

# HORROR AT HAVEL'S CROSS

A SECOND-LEVEL ADVENTURE  
USING D&D 5E BASIC RULES.

## WHAT IS THIS ADVENTURE?

This second-level adventure is designed for D&D veterans and complete beginners alike. It only uses rules, items, monsters and concepts found in the free basic ruleset that can be downloaded from the Wizards of the Coast website.

That means that you and your friends can play this without having to buy anything other than snacks, drinks and maybe some dice - though even these can be replaced by the many free Dice Roller apps available for phones and tablets.

## HOW DO I PLAY?

The basic rules of Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition can be downloaded at [dnd.wizards.com/articles/features/basicrules](https://dnd.wizards.com/articles/features/basicrules)

## SUMMARY

When a group of archaeologists put out a call for adventurers to help them escort a valuable artefact back to civilization, nobody expects anything out of the ordinary. However, our heroes have more than mere bandits to deal with at Havel's Cross. Will they be able to survive the horrors waiting for them and piece together a ghoulish mystery?



## MEETING LANDY

Professor Winsome Landy, a Halfling scholar (use the stats of a **Commoner**, *DM's Basic Rules* p54), is looking for help from a band of reliable and affordable adventurers. She may get in touch with the party through mutual acquaintances, a recommendation from a local innkeeper or even send them a note directly after hearing of their earlier exploits.

In any case, if they are interested in the job Landy meets them in *The Spring Shoot*, a quiet inn mostly frequented by Halflings, Gnomes and other diminutive sorts. As they enter, the party will immediately notice a woman with curly chestnut-brown hair and purple robes, sat alone at a table and reading from a heavy book. The professor is engrossed in her work, but will eventually tear herself away once she realises who the party are.

Naive, friendly and easily distracted, Landy will explain that she is an archaeologist and part of a team investigating ancient ruins that they believe were home to an ancient Elven death cult. Her colleagues asked her to stay in town to arrange supplies and carry out book research while they excavated the site.

A couple of days ago the team leader, an Elf named Calador, got in touch using one of their Scrolls of Sending. He said they had uncovered something rather interesting and wanted an armed escort to help bring it back to civilization. They're to meet a member of the team at Havel's Cross, a fortified coaching inn up in the hills near the dig site.

She is authorised to spend up to 500gp on the escort and will offer this right away, with no attempt to haggle or negotiate. If asked, she will explain that:

- She really has no idea what they found. It's unlikely to be gold, jewels or anything conventionally valuable, but could be an artefact of the cult.
- The team consists of two Elves - Calador and Skein - a human called Tanlik, a Gnome called Quinn and a Dwarfven bodyguard called Graz Shatterbone. They have been working together for about three years.
- It's a fairly dangerous area,

with Goblins and wolf packs prowling about. Shatterbone can keep the team safe, but the request for escorts isn't too surprising if they're found something interesting.

- The early research suggests that the cult was centered around death and rebirth, but may have strayed into the use of dark necromantic magic.

Havel's Cross is around three days' travel away. Landy wants to accompany the party and suggests that they gather supplies and leave immediately.

## A TERRIBLE SCENE

*As you journey the scenery around you becomes wilder. Farmland and meadows give way to thick tangled forests and stretches of open moor. After a morning spent trudging up a muddy road Landy eventually declares that the inn is just around the next bend.*

*With thoughts of a warm fire and dry clothes spurring you on you all put in a final push and hurry up the slope, but as soon as the inn comes into view it's clear that something is horribly wrong.*

*At a glance it would have been easy to mistake the three-story building for a small fortress, with narrow slits for windows and tough-looking stone walls. The oaken door at the front of the building is thick and sturdy-looking, but has been thrown wide open and swings gently in the breeze. The slumped form of a dead horse lays in the road and where the stables would have once stood there is only a smouldering pile of charred wood and bones.*

Landy will be panicked by the scene in front of her and hide in the bushes while the adventurers work out what they want to do.

The dead horse that lays in the mud was partially eaten. A DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check will allow an adventurer to work out that the bites did not come from wolves or wild dogs, but something roughly human-sized with sharp teeth. There are also signs of deep claw marks.

There are no entrances to the inn other than the main door, which is wide open, but

## WHAT HAPPENED

The carnage at Havel's Cross was caused when Calador - corrupted by the Bone of Doresain - turned up the previous night. He talked his way inside before clubbing the door guard over the head with the Bone and throwing the door open to his Ghouls.

After massacring the guests the undead monsters dragged some back to their lair at the dig site, but not before killing the horses in the stable and knocking over a lamp, burning it down.

the narrow windows can provide a view of the main taproom. Adventurers that approach within 10 ft. or so of the inn can attempt a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check to hear the sound of low voices speaking in Goblin coming from inside.

Whether the party looks through the door or a window, gazing into the Havel's Wood inn is like staring into a nightmare. Maybe a dozen bodies laid open with deep slashes are scattered on the floor and behind overturned tables. Beer and blood are spattered everywhere, and as with the horse outside the corpses appear to have been partially eaten.

If this wasn't bad enough, six **Goblins** (*DM's Basic Rules* p30) are going through the pockets of the fallen while a **Hobgoblin** (*DM's Basic Rules* p32) prises open a lockbox in the middle of the room using a rusted crowbar.

If they notice the adventurers the creatures will attack on sight, some charging forward while others hide behind overturned tables and loose arrows. However, once half the Goblins are slain or he's reduced to half health, the Hobgoblin will throw down his sword and surrender.

The Hobgoblin, **Krax**, will claim that they saw the fire from their camp last night and decided to investigate Everybody was already dead when they arrived a few hours ago, and they were in the process of looting the place when the adventurers arrived. If asked, he will tell the party:

- He has no idea what happened here but hopes he never meets the creature that did it, especially as the inn was usually well-defended from outside threats. The door was strong and was only unlocked when travellers were being let in.
- He and his men are raiders and bandits.
- They've spotted the scholars up in the hills from time to time, but as they didn't seem to have anything worth stealing and Krax didn't like the look of the big Dwarf with them, the group left them alone.



If allowed, Krax and his men will depart peacefully. They will attempt to take as much loot as they can, though they will drop it if challenged by the adventurers.

## INVESTIGATING THE CARNAGE

There are 12 bodies in the inn. Seven are humans, three Halflings and two Dwarves. If brought in, a very distressed Landy will confirm that none of her colleagues lie among the dead.

As with the horse outside, a DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check will allow an adventurer to work out that the bites came from something roughly human-sized with sharp teeth, while the slashes were caused by long claws.

An adventurer proficient in Nature may attempt a DC 15 Wisdom (Nature) check to work out that the attackers were probably Ghouls - undead humanoids that feast on the living.

Adventurers trying to work out what happened may attempt a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check. If successful - or if they specifically look at it - they will notice that the body nearest the door appears to belong to a guard of sorts, and that she appears to have been killed by a blow to the head rather than the bites and slashes suffered by the other patrons. They may also notice that there are a few large pools of blood that are not near any bodies, suggesting that several corpses may have been removed.

A DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check will allow an adventurer to follow the tracks left when the bodies were dragged off. It appears that four bodies were taken into the woods, heading up the hill. Landy will confirm that they're heading directly towards the dig site, and will be afraid that the creatures will be targeting her friends next.

In any case, Landy will insist that the adventurers hurry along to the dig site. She will give them directions, but wants to lead them there herself.

Opening the lockbox - which holds the inn's earnings - requires a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check (note that using the crowbar to prise the box open will grant Advantage on the check - see Players' Basic Rules p49). Alternatively, the key can be found on the body of the innkeeper. Inside there is around 120gp worth of various coins.

Elsewhere, the inn contains plenty of food and basic supplies (torches, rope, etc.). Searching the bodies will reveal 10 (3d6) gp and 14 (4d6) sp, though Landy will be horrified at any adventurer that robs a corpse in front of her.

## THE DIG SITE

*A shaking Landy guides you along a damp trail marked by broken twigs and crushed grass. It snakes its way through trees that rustle and moan in the bitterly cold wind, but after an hour or so of climbing up into the hills you spot a break in the foliage that opens into a wide clearing.*

*The grass is matted with tangled weeds and criss-crossed by shallow trenches carefully cut into the earth. In the centre of the clearing squats a low building made of grey stone that has been smoothed by countless centuries of wind and rain. Steps lead up to an arched doorway with a strange circular symbol carved into it, but the room beyond appears to be in total darkness. A mixture of worry and confusion flashes across Landy's face.*

*"They always kept the lamps in the main chamber lit... Something must have happened to them!"*

*With that, the Halfling breaks into a run, heading straight for the door to the old temple.*

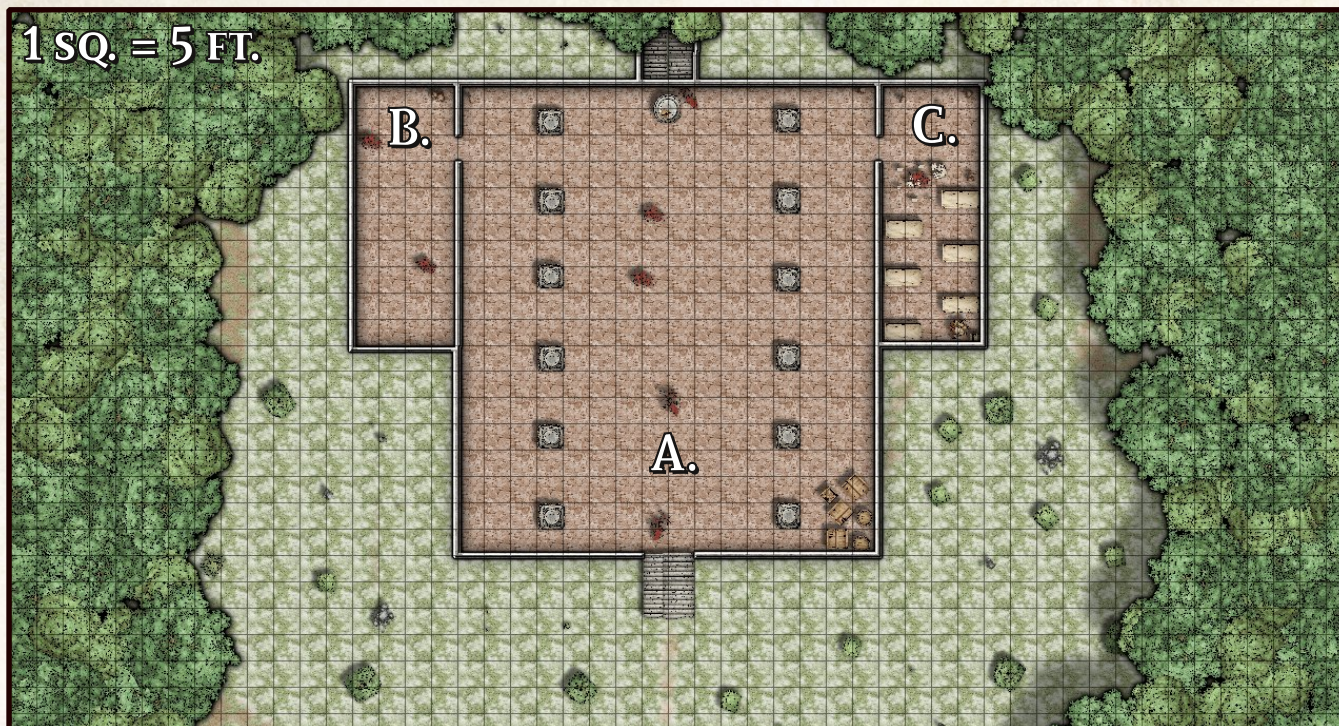
Catching and restraining Landy will be trivial for any reasonably fast and strong adventurer.

The various trenches are between one and five feet deep. If asked about them Landy will explain that the group was searching for artifacts relating to the temple that may have been buried in the soil outside.

A DC 13 Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check will allow adventurers to spot splashes of blood and the tracks of something being dragged along the ground leading up to the temple.

There are simple windows cut into the stone on either side of the door and on the right and left walls. They are about 8 ft. off the ground and are just about big enough for a small creature to squeeze through. There are no other obvious ways into the building.

The symbol over the archway is very faded, but seems to resemble a snake eating its own tail. However, there appears to be a crack running through it. Adventurers that pass a DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check will know that this is a symbol known as 'Ouroboros'. Many religions and other groups have used it to represent the cycle of death and rebirth.



## THE TEMPLE

*Inside the temple is a long, gloomy room. There are rows of columns to your left and right, but the only furniture seems to be a circular stone altar that lies just in front of the far wall, which is topped with a small wooden box, and a handful of crates over in one corner. Two arches appear to lead off to dark side-chambers.*

*As soon as you enter you notice two things. The first is the stench of death and blood which hangs in the air as thickly as the fog outside. The second is the wet sound of biting and chewing, which seems to be coming from the chamber off to the left...*

The main hall - the **Life Chamber (A)** - is dimly lit. The crates contain basic supplies including trail rations, some blankets and oil for the lamps that are hung up on old torch sconces. Pools of blood dot the floor, leaving trails that run to both doors and another that ends abruptly at the far wall. The altar and the box are described in the **Altar** boxout.

The sound in the **Birth Chamber (B)** is being made from two **Ghouls** (*DM's Basic Rules p22*), which are feasting on the body of a Human woman wearing the torn and bloody remnants of chainmail.

The Ghouls appear to be an Elf and a Human that Landy will be able to tearfully identify as Skein and Tanlik if she is allowed to examine them. The unfortunate Human woman was a uard at Havel's Cross.

The room they are in is fairly small and lit by thin shafts of light filtering in through the windows high up on the wall. Tiles that seem to show seeds and nuts decorate the walls, while the ceiling is engraved with ancient representations of humanoid babies, calves, chicks and other young creatures.

The Ghouls are engrossed in their feast and will only react if they are approached or if the adventurers (or Landy) make a particularly loud noise. Sneaking up on them requires an adventurer to make a successful DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check. Attacking before the Ghouls are aware of them will grant the adventurers a Surprise Round.

Another **Ghoul** - a former female Gnome that Landy will recognise as Quinn - is gnawing on bones in the **Death Chamber (C)** and will be attracted by any sound of fighting (likewise, the Ghouls in the Life Chamber will be roused if the adventurers fight her first).

The Death Chamber itself is the mirror image of the Life Chamber, but its walls are inlaid with withered thorns and wilted roses, while the ceiling shows a maze of bones and

skulls. It seems to have been used as a sleeping and living chamber by the archaeologists and contains several bedrolls, a handful of bags, some cooking equipment and a small chest containing 50gp. A character looking through the bags can make a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice a small phial containing a *Potion of Healing* (*Player's Basic Rules p50*) in one of the bags.

Scraps of bone-white paper are scattered around the floor, most of which are stained with blood and are completely illegible. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check will allow an adventurer to pick out a decently sized piece with legible writing. It reads:

*"...found a bowl in trench eight this morning, this time made of what we think to be onyx. It matches the shape of the two we already uncovered and has similar engravings. To be honest it's all a bit cryptic, but Calador says he thinks they are the key to unlocking the secrets of this old place. Old Shatterbone isn't too happy about it, but then again he nev..."*

## THE BONE CHAMBER

*Shallow steps descend into the earth, wending down a passage coated with ancient spider webs and damp moss. In the depths you can see the faint flickering light of a torch shine through a doorway, and even from the top of the passageway you have to fight off the urge to retch as the stink of rotting flesh rolls over you.*

Unless adventurers make efforts to get rid of or otherwise negate the hideous smell, all concentration checks (see *Players' Basic Rules p79*) in this area are made with disadvantage.

The stairs descend for around 40 ft. before opening up into the Bone Chamber.

*The open doorway leads into a large, low-ceilinged vault. Unlike the temple above it appears to be rugged and rough-hewn, with an uneven dirt floor and flimsy-looking stone pillars. Ancient bones litter the floor and primitive paintings showing humanoids tearing into one another with claws and teeth cover the walls.*

*Several overturned chairs are scattered around what appears to be another round altar, about twice as big as the one in the main temple, and wicked-looking stone knives are piled on the ground near them. On top of the altar are the remains of a humanoid, but they're too badly torn up for you to tell what race or gender they were. Another two bodies, both in even worse condition, lie slumped off against the wall to the left.*

## THE ALTAR

The circular altar at the far end of the Life Chamber is made out of well-worn stone and on top of it are three evenly-spaced hollows. The following words are carved around the rim in Ancient Elvish, forming a loop.

Landy is able to read the engravings easily, while any adventurer that can speak Elvish can decipher their meaning with a DC 10 Intelligence check. They read:

*"...and what lives will die and what dies will be reborn and what is reborn will live and..."*

Scattered on the floor nearby are three small bowls, which seem to have been knocked from the altar. One is made from gold, one from iron and one from black stone that appears to be onyx. The bowls are the perfect size to fill the hollows and each has an engraving running around the rim, also written in ancient Elvish. The words engraved are shown in the table below

The small wooden box on top of the altar contains a seemingly random collection of items. These are a half-dozen eggs, a small blood-stained knife, a mortar and pestle, and a bundle of chicken bones tied up with string.

Adventurers close to the altar will be able to notice that a trail of blood leads directly up to the center of the far wall. Interestingly, the final final pool ends neatly where it meets the wall and appears not to have splashed on it at all. An adventurer making a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check will be able to conclude that there is a secret door in the wall, and a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check will allow them to spot a tiny hairline crack running down the middle of the stonework

Opening the secret door requires that the bowls be placed on the altar and filled with appropriate offerings as shown in the table below. If adventurers are struggling, they can make a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check to find traces of old offerings left in the bowl (tiny fragments of ground bone, the lingering smell of egg, etc.)

| Bowl          | Engraving            | Offering    |
|---------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Golden Bowl   | The Essence of Birth | Broken egg  |
| Iron Bowl     | The Essence of Life  | Blood       |
| Obsidian Bowl | The Essence of Death | Ground bone |

Once the appropriate offerings are placed, a section of wall will swing back to reveal a staircase descending into the Bone Chamber.

## CALADOR

Medium Humanoid (Elf), Chaotic Evil

**Armor Class** 12 (15 with Mage Armor)

**Hit Points** 37 (5d10 + 10)

**Speed** 35 ft.

| STR     | DEX     | CON     | INT     | WIS    | CHA     |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|
| 16 (+3) | 14 (+2) | 14 (+2) | 18 (+4) | 9 (-1) | 11 (+0) |

**Skills** Arcana +6

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

**Languages** Common, Elvish

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Fey Ancestry.** Calador has advantage on saving throws against being Charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

**Ghoulish Vitality.** When Calador is reduced to 0 hp he is knocked unconscious but not killed. At the start of his next turn he regains 14 (4d6) hp and wakes up. He loses this ability if the Bone of Doresain is destroyed.

**Spellcasting:** Calador is a 3rd-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *Fire Bolt*, *Light*

1st level (3 slots): *Mage Armor*, *Magic Missile*, *Shield*

2nd level (1 slot): *Misty Step*, *Suggestion*

## ACTIONS

**Bone Club:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

**Claw:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage.

**Mind Rend (Recharge 5-6):** A wave of madness flows out from the Bone. All creatures within 15 ft. must make a DC 14 Charisma save or take 7 (2d6) psychic damage.

**Create Ghoul (once per day):** Calador creates a ghoul from the body of a dead humanoid within 60 ft. The Ghoul is under Calador's command and will obey simple instructions, but the control is very weak and it will always tend to act on its violent nature. For details, see *The Bone of Doresain*.

*Lying just in front of the doorway, is yet another body - this time in the crumpled form of a dwarf with a long red beard. His bald head is marked with a jagged wound that looks to have come from a heavy club or something similar.*

*As you look around you become aware of a soft, almost frantic sobbing sound coming from just behind the altar.*

The sobbing noise is coming from Calador, the Elven leader of the team. He is crouched down behind the altar and trying to hide.

Calador is tall and has long black hair that reaches his shoulders. He wears robes that were once rather fine, but have been stained with all manner of filth, blood and mud. He protectively clutches a long bone that adventurers able to pass a DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check will be able to identify as a femur, probably one that belonged to an Elf.

The bone is actually an evil artifact that has been imbued with some of the power of Doresain, the first Ghoul. It exerts an evil presence and like other magical items seems to be resistant to decay or staining, leaving it bone-white and gleaming.

Once found by the adventurers he will sob and wail and thank them for rescuing him from this nightmare. Should they be accompanied by Landy he will hug her tightly.

If given the chance he will explain that they uncovered this chamber a few days ago, finding the chamber much as it is now - only without the fresh bodies. The bone lay on the altar and seemed to be an object of worship for the ancient cult, making it very important. Some time after, however, his colleagues started acting strangely. Eventually Shatterbone attacked him, but he managed to fight the dwarf off by hitting him with the bone.

He claims that the rest of the team started turning into monsters so he overturned the bowls that unlocked the door and sealed himself down here to stay safe.

Almost all of this is, of course, a lie. Upon seizing the Bone Calador was corrupted by its power and slowly began transforming his colleagues into Ghouls. After tricking his way into Havel's Cross he had them drag a selection of corpses back here. Rather than lock the Ghouls

## THE BONE OF DORESAIN

*Weapon, Legendary (requires attunement by an evil creature)*

This femur bone is imbued with the malevolent evil of Doresain, the first Ghoul. It can be wielded as either a +1 magical club or a spell focus, but drives the holder mad with images of death, biting and tearing flesh. Even creatures unlucky enough to be nearby are plagued with headaches and strange visions.

Once per day, as an action, a creature attuned to the Bone can create one Ghoul from a humanoid corpse within 60 ft. These Ghouls are follow the commands of their creator and will obey simple instructions. However, the control the creator can exert is comparatively weak and the Ghouls will always tend to act on their violent nature.

When a creature attuned to the Bone is reduced to zero hit points they are not killed. Instead, at the beginning of their next turn they regain 14 (4d6) hit points. This effect lasts even if the creature is not holding the Bone.

The Bone itself has 14 (4d6) hp and AC 10. It is resistant to piercing damage, immune to psychic and poison damage and vulnerable to bludgeoning and radiant damage.



out because he was frightened of them, he simply wanted to be able to gorge on flesh without being disturbed. Virtually the only true element is that he did indeed club Shatterbone to death after he attacked the Elf.

There are several major holes in Calador's story - such as how the fresh bodies got down here - and he will not be able to explain them. Instead he will talk fast and try and bluff his way out. Adventurers examining him and able to make a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check will also notice that he had traces of blood around his lips and in between his teeth.

Once he realises that the ruse is up he will try and fight his way out, possibly grabbing Landy as a hostage if she is close enough.

He will fight to the death, and quite possibly beyond it, creating a **Ghoul** and striking out with the Bone. Should he have the slots left he will use *Misty Step* to teleport onto spellcasters or other weak targets.

If Calador is killed the Bone will glow with a sickly yellow light as it resurrects him, making it obvious that if the adventurers wish to destroy the Elf they need to dispose of the Bone first.

## ENDING THE ADVENTURE

Once the bone and Calador are both destroyed the temple will grow silent once more. Calador does not have anything of worth on him, but Shatterbone is wearing a Jade Ring of Resistance (*DM's Basic Rules p60*).

If Landy survived her ordeal she will break down sobbing and weeping for her lost friends. She will ask the adventurers to help her create a funeral pyre to burn all the bodies and then escort her back to town.

After she has gotten over her initial shock the scholar will become fiercely determined to help to use her knowledge to combat evil, potentially becoming a source of information for the party in the long term or heading off to join a crusading monastery or aid an order of Wizards.

## CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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1 SQUARE = 5 FT.

