

INTRIGUING ORGANIZATIONS

Osseous Dwarves of the Hollow Mountain



Ages after their kingdom fell the dwarves of the Hollow Mountain returned from the dead to find their world lost to history, their lands now ruled by others. Barely aware of their own undead nature, the cold, patient dwarves have undertaken a cam-

paign of careful reclamation and subtle manipulation, building their forces and readying to reconquer all that was theirs.

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HISTORY

Many years ago dwarven lands were assaulted by countless monstrosities of such ferocity that the stout folk's very existence was threatened. The dwarves couldn't match the assailants' numbers and so the clans sought out innovative solutions to their crisis. The most daring suggestion was by the small Skilaad clan: turn to necromancy in order to raise fallen warriors and fortify their army. The other clans were appalled—exclaiming that they'd rather die and join their ancestors in the afterlife rather than despoil the bodies of honored dead—and so the Skilaad were banished from the kingdom.

The exiles wandered for many years until eventually reaching a nameless, lone peak in the middle of the wilderness. They dug into the earth and stone, carving many caverns and passages throughout what has become the Hollow Mountain, constructing fortifications and defenses capable of fending off the most ardent foes (in case the monstrosities from their old lands reappear). Confident in their safety, the Skilaad claimed dominion over the many regions around their new home and renewed their experiments with raising the undead.

The clan no longer remember how their end came. Maybe it was the same disaster that befell the other dwarves, or perhaps the barbaric tribes around Hollow Mountain united under a warlord who defied the Skilaad's rule. In any case as their civilization was nearing its end, their most powerful mages performed a necromantic ritual in a final effort to oppose the enemy. The ceremony's power proved to be beyond their talents, roiling uncontrol-

ably and destroying the last of their greatest magic users as well as the hundreds of invaders already within their halls.

Ages went by until a few years ago when a group of adventurers (perhaps even the party, or someone they know) raided the entrance to Hollow Mountain, believing it to be an old dwarven keep. They did not realize that under the fortress' basement there were tunnels leading deeper into the mountain, nor were they aware that they have disturbed the slumber of hundreds of undead dwarves inside. The Skilaad have forgotten who they were, what they believed in, and even their names. The few who know of their existence call them the Osseous Dwarves, for the weapons and armors they wield are made of bones. The undead stout folk are barely aware of this fact, thinking they are armed with steel; their botched necromantic ritual granted them only a semblance of consciousness and they exist in a constant state of confusion, dimly aware that things are not as they should be but unable to focus their attention enough to understand the nature of their distress. They only know one thing for sure—this is their land and they want it back.

MOTIVATIONS

The Osseous Dwarves plan on restoring their rule over the lands surrounding Hollow Mountain. They have a need to rule and very few other desires besides. On occasion some try to find ways to restore their muddled memories but these efforts inevitably end within a few days as they lose their focus, leaving their research mid-way and having to start it all over again next time. The one exception is their leader Blue Helm (named for her headgear). Her given title was lost along with the others' but unlike them, she retained her emotions and some of her willpower. Blue Helm was in the center of the ritual, a powerful magesmith who led her fellow dwarves to their cursed demise. When she is angry they all become angry, and when she is grim and calculating they too are grim and calculating—yet neither she nor the others realize that she is the only one among them who still has her personality intact, or that her belief that she is the rightful ruler is what motivates them all.

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Should she become passionate about uncovering her clan's past, Blue Helm's subjects might be able to finally overcome the vicious cycle of researching and forgetting. Unfortunately she is set on a single plan: conquering Hollow Mountain's neighbors and expanding her kingdom.

MODUS OPERANDI

Thanks to their methodological leader the Osseous Dwarves are conniving and patient. They send agents into the world in small groups seeking to learn about their new neighbors, their intentions, and their defenses. The dwarves plan on taking their time, slowly building their forces by uncovering ancient armories and forging new weapons of war. When the time is right they'll start the revolution by activating their agents, assassinating rulers of towns and tribal chieftains, sending the societies of the land into conflict with each other—and appearing with their war machines, taking over the strongest and best-protected city to turn into their new capital.

For now the Osseous Dwarves avoid open confrontation and try to keep their existence a secret, disguised as “regular” grumpy dwarves or moving by the cover of darkness. Their agents work in small groups so as not to seem too organized, and they don't carry their weapons openly while in towns so as to not appear dangerous. So far it's worked—barely anyone is aware of their existence. However their efforts might be foiled from within by Blue Helm's temper. While most of the time her calm demeanor (or melancholy thoughts) allow her kin to operate in secret, their stubborn leader is troubled by bouts of anger and bewilderment and on occasion she'll lose her temper, making hundreds of patient dwarves suddenly angry and frustrated (wherever they might currently be located and during whatever mission they're currently undertaking).

ACTIVITIES

The Osseous Dwarves operate on several fronts to achieve all of the following:

Uncover Ancient Armories. During their time as living rulers of the land, the Skilaad built several ar-

mories, warehouses, and defensive structures. They now seek to find these lost bastions, and secretly reestablish a presence in them. The dwarves send groups consisting of several fighters and engineers under the cover of night to locate and unlock the (often trapped) buildings. At least one such building is now a temple, built on top of a dungeon that none suspects is an old dwarven storehouse.

Spying on Local Powers. A dozen or so dwarf spies have come down from their mountain in the last few months. They walk in groups of two or three, covered with heavy cloaks and appearing as ‘regular’ unfriendly dwarves. The undercover agents settle in an inn where they pay with gems and trinkets since their coins might look strange to the locals. After nightfall these teams sneak into back alleys, climb up walls, and infiltrate back rooms, uncovering secrets about people in power and leaving behind as little evidence as possible. Once every few weeks they send back a report about a settlement's defenses, current political climate, and important people. At first the spies barely spoke Common but they've been working hard on mastering other languages as well.

Cold Forge Weapons of Bone. The Skilaad's necromantic practices have only become more dreadful since they themselves became undead. They remain unaware of the change and keep forging tools and weapons—only now their creations are made from the bones of ancient foes whose bodies remained within the Hollow Mountain, all flesh rotted away ages ago. The forges are cold and no fires burn within them, each powered instead by the agonized spirits of those fallen invaders, their souls trapped within the metal of the Hollow Hearth at the center of the citadel. The dwarves are also creating siege weapons, fortifying their already-frightful siege mammoths.

HEADQUARTERS: THE HOLLOW MOUNTAIN

The Hollow Mountain is cold and dark, lit only by barely-fueled braziers that emit dim light out to 30 feet. The dwarves—who no longer care if they see color or shades of gray, as they've lost all aesthetic appreciation—maintain these flames only because they

vaguely remember this is how things should be done, the same reason their cooks boil poisonous mushrooms and inedible grubs, feeding all who gather in the mess halls to pour ‘food’ down their throats. The dwarves speak softly and barely make a sound as they work, but the Hollow Mountain rings with the sound of howling: the desperate spirits trapped in the Hollow Hearth, their cries echoing endlessly in the halls, with the occasional remote banging of reinforced metal as they try to escape their prison. The Hearth sits at the bottom of Hollow Mountain, once a glorious furnace which led steam up into many chambers throughout the citadel.

NEW MAGIC ITEMS

Boneplate

Armor (chainmail), rare (requires attunement)

This medium armor is made from the bones of several humanoids—ribs, shoulder, bones and many others have been bound in leather and fused with necromantic magic—and while donned it imparts a touch of undeath to the wearer. While wearing this armor, you gain resistance to poison and necrotic damage, but also vulnerability to bludgeoning damage. As a bonus action, you can make the bones rattle to gain advantage on the next Charisma (Intimidation) check you make this turn against a humanoid. It is in all other ways similar to chain mail, except that you don’t have disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks while wearing it.

Bone Warhammer

Weapon (warhammer), rare

Attacks made using this grim-looking weapon do both physical and supernatural harm. A living wielder can use their bonus action to allow the weapon’s cold power to feed off their life force. While activated, whenever the wielder successfully hits with the warhammer they deal an extra 1d6 necrotic damage but also take 1d4 cold damage. This trait lasts until deactivated by using another bonus action or letting go of the weapon. In the hands of an undead creature, this weapon instead deals an extra 1d6 necrotic damage on a hit.

Osseous Agent

Medium undead (dwarf), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (boneplate)

Hit Points 35 (6d8+8)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Skills Sleight of Hand +3, Stealth +3

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning

Damage Resistances necrotic

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Dwarvish

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Bone Weapon. When an Osseous Dwarf hits with a weapon made of bones, it deals an extra 3 (1d6) necrotic damage (included in the attack).

Delusional. The Osseous Dwarf is convinced it’s alive. If its true nature is proven to it with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, it is stunned until the end of its next turn, at which point it forgets what it was shown or finds a way to convince itself otherwise and becomes delusional again.

Emotional Swings. The Osseous Dwarf’s emotional state is tied to that of its leader, Blue Helm, who becomes agitated once she senses her dwarves enter combat. At the start of every round, roll a 1d8.

- **On a 1-4**, the dwarves behave normally.
- **On a 5**, they are all reckless. A reckless dwarf gains advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls during its turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.
- **On a 6**, they are all cautious. A cautious dwarf takes the Dodge action. If a melee attack made against it misses, the dwarf can use its reaction to retaliate with a warhammer attack.
- **On a 7**, they are all bitter. They deal an extra 2 damage on attacks this turn.
- **On an 8**, they are all confused. They have disadvantage on Wisdom and Charisma saving throws, and do not benefit from United in Action.

United in Action. If an Osseous Dwarf attacks a target in melee while adjacent to another Osseous Dwarf, it has an advantage on its attack roll.

ACTIONS

Bone Warhammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage, or 7 (1d10+2) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage if used with two hands.

Osseous Agents infiltrate local settlements and on occasion they can be seen in an inn or met on the road, always walking in twos or threes and covered by cloaks, grunting toward anyone who approaches them. During combat, they work carefully and methodically—they aim for spellcasters first, make clever use of the environment, retreat to advantageous (and often, already trapped) terrain, and use the cover of shadows. However because of Emotional Swings all of this tactical planning does not necessarily result in glorious victories. The dwarves are quick to retreat if they feel they've lost the fight.

Blue Helm

Medium undead (dwarf), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (boneplate)

Hit Points 65 (10d8+20)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws INT +4, WIS +3

Skills Arcane +4, Intimidation +3

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning

Damage Resistances necrotic

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Dwarvish

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Bone Weapon. When Blue Helm hits with a weapon made of bones, she deals an extra 3 (1d6) necrotic damage (included in the attack).

Delusional. Blue Helm is convinced she's alive. If her true nature is proven to her with a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check, she and every other Osseous Dwarf are Stunned until the end of her next turn, at which point she forgets what she was shown or finds a way to convince herself otherwise,

becoming delusional again.

Emotional Swings. Blue Helm's emotions influence all Osseous Dwarves, in the following ways.

- **While Blue Helm is frightened or stunned**, all Osseous Dwarves have the same condition.
- **When Blue Helm misses with a melee weapon attack**, her frustration makes all Osseous Dwarves reckless. They gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls during their next turn, but attack rolls against them have advantage until the start of their next turn.
- **When Blue Helm takes damage**, she becomes bitter. All Osseous Dwarves deal an extra 2 damage on their attacks next turn.
- **When Blue Helm makes a saving throw**, all Osseous Dwarves gain 5 temporary hit points.

Spellcasting. Blue Helm is a 5th level spellcaster, using Intelligence as her spellcasting ability (spell save DC 12; +4 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips: *chill touch, mage hand, ray of frost, true strike*

1st level (4 slots): *charm person, magic missile, shield, thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *darkness, ray of enfeeblement*

3rd level (2 slots): *vampiric touch*

United in Action. If Blue Helm attacks a target in melee while adjacent to another Osseous Dwarf, she has advantage on the attack and deals 3 (1d6) extra damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Blue Helm makes two melee attacks with her warhammer.

Bone Warhammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage, or 7 (1d10+2) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) necrotic damage if used with two hands.

The leader of the Osseous Dwarves is an accomplished mage and a clever strategist. She knows to calm herself down and wait with any important decision until after her head is clear, but her mood swings are unpredictable and can come at any moment. Blue Helm doesn't yet realize that she has instinctive

knowledge of anything any Osseous Dwarf sees—whenever she feels one of them is threatened, for example, she tenses without realizing why, a frustrating feeling that makes her angry and in turn makes them angry. Despite obvious evidence she is unable to realize all her kin are connected to her, her mind controlling them all. Behind Blue Helm’s throne room is the ritual chamber and site of the necromantic spell that turned her clan into the Osseous Dwarves. When she feels seriously threatened she doesn’t hesitate to run to that room and open the chimney of the Hollow Hearth, releasing hundreds of screaming spirits in a circle of death that covers the entirety of Hollow Mountain.

Siege Mammoth

Huge undead, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (bone grafts)

Hit Points 76 (8d12+24)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	9 (-1)	17 (+3)	3 (-4)	11 (+0)	6 (-2)

Damage Resistances necrotic

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Trampling Charge. If the mammoth moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a gore attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the mammoth can make one stomp attack against it as a bonus action.

Undead Siege Platform. The siege mammoth has a small fortification on its back, with room and cover for 4 humanoids. It acts independently, controlled by Blue Helm’s subconscious thoughts.

ACTIONS

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8+6) piercing and necrotic damage.

Stomp. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one prone creature. *Hit:* 22 (3d10+6) bludgeoning and necrotic damage.

The elephant-like mammoth once employed by the Skilaad clan have died and risen with them, becoming cold, dead-eyed beasts of war. The dwarves believe they are constructing steel armor for them but are actually fusing bones to undead flesh. 