Actually Scary Zombies for 5e

Spiciness: 5/5

Feeds any number of players, at any level
Scales for: Number of Players, Player Level

Ingredients:

- Zombies. All ya need. For each zombie, roll a d6 to determine it's type on the Variant Chart.

    Scale for Party Size & Level: Usually I give specific instructions for how to scale an encounter, such as boosting save DCs or adding HP to the creatures. For this though, use a tool like Kobold Fight Club to determine the right number for your group. Due to necroplague, these zombies remain threats at any level, though once you have a bunch on the field, you may want to consider using them in waves (to prevent AoEs nuking them down), and using the mob rules from page 250 of the DMG to make sure that at least some of them hit each round.

    Mob rules may get complicated if the zombies in each mob are different variants. So to fix that, treat each mob-squad as having each variation of every zombie within that squad.

Preparation

Zombies in 5e feel uninteresting because they basically have the same attacks and abilities as an unarmed commoner, with the exception of Undead Fortitude.

    To address this, I wanted to tap into the things that I find scary about Zombies-- being overwhelmed by a horde (getting grappled, pulled prone, and eaten), & the danger of a festering bite (a long-form disease mechanic that stays meaningful in a world of clerics). Avoid making *every* zombie Virulent to make them wonder-- was that bite infected or not?

Things you should Know!
- A grappled Creature has a movement speed of 0.
- A creature with a movement speed of 0 cannot stand up from being prone.
- A Prone creature has disadvantage on attack rolls. An attack roll against the creature has advantage if the attacker is within 5 feet of the creature.

Omega Zombies

In the event you want to make a zombie particularly terrifying, roll on the variant table more than once, or just pick the ones you want to use. Fast + Ichor makes for some speedy zombie-bombs. Use Hungry + Virulent to keep the virus spreading in play longer. Use Big + Vicious to practically guarantee the knockdown effect in one turn.

Zombie
Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 8
Hit Points 37 (5d8 + 15)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	5 (-3)

Skills. Athletics +3
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned, frightened, charmed, exhaustion
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages -
Challenge 1 (200 XP)
Proficiency Bonus +2

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

Variants. Each Zombie has a variant type. Roll a d6 on the Variant Table once for each zombie to determine what variant they are.

Actions

Overwhelm *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d6 + 1) slashing damage damage, and creature is Grappled (Escape DC 13). If a Zombie hits an already Grappled creature with this attack, they must made a DC 13 Strength save or be knocked prone.

Feed. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (3d6 + 1) piercing damage damage.

Zombie Variant Table
d6 Mutation Effect

d6	Mutation	Effect
1	**Fast**.	As a bonus action, this zombie may move up to it's movement speed towards a living creature. This movement does not provoke attacks of opportunity.
2	**Virulent**.	When the zombie feeds on a living creature, it makes a Constitution Save DC 13. On a failure, it contracts Necroplague (see section to the right).
3	**Ichor**.	This zombie is combustible. Any amount of fire damage being done to it causes it to light aflame. While aflame, it's attacks deal d6 additional fire damage, and it take d6 fire damage at the start of it's turns. If it dies while aflame, it explodes, dealing 4d6 fire damage in a 10ft radius.
4	**Big**.	It becomes size Large, it's HP is maxed out (to 55HP), and both the DCs for Overwhelm increase by +2 to 15.
5	**Hungry**.	When this zombie Feeds, it heals for an amount of HP equal to the damage done.
6	**Vicious**.	It gains Multiattack. The zombie does two Overwhelm attacks as an action.

Cooking the Zombies (By Type!)

Fast Zombies: These are the ones that can get behind enemy lines. Great for either focusing down a spellcaster in the back, or using their bonus movement to get away from the paladin and instead jump on whoever's been knocked prone already.

Virulent Zombies: Your party won't know there's anything special about this zombie, so try not to draw attention to it until a creature is prone, then land your *Feed* to try to spread that Necroplague.

Ichor. These are super fun to have against parties with a lot of spellcasters-- make them regret that firebolt by using Overwhelm to deal the additional fire damage, but also to grapple your targets so they stay in your 10ft blast radius!

Big. THESE are your big boys. Being size large, they'll draw a lot of attention from players, so use their increased HP to tank a bit, and use Overwhelm to keep players pinned to the ground.

Hungry. Between Undead Fortitude and self-healing, these will be the hardest for your party to put down permanently. Use them

Vicious. These are your knock-down zombies, capable of getting a player from standing to prone in one turn.

Necroplague

Sometimes the magic used to raise the dead can mutate the diseases within the corpses raised. After a creature contracts Necroplague, Symptoms set in after d4 hours. The first symptoms of Necroplague are mild-- but as each day passes, the symptoms become worse. When inflicted with the disease and at the end of each day after, gain one stack of Necroplague. The effects of the stacks are accumulative.

Necroplague Progression

Necroplague Stacks	Effect
1	The wound that inflicted the disease refuses to completely heal. They have disadvantage on Constitution Saves & Checks, and their max HP is reduced by 5.
2	Pain grips the creature's mind. The creature has disadvantage on Wisdom checks and Wisdom saving throws.
3	A raging fever sweeps through the creature's body. The creature has disadvantage on Strength checks, Strength saving throws, and attack rolls that use Strength.
4	The creature is overcome with shaking. The creature has disadvantage on Dexterity checks, Dexterity saving throws, and attack rolls that use Dexterity.
5	The creature's mind becomes feverish. The creature has disadvantage on Intelligence checks and Intelligence saving throws, and the creature behaves as if under the effects of the confusion spell during combat.
6	The creature's flesh decays. The creature has disadvantage on Charisma checks and vulnerability to all damage.
7	The creature perishes, and raises as a Virulent Zombie with 2 other mutations from the Zombie Variant Table.

Curing Necroplague

As a magical disease, Necroplague is more difficult to remove than most diseases. Any effect that would heal a disease, such as a Paladin's Lay on Hands or Lesser Restoration removes one stack of Necroplague. The creature is cured when all stacks are removed. Stacks are not removed upon death.

Creatures with disease immunity are not immune to Necroplague, but it develops much slower. When they would contract a stack of necroplague, roll a d20. On 10+, they do not gain that stack.

Delaying the Disease

Effects that suppress magic, such as an antimagic field, halt the progression while subjected to the effect but remove no stacks. Dispel magic can be used to delay the progression for one day, with the DC of the check involved being 10 + the number of stacks the creature already has.

Thank you!

If you've gotten this far into the document, I just wanted to say thank you for checking out my latest release.

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