

UNDEAD WASTES

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Undead Wastes is a Fifth Edition plug-in adventure for **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 1, 3, 5, or 8**. This document offers a general guideline on scaling the adventure for each level. The party must defend a small village on the edge of a frozen wasteland from droves of the undead.

SCALING THE ADVENTURE

Average Party Level	Recommended Adventure Version	Relative Difficulty
1	1st-Level	Hard
2	1st-Level	Medium
3	3rd-Level	Hard
4	3rd-Level	Medium
5	5th-Level	Hard
6	5th-Level	Medium
7	5th-Level	Easy
8	8th-Level	Hard
9	8th-Level	Medium
10	8th-Level	Easy

Adventure Hooks

The Frozen Wastes Adventure Hooks table offers some ideas if you don't have a reason for the characters to investigate the Frozen Wastes. Roll a d8 or choose the one you like best. If you need to motivate the party with a

monetary reward, their patrons offer 500 gp per level of the adventure.

Background

Every adventurer knows that in realms of magic, the dead don't always remain so. What's more, they know that, when discovered, creatures of unlife should be destroyed with fire and steel as quickly as possible. Occasionally, however, the undead will multiply unchecked, quickly becoming a horde the likes of which even the most potent adventurer is not foolish enough to tackle alone.

This year, a cruel winter grips the frozen wasteland, and a heavy and numbing cold blankets the region that even the warmth of raging hearths and thick furs seem unable to thaw. Worse still, this cold seems to sap the strength of even the most hale of folk, and a gnawing hunger grips every person. Fights break out in the marketplace over the last loaf of bread or haunch of meat, and people who once survived by sharing their troubles, now keep to themselves, hoarding food and resources.

Although they don't know it, this strange phenomenon is caused by the presence of an ancient and vicious evil. Once kept shackled within a timeless prison, a powerful monster has escaped. The presence of this vile creature corrupts the land, and icy death

UNDEAD WASTES ADVENTURE HOOKS

d8	Patron	Adventure Hook
1	Academy	The academy wishes to learn how the dead have become animate.
2	Adventurer's Guild	A merchant carrying medicines has gone missing while on their way to the village. The guild has a bounty for these supplies.
3	Ancient Being	The character feels the pull of their patron guiding them to rescue a nearby town.
4	Aristocrat	A character's ally seeks help driving back the undead.
5	Criminal Syndicate	The syndicate has lost contact with one of its agents.
6	Military Force	A knight sent to discover and help the town has not returned.
7	Religious Order	Something has caused an imbalance in the natural order, and the local church believes this imbalance originates within the Frozen Wastes.
8	Sovereign	The people of the village have sent word requesting help from their local ruler.

flows from it. Worse still, all those who die in this cold will become a monster of unlife.

Last Hearth

The small town of Last Hearth is barely two hundred people and survives off goods carried north by merchants who buy the resources the townsfolk mine out of the mountains. A small, nearby lake that once offered an abundance of fish is completely frozen.

General Features

Unless stated otherwise, the town of Last Hearth has the following features.

Gnawing Hunger. When the party first arrives, any character that requires food notices a painful hunger that seems insatiable.

Necrosis Poison. The attacks of all undead in this region carry an infectious disease known as necrosis poison. Many of the residents are already infected.

A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take 1d4 necrotic damage and become poisoned. The poisoned creature must repeat the saving throw every 24 hours, taking another 1d4 necrotic damage on a failed save. Whenever the creature takes damage from this effect, its hit point maximum is reduced by the same amount.

The creature dies if its hit point maximum is reduced to 0. A humanoid slain by this effect rises 24 hours later as a **zombie** unless the humanoid is restored to life or its body is destroyed.

After a successful saving throw, the effect ends, and the creature's hit point maximum is restored to normal. If the creature successfully saves against the effect, or if the effect on it ends, the target is immune to necrosis poison for the next 24 hours.

Rumors. While the locals are cranky and miserable, they will answer questions. If the characters spend time asking around, roll on the Rumors table.



RUMORS

d8 Information

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Only one of the hunters Izak sent out returned. |
| 2 | If the snows continue, the town will be cut off. If that happens, the townsfolk won't have enough food to last the week. |
| 3 | Brenda's been raising her prices again, but even she's nearly out of food. |
| 4 | Old Remy is on her last legs, Izak reckons she won't last the night. |
| 5 | Strange creatures have been seen on the roads. |
| 6 | Yizzik beat up Draz just for a joint of pork. |
| 7 | The town has no medicines or potions to help the sick. |
| 8 | Monsters killed the last of the livestock. Brenda's selling it, though, and she's charging four times the normal price. |



Last Hearth

The most prominent building is an inn also called Last Hearth. Its owner, Izak Koil (CG male dwarf **guard**). Izak is also the sheriff and the person the party will most likely need to speak to first. Two **commoners** resting at the bar have eaten infected meat and fallen ill. A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check will reveal the signs of necrosis poison.

What Izak Knows. Izak will provide the following information:

- The winter's gotten so bad that there was no thaw, and the townsfolk have been unable to hunt or fish.
- It's gotten so that no one leaves their home except to buy goods.
- There's little food left in town, and some people have packed up and left.
- If the snows worsen, the passes will seal, and the people will be cut off. Without the traders bringing food, the town will starve.
- In desperation, hunters were out. Only one returned to the inn, but shortly after, she went berserk and murdered two bystanders. All three bodies have been placed in an empty barn while they wait for the priest to arrive.

If he's asked to, Izak will take the characters to the barn.

Constant Blaze

Faladan runs the smithy (LN male dragon-born **thug**). The dragonborn's brass-colored scales are pale and worn, denoting his extreme age, but he is still strong and capable. He sells only a handful of tools and simple weapons. Faladan's sister, Kelxix, was the only hunter to return.

If asked, Faladan will admit that Kelxix came to her shop. She was angry at having failed, taking a swipe at Faladan before he sent her to the inn to get something to eat. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check will reveal that Faladan is wounded, and a subsequent DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check will reveal the wound is infected with some necrosis.

General Traders

Brenda Steinaltap (CG female dwarf **commoner**) runs a small trading post. Brenda still journeys to her trading partners four times a year. She also gets weekly shipments from traders who brave the snowy passes, but they are more than two weeks overdue, and Brenda's shelves are nearly bare.

She has five days' worth of rations, but they cost 2 gp each. Having been made from local livestock, these rations are infected with necrosis poison. Any creature eating one of these rations must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or become infected.

Empty Barn

On the edge of town stands a stout, well-constructed barn. It was, until recently, used to hold livestock, but all the animals were slaughtered. If the characters enter, read or paraphrase the following:

The building is simple, with four walls, a peaked roof, and a hayloft.

Stepping into the dark space, you shiver. The biting winds outside suddenly feel like a summer breeze compared to the numbing cold you feel upon entering.

Lying beneath a tarpaulin are three humanoid-shaped lumps.

Investigating the Bodies. Under the tarpaulin are the bodies of a brass dragon-born named Kelxix and two humans—a man and a woman named Jack and Sarah. All three bodies are covered in wounds from the fight at the inn, but a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check made on the body of Kelxix reveals that one of her wounds predates this. This wound shows signs of necrosis.

Dead Rising. Whenever it feels the most dramatic, all three bodies animate. The nature of the encounter depends on the level of the adventure, as shown in the table below. If Izak is present, he will help the characters fight.

EMPTY BARN ENCOUNTER

Adventure Level	Encounter
1st	2 zombies
3rd	3 ghouls
5th	3 ghasts
8th	3 wights

Insatiable Hunger

The worsening conditions have made the locals selfish, unforgiving, and aggressive. They have stopped caring for one another, and those who cannot help themselves have died.

The necrosis poison has turned these victims into monstrous undead. When the characters exit the barn, the undead attack. Read or paraphrase the following:

The chill wind snaps at your clothing, and you snatch it back to wrap yourself up, but the same wind brings something else. The hollow and chilling groan of the undead echoes through the square, followed seconds later by more and more lifeless voices until it seems to be coming from every direction.

Undead Swarm. Undead attack the party from all sides. The fogs make the entire area lightly obscured out to a range of 15 feet and heavily obscured beyond that, making it impossible for the characters to see what's happening elsewhere. The nature of the encounter depends on the level of the adventure, as shown in the table below.

INSATIABLE HUNGER ENCOUNTER

Adventure Level	Encounter
1st	2 zombies
3rd	3 ghouls
5th	3 ghasts
8th	3 wights

Creating Fear. Despite the challenge, the purpose of this encounter is to create a sense of unease amongst the party. Each round at initiative 20, roll on the Grisly Death table below and then read the description. The characters don't see these deaths, they only hear them.

GRISLY DEATHS

d6	Description
1	An audible crack is followed by a choked scream.
2	A man's voice begs for mercy from somewhere nearby, only to be cut off suddenly.
3	A blood-curdling scream cuts through the fog but quickly becomes nothing more than a gurgle.
4	A whispered prayer is carried to you on the icy wind. It's quickly accompanied by the sharp tang of urine assaulting your nostrils.
5	The crunch of frantic footfalls sounds in the distance, only to be silenced by a fleshy thud.
6	The sound of crying and whimpering ceases after the whip of a claw.

Lost and Alone

Once the encounter is over, the fog thickens further, making the entire area heavily obscured, and any characters not actively holding onto one another loses track of their comrades. Calling out to one another doesn't help. Lost and alone, the characters experience a short but harrowing encounter.



Keep the characters in the same initiative order, and on each of their turns, roll a d6:

- On a 1–2, roll on the Grisly Deaths table, reading the text aloud.
- On a 3–4, a single undead steps into the character's path and attacks. The undead acts before the character and then disappears into the fog unless the character deals enough damage to kill the creature in a single reaction. The nature of the undead depends on the level of the adventure, as shown in the Lost and Alone Encounter table below.
- On a 5–6, roll on the Special Events table below. Each event can only happen once, so reroll any you've already used. If none are left, treat the original d6 roll as a 1.

LOST AND ALONE ENCOUNTER

Adventure Level	Encounter
1st	1 zombie
3rd	1 ghoul
5th	1 ghast
8th	1 wight

SPECIAL EVENTS

d4	Description
1	Stumbling out of the fog, a man falls at your feet; he grabs at you and pulls himself up. From his neck, blood sprays from an arterial wound, drenching your face and filling your mouth with the coppery taste of blood. Collapsing, he dies.
2	A woman's voice begs for her life, and as the fog clears, you see a dwarven woman kneeling before one of the monsters. With a wail, the monster launches forward on all fours. Watching helplessly, you see it tear into her belly before the mists obscure everything but her screams.
3	From ahead, you hear the commanding voice of Izak directing people toward the inn. For a moment, you catch sight of him, only to watch in horror as a monster grabs him and tears his head clear of his body.
4	All the sounds around you are drowned out by a fierce and biting wind that buffets you. You must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or suffer one level of exhaustion.

This part of the encounter should last no more than 1 round. Once it's over, read or paraphrase the following:

The wind's howling takes on a vicious wail, and the sounds of death subside, replaced by the moans of the undead and dying.

Regardless of how many undead the characters have slain, a horde exits the town, leaving tracks that are easy to follow. As the mists clear, the characters can make out the horde marching away.

Aftermath

Last Hearth has been laid to ruin. Between those killed and those turned, the town's population has been more than halved. The survivors are in a state of shock. They are leaderless, grieving, and despondent. In this aftermath, the characters can do whatever seems best. There are injured to care for, survivors to console, and dead to be buried. Reward interesting and thoughtful play and consider using divine blessings to do so.

AFTERMATH REWARD

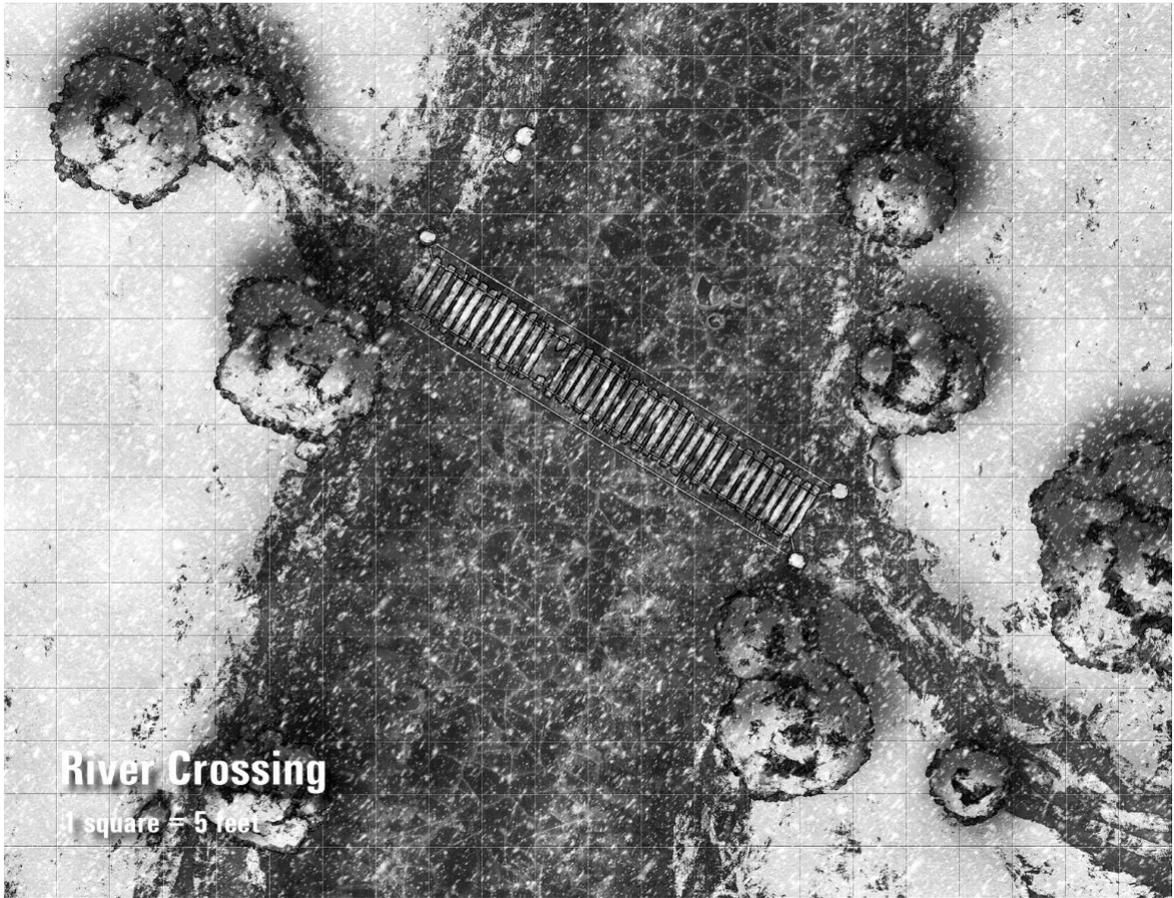
Adventure Level	Treasure
1st	2 potions of healing
3rd	1 potion of healing and 1 potion of greater healing
5th	2 potions of greater healing
8th	1 potion of greater healing and 1 potion of superior healing

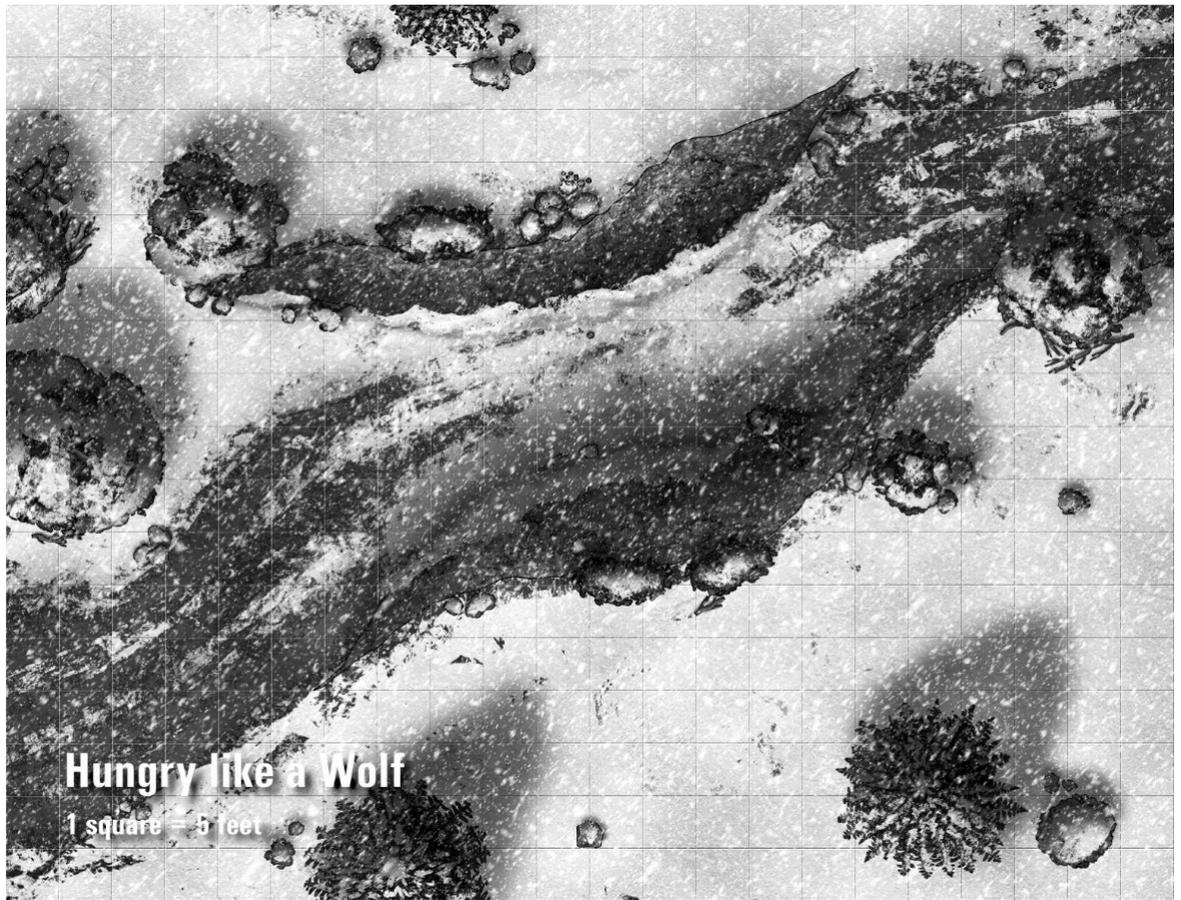
The characters also have the opportunity to investigate. Checking the bodies of any undead reveals that while some were beasts, many more were locals. Izak will beg the characters to discover what is creating the undead and destroy any more undead they encounter. If Izak is dead, Brenda Steinaltap will take his place.

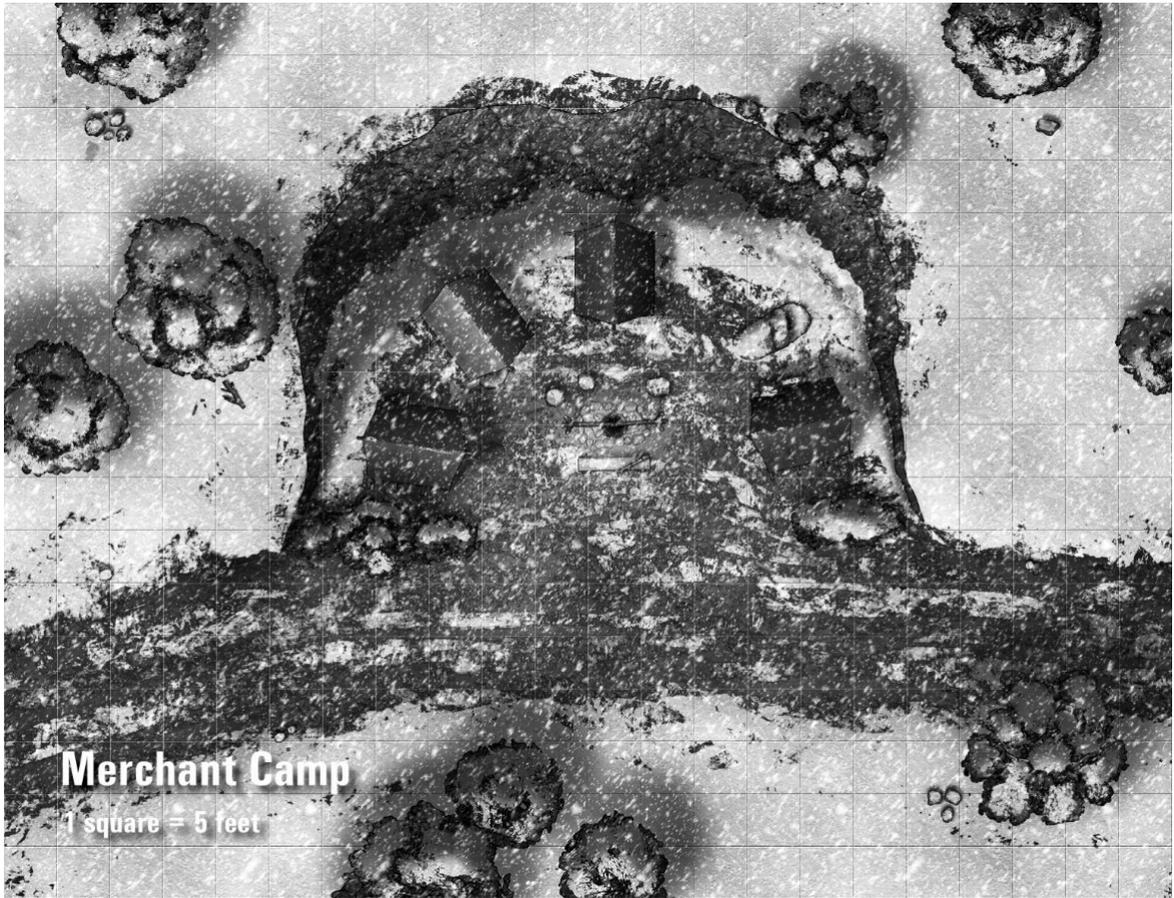
Reward. The town leader also rewards the party's efforts thus far. The nature of the reward depends on the level of the adventure, as shown in the table below.

Following the Horde. If the characters wish to follow the undead, they will quickly find dozens of tracks leading into the Frozen Wastes. No ability check is required to follow them.



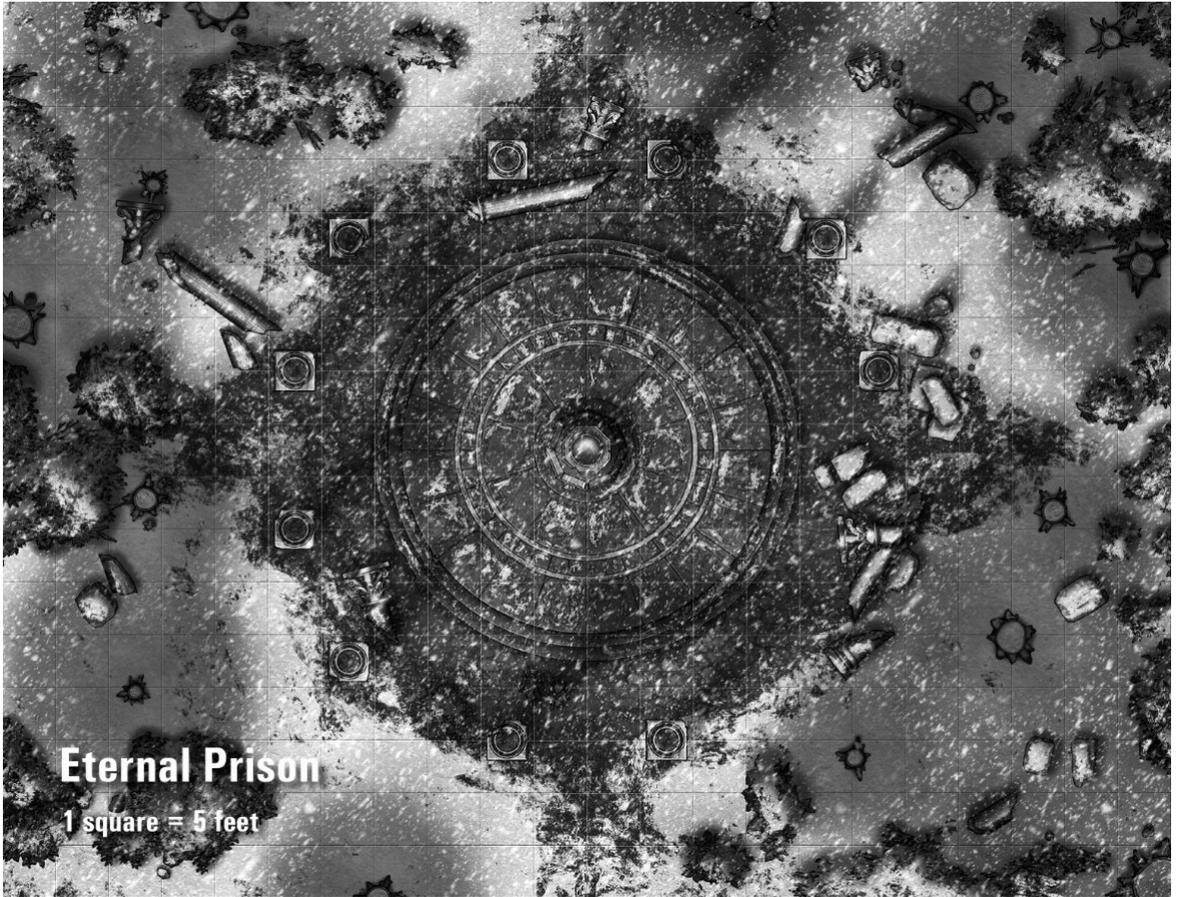






Merchant Camp

1 square = 5 feet





Frozen Wastes

The Frozen Wastes are a dangerous place to travel during the best times; venturing out into them during the current troubles is tantamount to suicide.

The undead are being drawn towards an ancient site of necromantic magic. Along the way, the characters must overcome several obstacles, none more challenging than the freezing conditions. For the party, this journey takes a minimum of 3 hours.

General Features

Unless stated otherwise, the following features are common to the Frozen Wastes.

Gnawing Hunger. The region's creatures have seen their strength sapped as they fail to satisfy an insatiable hunger. These creatures now appear emaciated, little more than bags of flesh and bone.

Extreme Cold. A frigid and biting cold covers the entire region. Outsiders will find

this cold challenging unless they are accustomed to such extreme temperatures.

A creature exposed to the cold and without both suitable clothing and access to food must succeed on a Constitution saving throw at the end of each hour or suffer one level of exhaustion. The DC is 10 for the first hour and increases by 1 for each additional hour. Creatures with resistance or immunity to cold damage automatically succeed on the saving throw, as do creatures naturally adapted to cold climates.

Biting Blizzard. The heavy snows cause the area to be lightly obscured out to a range of 60 feet for the characters and heavily obscured beyond that. The strong winds impose disadvantage on ranged weapon attack rolls and Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing. The wind also extinguishes open flames and disperses fog; a creature flying in the area by nonmagical means and without the ability to hover must land at the end of its turn or fall.

Frozen Wastes Encounters

The characters are confronted with the following encounters on their travels through the Frozen Wastes.

River Crossing

Less than an hour from Last Hearth, the road crosses a frozen river. Read or paraphrase the following:

The road leads to an old wooden bridge that spans a vast, frozen river. Through the blizzard, you can just make out the far side where the road continues.

The bridge has seen better days, with gaps and broken planks.

Crossing the Bridge. The bridge is dilapidated. Any creature attempting to cross it must make a DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. On a failure, the creature steps on a weak plank and falls through the bridge, hitting the ice below with enough force to break through it and fall into the freezing water.

Crossing the Ice. Any creature attempting to cross the ice on foot must make a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. On a failure, the creature steps on a patch of weak ice and falls into the freezing water below.

Freezing Water. If a creature falls into the freezing water, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw, suffering one level of exhaustion on a failure. Each additional minute spent in the frigid water or wet clothing requires the creature to succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or suffer another level of exhaustion. Creatures with resistance or immunity to cold damage automatically succeed on the saving throw, as do creatures naturally adapted to freezing water.

Pack of Wolves

A short walk from the river crossing, the party encounters a pack of hungry wolves. Read or paraphrase the following:

Heard long before they're seen, wolfish howls pierce through the churning snow. Moments later, a pack of skeletal wolves streaks into view.

Hungry like a Wolf. A pack of hungry and desperate wolves attacks the party and fights until utterly destroyed. The nature of the encounter depends on the level of the adventure, as shown in the table below.

PACK OF WOLVES ENCOUNTER

Adventure Level	Encounter
1st	2 wolves
3rd	4 wolves
5th	3 dire wolves
8th	2 winter wolves

Merchant Camp

Two hours from the town, the party finds a small campsite. It was being used by a caravan of merchants who had braved the snowy passes to reach Last Hearth with much-needed supplies. On their way through, however, the undead slaughtered the merchants and added them to their horde.

Scavenging Beasts. Hungry beasts have followed their noses to the camp. Some scatter when the party arrives, but others are gorging themselves on the supplies the merchants brought. The nature of the encounter depends on the level of the adventure, as shown in the table below.

MERCHANT CAMP ENCOUNTER

Adventure Level	Encounter
1st	1 brown bear
3rd	1 polar bear
5th	1 mammoth
8th	2 mammoths

Treasure. The remaining supplies are enough to sustain the people of Last Hearth for another week. There are also medical supplies worth 50 gp.

Cliffhanger

The tracks you have been following stop at a dead end. A sheer cliff face stands before you, blocking any further steps forward. The only way is up.

Scaling the Cliff. Climbing the cliff face is possible but difficult. Each character must make a successful Strength (Athletics) check to climb the cliff. Have the characters decide upon a marching order and then roll their checks in that order. On a failure, a character falls and takes bludgeoning damage. The DC for the check and the amount of damage taken on a failure are detailed below.

If a character that falls is attached to another character, that character must make a Strength saving throw against the same DC. On a success, the character keeps their grip and stops the other character from falling. On a failure, however, both characters fall.

CLIFFHANGER CHALLENGE

Adventure Level	Check/Save DC	Falling Damage
1st	12	2d6
3rd	13	3d6
5th	15	6d6
8th	16	10d6



Eternal Prison

The undead have been drawn to the ruins of an ancient prison built to contain a monster of great power. When they arrive, the undead are feverishly digging through the snow and stone, attempting to release this monster. Read or paraphrase the following:

Through the thick snowfall, you see groups of the undead, each digging through an area of frozen rock.

They're struggling to unearth something, but you cannot see what it is; what is clear is the number of undead are more than you can handle.

Undead Horde. While the characters can choose a direct assault, there are too many undead to be sure of victory. The party may be able to bypass the undead or find ways to separate them and reduce their numbers. However, they must do so through a skill challenge.

A skill challenge simulates a task requiring more time and effort than a single ability check. In its simplest form, the characters make a series of ability checks to earn a required number of successes before accumulating a maximum number of failed checks—similar to how death saving throws work.

This skill challenge consists of the following elements:

- **Goal and Context.** Reduce the number of undead the party must fight.
- **Difficulty.** Primary skill checks related to this skill challenge are made against a DC of 10. Secondary and repeat checks are made against a DC of 15.
- **Complexity.** The party can collectively make up to five ability checks related to this skill challenge. Each success reduces the number of undead they encounter.
- **Primary Checks.** When the characters partake in a skill challenge, they may commit any ability check they like to the skill challenge. Certain ability checks,

however, lend themselves better to a successful outcome than others. These ability checks are primary checks and usually have a lower DC than their secondary checks. The primary checks for this skill challenge are Dexterity (Stealth) to sneak closer to or past the undead, Intelligence (Arcana) to use a spell to draw away or trap the undead, and Wisdom (Survival) to use the terrain to lead the undead away.

- **Secondary Checks.** Secondary checks represent all the skills the characters may use to participate in a skill challenge that aren't considered primary checks. The main reason for the disparity between primary and secondary is that primary checks are a little more "obvious" in their function.
- **Other Conditions.** The characters must spend at least 1 hour and can't make a second attempt in a 24-hour period. All previous successes count as a success in subsequent attempts.
- **Consequences.** For each success the characters earn toward this skill challenge, reduce the number of undead they must face in the final encounter, noted in the table below.

As the characters approach, the monster is released from its ancient prison. The party must then choose whether they will flee or stand and fight. If they fight, the monster summons any remaining undead and attacks the party. The nature of the encounter depends on the level of the adventure, as shown in the table below. Creatures marked with an asterisk are new monsters detailed in the appendix.

ETERNAL PRISON ENCOUNTER

Adventure Level	Encounter	For each successful check, reduce the encounter by...
1st	1 ghoul and 10 zombies	2 zombies
3rd	1 wight and 20 zombies	4 zombies
5th	1 wraith and 10 ghouls	2 ghouls
8th	1 ghoul lord* and 15 ghouls	3 ghouls



Treasure. The characters can find treasure in the ruined prison. The nature of the treasure depends on the level of the adventure, as shown in the table below.

ETERNAL PRISON TREASURE

Adventure Level	Treasure
1st	A <i>potion of healing</i> , a +1 <i>longsword</i> , and assorted coins with a combined value of 112 gp.
3rd	A <i>potion of healing</i> , a <i>potion of fire resistance</i> , a +1 <i>longsword</i> , a chain shirt, and assorted coins with a combined value of 312 gp.
5th	A <i>potion of greater healing</i> , a <i>potion of hill giant strength</i> , a +1 <i>greatsword</i> , a suit of scale mail, and assorted coins with a combined value of 512 gp.
8th	A <i>potion of greater healing</i> , a <i>potion of frost giant strength</i> , a +1 <i>greatsword</i> , a suit of +1 <i>scale mail</i> , and assorted coins with a combined value of 812 gp.

Aftermath

If the characters succeed in destroying the monstrous prisoner, the blizzards cease almost immediately, and, for the first time in days, sunshine bursts through the clouds above. Furthermore, the magic animating the undead is broken, and within a few days, those creatures collapse and are lost beneath the snow.

If the characters return to Last Hearth, they find it slowly recovering. Any rewards they were promised are handed over, and the party is praised for saving the town. Although grateful to the party for their deeds, Last Hearth remains quiet and sad. Ω

APPENDIX

<h2>Ghoul Lord</h2> <p><i>Large Undead, Neutral Evil</i></p>						<p>Turn Defiance. The ghoull lord and any undead within 30 feet of it have advantage on saving throws against effects that turn undead.</p>
<p>Armor Class 16 (breastplate) Hit Points 127 (15d10 + 45) Speed 35 ft., climb 30 ft.</p>						<p>ACTIONS</p>
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA	<p>Multiattack. The ghoull lord makes one Bite attack and two Claw attacks. One of the attacks can be replaced by using Spellcasting.</p> <p>Bite. <i>Melee Weapon Attack:</i> +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. <i>Hit:</i> 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, its hit point maximum is also reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken. The target dies if its hit point maximum is reduced to 0.</p> <p>Claw. <i>Melee Weapon Attack:</i> +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. <i>Hit:</i> 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.</p> <p>Spellcasting. The ghoull lord casts one of the following spells, using Intelligence as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks):</p> <p>At will: <i>chill touch</i> (2d8), <i>command</i> 3/day each: <i>bestow curse</i>, <i>hold person</i> (as a 3rd-level spell) 1/day each: <i>contagion</i>, <i>dominate person</i></p>
16 (+3)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	
<p>Saving Throws Con +7, Wis +6, Cha +5 Skills Athletics +7, Perception +6 Damage Resistances cold, necrotic Damage Immunities poison Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16 Languages Common, telepathy 60 ft. Challenge 9 (5,000 XP) Proficiency Bonus +4</p>						<p>BONUS ACTIONS</p> <p>Undead Assault. The ghoull lord mentally commands up to three undead creatures it can see within 60 feet of it. Each of the creatures can use its reaction, if available, to make one melee attack against a creature within its reach.</p>
<p>Magic Resistance. The ghoull lord has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.</p> <p>Regeneration. The ghoull lord regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the ghoull lord takes radiant damage or damage from a critical hit, this trait doesn't function at the start of the ghoull lord's next turn. The ghoull lord dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.</p> <p>Stench. Any creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of the ghoull lord must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the ghoull lord's Stench for 24 hours.</p>						