



Shrine of the Emperor of Bones

Shrine of the Emperor of Bones is a Fifth Edition adventure for four to five characters of 1st to 2nd level, and is **optimized for a party of four characters with an average party level (APL) of 1**. This adventure is setting agnostic, meaning that you can easily set it into any campaign setting or environment of your choice.

Ideally, the shrine is hidden in a tropical environment such as a jungle or even under a town or city where water would easily flood its chambers.

Background

Once a noble's son with a promising future in arcane magic, the self-proclaimed emperor of bones destroyed himself and his followers during a necromantic ritual gone awry. Resurrected and driven by a compulsion to complete the ritual, the emperor continues his dark practices at the shrine that bears his name.

Adventure Hooks

If you need a quick adventure hook to get the characters involved, here are a few suggestions:

Lurking Evil

Paladins at a local temple detected the presence of desecrated ground below the city (or whatever setting you choose). Knowing that the characters are eager to make a name for themselves in the land, they task them with clearing out whatever lies in the dungeon, offering 200 gp upon successful completion.

The Emperor's Ritual

The characters are approached by a necromancer who seeks access to the same ritual that the emperor of bones used to destroy himself and his followers centuries ago. He suspects that the ritual is within the old shrine below the city and offers to pay the characters 200 gp to fetch him the emperor's spellbook (see area 8). If you choose this hook, the spellbook contains the ritual in addition to the other spells mentioned.

The Beast

A group of teens entered an old section of the city's sewers and came face to face with some horrible creature in the darkness. Little did they know that the creature was none other than the emperor's loyal owlbear zombie. The town

guard asks the characters to descend into the lost passage and clear out whatever dangers lie within.

The Shrine

The Shrine is an abandoned dungeon of a house long destroyed by the elements. The entire building reeks of mold and rot thanks to the standing water at the east end of the shrine and the undead that lurk within.

The shrine's ceilings, walls, and floors are made of crumbling dressed stone. Ceilings are 10 feet high in corridors and natural caverns and 20 feet high in manmade chambers.

Doors are made of ancient wooden planks hung on iron hinges. A door has AC 13, 15 hp, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. The locking mechanisms on the doors stopped functioning long ago.

Water fills many of the caverns and chambers of the shrine. Areas flooded with water count as difficult terrain.

Thanks to the emperor's failed necromantic ritual, the entirety of the shrine is considered **desecrated ground**. The desecrated ground is revealed by a *detect evil and good* spell or similar effects (such as a paladin's Divine Sense class feature). All undead in the shrine have advantage on all saving throws. A vial of holy water purifies a 10-foot-square

area of desecrated ground when sprinkled on it, and a *hallow* spell purifies desecrated ground within its area.

Keyed Locations

The areas detailed below are keyed to the map of the Shrine on this page.

1 - Entrance

Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 13 or better can hear the zombie owlbear moaning upon approach.

This dank chamber smells of mold and rot.

Encounter: Zombie Owlbear. The emperor keeps a **zombie owlbear** to protect the temple from intruders. The zombie owlbear's stat block is included in the Appendix. It's worth noting that this is a relatively dangerous encounter for a 1st-level party, so be sure to telegraph it in advance. If you feel the owlbear is too strong for the party, remove its Multiattack action.



2 - Missile Hallway

Litter clutters the cracked stone tiles of this area. There are three exits from the room: a door to the north, a door to the west, and an archway that connects to a hallway that extends 70 feet to the east into darkness.

The easternmost wall of the hallway boasts a bas-relief carving of a skeleton wielding a magic wand.

Feature: Dead Adventurer. The body of a dead tiefling knight lies in the center of the hallway, victim of the *magic missile* trap described below.

Trap: Magic Missile. The hallway connecting this area to areas 5 and 8 is trapped, triggered when a character steps through the easternmost archway of this room (marked on the map). On the easternmost wall of the hallway, the skeleton carving fires a 1st-level *magic missile* spell at the character that triggered the trap. Once triggered, 24 hours must pass before the trap resets. A character proficient in the Arcana skill who succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that there is a magical glyph on the floor by the archway. A creature can easily step over the glyph, requiring no check to do so. Additionally, the trap can be disabled with a successful *dispel magic* spell cast upon the glyph or the skeleton carving.

Treasure: Dead Adventurer. The tiefling has a backpack which contains the contents of an explorer's pack (minus the rations) plus a leather pouch holding 10 gp.

3 - Spiders, Ew!

Thick webs blanket the entirety of this otherwise empty room.

There is nothing of value in this spider's nest.

Hazard: Webs. This entire room is covered in sticky webbing which counts as difficult terrain and lightly obscures the entire area. A creature that starts its turn in the webs or enters the area on their turn must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed saving throw, the creature is restrained by the webbing. A creature restrained by the webs can use its action to make a DC 10 Strength check, freeing themselves on a success. Otherwise, a 10 foot cube section of webbing has AC 5, 10 hit points, vulnerability to fire, and immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, and psychic damage.

Encounter: Swarm of Spiders. When a character touches the webs, it alerts a **swarm of spiders** hidden in the room. The spiders immediately attack whatever is trapped in their webs.

4 - Fountain Passage

An old water fountain stands in the center of this musty passage. No water flows through the object as its pipes

are useless, clogged with mold and insects.

Obstacle: Rusted Portcullis. A rusted iron portcullis divides the hall to the west from the chamber. The device used to open the portcullis stopped functioning ages ago. A character who makes a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check can push the portcullis out of the way. The portcullis has AC 17, 25 hit points with a damage threshold of 5, with resistance to piercing and slashing damage and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Attacking the portcullis alerts the skeletons in area 5 to the characters' presence.

5 - Shrine of the Emperor of Bones

This large chamber is partially flooded. A statue depicting a six-armed skeleton wielding scimitars stands against the western wall. Candles with purple flames burn atop a shrine just in front of the statue.

The statue is dedicated to Xalstus, the god of murder. There, at Xalstus' foot, the emperor of bones tries to perform its grizzly rituals, destined to fail over and over for all eternity.

Encounter: The Emperor of Bones. The emperor of bones (see the Appendix) waits here with three skeletons. If the emperor knows the characters are coming, he casts *mirror image* on himself in advance and *fog cloud* as they enter the room. Once the characters are inside the *fog cloud*, he casts *sleep*, trying to capture as many as he can. The skeletons assisting the emperor then enter the *fog cloud* to take care of any unconscious characters. The emperor and skeletons fight until destroyed.

Treasure: Emperor's Key. The emperor carries a key to the door that leads to area 8. The key, when inserted into the door, disables the *arcane lock* there.

6 - False Treasure Room

The two doors leading into this room are not made of wood; instead, they are heavy stone tablets hung on stone hinges. When closed, a door conceals a steel grate in the floor through which water can drain. If a door seals (see the trap below), a successful DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check is needed to break it open. Alternatively, a character with proficiency in thieves' tools can open the door with a successful DC 16 Dexterity check. The door has AC 18, 30 hp with a damage threshold of 5, and immunity to poison and psychic damage.

This room appears to be empty except for four stone boxes in the room arranged in two neat rows.

Trap: Fake Stone Chests. The boxes all measure 2 feet on each side. They are built into the floor, but the lids are easily removed by a creature with a Strength score of 10 or higher. The four stone boxes are magical traps. If a character opens one or more of the lids, a tiny portal to the elemental plane of water begins to fill the box, eventually spilling

into the room. Furthermore, the two doors that lead into the room close and seal shut.

The room fills with three inches of water per round per open stone box. The ceilings in the room are 20 feet high. Thus, if all four stone boxes are discharging water into the room, it will take 20 rounds (two minutes) to completely flood the room. Be sure to review the rules for underwater combat and suffocating in the *PHB* before running this trap.

The room continues to flood until one of the following conditions are met:

- The characters find a way through the northernmost locked door as detailed above. Once this door is opened, the water stops coming through the portals and starts to exit through the grates in the floor of the door's archway. It takes 1 minute per foot of water in the room for the water to completely drain through the grates.
- One or more of the portals to the Elemental Plane of Water are clogged. A portal can be clogged using a tool, rag, or something else that can stuff the hole to prevent further water from leaking out. Note that stopping the flow of water does not unlock the stone doors.

The stone boxes contain nothing of value.

7 - Watery Passage

Whereas most of the complex's corridors and chambers are made of dressed stone, this area is natural and completely flooded.

Feature: Fissure. A natural fissure in the wall is responsible for flooding the dungeon's eponymous shrine.

Hazard: Spikes. To prevent creatures—and pesky adventurers—from gaining access to the shrine this way (and

ultimately, the emperor's treasure room), the emperor of bones commanded his skeleton lackeys to hide rusted iron spikes in the water just before the fissure leading to area 5. When a creature moves into or within the area, it takes 2 (1d4) piercing damage for every 5 feet it travels. Noticing the spikes in the murky water is difficult; a character must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to see the spikes.

8 - Treasure Room

The door to this area is *arcane locked*. A character must succeed on a DC 25 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tools to unlock the door or a DC 30 Strength (Athletics) check to break it open. The emperor's key unlocks the door and surpasses the spell.

This area looks like it once served as living quarters. Its furniture within is either broken, moldy, or both.

Treasure: Emperor's Hoard. The emperor of bones still keeps his treasure here. The treasure contains the emperor's spellbook which has all the spells he has prepared plus *false life* and *gentle repose*. It also contains a *wand of secrets*, 100 gp, and two obsidian gems worth 10 gp each.

Conclusion

Once the emperor is defeated, the shrine's grounds cease to be desecrated within a week. Of course, a dank, watery dungeon is the perfect place for future monsters to move in, especially if the emperor's shrine is below a major city or forested area. This may not be the last time that the characters have to enter the shrine of the emperor of bones.

Ω





Emperor of Bones

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Int +3, Wis +1
Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages Common
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Spellcasting. The emperor is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 11, +3 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, mage hand, minor illusion*
 1st level (4 slots): *fog cloud, sleep*
 2nd level (2 slots): *hold person, mirror image*

Actions

Chill Touch. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +3 to hit, range 120 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) necrotic damage and the target can't regain hit points until the start of the emperor's next turn. Undead hit by this attack have disadvantage on attack rolls against the emperor until the start of the emperor's next turn.

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage, or 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage when wielded with two hands.

Appendix: New Monsters

The two new monsters detailed here appear in this adventure: the emperor of bones and a zombie owlbear.

Undead Nature. The emperor of bones and the zombie owlbear do not require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Emperor of Bones

Once a noble's son with a promising future in arcane magic, the self-proclaimed emperor of bones destroyed himself and his followers thanks to a necromantic ritual gone awry. Resurrected and driven by a compulsion to complete the ritual, the emperor continues his dark practices at the shrine that bears his name.

Zombie Owlbear

As far as zombie companions go, owlbears make perfect subjects. Not only are they innately powerful, but their natural durability lends itself well to the difficult-to-kill nature of animated dead. The only drawback to reanimating owlbears is a noticeable loss of agility.

The emperor of bones uses a zombie owlbear to defend its shrine.

Zombie Owlbear

Large undead, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 59 (7d10 + 21)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	9 (-1)	17 (+3)	3 (-4)	8 (-1)	5 (-2)

Saving Throws Wis +1
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages —
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

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.

Actions

Multiattack. The zombie makes two attacks: one with its beak and one with its claws.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Credits

Adventure Design by DMDave

Illustrations by Matias Lazaro, Dyson Logos, and Tony Grasso

Open Gaming License

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other forms in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphics, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.
2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.
3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.
4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.
5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License

6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.
7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title, and interest in and to that Product Identity.
8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.
9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.
10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.
11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.
12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.
13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.
14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.
15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE Open Game License v 1.0a Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc. System Reference Document 5.0 Copyright 2016, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Mike Mearls, Jeremy Crawford, Chris Perkins, Rodney Thompson, Peter Lee, James Wyatt, Robert J. Schwalb, Bruce R. Cordell, Chris Sims, and Steve Townshend, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. Shrine of the Emperor of Bones Copyright 2021, Hamrick Brands, LLC; Authors Dave Hamrick, Tony Grasso, Matias Lazaro.

Product Identity: The following items are hereby identified a Product Identity, as defined in the Open Game License version 1.0a, Section 1(e), and are not Open Content: All trademarks, registered trademarks, proper names (characters, place names, new deities, etc.), dialog, plots, story elements, locations, characters, artwork, graphics, sidebars, and trade dress. (Elements that have previously been designated as Open Game Content are not included in this declaration).

Open Game Content: The Open content in this book includes the monster names, description, monster statistics, and monster abilities. No other portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without permission.

END OF LICENSE

