

Fig. XIV: The wendigo as the old accounts describe it, starved and frost-bitten, no antlers. House-style plate.

CRYPTID № 14

THE WENDIGO

The famine spirit of the Algonquian north, and the taboo it was built to enforce. The real folklore, honest about what Hollywood added, a full 5E stat block built around its heart of ice, and a system-neutral card.

> *"The monster is the easy part. The hard part is the choice that makes one."*

THE LEGEND

The wendigo belongs to the Algonquian peoples of the northern forests. That means the Ojibwe, the Cree, the Innu, and their neighbors. It is older and more serious than the monster movies suggest. At its heart it is a teaching about winter. The north could starve a family to death between one thaw and the next. The wendigo is what waits at the bottom of that hunger. It is the horror of eating the one thing you must never eat.

The taboo is cannibalism. In a hard winter a starving person might eat another to survive. The stories say that person does not stay a person. They become a wendigo, gaunt and frostbitten and hungrier than before. The

more it eats, the larger it grows, so it is never full. A heart of ice forms where a human heart used to be. It is a warning worn as a monster. Do not become the thing that feeds on its own people.

The record of the wendigo runs centuries deep. In 1636 a French missionary named Paul Le Jeune wrote of it. He had wintered in the north and heard of the Atchen, a being that devoured whole camps. His was among the first European accounts, but the belief was far older. A later report, in 1661, described Cree who turned cannibal in a killing winter. For four hundred years the wendigo has named the same fear, in the same cold country, in the same hungry season.

Two modern layers sit on top of the old belief, and neither is traditional. The first is the look. The skull-faced thing with deer antlers is a recent invention, from a 2001 horror film and the games that copied it. The real wendigo has no antlers. It is a gaunt, starved, ice-hearted figure that was once a person. The second layer is the phrase wendigo psychosis, an outside label that scholars now question. We keep the creature and set the costume aside.

So the wendigo is hunger that cannot be fed. It is the cold that outlasts the fire and the food. It is the fear that survival itself might cost you the thing that makes you a person. Run it with that weight, and credit whose story it is. The monster is the easy part. The hard part is the choice that makes one, the long winter and the empty stores and the terrible arithmetic of who eats. Keep the teaching, and the teeth take care of themselves.

For D&D 5E — STAT BLOCK

For Every Other Game — CREATURE CARD

The Wendigo

Large monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 152 (16d10 + 64)
Speed 40 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Skills Perception +6, Stealth +6, Survival +6
Damage Vulnerabilities fire
Damage Immunities cold
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP) **PB** +3

Heart of Ice. Where a human heart should be, the wendigo carries a fist of black ice, and that is the only part of it that truly dies. When the wendigo drops to 0 hit points it falls motionless but is not destroyed; at the start of its next turn it rises with 40 hit points. It is stopped for good only by its frozen heart: if it takes any fire damage while at 0 hit points it is destroyed, or a creature can use an action on the inert body to make a DC 15 Strength check, tearing the ice heart free and ending the wendigo when the heart is shattered or melted.

Aura of Famine. Hunger and killing cold pour off the wendigo. While within 30 feet of it, a creature cannot regain hit points, and the ground within that radius is rimed with frost and is difficult terrain. The aura is suppressed

The Wendigo

No stat lines. Just a creature that is really a warning: about famine, about winter, and about the one thing a starving person must never do. The wendigo is the Algonquian north's name for hunger that eats a person from the inside until there is nothing human left. Where the Dwayyo cannot be confirmed and the Kraken cannot be fled, the wendigo cannot be fed.

HOW IT BEHAVES AT THE TABLE

- **It is hunger, not malice.** It does not scheme. It pursues the nearest living thing to eat, always, and it is never full. That relentlessness is scarier than any plan.
- **The cold comes with it.** Food spoils, wounds will not close, the fire gutters. The land around a wendigo is already starving before anyone sees it.
- **It was a person.** The real horror is the choice that made it. Keep that human root in view; the monster is what the choice costs.

WAYS TO USE IT

- **The winter that would not end.** A snowed-in settlement, dwindling stores, and something outside that used to live inside. The dread is the arithmetic of who eats before anyone sees the creature.

while the wendigo is at 0 hit points.

Insatiable. Immediately after the wendigo reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee attack, or uses its action to feed on a corpse, it regains 15 hit points. Its hunger is never sated: it will always pursue the nearest living prey over any other goal.

Snow Stalker. The wendigo has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks in snow, forest, or storm, ignores difficult terrain from ice and snow, and leaves tracks only when it chooses to.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The wendigo makes two attacks: two with its Claws, or one with its Claws and one Bite.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) cold damage.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature reduced to 0 hit points by this bite, the wendigo tears loose a mouthful and the target must be stabilized by another creature or it dies.

Winter's Howl (Recharge 5–6). The wendigo looses a keening cry on the wind. Each creature within 30 feet that can hear it must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure a creature takes 18 (4d8) cold damage and is frightened of the wendigo until the end of its next turn; on

- **The camp found empty.** Tracks leading out, not in. A cooking fire long cold. One set of prints too large and too light for the snow it crosses.
- **The one who ate.** A survivor the party rescues, grateful and wrong, who has already crossed the line and is slowly becoming the thing that will hunt them. Handle it with gravity.
- **Cut it loose from the north, carefully.** Any place a long dearth can trap people will serve: a siege, a famine, a ship iced in. Keep the hunger, the cold, and the taboo, and keep crediting whose story it is.

DIFFICULTY DIAL

- Far down the dial it never fights: it is a cold that kills crops and courage, a rumor in the snow, a moral pressure on desperate people. Up the dial it is an ice-hearted apex predator that cannot be out-healed and will not stay down.
- Make it *survivable* by making the answer clever rather than strong: fire, or the heart, or simply surviving the winter until the thaw drives it off. Make it *dire* by cutting off the fire and the food and letting the Aura of Famine do the work.

a success it takes half damage and is not frightened.

Running it. The star of this block is Heart of Ice: the fight is not over when the wendigo drops. If the party celebrates at 0 hit points and turns away, it rises with 40 and the Aura of Famine means they have not been healing. The intended arc is a grind of attrition that FEELS like starvation, until someone realizes the only way to end it is fire or the heart. Lead with that, and with the Aura (no healing in 30 feet) which quietly makes every long fight a losing one. Treat the subject with weight: this is a living Algonquian teaching, not set-dressing, so name its origin at the table and lean on the real horror, which is the human choice behind it, not a monster costume. Deliberately CR 8, but scale freely: at low levels it is a distant dread, a camp found empty, tracks in the snow, a cold that will not lift, with no fight at all; at high levels it is the ice-hearted apex of a killing winter. Do NOT give it antlers or a deer skull; that is modern pop culture, not the tradition (see the Legend).

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