diminutive	1d2
Tiny	1d3
Small	1d4
Medium	1d6
Large	1d8
Huge	2d6
Gargantuan	2d8
Colossal	3d6

In addition, a creature struck by this attack must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or have its hit point maximum reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. The slain creature rises as a shambling zombie 2d6 hours later.

- **Special Actions.** The shambling zombie retains none of the base creature's special attacks. Instead, the zombie gains several special actions, as described below.

- **Immobilize.** A shambling zombie can immobilize opponents within reach. The target loses five feet of speed for each shambling zombie adjacent to them. A character whose speed drops to zero becomes restrained and is considered pinned. The pinned character remains pinned until no shambling zombie can reach them.
- **Rend.** The shambling zombie makes a slam attack as a bonus action against a character pinned by its immobilize ability.

A shambling zombie loses the special abilities of the base creature. It gains the following special ability.

Follow the Scent. A shambling zombie has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell. A shambling zombie can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell. If the opponent is upwind, this range increases to 60 feet; if downwind, it drops to 15 feet. Strong scents, such as smoke or rotting garbage, can be detected at twice the ranges noted before. Overpowering scents, such as skunk musk or troglodyte stench, can be detected at triple the normal ranges. It gains advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track a creature by smell.

Shambling zombies hunt in packs. Typically—though no one knows why—shambling zombies move in a mob (4d12 shambling zombies), with three or four members of the mob moving roughly forty feet away from the main group. These outliers usually detect prey first, whether by sight, sound, or scent. They then alert the main body by moaning—a unique sound audible up to a quarter of a mile away. Upon hearing the moans, the main body moves to attack the prey.

Shambling zombies do not eat. They kill, but then move on once a target is dead. This behavior explains why their numbers exploded across Abaddon. If one shambling zombie kills a living person, that person rises as a shambling zombie.

Grouped together, their ability to immobilize, rend, and infect prey increases, creating more shambling zombies, and so on.

Shambling zombies reserve their most destructive behavior for anything interfering with them that they cannot convert. Aberrations, beasts, celestials, constructs, dragons, elementals, fiends, monstrosities, oozes, plant creatures, and undead that attack shambling zombies are likely to find themselves ripped to shreds.

SAMPLE SHAMBLING ZOMBIES

SHAMBLING ZOMBIE GOBLIN

Small undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 7 (2d6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Skills Stealth +4

Damage Immunities Poison

Condition Immunities Exhausted, Frightened, Poisoned
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Goblin
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Follow the Scent. The shambling zombie goblin has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell. It can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell. If the opponent is upwind, this range increases to 60 feet; if downwind, it drops to 15 feet. Strong scents, such as smoke or rotting garbage, can be detected at twice the ranges noted before. Overpowering scents, such as skunk musk or troglodyte stench, can be detected at triple the normal ranges. The shambling zombie goblin gains advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track a creature by smell.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage. In addition, a creature struck by this attack must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or have its hit point maximum reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. The slain creature rises as a shambling zombie 2d6 hours later.

Immobilize. The shambling zombie goblin can immobilize opponents within reach. The target loses five feet of speed for each shambling zombie adjacent to them. A character whose speed drops to zero becomes restrained and is considered pinned. The pinned character remains pinned until no shambling zombie can reach them.

Rend. The shambling zombie goblin makes a slam attack as a bonus action against a character pinned by its immobilize ability.

SHAMBLING ZOMBIE BANDIT CAPTAIN

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 65 (1d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws STR +5, DEX +4, WIS +2

Skills Athletics +5, Deception +4

Damage Immunities Poison

Condition Immunities Exhausted, Frightened, Poisoned

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 10

Languages Any two languages

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Follow the Scent. The shambling zombie bandit captain has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell. It can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell. If the opponent is upwind, this range increases to 60 feet; if downwind, it drops to 15 feet. Strong scents, such as smoke or rotting garbage, can be detected at twice the ranges noted before. Overpowering scents, such as skunk

musk or troglodyte stench, can be detected at triple the normal ranges. The shambling zombie bandit captain gains advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track a creature by smell.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage. In addition, a creature struck by this attack must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or have its hit point maximum reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. The slain creature rises as a shambling zombie 2d6 hours later.

Immobilize. The shambling zombie bandit captain can immobilize opponents within reach. The target loses five feet of speed for each shambling zombie adjacent to them. A character whose speed drops to zero becomes restrained and is considered pinned. The pinned character remains pinned until no shambling zombie can reach them.

Rend. The shambling zombie bandit captain makes a slam attack as a bonus action against a character pinned by its immobilize ability.

SHAMBLING ZOMBIE OGRE

Large undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 59 (7d10 + 21)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	-2A
21 (+5)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	7 (+2)

Damage Immunities Poison

Condition Immunities Exhausted, Frightened, Poisoned

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 8

Languages Common, Giant

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Follow the Scent. The shambling zombie ogre has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell. It can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell. If the opponent is upwind, this range increases to 60 feet; if downwind, it drops to 15 feet. Strong scents, such as smoke or rotting garbage, can be detected at twice the ranges noted before. Overpowering scents, such as skunk musk or troglodyte stench, can be detected at triple the normal ranges. The shambling zombie ogre gains advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track a creature by smell.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage. In addition, a creature struck by this attack must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or have its hit point maximum reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. The slain creature rises as a shambling zombie 2d6 hours later.

Immobilize. The shambling zombie ogre can immobilize opponents within reach. The target loses five feet of speed for each shambling zombie adjacent to them. A character whose speed drops to zero becomes restrained and is considered pinned. The pinned character remains pinned until no shambling zombie can reach them.

Rend. The shambling zombie ogre makes a slam attack as a bonus action against a character pinned by its immobilize ability.

SHAMBLING ZOMBIE HILL GIANT

Huge undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 105 (10d12 + 40)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	6 (-2)	19 (+4)	5 (-2)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

Damage Immunities Poison

Condition Immunities Exhausted, Frightened, Poisoned

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 12

Languages Giant

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Follow the Scent. The shambling zombie hill giant has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell. It can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell. If the opponent is upwind, this range increases to 60 feet; if downwind, it drops to 15 feet. Strong scents, such as smoke or rotting garbage, can be detected at twice the ranges noted before. Overpowering scents, such as skunk musk or troglodyte stench, can be detected at triple the normal ranges. The shambling zombie hill giant gains advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track a creature by smell.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage. In addition, a creature struck by this attack must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or have its hit point maximum reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. The slain creature rises as a shambling zombie 2d6 hours later.

Immobilize. The shambling zombie hill giant can immobilize opponents within reach. The target loses five feet of speed for each shambling zombie adjacent to them. A character whose speed drops to zero becomes restrained and is considered pinned. The pinned character remains pinned until no shambling zombie can reach them.

Rend. The shambling zombie hill giant makes a slam attack as a bonus action against a character pinned by its immobilize ability.

SHAMBLING ZOMBIE FIRE GIANT

Huge undead, neutral evil



Armor Class 8

Hit Points 162 (13d12 + 78)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	7 (-2)	23 (+6)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws DEX +2, CON +10, CHA +5

Skills Athletics +12, Perception +4

Damage Immunities Fire, Poison

Condition Immunities Exhausted, Frightened, Poisoned

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 14

Languages Giant

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Follow the Scent. The shambling zombie fire giant has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell. It can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell. If the opponent is upwind, this range increases to 60 feet; if downwind, it drops to 15 feet. Strong scents, such as smoke or rotting garbage, can be detected at twice the ranges noted before. Overpowering scents, such as skunk musk or troglodyte stench, can be detected at triple the normal ranges. The shambling zombie hill giant gains advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track a creature by smell.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) bludgeoning damage. In addition, a creature struck by this attack must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or have its hit point maximum reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. The slain creature rises as a shambling zombie 2d6 hours later.

Immobilize. The shambling zombie fire giant can immobilize opponents within reach. The target loses five feet of speed for each shambling zombie adjacent to them. A character whose speed drops to zero becomes restrained and is considered pinned. The pinned character remains pinned until no shambling zombie can reach them.

Rend. The shambling zombie fire giant makes a slam attack as a bonus action against a character pinned by its immobilize ability.