

The False Necromancer

Designed for four level 2 characters. *Five level 2/Four level 3:* Add one ostovite to each encounter.

The residents of the remote town of Xolos are gripped with panic after the dead returned to life and terrorized the town.

Investigations

- The gossip baker Jeb: The local cleric of Yaheine, Yolande, has been thrown in jail by the lawman Spade for failing to repulse the shambling skeletons.
- Spade's deputy Smithson: Spade suspects Yolande of raising the dead herself, and is planning to execute her come the end of the week.
 - *Intimidate DC 13:* If questioned sternly, Smithson breaks down and reveals something Spade would rather kept secret. Since her arrest yesterday, Yolande spent a sleepless night praying to Yaheine. If she is a charlatan, she is a convincing one.
- Aging scholar Zachariah Zibrek: Zachariah prevails on the heroes to investigate. He's sure there's something else going on, but lacks the courage and physical strength to investigate himself.
 - Zachariah will be extremely grateful if the heroes can bring back an undamaged specimen for further investigation. They are not to prioritize this over securing the safety of the town, however! (500 XP if the heroes succeed.)
 - *Arcana DC 9:* If prompted by a learned question, Zachariah admits he has read of creatures that appear to be one type but are another: demons that resemble golems, angel-winged fairies, and so on.
- Farmer Sarah: Sarah spied the skeletons creeping through her fields, on their way into town. Her pumpkin farm lies between the town and the mausoleum.
 - *Diplomacy DC 9:* If reassured by the heroes, Sarah feels comfortable volunteering something she was holding back: the skeletons looked more like strange animals built out of bone than they did properly-formed human skeletons. One seemed to have six legs, and another had hands made out of a pair of clattering lower jaws.
- Mayor Cartwright: The mayor has no particular affections for Yolande, but is worried that executing her unduly will both fail to prevent the undead attacks and risk the wrath of Yaheine. She is prepared to pay 500 gold pieces if the heroes find what's happening and put a stop to it. She will let them take any amount in advance, in the form of minor magical items.
 - *Bluff or Insight DC 9:* If the heroes pretend they are willing to walk, the mayor will go as high as 1,200 gold pieces.

For the Game Master: Yolande is no charlatan. Her anti-undead magic has failed because the shambling skeletons are not undead. They are intricate mechanical puppets created and controlled by strange insects called ostovites. Jealous of the size and skeletons of larger creatures, ostovites use skeletons they find or "create" to build themselves chariots of bone.

Mausoleum (500 XP): At some point, the heroes will head to the mausoleum to investigate further. The upper level is a beautiful marble reception area, where the dead were lain in rest for their loved ones to file past.

As if in hideous parody of human rites, two "skeletons" are lain in the sarcophagus on the dais. When they sense the approach of fresh meat, they stir.

- 2 ostovites
- 2 bone chariots

Undertaker's Cottage: Behind the mausoleum is the undertaker's cottage. You find what remains of him: skin and flesh cut away from his bones, all of which are missing. However, before you feel too sympathetic - note that hidden under his bed is a chest filled with necklaces, rings, earrings and other treasures he stole from dead townsfolk before burial. This is 400 gold pieces worth of jewelry and a *+1 amulet of shielding*.

Down the Font (500 XP): The water font has been hollowed out by thousands of scratches, creating a pit leading down into the catacombs below. When the heroes reach the first room, the ostovites attack.

- 2 ostovites
- 2 bone chariots

Staging Room (625 XP): This large room contains four bone chariots, one in each corner. Their masks are up, to reveal that there is no ostovite inside. However, the bone chariots are under the control of a psychic ostovite, who is hidden beneath a pile of bones in a corner of the room (Perception DC X to spot).

- 4 bone chariots
- 1 ostovite sentient

The sentient is wearing an (ill-fitting) *helm of intellect*.

Earthworks and beyond: Beyond the carefully sealed catacombs is a rising earthen tunnel. Shards of bones litter the ground, as well as piles of rocks that have been pushed to the side of the earthworks. Echoing from the tunnel is the sound of scraping and falling earth. The heroes come across a bone chariot the size of a moose, scratching at the roof of the tunnel. As they arrive, a sliver of light appears and then, before their eyes, the massive bone chariot opens up a hole to above ground. With a flick of its tail (made of human spines), it climbs out.

The mega-chariot is making its way to town. The heroes will have to stop it there to protect the townsfolk.

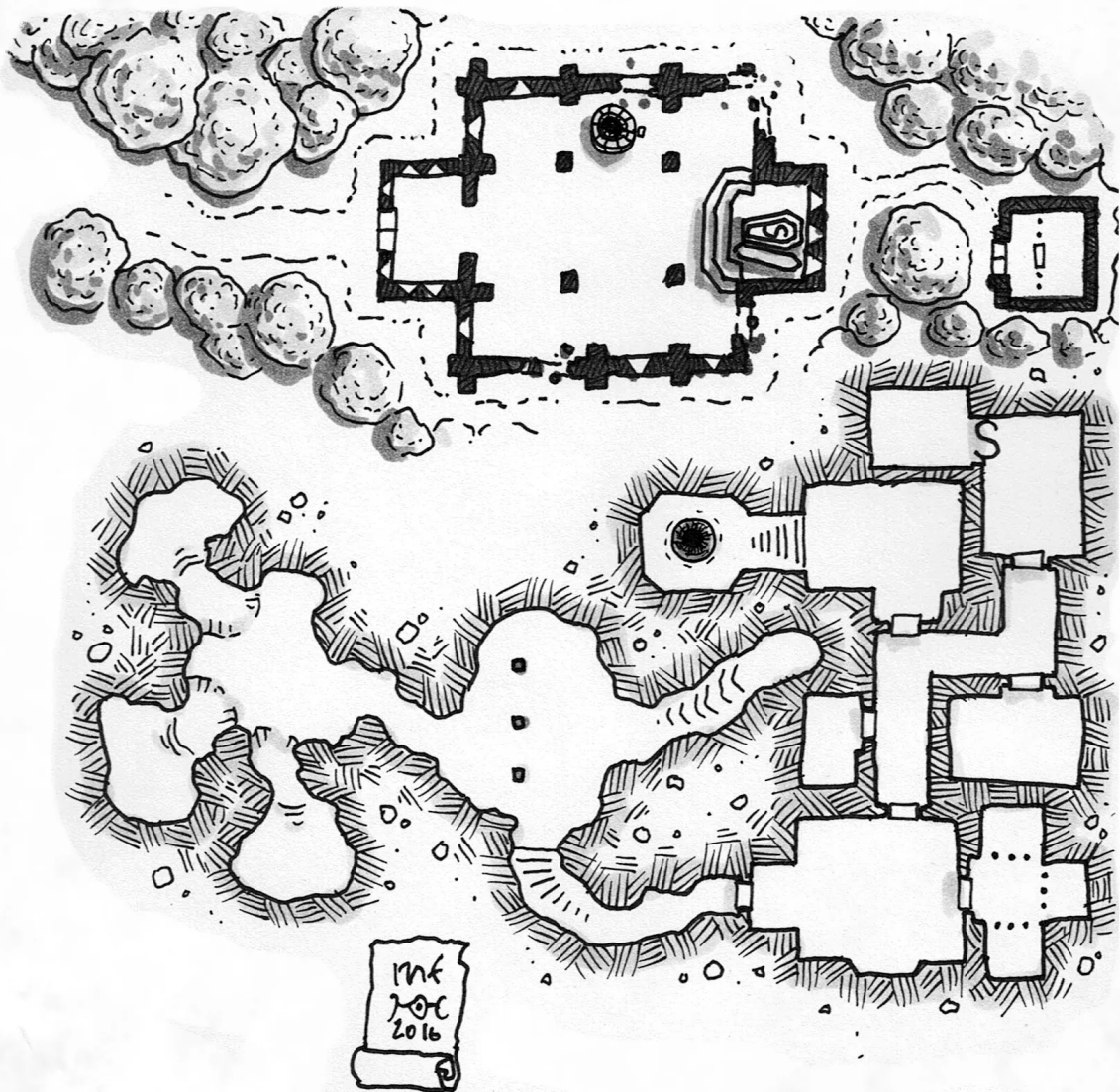
Back in town (750 XP):

- 1 mega-chariot

When the mega-chariot is destroyed, the ostovites swarm out to continue the fight as an ostovite swarm.

Each round, the mega-chariot/ostovite swarm threatens a different civilian: Jeb, Smithson, Zachariah, Sarah or Mayor Cartwright. Successful skill checks or other interventions can protect the civilians (DC 9 for a good idea, DC 13 for a stretch).

The Red Catacombs



Map artwork by Miska Fredman.

Ostovites

The feature of this adventure are the ostovites and their unusual bone chariots. Emphasize that these are skeletons as assembled by someone with only a passing familiarity with or interest in human anatomy.

The ostovite and its chariot act on the same initiative. Each ostovite should have its own initiative.

The players will likely assume that the ostovite and its chariot are a single creature. Assume they are attacking the chariot unless they specify otherwise. When the ostovite is ready to attack, it lifts the chariot's bone mask. At some point, they will tweak that the chariot's skittering silver "tongue" is an armor-plated insect with a hundred chitinous legs gripping onto the chariot.

Since a chariot stops working when its ostovite is destroyed, the heroes may start targeting the ostovites with attacks. Some things they may choose include:

- The default is simply to attack the ostovite through the bone chariot. The ostovite has cover, and gets resistance from the chariot until the chariot is Staggered.
- They may pull the chariot's mask off to leave the ostovite exposed. Make a Strength check vs Fortitude.
- They may ready an action to attack when the ostovite attacks.
- Any other creative solution will do.

Ostovite

Level 2 Assassin (125 XP)

Tiny Cosmic Monstrosity (Evil)

Senses: Perception +2

Skills Stealth +9

Str 6 (+2), **Con** 14 (+2), **Dex** 16 (+3), **Int** 2 (+-4), **Wis** 12 (+1), **Cha** 8 (+-1)

Initiative +4

AC 15; **Fort** 13, **Ref** 14, **Will** 12

HP 29, **Staggered** 14

Speed 5

() **Mandibles** (standard action, at-will) • Acid

Melee, +7 vs AC, 1d12+3 acid damage.

✂ **Bone Spike** (standard action, at-will)

Melee, +7 vs AC, 2d10+2 damage. *Special:* Only usable if the ostovite is not in a bone chariot.

Scuttle Away (react action, the ostovite's bone chariot is destroyed)

Shift 5.

Jealous of the size and skeletons of larger creatures, the strange insects called ostovites use skeletons they find or "create" to build themselves chariots of bone.

Special

Ostovites are usually found sheltered in their bone chariots, which they control through elaborate pulleys and levers. The ostovites will intermittently lift their bone chariot's face masks (often made from hip bones or interlaced ribs) to strike with their mandibles.

Ostovite Sentient: As the ostovite above, except it does not get *bone spike*. Instead, it has:

Activation aura 10: Bone chariots within the aura act on the ostovite sentient's initiative as if they were being ridden, taking their full complement of actions.

Bone Chariot

Level 2 Blocker (125 XP)

Medium Natural Automaton, Construct, Mount (Unaligned)

Senses: Perception +3


Str 14 (+2), **Con** 16 (+3), **Dex** 8 (+-1), **Int** 2 (+-4), **Wis** 2 (+-4), **Cha** 2 (+-4)

Initiative +0

AC 17; **Fort** 14, **Ref** 13, **Will** 13

HP 34, **Staggered** 17

Speed 5

() **Slam** (standard action, at-will)

Melee, +7 vs AC, 1d12+3 damage.

Shelter • Mount

An ostovite riding a bone chariot benefits from cover and the bone chariot's resistance 5 against all. It is affected by area of effect attacks, although it still receives the resistance against those attacks.

Shattered Bone

While the bone chariot is Staggered, it loses its resistance 5 to all damage and no longer grants *shelter* to the ostovite riding it.

Empty Vessel

If the ostovite riding the bone chariot is ever incapacitated or leaves the bone chariot, the bone chariot cannot take any actions until an ostovite rides it again.

Mega-Chariot

Level 3 Boss Blocker (0 XP)

Large Natural Automaton, Construct (Unaligned)

Senses: Perception -3

Str 18 (+4), **Con** 20 (+5), **Dex** 6 (-2), **Int** 2 (-4), **Wis** 2 (-4), **Cha** 2 (-4)

Initiative -1

AC 17; **Fort** 14, **Ref** 13, **Will** 13; **Saving Throws** +5

HP 78, **Staggered** 39


Ostovite Lashings aura 1: Creatures that begin their turn adjacent to the mega-chariot take 1d12+4 acid damage.

Action Points 2

Speed 5

() **Slam** (standard action, at-will)

Melee, +8 vs AC, 1d12+4 damage.

() **Ostovite Surprise** (an enemy does not move during their turn; react action, at-will) • Acid

Ranged 5, +8 vs AC, 5 persistent acid damage (save ends).

Bone Garden

Each time the mega-chariot takes damage, create a Near burst 1 zone of difficult terrain. This lasts until the end of the encounter.

Breakdown

When the mega-chariot is reduced to 0 HP or below, it is replaced by an ostovite swarm.

Special

The mega-chariot gives no XP. The ostovite swarm must be defeated for the heroes to gain XP.

Ostovite Swarm

Level 3 Boss Spoiler (750 XP)

Large Cosmic Monstrosity, Swarm (Evil)

Senses: Perception +2

Str 12 (+1), **Con** 14 (+2), **Dex** 16 (+3), **Int** 2 (+-4), **Wis** 12 (+1), **Cha** 8 (+-1)

Initiative +4

AC 15; **Fort** 13, **Ref** 12, **Will** 14; **Saving Throws** +5

HP 156, **Staggered** 78

Activation aura 10: Bone chariots within the aura act on the ostovite swarm's initiative as if they were being ridden, taking their full complement of actions.

Action Points 2

Speed 5

☠ **Mandibles** (standard action, at-will) • Acid

Near burst 1, +8 vs AC, 1d12+4 acid damage.

✂ **Bone Spike** (standard action, at-will)

Melee, +8 vs AC, 1d12+4 damage and the target is grappled (save ends).

✂ **Begin the Harvest** (standard action, encounter)

Melee; the target must be grappled, +8 vs AC, 2d10+3 damage and the target is weakened (save ends).

Scuttle Away (react action, the ostovite swarm is Staggered for the first time)

Shift 5