# JOURNALS OF DREAD VOL. II

## SECRETS OF THE SKELETON

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# Journals of Dread

## Vol. II

## Secrets of the Skeleton

# Credit

# Contents

# Introduction

My name is Morthios Delthain.

During my youth, before I became a monster chronicler, I spent a few months working together with an odd fellow, who called himself a "white necromancer". By this, he meant that he wasn't the animating type and that he had dedicated his life to putting the undead back into the grave. It was he that taught me many of the techniques and observational habits that I use today.

However, the incident I remember the most was in the early days of our working relationship. We'd been called by a local village, to help them with what they described as "the long-gone dead crawling from the ground", and when we arrived we saw indeed that part of the town had been overrun with skeletons. Feeling confident, I hefted my mace, and charged in, only to be pulled back by my friend. "Look again young one, do you not see something strange with these undead?"

I shook my head but did as he asked, and it was then that I noticed the pattern. All the skeletons were dressed in ordinary clothing, if many years and decades out of fashion, but all of them seemed to be doing... Well, there's no other word for it, but work. One skeleton, dressed as a mason, appeared to be stacking bricks on top of one another, while a nearby skeleton, dressed in a guard's uniform, appeared to be patrolling the street!

"Surely, anyone animating these would have better use for them than just having them re-enact a macabre of everyday life?" – My friend paused at my words, looked at me and nodded. "Your assumption is most likely correct. When dealing with those who traffic with the dead, we cannot afford to take any chances, but these skeletons are not likely to be controlled." I shook my head in astonishment and looked at the skeletons again. "So, do you think these have their own free will?"

"Free will yes. Free intelligence... That can be debated. When a skeleton is animated, they're given orders by the owner, and when the owner dies, they are likely to continue obeying his orders until they are destroyed by some outside force. However, sometimes their orders are scrambled, or they never receive any, with time, they revert to what they know. Or what the fragment that's left of their soul knows. It's like a habit, once you have it, it's hard to kick, and these skeletons have had habits their whole lives before they died and were reanimated. Now, their bones, free of the magic or abilities of others to control them, have returned to their homes, to continue with their habits."

So saying, my friend turned and walked towards the living side of ton. "Come, we must have a word with the village elders, and see what doom befell this town so many years ago. If they have returned to their lives, they will need destroying, but we will need to determine if there's a chance of whatever created them coming back".

**Excerpt taken from the tome: Voices in the Dark Volume I., Personal Essays & Journal of Morthios Delthain**
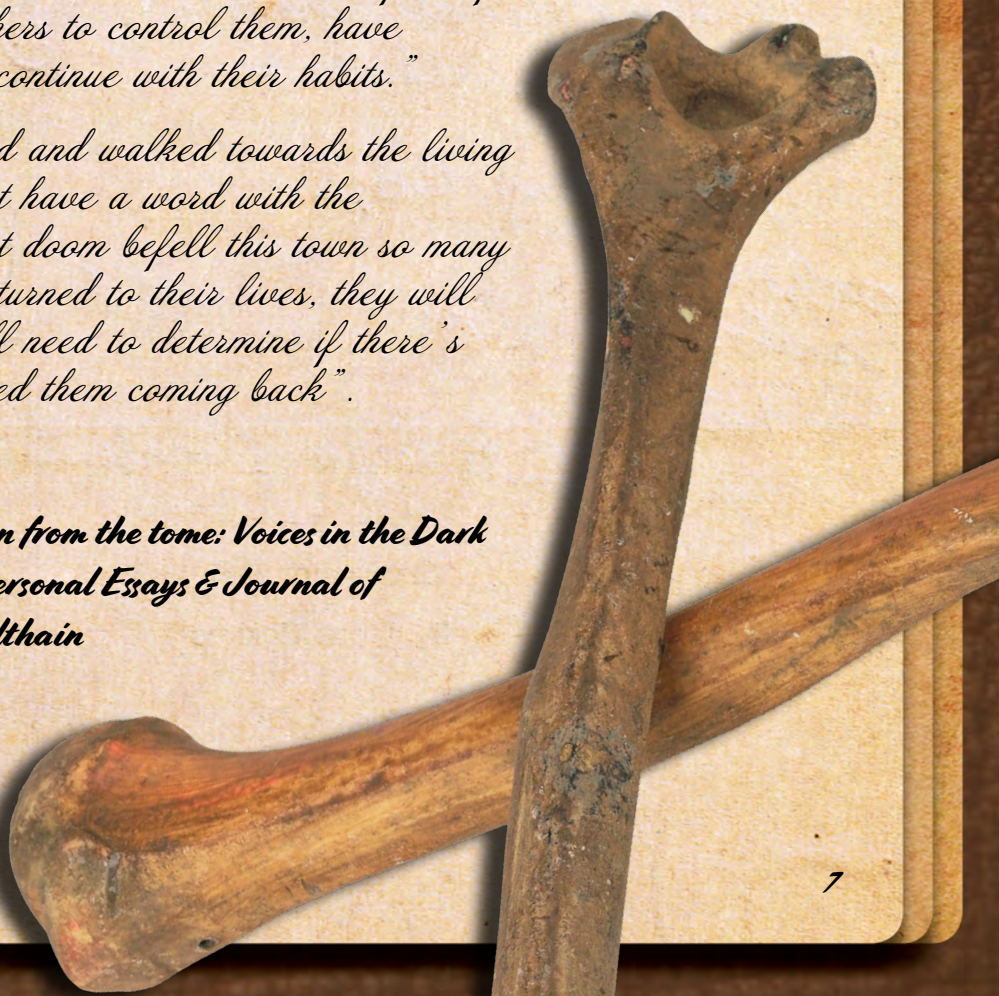
# The Monster Explained

Skeletons are a symbol of death in most cultures. We perceive them as the very personification of the end of all things, and they are such a pervasive image that we even use them as the sign on warning labels to indicate something that might be deadly. They represent the mortality of our lives, and many feel uncomfortable being around them, while others see them almost as curiosities, a remind of events long gone, somehow come back to us, to tell of these events.

Skeletons are with us in literature, films, dramas, and almost every other medium that mankind has ever explored. When we see Hamlet talking to the skull of his father, we know that he is contemplating death, or whatever happened to his father. When we see a huge machine driving over a field of skulls in Terminator, we know that something dreadful has happened. When those machines themselves have the shape of skeletons, we know that they are deadly to us. In some cultures, they are a representation of eternal life or resurrecting, while the skull itself, when combined with a candle is often synonymous with black magic.

In the following, we will provide you information on the appearance of skeletons in various situations, how they impact ecology where they live (and what part they take in it), how they interact socially, and what drives them and their creators. We will also provide you with 11 new templates for use with skeletons, for use with animate dead, create undead, create greater undead, as well as a five new skeleton-related monsters who either live in synergy with or are part of the skeletal hordes. Finally, we also provide you with equipment and a spell for players who are looking to battle this undead menace.
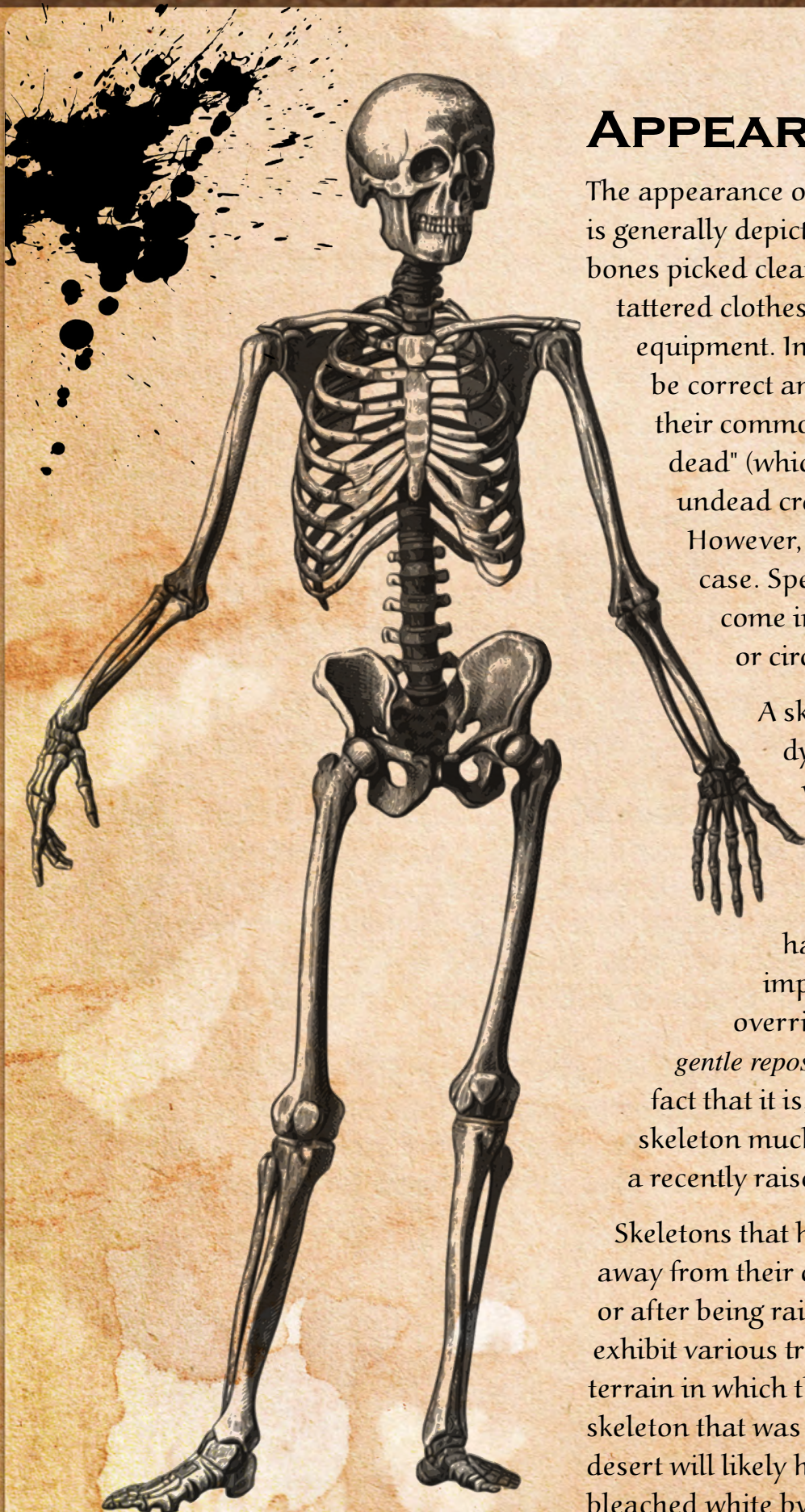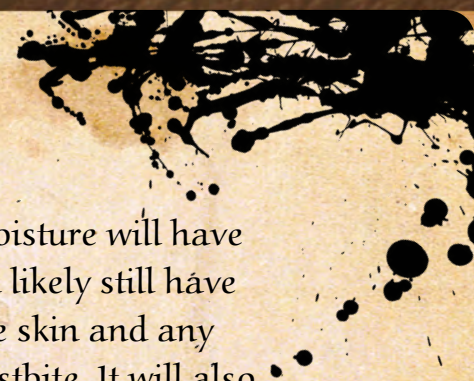
# Appearance

The appearance of the common skeleton is generally depicted as a skeleton with its bones picked clean of flesh, wearing tattered clothes, and wielding broken equipment. In many cases, this would be correct and is the source of one of their common monikers "the ancient dead" (which is also often used for undead creatures like mummies). However, this is not always the case. Specifically, skeletons can come in any guise their creator or circumstances dictated.

A skeleton raised just after dying still becomes a visible skeleton, causing the flesh to drop from its body and reveal the monstrosity that has been created. This is important to note as it overrides the use of effects like *gentle repose* and makes hiding the fact that it is, in fact, a moving skeleton much harder than disguising a recently raised zombie.

Skeletons that have had the flesh rot away from their corpses, either before or after being raised from the dead, will exhibit various traits depending on the terrain in which they decomposed. A skeleton that was left in the sun in a desert will likely have sandblasted bones, bleached white by the unrelenting sunlight,

possibly even with some of the skin still intact, since the moisture will have left the body long ago. A skeleton raised in arctic areas will likely still have most of its flesh intact, preserved as it is in the cold, but the skin and any exposed bone will have turned black from the frost and frostbite. It will also move about with some stiffness, as the joint of the bones will be frozen and unyielding, though this does not hamper its actual abilities. Meanwhile a skeleton interred in open farmland (like a typical graveyard) or forest will decompose normally, though will most likely have dirt and moss clinging to its form if newly raised, while a skeleton that came from a bog or swamp will have deformed and slightly soft bones due to the acidic nature of these areas.

The equipment of a skeleton varies wildly as well. It can range from broken to pristine, though commonly skeletons raised directly are only armed with whatever they happened to have with them when they went to their grave. For those buried in a normal graveyard, that normally just means clothes, or perhaps a keepsake of some sort, though certain cultures (and for some heroes), their dead might be buried with their favorite armor and weapons. Meanwhile, skeletons who never received a proper burial, or who fell on a battlefield, might still have their tools and equipment with them. For soldiers on a battlefield, this would typically include some form of weapon and armor, but a farmer who fell from disease or who fell down a ravine, and who was never recovered might only have his pitchfork with him.

All these equipment generalizations go out of the window when a necromancer or spellcaster interested in raising skeletons have specific ideas for his newly created companions. In those cases, the skeletons might find themselves with a particular appearance (some necromancers enjoy painting up their skeletons), but more often they will be given specific equipment for a mission or task. If he is equipping bodyguards, typically they'll be given good quality armor along with decent weapons, possibly even a mix of weapons, so that they can fight in multiple ranks, with the rearmost ranks using reach or ranged weapons while the front line defends itself with close combat weapons and shields. The armor choices will often be based upon the generally high maneuverability and quickness that the skeletons exhibit and skeletons make particularly good archers.

# Ecology
## & ecological impact

Skeletons, by their very undead nature, stand aside from the normal ecology of their surroundings. As they have no need to feed, they do not hunt animals, nor do they cultivate plants. That is not to say that they do not have an impact, however, any area inhabited by skeletons tends to fall into one of two types: The first is the "dead zone". All undead, even those of such relatively low stature as a skeleton, has a connection to the Negative Energy Plane. This negative energy suffuses them, motivates them, and is the force that keeps them moving. But that very force is the antithesis of life, and this causes plants to die in the surrounding area, and animals to leave in fear. These areas are easily identifiable as there is no living creature or plant in the area frequented by the skeleton (though this does take decades), and an eerie silence surrounds it. Wild animals refuse to enter, and domesticated ones shy away unless forced to do so.

The other zone is the overgrown zone. This is usually the leadup to the "dead zone", as skeletons are inimical to intelligent life (especially that of their own previous kind), so while they generally do not bother with normal animals, humanoids and other creature

types are hunted down and slain, out of some instinct remaining within them. This leads to the areas often being overgrown with vines, thorny bushes, and other kinds of plants normally considered weeds, as those who would normally tend and remove these plants now, stay away (or are hunted down, killed, and then become fertilizer for those very plants). Here, animal life survives, but has become more aggressive and more feral and the fauna in the area is dominated by plants that either grow very quickly or survive by choking the life from other plants (such as most vines).

Finally, some mention should be made of carrion eaters. These are the only creatures to generally stick around when skeletons move in, attracted not only be the negative energy exuded by the skeleton, but also by the potential pickings of both victims, and even the flesh of the skeletons themselves in the case of the fresher ones. But, like all other animals, they too move away, once there are no more pickings for them to eat. Until then, however, a small group of skeletons can often be seen from far away, simply by following the buzzards.

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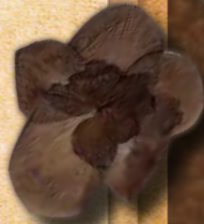
# Social

Skeletons, being unintelligent creatures, have no real social life of their own, though if left to their own devices, some remnant of the soul that once inhabited the body, will (if left long enough), revert to something eerily similar to the life they once led. A skeleton who was a farmer in life might revert to tilling the soil endlessly over and over, a skeleton that was once a horse might try to graze or stand around a crumbling stable, endlessly eating non-existing hay, while a skeleton that was a guard, might still patrol the walls of its hometown.

Skeletons are usually raised with a purpose, however, designated by their creator. The necromancer who raised them could have any purpose in mind, but the one usually envisioned by such a person is the destruction of something else. Skeletons, being mindless, have no mercy, no compassion, and show no remorse regardless of what they're asked to do. In fact, the energy that suffuses the undead, even a mindless one, such as a skeleton, will incline it towards evil, unconsciously seeking to destroy innocence and goodness, even when they are not actively controlled. Therefore, some necromancers raise more skeletons, far beyond the amount that they can normally

control, and simply grab one group a time; lead them to a target, and then just let go of that control, trusting the instincts and previous orders of the skeletons to take care of business. In rare cases, a necromancer might recruit an intelligent skeletal undead (such as a skeleton champion) to lead the undead horde, but these more powerful creatures are far harder to control, and any would-be undead master would be well-served to keep active control of these more powerful undead, otherwise they run the risk of losing control of the horde, and succumbing to its ravages along with the other, intended victims.

Skeletons are also used by free-willed undead of other types, providing guards or distractions as a needed. For example, a lich might well use several skeletons as cover in its lair, dress them up as himself, possibly even use illusion magic, so that any opponents target the skeleton instead of the lich itself, giving it more time to deal with the intruders. A vampire might use skeletons as guards over its coffin during the daylight hours, as they are not susceptible to the sunlight that could kill the vampire. At the same time, these guardians are silent, and never fall asleep, though they lack the initiative and intelligence of living minions. While most vampires prefer living minions for their intelligence, as well as the ready food supply, they know that the skeletons are utterly loyal and cannot be distracted. Other undead and other creatures, in general, use them only on an individual basis, as per their preference.

# Motivation & Goals

Being unintelligent, skeletons are normally subject to the whims and desires of their creators or their controller. As such, they can act in any simple manner as directed by that person, while still working towards a greater goal. For example, a group of skeletons could work as guards or a distraction, while another group forces their way into a nobleman's estate in order to kill him. This can sometimes give the appearance of a greater intelligence at work, though canny necromancers might attempt to make these appear to be mere coincidence. Usually, though, this tactic fails as skeletons are well known for being unintelligent and emotionless, leading any onlooker to suspect a greater power or force at work.

Skeletons left on their own, often do not exhibit any motives or desires. However, if unintelligent undead are left to their own devices for decades or centuries, the soul-remnant that animates them, does seem to have some influence upon their behavior, leading them to be hostile to living creatures (especially those who share the race that the skeleton used to be, before becoming undead), and instinctively searching out life within a few miles and destroying it. This is also the cause of the "dead zones" described above, as slowly and methodically the skeleton will eradicate any living being within range. They will generally not move beyond a few miles surrounding area of where they were

let loose, though some circumstances like a natural disaster might lead them to migrate elsewhere.

Finally, it should be noted that while skeletons are unintelligent, they do not lack a certain evil cunning. This means that they will try to attack from ambush, though they do not lay traps, and they will tend to focus their attacks on the same target until that target goes down. They will, however, unless controlled and told otherwise, simply focus their attacks on the closest target, so any smart adventurer should be able to use this to their advantage.

# The Monster & its kin

Presented below are a series of skeleton templates and types for use in your campaign. The aim for these is to expand the use of the skeleton beyond its original Challenge Rating so that it can occupy a greater and more recurring role in your campaign. Please note that some of the versions presented below have appeared elsewhere and are included here for the sake of completeness.

"*Skeleton*" is an acquired template that can be added to any corporeal creature (other than an undead) that has a skeletal system (referred to hereafter as the base creature).

**Challenge Rating:** This depends on the creature's new total number of Hit Dice, as follows:

| HD | CR | XP |
|-----|-----|-------|
| 1/2 | 1/6 | 65 |
| 1 | 1/3 | 135 |
| 2-3 | 1 | 400 |
| 4–5 | 2 | 600 |
| 6-7 | 3 | 800 |
| 8-9 | 4 | 1,200 |
| 10-11 | 5 | 1,600 |
| 12-14 | 6 | 2,400 |
| 15-17 | 7 | 3,200 |
| 18-20 | 8 | 4,800 |

**Alignment:** Always neutral evil.

**Type:** The creature's type changes to undead. It retains any subtype except for alignment subtypes (such as good) and subtypes that indicate kind (such as giant). It does not gain the augmented subtype. It uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

**Senses:** A skeleton gains darkvision 60 ft.

**Armor Class:** Natural armor bonus changes as follows:

| Skeleton Size | Natural Armor Bonus |
|---|---|
| Tiny or smaller | +0 |
| Small | +1 |
| Medium or Large | +2 |
| Huge | +3 |
| Gargantuan | +6 |
| Colossal | +10 |

**Hit Dice:** A skeleton drops any HD gained from class levels and changes racial HD to d8s. Creatures without racial HD are treated as if they have 1 racial HD. If the creature has more than 20 Hit Dice, it can't be made into a skeleton by the animate dead spell. A skeleton uses its Cha modifier (instead of its Con modifier) to determine bonus hit points.

**Saves:** Base save bonuses are Fort +1/3 HD, Ref +1/3 HD, and Will +1/2 HD + 2.

**Defensive Abilities:** A skeleton loses the base creature's defensive abilities and gains DR 5/bludgeoning and immunity to cold. It also gains all of the standard immunities and traits possessed by undead creatures.

**Speed:** A winged skeleton can't use its wings to fly. If the base creature flew magically, so can the skeleton. All other movement types are retained.

**Attacks:** A skeleton retains all the natural weapons, manufactured weapon attacks, and weapon proficiencies of the base creature, except for attacks that can't work without flesh. A creature with hands

gains one claw attack per hand; the skeleton can strike with each of its claw attacks at its full attack bonus. A claw attack deals damage depending on the skeleton's size (see Natural Attacks table below.) If the base creature already had claw attacks with its hands, use the skeleton claw damage only if it's better.

| Claw (Natural Attack) | Base Damage by Size |
|---|---|
| Fine | 1 |
| Diminutive | 1 |
| Tiny | 1d2 |
| Small | 1d3 |
| Medium | 1d4 |
| Large | 1d6 |
| Huge | 1d8 |
| Gargantuan | 2d6 |
| Colossal | 2d8 |

**Special Attacks:** A skeleton retains none of the base creature's special attacks.

**Abilities:** A skeleton's Dexterity increases by +2. It has no Constitution or Intelligence score, and its Wisdom and Charisma scores change to 10.

**BAB:** A skeleton's base attack bonus is equal to 3/4 of its Hit Dice.

**Feats:** A skeleton loses all feats possessed by the base creature and gains Improved Initiative as a bonus feat.

**Special Qualities:** A skeleton loses most special qualities of the base creature. It retains any extraordinary special qualities that improve its melee or ranged attacks.

**Environment:** Any, usually the same as base creature.

**Organization:** Any.

**Treasure:** Generally, none, although sometimes a skeleton's creator arms it with magical armor or weapons.
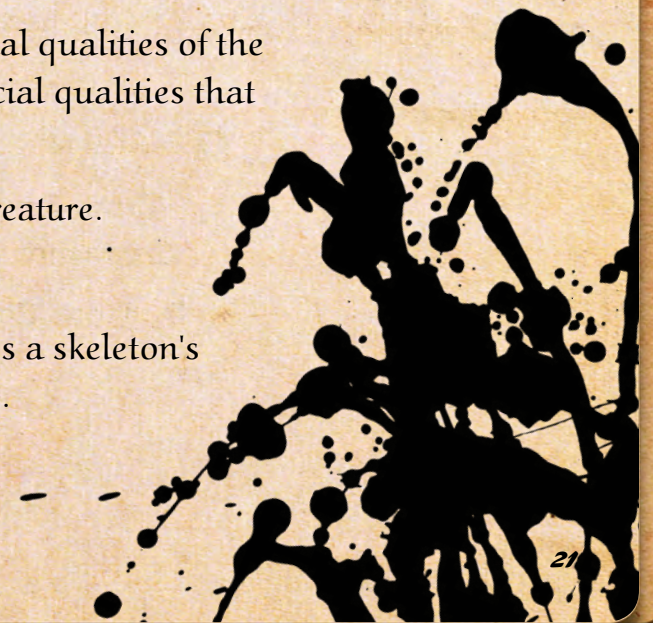
# Skeleton Variants

## Exoskeleton

*An exoskeleton is an empty husk, an animated carapace of vermin infused with the power of a necromancer, though a few are spontaneous creations. They creak and clatter even more so than normal skeletons, due to the interlocking plates.*

### Animating an Exoskeleton

Animating an exoskeleton with *animate dead* causes it to take up twice as many hit dice from the amount you can create with a single casting of *animate dead*, so if you could

normally make 10 skeletons, you can only make 5 exoskeletons. It is important to note, however, that while the exoskeletons take up twice as many hit dice per casting of *animate dead* for the purposes of creating them, they do NOT take up twice as many hit dice to control, so if you have time, you can animate and control as many exoskeletons as you could normal skeletons. The same goes for stacking multiple of these variant templates.

Further, the recipient of *animate dead* must have the vermin type.

### The Exoskeleton Template

"Exoskeleton" is an acquired template that can be added to any corporeal vermin that has an exoskeleton (referred to hereafter as the base creature).

**Challenge Rating:** Depends on Hit Dice, as follows

| HD | CR | XP |
|----|----|----|
| 1 | 1/4 | 100 |
| 2 | 1/2 | 200 |
| 3-4 | 1 | 400 |
| 5-6 | 2 | 600 |
| 7-8 | 3 | 800 |
| 9-10 | 4 | 1,200 |
| 11-12 | 5 | 1,600 |
| 13-15 | 6 | 2,400 |
| 16-17 | 7 | 3,200 |
| 18-20 | 8 | 4,800 |
| 21-24 | 9 | 6,400 |
| 25-28 | 10 | 9,600 |

**Alignment:** Always neutral evil.

**Type:** The creature's type changes to undead. It retains any subtype except for alignment subtypes and subtypes that indicate kind. It does not gain the augmented subtype. It uses the base creature's abilities except as noted below.

**Armor Class:** The base creature's natural armor changes as follows.

| Exoskeleton Size | Natural Armor Bonus |
|---|---|
| Tiny or smaller | +0 |
| Small | +1 |
| Medium | +2 |
| Large | +3 |
| Huge | +4 |
| Gargantuan | +7 |
| Colossal | +11 |

**Hit Dice:** An exoskeleton retains the number of Hit Dice the base creature had and gains a number of additional Hit Dice as noted on the following table. If the base creature has more than 20 Hit Dice, it can't be made into an exoskeleton by *animate dead*. An exoskeleton uses its Charisma modifier (instead of its Constitution modifier) to determine bonus hit points.

| Exoskeleton Size | Bonus Hit Dice |
|---|---|
| Tiny or smaller | - |
| Small or Medium | +1 |
| Large | +2 |
| Huge | +4 |
| Gargantuan | +6 |
| Colossal | +10 |

**Saves:** Base save bonuses are Fort +1/3 Hit Dice, Ref +1/3 Hit Dice, and Will +1/2 Hit Dice + 2.

**Defensive Abilities:** Exoskeletons lose their defensive abilities and gain all of the qualities and immunities granted by the undead type. In addition, exoskeletons gain DR 5/bludgeoning.

**Speed:** Exoskeletons retain all movement speeds. They can still fly but their maneuverability drops to clumsy.

**Attacks:** An exoskeleton retains all of its natural weapons. If the base creature didn't have any natural weapons, it gains a slam attack that deals damage as if it were one size category larger than its actual size.

**Special Attacks:** An exoskeleton loses all of its special attacks that rely on a living biology (such as poison), but it retains any others.

**Abilities:** An exoskeleton's Strength increases by +2. The exoskeleton has no Constitution or Intelligence score, and its Wisdom and Charisma scores change to 10.

**BAB:** An exoskeleton's base attack bonus is equal to 3/4 of its Hit Dice.

**Skills:** Though most vermin are mindless and have no skill ranks, the exoskeleton loses all skill ranks if it had any, and it doesn't retain any racial bonuses it had.

**Feats:** An exoskeleton loses all feats that the base creature had and doesn't gain feats as its Hit Dice increase, but it does gain Toughness as a bonus feat.

**Special Qualities:** An exoskeleton loses most special qualities of the base creature. It retains any extraordinary special qualities that improve its melee or ranged attacks.

An exoskeleton gains the following special quality.

**Burst (Ex)**
When an exoskeleton is destroyed, its desiccated husk bursts, releasing the dusty remains of the vermin's insides into the surrounding air. Any creature adjacent to an exoskeleton when it bursts must succeed at a Fortitude save or become staggered for 1 round as it coughs and sneezes. Creatures that don't need to breathe are immune to this effect. If the exoskeleton has 10 or more Hit Dice, the victim is instead nauseated for 1 round.
The save DC is equal to 10 + half the exoskeleton's Hit Dice + its Charisma modifier.

## HAUNTED EXOSKELETONS

Rarely, an exoskeleton is haunted by the lost spirit of a stubborn soul. This wreaks havoc on the spirit, wiping away most of its memories but giving the exoskeleton an Intelligence score of 10, along with all of the feats and skill ranks its Hit Dice would afford. Climb, Fly, Perception, and Swim are class skills for haunted exoskeletons. A haunted exoskeleton typically understands one language (usually Common) but cannot speak.

# Bloody Skeleton

*A bloody skeleton is coated in a slick layer of blood and gore, infused with negative energy. This gore allows the skeleton to reform and heal itself.*

### Animating a Bloody Skeleton

Animating a bloody skeleton with *animate dead* causes it to take up twice as many hit dice from the amount you can create with a single casting of *animate dead*, so if you could normally make 10 skeletons, you can only make 5 bloody skeletons. It is important to note, however, that while the bloody skeletons take up twice as many hit dice per casting of *animate dead* for the purposes of creating them, they do NOT take up twice as many hit dice to control, so if

you have time, you can animate and control as many bloody skeletons as you could normal skeletons. The same goes for stacking multiple of these variant templates.

## The Bloody Skeleton Template

In addition to the changes for the skeleton template (above), make the following adjustments to the base creature:

**Challenge Rating:** As a normal skeleton + 1.

**Fast Healing:** A bloody skeleton has fast healing equal to 1 per 2 Hit Dice it possesses (minimum 1).

**Saves:** A bloody skeleton gains channel resistance +4.

**Abilities:** A bloody skeleton's Charisma is 14.

**Special Qualities:** A bloody skeleton gains the deathless special quality.

### Deathless (Su)

A bloody skeleton is destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points, but it returns to unlife 1 hour later at 1 hit point, allowing its fast healing thereafter to resume healing it. A bloody skeleton can be permanently destroyed if it is destroyed by positive energy, if it is reduced to 0 hit points in the area of a bless or hallow spell, or if its remains are sprinkled with a vial of holy water.

# Burning Skeleton

*A burning skeleton is surrounded by an aura of flames that deals fire damage to those it strikes.*

### Animating a Burning Skeleton

Animating a burning skeleton with *animate dead* causes it to take up twice as many hit dice from the amount you can create with a single casting of *animate dead*, so if you could normally make 10 skeletons, you can only make 5 burning skeletons. It is important to note, however, that while the burning skeletons take up twice as many hit dice per casting of *animate dead* for the purposes of creating them, they do NOT take up twice as many hit dice to control, so if you have time, you can animate and control as many burning skeletons as you could normal skeletons. The same goes for stacking multiple of these variant templates.

### The Burning Skeleton Template

In addition to the changes for the skeleton template (above), make the following adjustments to the base creature:

**Challenge Rating:** As a normal skeleton + 1.

**Aura:** Burning skeletons possess a fiery aura.

### Fiery Aura (Ex)

Creatures adjacent to a burning skeleton take 1d6 points of fire damage at the start of their turn. Anyone striking a burning skeleton with an unarmed strike or natural attack takes 1d6 points of fire damage.

**Defensive Abilities:** Burning skeletons lose their immunity to cold but gain immunity to fire. A burning skeleton gains vulnerability to cold damage.

**Melee Attacks:** A burning skeleton's melee attacks (including both those made with a natural weapon and those made with a manufactured weapon) deal an additional 1d6 points of fire damage.

**Abilities:** A burning skeleton's Charisma is 12.

**Special Qualities:** A burning skeleton gains fiery death.

### Fiery Death (Su)

A burning skeleton explodes into a burst of flame when it dies. Anyone adjacent to the skeleton when it is destroyed takes 1d6 points of fire damage per 2 Hit Dice the skeleton possessed (minimum 1d6). A Reflex save (DC = 10 + 1/2 the skeleton's Hit Dice + the skeleton's Cha bonus) halves this damage.

# Cackling Skeleton

*A cackling skeleton constantly emits a racket of hideous laughter, unhinging its jaw and laughing like a mortal creature would at a hilarious joke.*

### Animating a Cackling Skeleton

Animating a cackling skeleton with *animate dead* causes it to take up twice as many hit dice from the amount you can create with a single casting of animate dead, so if you could normally make 10 skeletons, you can only make 5 cackling skeletons. It is important to note, however, that while the cackling skeletons take up twice as many hit dice per casting of *animate dead* for the purposes of creating them, they do NOT take up twice as many hit dice to control, so if you have time, you can animate and control as many cackling skeletons as you could normal skeletons. The same goes for stacking multiple of these variant templates.

### The Cackling Skeleton Template

In addition to the changes for the

skeleton template (above), make the following adjustments to the base creature:

**Challenge Rating:** As a normal skeleton + 1.

**Abilities:** A cackling skeleton's Charisma is 14.

**Special Qualities:** A cackling skeleton gains the fear aura special quality.

**Fear Aura(Su)**
A cackling skeleton is cloaked in a 30-foot aura of fear. This aura manifests as a hideous laughter that unnerves the listener. The first time it ends its turn within the aura, a creature must make a DC 13 Will save or become shaken for as long as it stays within the aura. If the creature succeeds at the saving throw, it cannot be affected again by the aura for another 24 hours. This is a fear and sonic effect. The DC is Charisma-based.

**Spell-like ability:** A cackling skeleton gains the ability to cast hideous laughter 3/day, as a bard of a level equal to its Hit Dice.

# Crystalline Skeleton

*A crystalline skeleton is covered in glass, obsidian or similarly fragile materials. When struck, a shower of shrapnel is released on the attacker, and when it is destroyed, it explodes in a shower of destructive shards.*

**Animating a Crystalline Skeleton**

Animating a crystalline skeleton with *animate dead* causes it to take up twice as many hit dice from the amount you can create with a single casting of *animate dead*, so if you could normally make 10 skeletons, you can only

make 5 crystalline skeletons. It is important to note, however, that while the crystalline skeletons take up twice as many hit dice per casting of *animate dead* for the purposes of creating them, they do NOT take up twice as many hit dice to control, so if you have time, you can animate and control as many crystalline skeletons as you could normal skeletons. The same goes for stacking multiple of these variant templates.

Further, this also replaces the material component of the animate dead spell, causing it to require glass or obsidian worth at least 25 gp per Hit Dice of the undead, instead of the normal onyx gems (though this can be mixed and matched, to create a variety of skeleton types with one casting).

### The Crystalline Skeleton Template

In addition to the changes for the skeleton template (above), make the following adjustments to the base creature:

**Challenge Rating:** As a normal skeleton + 1.

**Defensive Abilities:** Crystalline skeletons lose their immunity to cold but gain immunity to fire. A crystalline skeleton gains vulnerability to sonic damage.

### Crystalline Vengeance (Ex)

When struck by an unarmed or melee attack, the attacker takes 1d6 points of slashing damage per successful hit, as crystalline shards erupt from the body of the skeleton.

**Attacks:** A crystalline skeleton retains all the natural weapons, manufactured weapon attacks, and weapon proficiencies of the base creature, except for attacks that can't work without flesh. A creature with hands gains one claw attack per hand; the skeleton can strike with each of its claw attacks at its full attack bonus. A claw attack deals damage depending on the skeleton's size (see Natural Attacks table below.) If the base creature already had claw attacks with its hands, it deals damage as if it was one size larger.

| Claw (Natural Attack) | Base Damage by Size |
|---|---|
| Fine | 1 |
| Diminutive | 1d2 |
| Tiny | 1d3 |
| Small | 1d4 |
| Medium | 1d6 |
| Large | 1d8 |
| Huge | 2d6 |
| Gargantuan | 2d8 |
| Colossal | 4d6 |

**Abilities:** A crystalline skeleton's Charisma is 12.

**Explosive Death (Su)**
A crystalline skeleton explodes into a shower of shards when it dies. Anyone adjacent to the skeleton when it is destroyed takes 1d6 points of piercing damage per 2 Hit Dice the skeleton possessed (minimum 1d6). A Reflex save (DC = 10 + 1/2 the skeleton's Hit Dice + the skeleton's Cha bonus) halves this damage.

# Dread Skeleton

*The similarity of dread skeletons to the mindless creatures so often animated by spellcasters leads many to underestimate them. A dread skeleton looks much like a normal skeleton (or exoskeleton, depending on the nature of the base creature), but it retains many qualities of the base creature that its lesser cousin does not. For example, a dread skeleton remorhaz still blurs the air with the heat from its body, and a dread skeleton troglodyte continues to fill the area around it with a terrible stench. Dread skeletons can speak and make vocal noises as their living forms could.*

*Most dread skeletons are motivated by hatred of the living and a desire to dominate all they survey. They seek the death of the living and even resent the existence of other thinking undead. Dread skeletons prefer to be the only free-willed creatures in the world, but they suffer the existence of others in order to attain their goal of dominance and to gain more mindless skeleton servants.*

### The Dread Skeleton Template

"Dread Skeleton" is an acquired template that can be added to any living creature with a skeleton or exoskeleton (referred to hereafter as the base creature). A dread skeleton uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

**Challenge Rating:** Same as base creature +1.

**Alignment:** Any evil.

**Type:** The creature's type changes to undead. Do not recalculate base attack bonuses, saves, or skill points.

**Aura:** A dread skeleton gains the unnatural aura (30 ft.) special ability.

**Armor Class:** The base creature's natural armor bonus is replaced by a new one based on the dread skeleton's size:

| Skeleton Size | Natural Armor Bonus |
|---|---|
| Tiny or smaller | +0 |
| Small | +1 |
| Medium or Large | +2 |
| Huge | +3 |
| Gargantuan | +6 |
| Colossal | +10 |

**Hit Dice:** Change all of the base creature's racial HD to d8s.
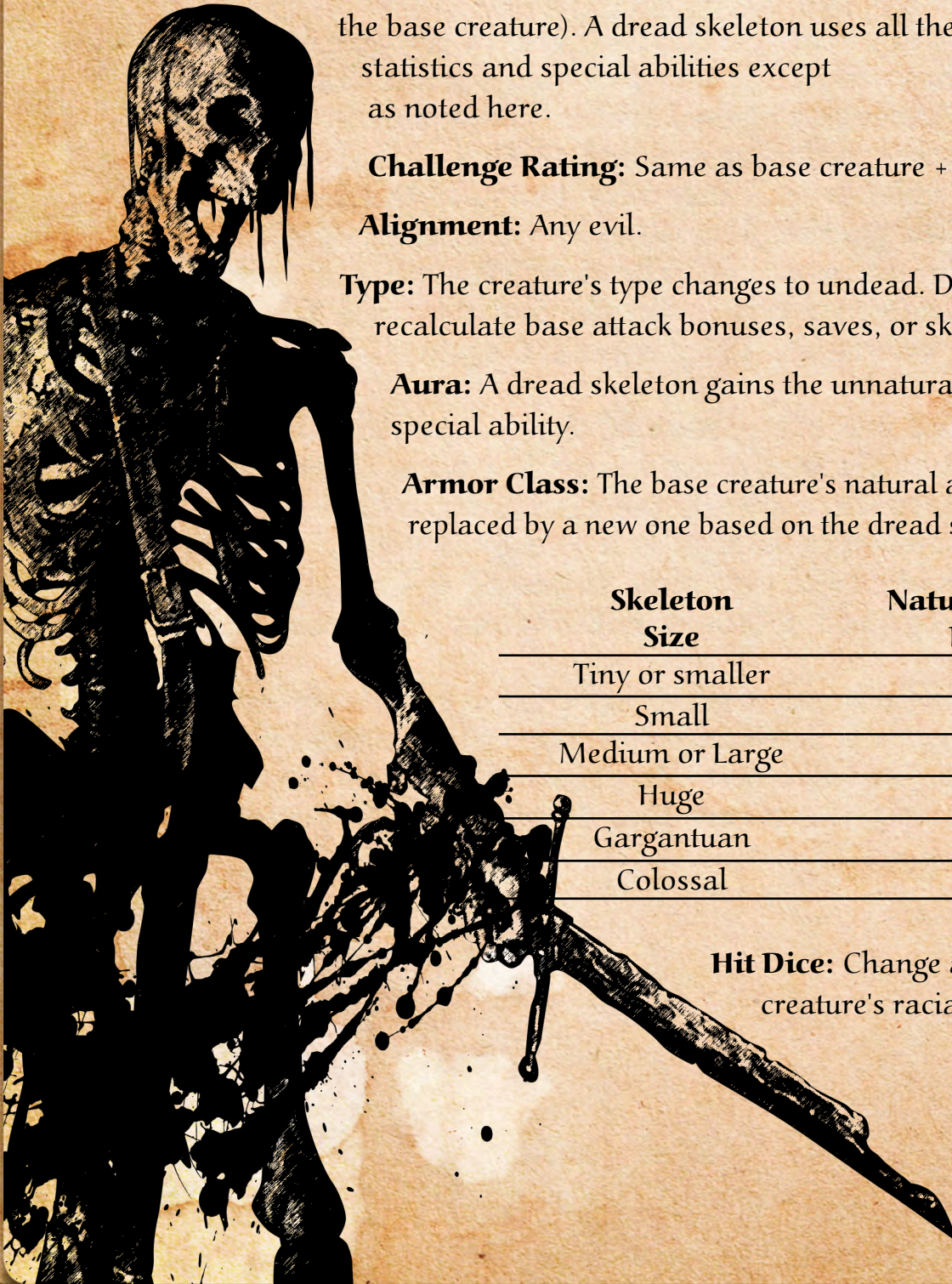
**Defensive Abilities:** A dread skeleton, in addition to normal undead traits, has DR 10/bludgeoning, immunity to cold, and channel resistance +2.

**Attacks:** The dread skeleton retains all the base creature's attacks, using limbs that have bones, teeth, or exoskeletons. Attacks with boneless limbs, such as tentacles, are lost. If the base creature possesses at least one arm but has no natural attacks with it, the dread skeleton gains a claw attack with each such limb. The claws are primary attacks if the base creature has no other natural attacks; otherwise, they are secondary attacks.

If the dread skeleton gains claw attacks from the application of this template, the damage for the attacks depends on the base creature's size:

| Claw (Natural Attack) | Base Damage by Size |
| --- | --- |
| Diminutive | 1 |
| Tiny | 1d2 |
| Small | 1d3 |
| Medium | 1d4 |
| Large | 1d6 |
| Huge | 1d8 |
| Gargantuan | 2d6 |
| Colossal | 2d8 |

**Special Attacks:** The dread skeleton retains all the base creature's special attacks and gains those described here.

**Command Skeletons (Su)**

As a free action, a dread skeleton can automatically command all normal skeletons within 30 feet (as command undead). It can attempt to command skeleton warriors, but they get a Will save to resist (caster level equal to dread skeleton's total HD; save DC is Charisma-based). Normal skeletons never attack a dread skeleton unless compelled.

**Abilities:** Dex +2, Cha +2. As an undead creature, a dread skeleton has no Constitution score.

**Feats:** A dread skeleton gains Improved Initiative as a bonus feat.

**Environment:** Change to any.

**Treasure:** Change to incidental.

# Elemental Skeleton

*An elemental skeleton is intrinsically tied to the elemental planes, focusing energies from beyond the material realm. The energy itself can be seen roiling in both its ribcage and within its otherwise empty eye sockets.*

## Animating an Elemental Skeleton

Animating an elemental skeleton with *animate dead* causes it to take up twice as many hit dice from the amount you can create with a single casting of *animate dead*, so if you could normally make 10 skeletons, you can only make 5 elemental skeletons. It is important to note, however, that while the elemental skeletons take up twice as many hit dice per casting of *animate dead* for the purposes of creating them, they do NOT take up twice as many hit dice to control, so if you have time, you can animate and control as many elemental skeletons as you could normal skeletons. The same goes for stacking multiple of these variant templates.

## The Elemental Skeleton Template

In addition to the changes for the skeleton template (above), make the following adjustments to the base creature:

**Element type:** When created, an elemental skeleton becomes associated with one of the following elements: acid, cold, electricity or fire.

**Challenge Rating:** As a normal skeleton + 1.

**Defensive Abilities:** Elemental skeletons lose their immunity to cold but gain immunity to their related element. They do not gain vulnerability to any other elements.

**Elemental Defense (Su):** Anyone striking an elemental skeleton with an unarmed strike or natural attack takes 1d6 points of elemental damage, of the type associated with the elemental skeleton.

**Melee Attacks:** An elemental skeleton's melee attacks (including both those made with a natural weapon and those made with a manufactured weapon) deal an additional 1d6 points of damage, of the type associated with them.

**Elemental Lash (Su):** A elemental skeleton can focus its energy into a powerful lash that it can use to attack enemies at range. Once per day, as a standard action, an elemental skeleton can lash out with an energy-whip. This is a touch attack with a 30-foot range, causing 4d6 points of damage, of the type of the skeleton.

# Mechanical Skeleton

*A mechanical skeleton has its normal bones strengthened and reinforced with steel and other metals, making it more sturdy than normal skeletons.*

### Animating a Mechanical Skeleton

Animating a mechanical skeleton with *animate dead* causes it to take up twice as many hit dice from the amount you can create with a single casting of *animate dead*, so if you could normally make 10 skeletons, you can only make 5 mechanical skeletons. It is important to note, however, that while the mechanical skeletons take up twice as many hit dice per casting of *animate dead* for the purposes of creating them, they do NOT take up twice as many hit dice to control, so if you have time, you can animate and control as many mechanical skeletons as you could normal skeletons. The same goes for stacking multiple of these variant templates.

Further, this also replaces the material component of the *animate dead* spell, causing it to require steel rods worth at least 25 gp per Hit Dice of the undead, instead of the normal onyx gems (though this can be mixed and matched, to create a variety of skeleton types with one casting).

### The Mechanical Skeleton Template

In addition to the changes for the skeleton template (above), make the following adjustments to the base creature:

**Challenge Rating:** As a normal skeleton + 1.

**Armor Class:** Natural armor bonus changes as follows:

**Saves:** A mechanical skeleton gains channel resistance +4.

**Speed:** A winged mechanical skeleton can't use its wings to fly, and all base speeds (of any type possessed by the mechanical skeleton), is reduced by 10 feet, though it is not affected by heavy loads.

| Skeleton Size | Natural Armor Bonus |
|---|---|
| Tiny or smaller | +2 |
| Small | +3 |
| Medium or Large | +4 |
| Huge | +5 |
| Gargantuan | +8 |
| Colossal | +12 |

**Attacks:** A mechanical skeleton retains all the natural weapons, manufactured weapon attacks, and weapon proficiencies of the base creature, except for attacks that can't work without flesh. A creature with hands gains one slam attack per hand; the skeleton can strike with each of its slam attacks at its full attack bonus. A slam attack deals damage depending on the skeleton's size (see Natural Attacks table below.) If the base creature already had slam or claw attacks with its hands, use the mechanical skeleton slam damage only if it's better.

| Claw (Natural Attack) | Base Damage by Size |
|---|---|
| Fine | 1 |
| Diminutive | 1d2 |
| Tiny | 1d4 |
| Small | 1d4 |
| Medium | 1d6 |
| Large | 1d8 |
| Huge | 2d6 |
| Gargantuan | 2d8 |
| Colossal | 4d6 |

**Abilities:** A mechanical skeleton's Strength is increased by +2.

# Skeleton Champion

*Some skeletons retain their intelligence and cunning, making them formidable warriors. These undead are far more powerful than their mindless kin, and many gain class levels.*

## Animating a Skeleton Champion

Unlike many other skeletons, a skeleton champion cannot be animated through the use of *animate dead*. Instead, these skeletons are free-willed, rising up from the dead only through extraordinary circumstances, similar to those that cause

the rise of ghosts, via rare and vile rituals, or through the actions of an angry deity.

"*Skeletal Champion*" is an acquired template that can be added to any corporeal creature (other than an undead) that has a skeletal system (referred to hereafter as the base creature) and a minimum Intelligence of 3.

**CR:** A skeletal champion's CR is +1 higher than a normal skeleton with the same HD. (see above)

**Type:** The creature's type becomes undead. It keeps subtypes save for alignment subtypes and subtypes that indicate kind.

**Alignment:** Any evil.

**Armor Class:** Natural armor as per skeleton.

**Hit Dice:** Change all of the creature's racial HD to d8s, then add 2 racial Hit Dice to this total (creatures without racial HD gain 2). HD from class levels are unchanged.

**Defensive Abilities:** A skeletal champion gains DR 5/bludgeoning, channel resistance +4, and immunity to cold. It also gains all of the standard undead traits.

**Speed:** As standard skeleton.

**Attacks:** As standard skeleton.

**Abilities:** Str +2, Dex +2. As undead, it has no Constitution score.

**BAB:** Its BAB for racial HD equals 3/4 of its HD.

**Skills:** Gains skill ranks per racial Hit Die equal to 4 + its Int modifier. Class skills for racial HD are Climb, Disguise, Fly, Intimidate, Knowledge (arcana), Knowledge (religion), Perception, Sense Motive, Spellcraft, and Stealth. Skills gained from class levels remain unchanged.

**Feats:** A skeletal champion gains Improved Initiative as a bonus feat.

**Saves:** Base save bonuses for racial Hit Dice are Fort +1/3 HD, Ref +1/3 HD, and Will +1/2 HD + 2.

# Twice-tramscended Skeleton

*The twice-transcended skeletons are a particularly strange type of skeleton, who were once animated, killed, and then restored to a semblance of their old bodies, except these bodies are now only the spiritual memories of the existing body. They resemble ghostly, vaguely translucent, skeletons with their skeletal build clearly visible inside an almost invisible outline of a vaguely humanoid body. Whispers surround them, creeping into any onlooker's mind.*

**Animating a Twice-transcended Skeleton:**

Animating a twice-transcended skeleton with *animate dead* causes it to take up twice as many hit dice from the amount you can create with a single casting of *animate dead*, so if you could normally make 10 skeletons, you can only make 5 twice-transcended skeletons. It is important to note, however, that while twice-transcended skeletons take up four times as many hit dice per casting of *animate dead* for the purposes of creating them, they do NOT take up four times as many

hit dice to control, so if you have time, you can animate and control as many twice-transcended skeletons as you could normal skeletons. The same goes for stacking multiple of these variant templates.

This also requires the caster of *animate dead* to know gaseous form and lose the spell for that day (if the caster must prepare spells each day. Otherwise they expend a single use of gaseous form, similar to casting it normally), though this does not otherwise affect the casting of *animate dead*. Finally, the remains to be animated must previously have been animated as a skeleton and then killed once more.

**The Twice-transcended Skeleton Template**
In addition to the changes for the skeleton template (above), make the following adjustments to the base creature:

**Challenge Rating:** As a normal skeleton + 1.

**Armor Class:** A twice-transcended skeleton gains a deflection bonus equal to its Charisma modifier. It loses the base creature's natural armor bonus, as well as all armor and shield bonuses not from force effects or ghost touch items.

**Melee Attacks:** A twice-transcended skeleton loses all of the base creature's attacks. If it could wield weapons in life, it can wield ghost touch weapons as a twice-transcended skeleton. Instead, it gains a single touch attack.

**Abilities:** A twice-transcended skeleton's Charisma is 14.

**Special Qualities:**

**Aura of Whispers (Su)**
A twice-transcended skeleton is surrounded by a 30-foot aura of whispers. This aura manifests as almost imperceptible whispers that get in your head, suggesting all kinds of unlikely, paranoid, scenarios. The first time it ends its turn within the aura, a creature must make a Will save (DC 10 + 1/2 twice-transcended skeleton's hit dice + Charisma modifier) or become confused for as long as it stays within the aura. If the creature succeeds at the saving throw, it cannot be affected again by the aura for another 24 hours. This is a fear effect. The DC is Charisma-based.

### Touch of the Grave (Su)

All twice-transcended skeletons gain this incorporeal touch attack. By passing part of its incorporeal body through a foe's body as a standard action, the twice-transcended deal 1d6 points of damage per CR +Charisma modifier points of damage (i.e. a CR 1 twice-transcended skeleton deals 1d6+Charisma modifier, while a CR 2 deals 2d6+Charisma modifier, etc). This damage is not negative energy—it manifests in the form of physical wounds, appearing as claw marks as if the creature damaged had been attacked by hundreds of small animals.

### Defensive Abilities:

A twice-transcended skeleton loses the base creature's defensive abilities and gains immunity to cold. It also gains all of the standard immunities and traits possessed by undead creatures. It also gains the incorporeal ability. Unlike normal skeletons, it does not gain DR 5/bludgeoning.

# Vampiric Skeleton

*Vampiric skeletons have elongated fangs protruding from their upper jaw, and they have a hunger for blood that can never be sated. Their eye sockets resemble pools of hellishly glowing blood, and their fingers end in long claws.*

### Animating a Vampiric Skeleton:

Animating a vampiric skeleton with *animate dead* causes it to take up twice as many hit dice from the amount you can create with a single

casting of *animate dead*, so if you could normally make 10 skeletons, you can only make 5 vampiric skeletons. It is important to note, however, that while the vampiric skeletons take up twice as many hit dice per casting of *animate dead* for the purposes of creating them, they do NOT take up twice as many hit dice to control, so if you have time, you can animate and control as many vampiric skeletons as you could normal skeletons. The same goes for stacking multiple of these variant templates.

This also requires the caster of *animate dead* to know *vampiric touch* and lose the spell for that day (if the caster must prepare spells each day. Otherwise they expend a single use of *vampiric touch*, similar to casting it normally), though this does not otherwise affect the casting of *animate dead*.

### The Vampiric Skeleton Template
In addition to the changes for the skeleton template (above), make the following adjustments to the base creature:

**Challenge Rating:** As a normal skeleton + 1.

**Melee Attacks:** A vampiric skeleton gains a bite attack causing 1d6+1-1/2 strength points of damage.

**Feats:** A vampiric skeleton gains Improved Unarmed Strike and Improved Grapple.

**Abilities:** A burning skeleton's Charisma is 14.

**Special Qualities:** A vampiric skeleton gains blood drain:

### Blood Drain (Su)
A vampiric skeleton can suck blood from a grappled opponent; if the skeleton establishes or maintains a pin, it drains blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution damage. The skeleton heals 5 hit points or gains 5 temporary hit points for 1 hour (up to a maximum number of temporary hit points equal to its full normal hit points) each round it drains blood.
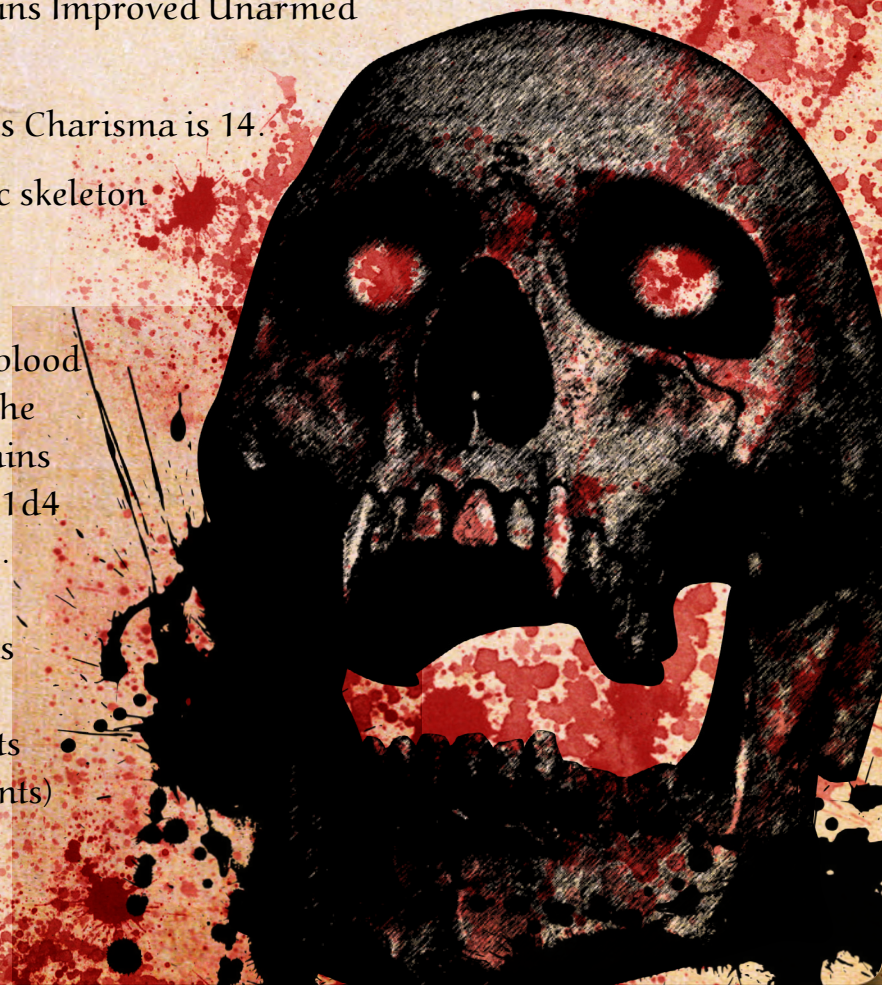
# Variant Skeleton Monsters

# Black Skeleton

*This creature looks like a skeleton with glistening black bones, seemingly constructed of blackened steel. Small red pinpoints of light burn in its hollowed eye sockets.*

**Black Skeleton CR 5**

**XP 1,600**

CE Medium undead

**Init** +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; **Perception** +10

**Aura** frightful presence (60 ft., DC 15)

## DEFENSE

**AC** 20, touch 14, flat-footed 16 (+4 Dex, +6 natural)

**hp** 45 (7d8+14)

**Fort** +4; **Ref** +6; **Will** +5

**Defensive Abilities** channel resistance +4; **DR** 10/bludgeoning and good; **Immune** undead traits

## OFFENSE

**Speed** 40 ft.

**Melee** 2 short swords +10 (1d6/19–20 plus 1d3 Strength damage) or 2 claws +9 (1d4 plus 1d3 Strength damage)

**Special attacks** superior two-weapon fighting

## STATISTICS

**Str** 11, **Dex** 19, **Con** —, **Int** 13, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 14

**Base Atk** +5; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 19

**Feats** Improved Initiative, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (short sword)

**Skills** Acrobatics +11, Climb +10, Escape Artist +11, Perception +10, Stealth +14

**Languages** Abyssal, Common

**Gear** 2 short swords

## ECOLOGY

**Environment** underground

**Organization** any

**Treasure** standard

## SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Strength Damage (Su)** A black skeleton's attacks (either by a weapon or natural attack) deal 1d3 points of Strength damage to a living creature. This is a negative energy effect. This is a function of the black skeleton itself, not its weapons.

**Superior Two-Weapon Fighting (Ex)** A black skeleton usually fights with a short sword in each hand. Because of its magical nature, its Two-Weapon Fighting feat allows it to attack with both weapons at no penalty.

Much more powerful than standard skeletons, these minions of evil are often employed as guardians or protectors to keep sealed some ancient knowledge best left undiscovered. They are intelligent monsters and are not subject to the mindless commands that can be given to such undead as skeletons or zombies. They have a clear mind and sometimes go against the commands and wishes of those they serve if it benefits the black skeleton in question.

Black skeletons are the remnants of living creatures slain in an area where the ground is soaked through with evil. The bodies of fallen heroes are contaminated and polluted by such evil and within days after their death, the slain creatures rise as black skeletons, leaving their former lives and bodies behind. Black skeletons are intelligent and do maintain some memories of their former lives.

Black skeletons wear any clothes or armor they had in life, and some still carry their gear or weapons (most discard their weapons in favor of two short swords as soon as they can).

Black skeletons attack with two short swords in battle with little more than the intention of cutting their foes to pieces. They are intelligent opponents and will use tactics during battle, often sending several of their number against a foe's front, while the others move into position to flank their adversaries. Black skeletons are smart enough to know when the battle is lost and withdraw from combat, though rarely. Most simply fight to the death, driven by some unseen hatred for the living.

# Skeletal Drake

*Bones protrude through the rotting skin of this two-legged, once reptilian creature. Enormous wings stretch from its shoulders, and a foul stench surrounds the creature, while empty eye sockets scan the area.*

**Skeletal Drake CR 6**

**XP 2,400**

CE Large undead

**Init** +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent;
**Perception** +10

## DEFENSE

**AC** 21, touch 10, flat-footed 18 (+3 Dex, +9 Natural, -1 size)

**hp** 67 (9d8+27);

**Fort** +2; **Ref** +5; **Will** +5

**DR** 5/bludgeoning; **Immune** cold, undead traits

## OFFENSE

**Speed** 20 ft., fly 60 ft. (poor)

**Melee** bite +10 melee (2d6+4 plus grab), 2 wings +5 (1d6+2)

**Space** 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

**Special Attacks** boneshard breath weapon (30-ft. cone, DC 16, 3d6 piercing)

## STATISTICS

**Str** 19, **Dex** 16, **Con** —, **Int** —, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 16

**Base Atk** +5; **CMB** +10; **CMD** 23

**Feats** Improved Initiative

## ECOLOGY

**Environment** any

**Organization** solitary

**Treasure** incidental

## SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Boneshard Breath Weapon (Ex)** Three times per day a skeletal drake can unleash a cone of sharpened bones that flense and tears at everyone caught within the cone. Anyone in the area must succeed on a DC 16 Reflex save or take 3d6 points of piercing damage. Success indicated that the target only takes half damage. Anyone failing the Reflex saving throw must then make a DC 16 Fortitude save or take 1d4 points of bleeding damage for 1 round per hit dice of the skeletal drake (typically 9). A successful DC 16 Heal check staunches the bleeding as normal. This save DC is Charisma-based.

The skeletal drake is the animated remains of a dragon or wyvern who was killed in an area strong in necromantic magic (such as that created by unhallow), and which is left undisturbed for that time. The skeletal drake rises a year later, a mindless automation seeking only the destruction of living things.

Skeletal drakes have no interest in society or their own kind and will destroy anyone approaching them. Powerful necromancers and undead sometimes use them for mounts, once they have established control over the skeletal drake.

# Skeletal Master

*This decrepit skeletal humanoid is hunched over as if in pain, a sickly green aura outlining its bony hands. The smell of dirt and rot hangs in the air around it.*

**Skeletal Master CR 5**

**XP 1,600**

NE Medium undead

**Init** +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +11

## DEFENSE

**AC** 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15 (+2 Dexterity, +5 natural armor)

**hp** 59 (7d8+28);

**Fort** +2; **Ref** +4; **Will** +6

**Defensive Abilities** channel resistance +2; **DR** 5/bludgeoning; **Immune** cold; **Resist** electricity 10 **SR** 17

## OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** sickening touch +6 (1d8+1 plus sickening touch)

**Special Attacks** sickening touch

**Sorcerer Spells known**

(CL 5th; concentration +8)

**2nd (4/day)**—*command undead* (DC 17), *stricken heart*

**1st (6/day)**—*cause fear, chill touch* (DC 16), *ray of enfeeblement* (DC 16); *repair undead* (DC 16)

**0 (at will)**—*acid splash, detect magic, read magic, spark* (DC 14)

## STATISTICS

**Str** 12, **Dex** 15, **Con** −, **Int** 17, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 18

**Base Atk** +5; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 16

**Feats** Improved Initiative,
Skill Focus (Spellcraft), Spell Focus
(necromancy)

**Skills** Craft (alchemy) +10, Heal +11,
Intimidate +14, Knowledge (arcana)
+13, Knowledge (religion) +13,
Perception +11, Spellcraft +16

**Languages** Common, Draconic,
Elven, Necril

**SQ** almost an arcane master

## ECOLOGY

**Environment** any

**Organization** solitary

**Treasure** standard

## SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Almost an Arcane Master (Su)**
Three times per day a skeletal
master can cast any of its spells with
any metamagic feat that it knows, as
a free action. This does not increase
the level of the spell being cast.

**Sickening Touch (Su)**
Any living creature a skeletal master
hits with its touch attack must succeed
on a DC 15 Fortitude save or be
sickened for 1d6 minutes. Success

reduces the duration to 1d6 rounds.
This ability is Charisma-based.

Skeletal masters are the result of a
spellcaster trying to ascend to lichdom
and failing. They are exceedingly rare,
as normally any spellcaster failing to
become a lich simply dies or is
destroyed. For the skeletal masters to
happen, the spellcaster must almost
succeed, only to fall at the final hurdle.
Where a lich becomes more powerful
if the experiment succeeds, the skeletal
master is reduced to a mere shade of its
former power, and it knows it. As such,
it absolutely hates and resents liches,
but often end up serving the more
powerful undead, to glean more power.
The liches themselves usually find
skeletal masters to be pathetic failures,
and only suffer having them around
due to their usefulness.

A skeletal master left to its own devices
will generally seek out powerful
spellcasters in an attempt to regain
their former lives and then try again.
They offer their services to any
powerful necromancer willing to at
least attempt to help them, but
generally they end up serving similar
roles to the skeletal tutors, teaching

from their immense store of magical knowledge, talking about power they once had, successes they once accomplished, and in their own way, serving as a warning to power-hungry spellcasters of the dangers inherent in their search.

# Skeletal Tutor

*Dressed in tattered robes, covered in fading glyphs and symbols, this skeleton stands hunched over, clutching a broken holy symbol in one hand, and a book in the other.*

**Skeletal Tutor CR 3**

**XP** 800
NE Medium undead

**Init** +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +8

**Aura** vitalizing undeath (60 ft., DC 14)
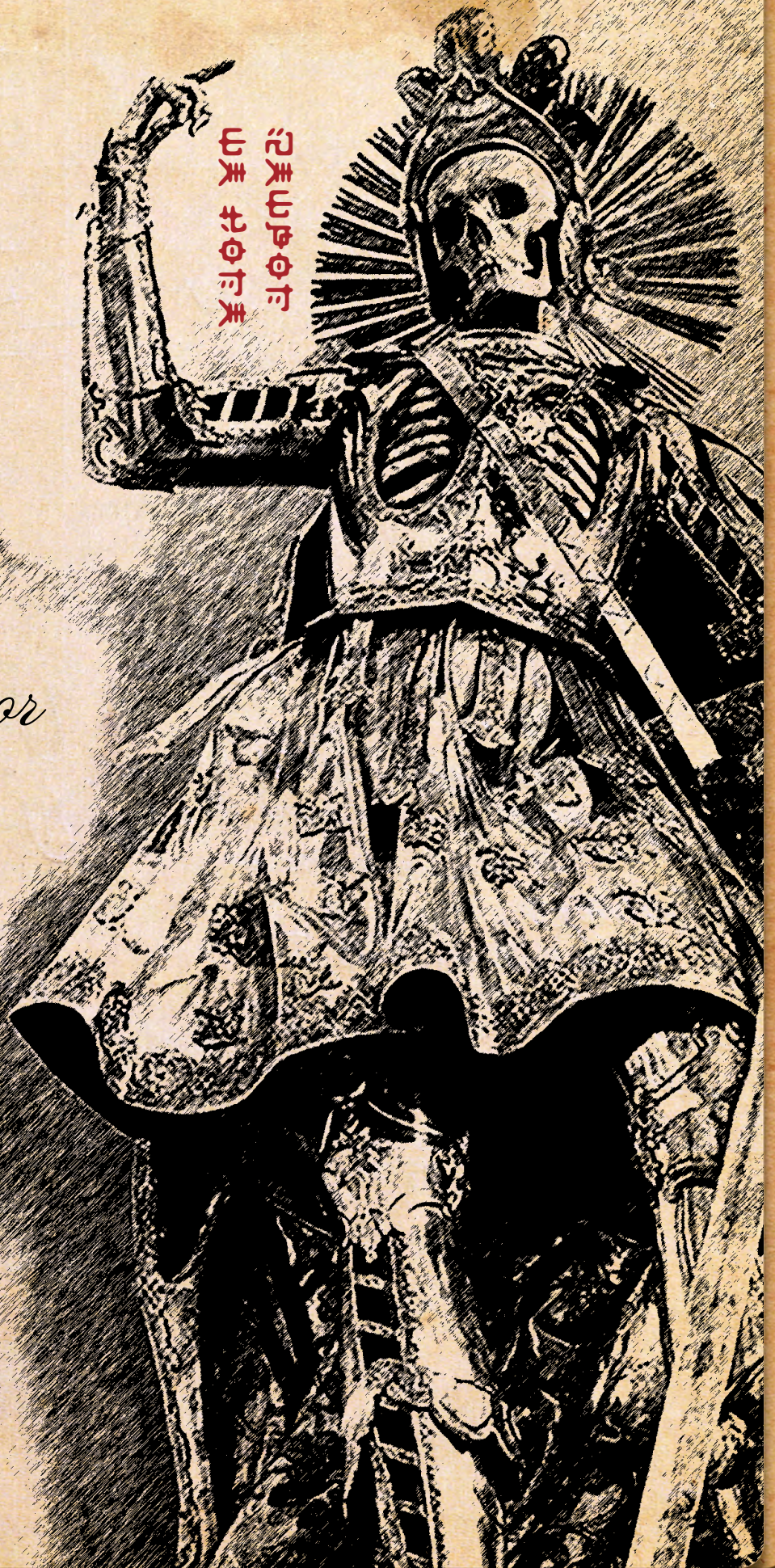
## DEFENSE

**AC** 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13 (+2 Dexterity, +3 natural armor)

**hp** 30 (4d8+12);

**Fort** +1, **Ref** +3, **Will** +5

**DR** 5/bludgeoning;

**Immune** undead traits

## OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** 2 claws +4 (1d6+1)

**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 7th; concentration +10)

**1/day**—*animate dead*

**Spells Prepared** (CL 3rd)

**2nd**—*death knell* (DC 15), *lesser animate dead*

**1st**—*cause fear* (DC 14), *chill touch* (DC 14), *repair undead* (DC 14)

**0**—*bleed* (DC 13), *guidance* [x2], *touch of fatigue* (DC 13)

## STATISTICS

**Str** 12, **Dex** 15, **Con** —, **Int** 15, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 17

**Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +3; **CMD** 15

**Feats** Eschew Materials, Spell Focus (necromancy)

**Skills** Intimidate +10, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (religion) +9, Perception +8, Spellcraft +9, Use Magic Device +7;

**Languages** Common, Necril, +1 language of GM's choice

**SQ** aura of vitalizing undead

## ECOLOGY

**Environment** any

**Organization** any (skeletal tutors are rarely ever found alone)

**Treasure** standard

## SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Aura of Vitalizing Undead (Su)** Any undead within a 60-foot radius gain a +1 unholy bonus to all attack rolls and saving throws. Further, any mindless (i.e. Intelligence 0) skeleton or skeletal undead within the area is affected (while within the aura) are made self-aware, as if they had an intelligence of 10. This only lasts while they remain within the aura. This gives the skeletal tutor no control over the undead in the area, but they instinctively know what will happen if they leave again.

Skeletal tutors are not created in the manner that other skeletons are. Instead, they arise spontaneously at the whim of the gods of the undead when one of their servants create normal skeletons with the animate dead spell. On these occasions, the favored servants of the gods find that the skeletal tutor is there to help them achieve their goals, and often bring direct messages from the gods themselves. Whether these messages are understandable to the mortal or not, the skeletal tutor will assist the mortal to the best of its abilities.

Should the mortal die or be destroyed, while the skeletal tutor remains alive, the skeletal tutor will seek to bring the gift of undeath to the rest of the world, traveling with a retinue of skeletons or other undead, often seeking out and taking service for the more powerful undead.

# Skeletal Noble

*A hideous amalgamation of man and horse, it is difficult to tell rider apart from the mount. The bones of both intertwine and mingle, with the rider grasping a decrepit looking lance and shield, and both clad in ancient armor.*

**Skeleton Noble CR 10**

**XP 9,600**

LE Large undead

**Init** +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +19

**Aura** cold (30 ft., DC 19)

## DEFENSE

**AC** 24, touch 9, flat-footed 22

(+9 armor, +4 natural, +2 shield -1 size)

**hp** 127 (15d8+60);

**Fort** +9, **Ref** +7, **Will** +12

**DR** 10/bludgeoning;

**Defensive Abilities** undead traits;

**Immune** cold

## OFFENSE

**Speed** 50 ft.,

**Melee** lance +18/+13 (1d8+5/x3 plus 1d6 cold), 2 hooves +16 (1d8+5 plus 1d6 cold)

**Space** 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 10th; concentration +12)

**3/day**—*lead blades*

## STATISTICS

**Str** 20, **Dex** 11, **Con** −, **Int** 14, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 18

**Base Atk** +11; **CMB** +17; **CMD** 27

**Feats** Improved Bull Rush, Improved Natural Attack (hooves), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (lance), Quicken Spell-like Ability (lead blades).

**Skills** Intimidate +22, Knowledge (nobility) +17, Knowledge (religion) +20, Perception +19

**Languages** Common, Infernal, Necril

**SQ** armored expertise, lance mastery, undersized weapons

## ECOLOGY

**Environment** any cold

**Organization** solitary or hunt (2-5)

**Treasure** masterwork full plate (counts as barding too), masterwork heavy steel shield, and masterwork lance

## SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Aura of Cold (Su)**
Skeleton nobles are surrounded by a 30-foot radius of deathly chill. Any living creatures within this area during the skeleton noble's turn takes 2d6 points of cold damage. This ability is Charisma-based.

**Armored Expertise (Ex)**
A skeleton noble suffers no speed reduction when wearing heavy armor or barding.

**Lance Mastery (Ex)**
A skeleton noble deals double damage on a successful charge, which stacks with the lance used by the skeleton

noble, i.e. a skeleton noble charging and hitting does 3d8+X when charging. Furthermore the skeleton noble is able to use the lance against adjacent opponents.

### Skeleton Mastery (Su)

As a free action, a skeleton can automatically command all normal skeletons within 30 feet (as command undead) provided they have fewer hit points than the skeleton noble. Intelligent skeletal undead (as adjudicated by the GM) are affected as well, but they get a Will save to resist (DC 19; save DC is Charisma-based). Normal skeletons never attack a skeleton noble unless compelled.

### Undersized Weapons (Ex)

Although a skeleton noble is Large, its upper torso is the same size as that of a Medium humanoid. As a result, they wield weapons as if they were one size category smaller than their actual size. Skeleton nobles were once brave knights of the cold counties of the world, pledged to defend their lands. As time ravaged them, however, and they grew older, they saw younger, fitter, heroes taking their place on the front lines, and resentment grew. Eventually, they turned to dark powers to regain their vigor, pleading themselves to the lords of Hell, in exchange for eternal vigor.

Their wish was granted, and they became skeleton nobles, standing ever vigilant against younger heroes, fighting on battlefields where they no longer belong and destroying anything that they held dear while still alive. Often travelers will see skeleton nobles in the distance, only for the creature to have disappeared once they arrive. These are seen as ill portents, and villages have been known to be uprooted at the mere sighting of a skeleton noble.

# EQUIPMENT

In the following, you'll find new equipment and magic items for the use of those who hunt down skeletons and the skeletal dead.

## MUNDANE ITEMS

These are the non-magical items available to the hunters of the undead.

| Name | Cost | Weight |
|---|---|---|
| Bonecrusher Hammer | 100 gp | 20 lbs. |
| Ribcage Breastplate | 500 gp | 20 lbs. |

**Bonecrusher Hammer:** The bonecrusher hammer is a specialized weapon, designed to break bones and objects. Resembling a gigantic hammer, the head of the hammer has a number of ridges, indentations, and grooves that causes the hammer to dig deeper than normal with each hit, causing grievous damage to solidified objects.

When a bonecrusher hammer hits a creature with damage reduction that is



*Bonecrusher Hammer*

ignored by bludgeoning weapons (such as a skeleton with DR 5/bludgeoning), then it deals double damage, and the critical damage of the bonecrusher hammer is increased to x4 instead of x3. Further, it also ignores the first 5 points of hardness on objects.

### (Exotic) Two-handed Melee Weapon

| Name | Cost | DMG (S) | DMG (M) | Crit | Range | Weight | Type | Special |
|------|------|---------|---------|------|-------|--------|------|---------|
| Bonecrusher Hammer | 100 gp | 1d10 | 2d6 | x3 | - | 20 lbs. | B | see text |

**Ribcage Breastplate:** The ribcage breastplate is a specialized bone armor creating by those of a necromantic intent. Created from the ribcage of a single skeleton, it has been reinforced with the ribs of several more, all of which have previously been animated, and the bones suffused with necromantic energy. Anyone wearing a ribcage breastplate has their arcane spell-failure reduced by 10% when casting necromantic spells (for a total of 15% instead of the normal 25%), and they add +1 caster level to their necromancy spells. Finally, as the ribcage breastplate is crafted from bone and not metal, it can be used by druids and others with similar restrictions.
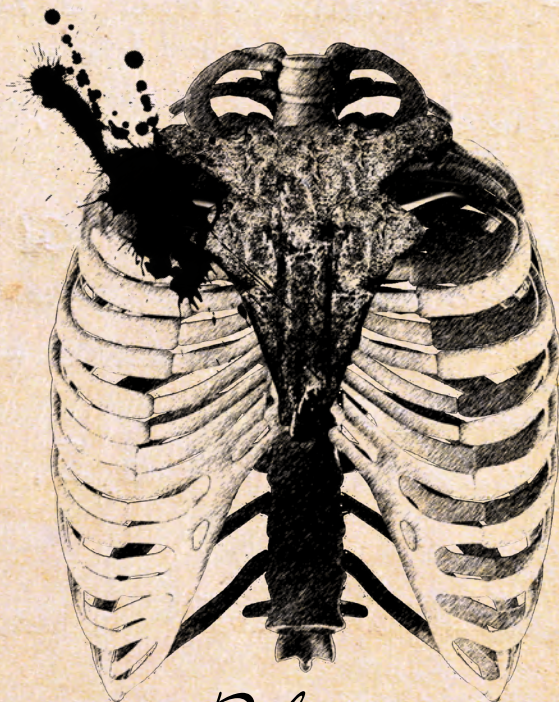


*Ribcage Breastplate*

### Medium Armor

| Name | Cost | Armor Bonus | Max DEX Bonus) | Armor Penalty | Spell Failure | Speed 30 ft./20 ft. | Weight |
|------|------|-------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|--------|
| Bonecrusher Hammer | 500 gp | +5 | +3 | -3 | 25% | 20 ft./15 ft. | 20 lbs. |

# MAGIC ITEMS

Below you'll find two new magic items for use in your campaigns.

## Fanged Skull

**Aura** faint necromancy; **CL** 5th;

**Slot** head; **Weight** −; **Price** 6,375 gp

*This black steel helmet is wrought into a terrible visage, with red diamonds in place of its eyes, giving it a piercing red gaze, while the mouthguard has two large fangs protruding from the upper part, giving a wearer the appearance of a fanged monster.*

### BENEFITS

A fanged skull provides the wearer with a bite attack as if they had a natural bite attack as appropriate for their size (1d6 for a Medium size wearer, 1d4 for a Small one), that counts as a primary attack. When the wearer attacks with the bite attack, anyone wounded must make a DC 14 Fortitude save or start taking 1 points of bleed damage per successful attack until they receive magical healing, or are healed with a DC 14 Heal check.

Further once per day, the wearer of the fanged skull can use a standard action to caster vampiric touch (as a 5th level caster) on any creature who is currently suffering from the bleed effect.

### CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS

**Feats** Craft Magic Arms and Armor; **Spells** *vampiric touch*; **Cost** 3,188 gp

*Franged Skull*

# Graveyard Dust

**Aura** faint necromancy; **CL** 3rd;

**Slot** —; **Weight** —; **Price** 1,200 gp

*This black and very finely ground bone meal has a distinct, unpleasant, metallic odor.*

## BENEFITS

One application of graveyard dust is enough to cover one single undead creature. When used as a standard action to cover an undead creature, the creature receives a +2 profane bonus to attack rolls and +2 hit points per hit dice that it possesses. This lasts for 1d6 minutes and one jar of graveyard dust comes with 10 applications.

Graveyard dust is typically stored in jars similar to funeral urns.

## CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS

**Feats** Craft Wondrous Item; **Spells** *desecrate*; **Cost** 600 gp

Below is a single new spell for use in your campaigns.

# Reinforce Bone

**School** necromancy;
**Level** sorcerer/wizard 3
**Casting Time** 1 standard action
**Components** V, S, M
**Range** touch
**Target** creature touched
**Duration** 10 mins./level
**Saving Throw** Will negates (harmless);
**Spell Resistance** yes (harmless)

Reinforce bone causes the bones of the creature touched to become as strong as steel, and nearly unbreakable. Creatures where the skeletal structure is exposed already, such as the exoskeleton of many types of vermin, or skeletons, becomes even stronger and more durable than before.

The target touched gains DR 5/bludgeoning. If the target already has DR —/bludgeoning, or a mostly skeletal structure (as adjudicated by the GM) then this increases by +5 (to DR 10/bludgeoning for a skeletal creature that does NOT have DR already, and increasing the already existing DR —/bludgeoning by 5 for those who do).

Those experiences in that village changed my outlook on life. Or unlife I should say. Until that point, I had been convinced that once the soul left the body, there was nothing left of the person inside, and that the monsters that rose from the grave did not have anything to do with the people they had once been. That little village changed that. Now I believe, that even the so-called mindless undead have some sort of personality still left within them. Some believe that the intelligent undead are possessed by some form of evil spirit, but I believe that it is the original soul that still inhabits the body (certainly in the case of creatures like liches who capture their soul as part of the transformation from life to undeath), and that this soul is twisted and changed by touch with the negative energy plane that all undead, to some degree or other, are in touch with.

One more thing changed after that little village. My friend never left. We were caught, in spite of trying to hide, and he stayed behind as I ran. He... he's not the only friend that I've left behind as I pursued my calling as a monster chronicler, but he was the first. And in my dreams, I still hear his screams as those skeletal hands tear him to pieces.

Excerpt taken from the tome: Voices in the Dark Volume I., Personal Essays & Journal of Morthios Delthain

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# Skeletons

We all know these iconic monsters, swarming forth at the behest of insane necromancers and elder gods best left forgotten. They are a reminder of our own mortality, literally what keeps us upright. Encased in our very flesh is the worst nightmare of many of us.

This book expands upon the existing rules of the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, and provides many more player and Game Master options for those who wish to use skeletons more in their games. You'll find new templates for your necromancers to apply to their skeletons when creating them, as well as new unique skeletal monsters who will haunt your players' nightmares.