MonsterFocus Skeletons



A Minotaur Games Supplement By Jason Bulmahn



Monster Focus: Skeletons

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Skeletons are a common danger faced by many young heroes venturing into ancient crypts and dusty tombs. For most, these clattering abominations are the first undead they ever encounter and a memorable part of their early career. Unfortunately, these iconic monsters are quickly replaced by more powerful undead, relegated to the role of fodder in the horde of the restless dead.

This supplement presents a number of rules and options for making skeletons a pivotal part of the game, from a single adventure to an entire campaign arc. Included are tools for player characters, from skills and feats to alchemical items and spells, as well as new options for Game Masters to expand the role of these undead in their adventure, including magic items and new types of skeletons.

SKILLS

Characters trying to recall a bit of lore about the skeleton that they face must make a Knowledge (religion) skill check. The following DCs and provided information assume that the skeleton is CR 1 or less. If it is above this, add the CR to the listed DCs.

DC Information

- 6 The creature is a skeleton, an undead abomination created from the bones of a dead creature.
- 11 The bones of a skeleton are resistant to blades and arrows, but a heavy mace or club can destroy them easily.
- 16 Some skeletons possess special powers that allow them to heal or burst into flames. Rarely, some even retain a vestige of their former lives, wielding weapons with great skill.
- 21 Rumors hold that there are even greater skeletal creatures, capable of commanding others and casting spells.

FEATS

The following feats help characters fight against skeletons or aid them in commanding a legion of dead themselves.

Ash and Dust

Your channeled energy easily destroys skeletal creatures.

Prerequisite: Channel positive energy class feature.

Benefit: Whenever you use channel positive energy to harm undead creatures, any skeleton (or undead creature made up primarily of bones, such as a lich) takes 2 extra points of damage per die of damage dealt. In addition, undead creatures made from bone take a -2 penalty on any saving throw made to reduce this damage.

Bone Breaker (Combat)

You are skilled at shattering the bones of the undead, even when using a slashing weapon.

Prerequisite: Base attack bonus +1.

Benefits: Whenever you deal damage with a slashing melee

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weapon, you can ignore any damage reduction that could normally only be bypassed by weapons dealing bludgeoning damage. If the damage reduction also requires magic, silver, or

any other type to bypass it, your weapon must meet that type to bypass the damage reduction.

Skull Lord

You easily control skeletons of any type. **Prerequisite**: Spell Focus (necromancy).

Benefits: When determining the total amount of undead you can control, skeletons count as if their Hit Dice were reduced to 25% of their actual total, rounded up to the nearest Hit Die. Add up all the Hit Dice of any skeletons you control before reducing their total.

ALCHEMICAL ITEMS

Those finding themselves fighting against skeletons have a number of tools at their disposal, from bone bane to impact oil.

This section also presents a new type of item made through alchemy that can enhance spells if used as a spell component. These alchemical components are always consumed when casting the spell that they enhance and no more than one such component can be used in the casting of a single spell. The DC to craft an alchemical component is equal to 15 + the level of the spell that the component modifies (this DC is included in the table). While alchemical components are crafted using parts from various creatures, their cost comes from other rare ingredients and reagents.

Bone Bane: This crystal vial of opalescent fluid is a boon to anyone who plans to fight against creatures made up primarily of bone. You can throw bone bane as a splash weapon with a range of 10 feet. A direct hit by bone bane deals 2d4 points of damage to any creature made up primarily of bone, such as a skeleton, lich, or bone devil. Any such creature within 5 feet of the point where the vial hits takes 1d4 points of damage from



the splash. Bone bane has no effect on other creatures, but it does deal damage to items made of bone as noted above, ignoring any Hardness the object might possess.

Grave Scent: This pale gray liquid smells of grave soil and rotting flesh. Each vial contains enough to coat one Medium creature and its effects last for one hour. Creatures coated in grave scent receive a +4 competence bonus on Stealth checks made against unintelligent undead creatures.

Impact Oil: This sticky residue is stored in a ceramic jar with a tightly fitting lid. Each jar holds enough impact oil to coat 5 weapons or 20 pieces of ammunition. Whenever a weapon coated in this oil strikes a creature or object the oil explodes. The weapon deals normal damage, but the damage type is bludgeoning in addition to any other type. Once applied, impact oil only lasts for

a single attack or until one hour has past, after which is evaporates.

This Necromancer's Eye: alchemical component is made from rare grave earth and powdered skeletal bone. Appearing as little more than a small black stone, a necromancer's eye can be used when casting animate dead in

place of onyx to create skeletons and zombies that are unquestionably loyal to their creator. Undead made using a necromancer's eye treat their total Hit Dice as 1/2 their total (minimum 1) when determining how many Hit Dice their creator can control. This reduction does not stack with the reduction from the Skull Lord feat. One necromancer's eve must be used for each Hit Die of the skeleton or zombie created for the necromancer's eve to have the listed effect.

Obsidian Knuckle: This alchemical component is made from the knucklebones of a powerful skeleton, such as a skeletal champion, that is then infused with wisps of negative energy harvested from a ghost or spirit. When used to cast animate dead, or a similar spell, any skeletons created by the spell receive turn resistance +2. This does not affect the CR of the skeleton.

Sun Crystal: This alchemical component is made by soaking a piece of pure quartz in special oil and then bathing the mixture in the noonday sun. When used to cast searing light, the beam is particularly destructive to undead, dealing an additional 1 point of damage per die of damage. In addition, if the undead is destroyed by this spell, it explodes in a blast of light that deals 1 point of damage per Hit Die of the exploding undead to each adjacent undead creature.

SPELLS

Some of the following spells are useful in fighting against skeletons, while others are used to create or control the undead abominations. These rare spells are usually only found on long forgotten scrolls or in ancient libraries.

Animate Dead, Minor

School necromancy [evil]; Level cleric 1, sorcerer/wizard 2

Target one corpse touched

Duration 1 day

This spell functions as animate dead except that it can create one standard humanoid skeleton or zombie with a maximum number of HD equal to your caster level, to a maximum 5 Hit Dice at 5th level. You cannot have more than one undead creature under your control through this spell. If you cast this spell a second time, the

first creature immediately crumbles to dust. This creature counts against your maximum limit of undead creatures you can control.

Boneshatter

School evocation [sonic]; Level cleric 2, witch 2 Casting Time 1 standard action Components V, S Range short (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels) Area 10-ft. radius burst **Duration** instantaneous Saving Throw see text; Spell Resistance yes

This spell creates a jarring resonance in the bones of any creature in the area. Against skeletons, liches, or other creatures made up primarily of bone, this spell deals 1d6 points of sonic

Alchemical Item	Cost	Weight	Craft DC
Bone Bane	15 gp	1 lb.	20
Grave Scent	20 gp	1/2 lb.	15
Impact Oil	20 gp	1 lb.	25
Necromancer's Eye	50 gp	—	18
Obsidian Knuckle	100 gp	1/2 lb.	18
Sun Crystal	60 gp	—	18

damage per caster level, maximum 5d6. Such creatures can attempt a Reflex saving throw to halve the damage. Against living creatures with a skeletal structure, this spell causes them to be staggered for one round. Living creatures affected by this spell can attempt a Fortitude saving throw to negate the effect.

Call the Dead

School necromancy [evil]; Level cleric 8, sorcerer/wizard 9 Casting Time 4 hours

Components V, S, M (skull of a powerful undead creature, onyx gemstone worth 5,000 gp)

Range medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Targets all corpses in a 100-ft. spread

Duration 1 hour/level (D)

Saving Throw none; Spell Resistance no

Calling on the grim powers of death, you cause all the corpses in the area to rise up as skeletons under your control. This spell affects corpses buried underground as well, up to a depth of 10 feet, although such undead take 1d4 minutes to claw their way up to the surface. These skeletons can be made into burning or bleeding skeletons at the time of casting by reducing the duration to 10 minutes per level. These undead do not count against your Hit Die limit for the amount of undead you can control. These undead must be commanded as a single group and cannot be split up to perform multiple tasks. If you are slain, these undead immediately crumble to dust.

Corpse Rebellion

School necromancy; Level sorcerer/wizard 1, witch 1 Casting Time 1 standard action Components V, S

Range short (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target one corporeal undead creature

Duration 1 round/level

Saving Throw Will negates, see text; Spell Resistance yes

This spell causes the once living spirit of an undead creature to attempt to regain control of its body. This functions as the confused condition, affecting the undead creature. In addition, if the "act normally" result is rolled and the spirit of the creature would be opposed to being undead, it instead deals damage to itself as if it had rolled that result instead. If the undead fails its Will save, it receives a new saving throw at the end of each of its turns to end this effect. Mindless undead creatures take a -4 penalty on their saving throws against this spell.



Maul of the Righteous

School evocation [force]; Level cleric 3, paladin 2 Casting Time 1 standard action Components V, S, DF Range personal Effect magic weapon of force Duration 1 round/level (D)

This spell creates a two-handed maul made up of shimmering force. You must have both hands free to cast this spell and the maul appears in your hands upon completion of the spell. You are automatically proficient with this weapon and you receive a +1 bonus on attack rolls for every four caster levels you possess (maximum +5 at 20th level). The maul deals 2d6 points of bludgeoning damage on a hit (if you are Medium) and has a x3 critical multiplier. The damage from this weapon is not halved against incorporeal creatures. If the weapon strikes an undead creature, it deals 1 additional point of damage per two caster levels. This damage is not multiplied on a critical hit. If this weapon leaves you possession, the spell immediately ends.

MAGIC ITEMS

There are a number of magic items made from the bones of the undead, some of which are tools for fighting against them, while other conjure and control them. Most of the following items are rare, and characters of a good faith might find their use unpalatable, if not outright evil.

Bone Sword

Aura moderate necromancy; CL 10th Slot none; Price 16,315 gp; Weight 4 lbs.

This ancient blade appears to be made from bone, but it is as hard as steel. Once per day, when this +2 longsword is used to deliver the killing blow to a humanoid creature, the bone sword can be used as a swift action to cause the creature's flesh to melt away and its body to rise up as a skeleton under the wielder's control, as if using lesser animate dead (Ultimate Magic). The skeleton can have no more than 5 Hit Dice when created in this way. The sword wielder cannot control more than one skeleton in this way at a time. If the sword is used again to create a skeleton, any previous skeleton created by the sword immediately crumbles to dust. This skeleton does not count against the Hit Die limit of undead that the wielder can control, but if the wielder ever loses the bone sword the undead becomes uncontrolled until a creature picks up the sword, gaining control of the skeleton.

Construction Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *lesser animate dead*; **Cost** 8,315 gp

Crown of Bones

Aura moderate necromancy; CL 7th Slot head; Price 56,000 gp; Weight 4 lbs.

This grisly crown is made up of dozens of finger bones, rib bones, and teeth, blackened with age. Three times per day, the wearer of the crown can call down a storm of razor sharp bone shards. These shards deal 5d6 points of slashing damage to all creatures in a 10-foot-radius burst and each creature bleeds on its turn for an additional 1d6 points of damage (this bleed can be healed or stopped as normal). Creatures in the area can attempt a DC 16 Reflex save to halve the damage and negate the bleed. In addition, the wearer of the crown can cast *animate dead* once per day without having to provide a material component, although the crown can only be used to create skeletons. Finally, once per day, the crown allows its wearer to assume the form of a skeleton (of the same size as the wearer) as if using *undead anatomy II* (Ultimate Magic). The wearer can end this transformation as a free action.

Construction Craft Wondrous Item, *animate dead, ice storm, undead anatomy II;* **Cost** 28,000 gp

Ring of Light

Aura faint conjuration; CL 5th

Slot ring; Price 4,000 gp; Weight ----

This ring is made from pale, white gold set with a trio of small diamonds on its face. The ring can shed *light*, as per the spell, on command. In addition, three times per day as a standard action, the wielder can attempt a melee touch attack against an undead creature to deal 1d8+5 points of damage, as if using *cure light wounds*. This cannot be used to heal a living creature. The undead creature receives a DC 11 Will save for half damage.

Construction Forge Ring, cure light wounds, light; Cost 2,000 gp

Skull of Command

Aura faint necromancy; CL 5th

Slot none; Price 16,000 gp; Weight 4 lbs.

This ancient skull has a single black diamond embedded in its forehead. Three times per day, when the skull is pointed at an undead creature it can be used to control that creature as

if using *command undead* (DC 13), but it cannot command more than one creature at a time. In addition, the skull can be used as a holy symbol when attempting to channel negative energy, allowing the wielder to attempt to command undead creatures instead of heal them, as if he possessed the Command Undead feat.

Construction Craft Wondrous Item, Command Undead or command undead; Cost 8,000 gp

Skull of Fangs

Aura faint transmutation; CL 6th

Slot none; Price 10,000 gp; Weight 4 lbs.

This sinister black skull has a mouth full of incredibly sharp fangs. As a standard action the skull can be commanded to fly from the wielder's grasp and attack one creature within 30 feet. Each round, including the first, the skull attempts to bite the target, making a melee attack with a +5 bonus on the roll. If the bite hits, it does 1d4+3 points of piercing damage. In addition, any creature bit by the skull must make

a DC 13 Will save or be shaken for 1 round. The skull can be used a total of 10 rounds each day. The skull has a fly speed of 30 feet with perfect maneuverability. It can be redirected to a new target once per round as a move action. The skull has an AC of 16, 10 hit points, and Hardness 5. If it takes any damage (but is not destroyed), it immediately flies back to its wielder.

Construction Craft Wondrous Item, animate object; Cost 5,000 gp

Skull of the Servant

Aura moderate necromancy; CL 10th

Slot none; Price 16,000 gp; Weight 4 lbs.

This pale white skull emits a faint glow when in total darkness and seems to chatter faintly while unattended. Once per day, a *skull of the servant* can be commanded to transform into a skeletal champion. It remains in this form for up to 10 minutes, until destroyed or commanded to revert back into a simple skull.



Destroying the skeletal champion does not destroy the skull, but it does prevent it from being used again for one week. When the skeletal champion appears, it is at full hit points and has all of the listed gear, but that gear disappears when it reverts back to its skull form. The skeletal champion understands Common, but it cannot speak. It obeys the commands of the creature that activated it to the best of its abilities, but it cannot comprehend instructions more than one brief sentence in length.

Construction Craft Wondrous Item, animate dead; Cost 8,000 gp

Spine Mace

Aura faint necromancy; CL 5th Slot none; Price 10,312 gp; Weight 8 lbs.

The handle of this *+1 heavy mace* is crafted from the spine of a humanoid creature, with its skull as the head of the mace. Whenever the mace strikes a skeleton, or another creature made primarily of bones, the *spine mace* deals an additional 1d6 points of damage. This additional damage is not multiplied on a critical hit. Once per day as a standard action, the wielder of the mace can cause the skull to emit a silent scream. Any undead within 30 feet of the wielder must make a DC 13 Will save or flee from the wielder of the mace for 1 minute as if panicked. Intelligent undead receive a new saving throw each round to end the effect.

Construction Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Turn Undead, summon monster I; Cost 10,312 gp

NEW SKELETONS

The basic skeleton template allows for a wide variety of clattering undead. The addition of the bleeding, burning, and

skeletal champion variations greatly expands the number of skeletons at the GMs disposal. The following variants are designed to give even more options to keep your players guessing whenever a shambling mound of bones emerges from their darkest nightmares. These variant skeletons follow the rules of the skeleton template unless noted otherwise.

Decrepit Skeleton

These skeletons are so ancient that the magic that binds them is beginning to fail. They are often missing parts of their bodies, such as an arm or a number of ribs. Some even lack legs and instead must crawl about. Decrepit skeletons cannot be intentionally created.

Challenge Rating: As a normal skeleton -1.

Armor Class: As a normal skeleton, but reduce the natural armor bonus by 1 (minimum 0).

Defensive Abilities: As a normal skeleton, except a decrepit skeleton gains DR 5/bludgeoning or slashing instead of DR 5/bludgeoning.

Abilities: As a normal skeleton, but its Charisma score is reduced to 8.

Special Qualities: A decrepit skeleton frequently is missing various parts that impair its function. Roll 1d10 and consult the following table.

1–5: No missing parts.

6–7: Missing one arm. The skeleton only gets one claw attack or weapon attack and can't use two-handed weapons.

8–9: Missing a number of bones all over its body. It loses DR 5/bludgeoning or slashing.

10: Missing one or both legs. It takes a -4 penalty to Dexterity and its speed is reduced to 5 feet. It cannot take a 5-foot step.

Monstrous Skeleton

Skeletons made from the bodies of larger monsters have been known to have a wide variety of abilities and this simple addition allows them to retain some of the abilities they had in life. A monstrous skeleton can be created with *animate dead*, but it counts as twice the number of Hit Dice for that spell.

Challenge Rating: As a normal skeleton +1, this increases to +2 if the skeleton has 10 or more Hit Dice.

Special Abilities: A monstrous skeleton gains a number of special abilities equal to it CR (without the adjustment made by this template, minimum 1). These abilities should be the same as those it had when it was alive. If there are not enough matching abilities listed, select new abilities until the correct number is reached. Abilities marked with an asterisk (*) cannot be selected unless possessed by the living creature. Select abilities from the following list:

Ability Score Increase: Increase the skeleton's Strength or Dexterity by +2. This can be selected by any monstrous skeleton.

Armor Increase: Increase the skeleton's natural armor bonus by +2. This can be selected by any monstrous skeleton.

*Breath Weapon**: As the living creature but it can only be used once per day.

*Climb**: As the living creature.

*Constrict**: As the living creature.

Disease: As the living creature or filth fever through one of its natural attacks (DC 10 + 1/2 its Hit Dice + its Cha modifier).

*Flight**: The skeleton retains any mode of flight it had while alive. If the ability was extraordinary, it is now supernatural.

Grab*: As the living creature.

Poison: As the living creature or black adder venom through its bite if it has one (DC 10 + 1/2 its Hit Dice + its Cha modifier).

Pounce: The skeleton gains the pounce ability. *Rake**: As the living creature.

Rend: The skeleton gains the rend ability, using its original attacks or its claws. It deals damage as per its original ability or an amount equal to the

damage caused by its claw attack plus 1-1/2 times its Strength modifier.

Spell Resistance: The skeleton gains Spell Resistance (11 + the skeleton's CR).

Swim*: As the living creature.

Trample*: As the living creature.

*Trip**: As the living creature.

Skeletal Lord

Based on the skeletal champion, the skeletal lord can command other undead. Necromancers often create these monstrosities to help control their horde. A skeletal lord cannot be created without powerful evil rituals.

Challenge Rating: As a normal skeletal champion +1.

Armor Class: As a normal skeletal champion, but increase the natural armor bonus by +2.

Hit Dice: Add 3 racial HD to the creature's total (instead of 2). **Defensive Abilities**: A skeletal lord gains the following defensive ability in addition to the standard abilities of a skeletal champion.



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Sacrifice Minion (Su): As an immediate action, whenever a skeletal lord takes damage from channel energy or a *cure* spell, it can redirect this damage to any one skeleton under its control within 30 feet. If that skeleton is also within the range of the effect it takes this damage twice, although it can attempt a saving throw as normal.

Special Attacks: A skeletal lord gains the following special attacks.

Command Skeleton (Su): As a standard action, a skeletal lord can command any unintelligent skeleton with 3 Hit Dice or less within 30 feet. These skeletons do not receive a saving throw to resist this control. This ability cannot be used to gain control of a skeleton under the control of another creature. A skeletal lord can only have a number of Hit Dice of undead under its control equal to four times the skeletal lord's total Hit Dice. If the skeletal lord is controlled by another creature, any undead under the skeletal lord's control do not count toward the limit of the creature controlling the skeletal lord.

Detonate Minion (Su): As a standard action, a skeletal lord can cause one skeleton under its control to explode. This destroys the skeleton (no saving throw allowed). Any creature within 10 feet of the exploding skeleton takes 1d6 points of piercing damage per Hit Die of the exploding skeleton. A Reflex save halves this damage (DC 10 + 1/2 the skeletal lord's Hit Dice + the skeletal lord's Charisma modifier).

Spell-Like Abilities: A skeletal lord gains the ability to cast *animate dead* once per day as a spell-like ability, using its total Hit Dice as its caster level. It can only use this ability to animate skeletons and the skeletons cannot have more than 3 Hit Dice. Skeletons created in this way are under its control and count against the Hit Dice limit in the command skeleton special ability. The skeletal lord does not need to pay any material component costs when using this ability.

ADVENTURE IDEAS

The following adventure ideas use rules from this supplement and are suitable for any challenge level.

Missing Bones: A minor noble was slain by a foul villain using a *bone sword* and turned into a skeleton. The family of the noble has the means to restore him to life, but only if they can perform the ritual on his undead bones. The PCs must track down the villain and retrieve the *bone sword* without destroying the noble's shambling bones.

Night of the Dead: A young necromancer acquired a scroll of *call the dead*, hoping to use it to raise all the dead in the graveyard as his minions. Upon completing the spell, he failed to make the check to cast it causing the spell to backfire. The dead of the town rose as skeletons, but not under his control. Arriving back to town just barely before the horde, he goes to the PCs, confessing his crime and explaining that for the next 17 hours, the town will be assaulted by endless waves of the dead.

Warlord Reborn: After defeating a local bandit lord, the PCs learn that another bandit has entered the area and is attacking the same caravans as before. In reality, the old bandit returned from the grave as a skeletal lord. After animating all of his slain followers, he has resumed his old plans and is intent upon getting his revenge against the PCs.

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