



## Shrine of the Emperor of Bones

**S**hrine of the Emperor of Bones is a Fifth Edition adventure for **three to five characters of 5th to 7th level** and is optimized for a party of **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 5**. 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

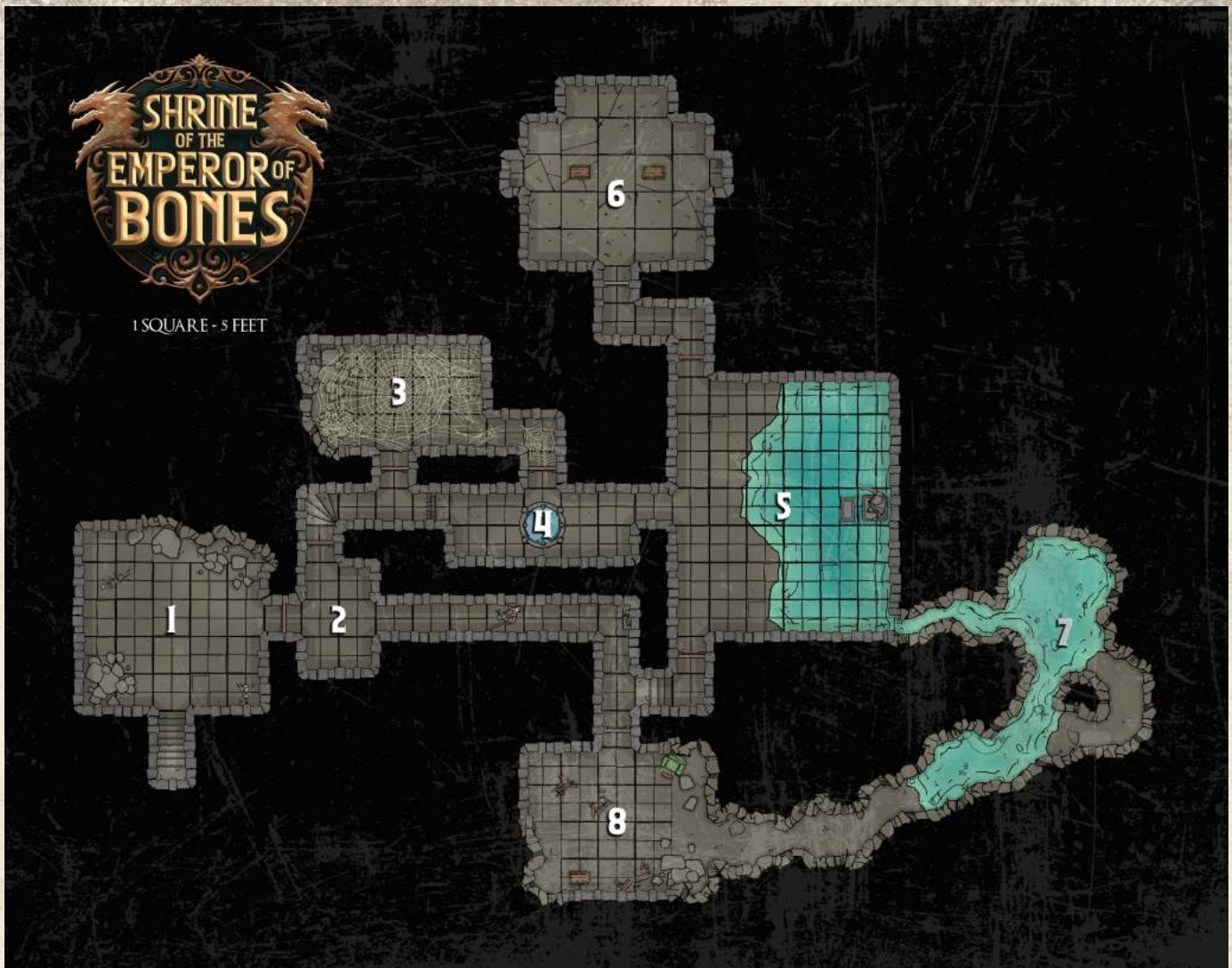
Paladins at a local temple detected the presence of desecrated ground below the city (or whatever setting you choose). Having already proved themselves on multiple quests, the paladins trust the characters to enter the dungeon and clear out whatever lies within. The paladins offer 2,000 gp upon successful 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 2,000 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 dragon 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 home 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 following 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 dragon zombie moaning upon approach.

This dank cavern smells of mold and rot.

**Encounter: Dragon Zombie.** The emperor keeps a **young blue dragon zombie** (see the Appendix) to protect the temple from intruders. It's worth noting that this is a relatively dangerous encounter for a 5th-level party, so be sure to telegraph it in advance. If you feel the zombie is too strong for the party, remove its Undead Fortitude trait.

## 2 - Disintegration 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.

**Ash Piles.** Characters with passive Perception scores of 15 or better notice that there are numerous piles of gray ash in neat little piles all throughout the hallway. A successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals the truth behind these ash piles: these are the remains of people who've been disintegrated.

**Trap: Disintegration Ray.** 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 ray of disintegration at whoever triggered the trap. The target must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (5d8) force damage on a failure. If this reduces the target's hit points to 0, the target is disintegrated and reduced to a pile of fine gray ash.

Once triggered, 24 hours must pass before the trap resets. A character proficient in the Arcana skill who succeeds on a DC 16 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 targeting a 6th-level spell cast upon the glyph or the skeleton carving.

## 3 - Spiders, Ew!

Thick purplish webs obscure the entirety of this room.

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

**Hazard: Necrotic 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. While restrained, the creature takes 3 (1d6) necrotic damage at the end of each of their turns. A creature restrained by the webs can use its action to make a DC 14 Strength check, freeing themselves on a success. Otherwise, a 10-foot cube section of webbing has AC 10, 5 hit points, vulnerability to fire, and immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, necrotic, and psychic damage. A humanoid slain by these webs rises 24 hours later as a zombie under the deathweaver's control unless the humanoid is restored to life or its body is destroyed.

**Encounter: Deathweaver.** When a character touches the webs, it alerts the **deathweaver** (see the Appendix) hidden in the room.

## 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 is here. If the characters caught him off guard, he's praying at Xalstus' feet. Otherwise, he's ready for combat. The emperor uses the **deathspeaker** stat block. He's joined by four **thug swordbreaker** skeletons. These new stat blocks are included in the Appendix.

**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 20 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 15 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 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 7 (3d4) 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 27 Dexterity check using proficiency in thieves' tools to unlock the door or a DC 32 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 keeps his treasure here. The treasure contains the emperor's old spellbook which has all the spells that a **mage** is capable of preparing plus *false life* and *gentle repose*. It also contains a *wand of fear*, 1,000 gp, and two obsidian gems worth 250 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



## Appendix: New Monsters

The four new monsters detailed here appear in this adventure: the deathspeaker, the deathweaver, the thug swordbreaker skeleton, and the young blue dragon zombie.

**Undead Nature.** The deathspeaker, thug swordbreaker skeleton, and young blue dragon zombie do not require air, food, drink, or sleep.

### Deathspeaker

*Medium undead, lawful evil*

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**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 97 (13d8 + 39)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

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**Saving Throws** saving\_throws

**Skills** Deception +8, Persuasion +8

**Damage Vulnerabilities** damage\_vulnerabilities

**Damage Resistances** Resistances

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** exhaustion, poison

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

**Languages** any languages it knew in life

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

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**Deathspeak.** If the deathspeaker engages at least one creature in conversation for at least 1 minute, it can perform a prophetic display, reading cards, throwing bones, speaking to a crystal ball, or similar. Each creature that can see or hear the prophetic display must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw or be cursed with the belief it will soon die. While cursed, the creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks. The curse lasts until it is lifted by a remove curse spell or similar magic, or until the deathspeaker dies. The deathspeaker can use this trait only on creatures that share at least one language with it.

### Actions

**Multiattack.** The deathspeaker makes two rake attacks. Alternatively, it can use Necrotic Ray twice.

**Rake.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage.

**Necrotic Ray.** *Ranged Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) necrotic damage.

**Pronounce Death.** The deathspeaker chooses a creature it can see within 30 feet of it that has been reduced to 0 hp. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or immediately die. Creatures cursed by the Deathspeak trait have disadvantage on this saving throw.

## Emperor of Bones/Deathspeaker

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.

### Thug Swordbreaker Skeleton

*Medium undead, lawful evil*

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**Armor Class** 13 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 32 (5d8 + 10)

**Speed** 30 ft.

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STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	6 (-2)	8 (-1)	5 (-3)

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**Skills** Intimidation +2

**Damage Vulnerabilities** thunder

**Damage Resistances** piercing, slashing

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Condition Immunities** exhaustion, petrified, poisoned

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

**Languages** Understands all languages it knew in life but can't speak

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

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**Fossilized Bones.** Any nonmagical slashing or piercing weapon made of metal or wood that hits the swordbreaker skeleton cracks. After dealing damage, the weapon takes a permanent and cumulative -1 penalty to damage rolls. If its penalty drops to -5, the weapon is destroyed. Nonmagical ammunition made of metal or wood that hits the swordbreaker skeleton is destroyed after dealing damage.

**Pack Tactics.** The thug swordbreaker skeleton has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the thug's allies is within 5 ft. of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

### Actions

**Multiattack.** The thug swordbreaker skeleton makes two melee attacks.

**Mace.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

**Heavy Crossbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) piercing damage.

# Deathweaver

*Huge monstrosity, neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 16 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 95 (10d12 + 30)

**Speed** 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

**Skills** Perception +4, Stealth +5

**Damage Resistances** necrotic

**Senses** blindsight 20 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

**Languages** Deep Speech

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Innate Spellcasting.** The deathweaver's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *chill touch*

3/day each: *darkness*, *ray of enfeeblement*

1/day: *vampiric touch*

**Spider Climb.** The deathweaver can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

**Web Sense.** While in contact with a web, the deathweaver knows the exact location of any other creature in contact with the same web.

**Web Walker.** The deathweaver ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

## Actions

**Multiattack.** The deathweaver makes two bite attacks.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage. The target must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 9 (2d8) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. If the necrotic damage reduces the target to 0 hp, the target is stable but poisoned for 1 hour, even after regaining hp, and is paralyzed while poisoned this way.

**Web (Recharge 5-6).** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 40/80 ft., one creature. *Hit:* The target is restrained by webbing. As long as the creature remains restrained by the webbing, it takes 3 (1d6) necrotic damage at the end of each of its turns. As an action, the restrained target can make a DC 14 Strength check, bursting the webbing on a success. The webbing can also be attacked and destroyed; AC 10; hp 5; vulnerability to fire damage; immunity to bludgeoning, necrotic, poison, and psychic damage. A humanoid slain by this attack rises 24 hours later as a zombie under the deathweaver's control, unless the humanoid is restored to life or its body is damaged. The deathweaver can have no more than twelve zombies under its control at one time.

# Young Blue Dragon Zombie

*Large dragon, neutral evil*

**Armor Class** 18 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 152 (16d10 + 64)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 10 ft., fly 70 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	6 (-2)	19 (+4)	3 (-4)	8 (-1)	5 (-3)

**Saving Throws** Dex +2, Con +8, Wis +3, Cha +1

**Damage Immunities** lightning, poison

**Condition Immunities** poisoned

**Senses** blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 9

**Languages** understands Common and Draconic but can't speak

**Challenge** 10 (5,900 XP)

**Undead Fortitude.** If damage reduces the dragon zombie to 0 hp, 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 dragon zombie drops to 1 hp instead.

## Actions

**Multiattack.** The dragon zombie makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage plus 5 (1d10) necrotic damage.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

**Rotting Breath (Recharge 5-6).** The dragon zombie exhales rotting breath in an 60-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 55 (10d10) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A humanoid reduced to 0 hp by this damage dies, and it rises as a zombie and acts immediately after the dragon zombie in the initiative count. The new zombie is under the control of the creature controlling the dragon zombie.



## Credits

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