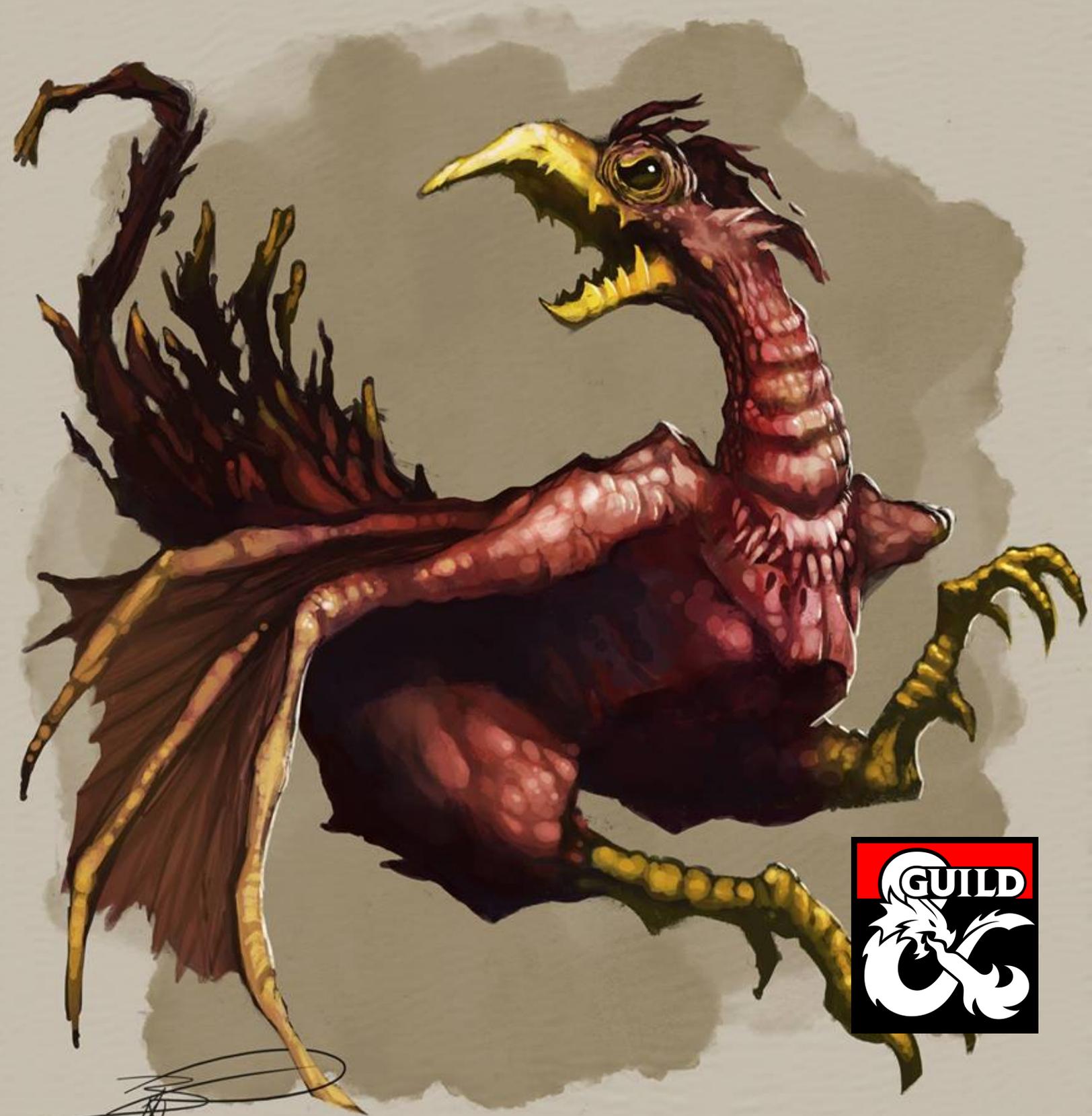


MONSTER MANUAL ENCOUNTERS #21

COCKATRICE





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COCKATRICE

This adventure can take place in any city with a shady district - a quarter controlled by a thief's guild, the docks, an undercity... any of these locales are equally suitable; this document assumes a docks district. The adventure is suitable for 1st level characters, just starting their journey and meeting some mid-tier movers & shakers.

Jace and the organization he represents can be tied to a character's backstory, or serve to introduce a thief's guild organization which the characters can ally themselves with or oppose. Whatever the case, the actions of the party are likely to attract some degree of notariety...

DOWN BY THE DOCKS

As the characters move through one of the city's shadier districts, their walk is interrupted by the following:

Screams from a group of buildings down the street signal precisely the sort of trouble you came to the docks to find - the kind of trouble best solved by daring-do and boundless bravery - adventurer's work!

Arriving in the darkened streets, panicked, scattering ruffians pay no heed to your hails, apparently fleeing some unknown terror beyond. Bravely drawing your weapons, you and your companions ready yourselves for battle, and boldly wade against the grain of the fleeing rabble.

That's when you see the first: A beggar, huddled on the threshold of a residence, hands raised above their face in a gesture of helpless resistance... or an exceptionally lifelike statue of one.

An expression of terror is frozen on the figure's face - stone tears of soundless panic chiselled into the eyes, with skill so masterful not a single tool-mark is visible on the entire sculpture.

Casting your eyes down the street, you see another statue... and can just make out a third in the lamplit evening mists beyond.

Allow the characters to inspect the other statues. One is of a dockworker, doubled over in pain; the second is a woman, eyes defiant, clutching a steel dagger as if poised to strike at some absent foe.

Following the trail of statues and panicked townsfolk is not difficult - any character may attempt a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival or Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check to follow the chaos left in the wake of this mysterious event. Petrified townspeople, evidence of panicked flight down the streets and alleyways, occasional splatters of blood - all signs point the way towards a large, open warehouse near the water's edge.

Here, characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 13 or higher will notice the first signs of movement since the crowd dispersed: a few dark-clad figures, milling about near the warehouse's entrance, some of whom appear to be carrying a body.

Two **Thugs** and one **Bandit** are outside the warehouse; none have weapons drawn. The thugs are carrying a petrified villager inside while the bandit keeps watch - if the group wishes to approach inconspicuously, they must make Dexterity or Charisma (Stealth) checks against the either the bandit's Wisdom (Perception or Insight), depending on what manner of stealth they chose to employ. If the group is spotted, or they decide not to obscure their approach, read the following - otherwise, skip to "The Warehouse," below:

The sentry sees you and calls out "Oi, you lot! C'mere a sec, would ya? I 'spect the boss might 'ave a job for ya, if'n you're running about armed like that."

THE WAREHOUSE

Whether they slip past the guards or enter escorted, once the group enters the warehouse, read the following:

The interior of this shipping warehouse has been converted into a fighting pit. Stacks of crates have been arranged into stadium seating surrounding a depression in the floor. A chalk circle has been drawn in the center, where a surprised-looking human statue stands. A few ruffians mill about the warehouse, carefully placing a half-dozen similar statues in one corner of the open room. Another leather-clad tough patrols on a catwalk, providing security for the now-abandoned fight.

If the group is escorted inside, the thug keeping watch glances at the party and pays them no further attention. If they enter alone, they must make Dexterity (Stealth) checks against his Wisdom (Perception) or he'll spot them, and call for another thug to approach and ask their business. This thug will escort the group - willingly or not - to Jace's office.

If the group remains undetected, they can see a light burning in the office, which can only be reached by ascending an iron staircase near the back of the room. A half-orc **Veteran** stands guard outside the office door.

Unless the group attacks the thugs, or takes some other hostile action, the ruffians here are more interested in introducing the party to Jace, their boss, than they are in running the group off. If they are attacked, the thugs will try and capture the party - and bring them to Jace as captives rather than potential allies.

JACE STATEMAN

Unless they somehow manage to enter undetected, the veteran guarding the office confiscates the characters' primary weapons (and magical foci) before they enter. He assures them it's simply a precaution, and that their belongings will be returned the moment they leave. When the characters enter the office, read the following:

Stepping through the office door, you spy a halfling man, sitting at a desk with a hand partially covering his face. You can just make out a receding hairline on his nearly-shaven head, and his cheeks are covered in rough, carefully maintained stubble. His sharp features pull into a slight frown as you enter, and he carefully looks each of you over.

"Well now," he begins in a gruff but not grating voice, "I see my night's continuing to be interesting. As you can probably tell, there's been a bit of a cock-up downstairs, and I might have some work for ya if you can manage it."

"Name's Jace, and I book fights. Fistfights, dog fights, or, in the case of this particular evening's truncated festivities, cockfights. If there's a brawl 'round these parts, you can bet your asses I had a hand in making it happen. Now then, that's enough about me, let's cover who the fuck you are, and if you're up for making a bit of scratch, shall we?"

The characters can decline, though if they don't do so politely **Jace Stateman** (see appendix) may be less than gentle when he has them removed. He will attempt to persuade them to do the job - citing public safety, earning favors with him, or simply making some good old fashioned coin; if that doesn't work, he may question their valor or capability, in an effort to goad them into accepting the mission to prove themselves. Failing all of that, Jace will tell them to get out, and have his guards see them to the warehouse's exit - and the group may find they've been blacklisted by the town's criminal element as a consequence.

Assuming the group agrees to do the job, Jace continues:

"Brilliant. Let's fill you in, then. Tonight's particular bother began with a pair of fuck-ups called Ernie and Thom. They've found themselves in a rather sizeable debt to me, and thought they'd strike it even playing me at my own game. I won't lie, if they weren't so bloody stupid, I'd almost be proud of the boys. The prize for winning tonight's bout would have bought them enough time to score some more cash without me boys breathing down their necks, or they could have entered their bird in the champion's match I schedule for the end of the month. Either way, it wasn't a bad idea on paper."

Jace stands, and pulls the blinds to show the warehouse floor, and the villager statues scattered about it. He continues:

"Problem is, the bird they let loose tonight was a bloody cockatrice. And I don't mean that in a metaphorical sense, mind, I mean they came in here with a bona fide cocka-fucking-trice, and set the damn thing loose in one of my fights. I've always known those wankers couldn't tell an asshole from an elbow, but how they looked at a cockatrice and mistook it for a chicken is beyond me. Kept the thing covered up until the fight, too, so none of my men had a chance to see the damn thing and warn anyone.

Soon as they let it loose, it was pandemonium. Damned thing killed the other bird, then turned on them. Bloody's Thom's still down there, petrified like a bleedin' troll in the sunshine." He points at the statue inside the chalk circle. "I've half a mind to leave 'im down there."

Jace turns back to face you. "After it got Thom, it jumped the wall and got into the crowd, which started a right royal riot. I've no idea what happened to Ernie, but his fuckin' 'bird,' and I do use the term loosely, is loose in the streets at this very moment, petrifying townsfolk and bringing the town bloody guard to my door asking questions.

Now, I'd like you lot to get out there, find this fucking thing, and kill it. Bring me some proof, and I'll see to it that you're compensated for your efforts; not to mention, you'll have my undying gratitude, which is not worth nothing."

Thom and Ernie owe Jace nearly 200gp. Winning tonight's match would have earned them 50gp, and the Champion's Match at the month's end has a grand prize of another 200gp. For killing the cockatrice, Jace will name the party tonight's champions and award them the 50gp purse. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check will convince Jace to up to double the reward.

Jace's men are attempting to round up all the petrified townsfolk - seeing their friends and neighbors turned to stone in the streets would cause a panic, and it's far easier to store them out of sight and out of mind until the petrification wears off tomorrow night. If the party asks, Jace says he plans to pay the citizens off and send them on their way (he is lying; he plans to have his men scatter the statues about the docks and let them come to their own conclusions about what happened).

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

Jace's thugs have rounded up most of the petrified villagers near the warehouse, but any can point out the direction the cockatrice fled once it escaped - along the water's edge, towards the heart of the city.

As the party follows the trail, characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 14 or higher will notice a figure following them at a distance, trying to be inconspicuous. It is Ernie, a **commoner** and the former "owner" of the escaped cockatrice.

Ernie saw the group leave Jace's and is following them, hoping they'll lead him to the cockatrice so he can recover it and somehow find a way to still use it to pay off his debts. Ernie will run if he's approached or called out, but resume following a short time later unless the party gives him the slip.

If the group manages to sneak up on him or chases him down, read the following:

The figure flinches away from you, wincing like a beaten dog. "Please, don't hurt me! I 'aven't got any money, believe me!" After a moment, he'll open his eyes and add "Are... are you not tryin' a rob me? Bleedin' hells, you nearly did me in there, scarin' me like that! Where d'you get off, scarin' innocent bystanders shitless in the street?"

Ernie doesn't know exactly where the cockatrice escaped to, but can tell the party where he and Thom got it: a shifty-looking tiefling sold it to them, claiming it was a prize-winning fiendish rooster.

"I wanted to ask 'im, 'Isn't fiends usually... evil-like?' but what with 'im being a tieflin an' all, I wasn't sure 'ow he'd take it. 'Snot exactly polite to go about calling a man's whole lineage evil while you're tryin' to do business."

Thom and Ernie scrounged every coin they could scrape together to buy the "bird" for a total of 15gp. The tiefling guaranteed it would win any cockfight in the city, and gave them a flute he said would calm the beast down so they could wrangle it back into its carrier. When Ernie tried to use it during the cockfight, though, the panicked crowd jostled it out of his hands and it broke. A *mending* cantrip would repair the flute, but physical repairs would be too extensive to complete in an evening's time.

The cockatrice's trail eventually leads the group to a sewer outlet, and one of the monster's twisted tailfeathers is caught where it appears to have slipped between the bars, which are just wide enough for a Medium creature to squeeze through.

THE SEWERS

Splatters of blood and the petrified body of a giant rat tell the party they're headed the right direction. The sewer tunnels aren't labyrinthine, but the party could encounter **giant rats** or other sewer creatures to soften them up a little before reaching their goal, if you wish.

Eventually, as they explore, they will hear a commotion, and see a light in the otherwise dark tunnels:

A muffled cry of pain echoes from a tunnel ahead, followed by a shouted curse and the ring of steel striking stone. Rushing forward, you discover the drainage channel you've been walking along opens into a larger junction, where a shady-looking group of mercenaries is fighting a red-skinned rooster with bat-like wings.

The cockatrice is currently perched on top of a petrified mercenary, as two other ruffians back away nervously and a third looks to be readying a net. A fourth, dressed in robes, spys you and cries out:

"Shit! Looks like we got a little competition, boys. Nab that bird and let's chase these blighters off!"

Roll initiative. The opposing party consists of one **Thug**, one **Scout** (with the net), two **Bandits** (plus a 3rd, who is petrified), and an **Acolyte** (replace the acolyte's default 1st-level spells with *Bane*, *Healing Word*, and *Inflict Wounds*). This group of ruffians were at the cockfight, and heard Jace offer a reward for anyone who killed it and brought it back - they're hoping bringing it back alive might increase their payout, which they're willing to fight the party to protect.

The **cockatrice** is frenzied and overstimulated, attacking the nearest creature until it dies or turns to stone. If Ernie's flute was repaired, as an action he or another character may use it to attempt a DC 20 Charisma (Animal Handling or Performance) check to calm the cockatrice down, but if anyone besides the flute player approaches within 5 feet of the creature it will viciously attack them.

The rival party is not looking for a bloodbath - if they reduce a PC to 0 hit points they will choose to knock them out rather than finishing them, unless the characters kill one of them first. The individual members of the opposing group will surrender if they are knocked below half their HP or if they take a critical hit, disengaging and fleeing the sewers.

CONCLUSION

Returning to Jace with proof of the cockatrice's death earns the group the gold he promised them, and he and his organization will treat them favorably. Either Jace or his employers may even have other work the party could help with, if they're still looking to turn a profit.

The other group in the sewers weren't allied with Jace or his men, but either they or their allies will remember the party's interference in their job and may look to get even in the future...

JACE STATEMAN

Small halfling, neutral

Armor Class 17 (Studded Leather, *Ring of Protection*)

Hit Points 61 (11d8 + 11)

Speed 25ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)

Skills Deception +11, Insight +11, Intimidation +11, Investigation +6, Perception +11, Persuasion +7, Sleight of Hand +8, Stealth +8

Damage Resistances Poison

Senses passive Perception 21

Languages Common, Halfling, Elvish, Orcish, Thieves' Cant

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Lucky. If Jace rolls a 1 on a d20 for an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, he can reroll the die but must use the new roll.

Brave. Jace has advantage on saves against being frightened or intimidated.

Halfling Nimbleness. Jace can move through the space of any creature which is larger than him.

Stout Resilience. Jace has advantage on saves against poison, and resists poison damage.

Cunning Action. On each of his turns, Jace can use a bonus action to use the Dash, Disengage, or Hide actions.

Master of Tactics. Jace can use the Help action as a bonus action; additionally, Jace can use the Help action to aid an ally in attacking a creature up to 30 feet away from him, so long as the target can see and hear him.

Insightful Manipulator. If Jace spends at least 1 minute interacting with another creature outside of combat, he can learn certain information about its capabilities compared to his own. He knows if the creature is his equal, superior, or inferior in regard to two of the following characteristics of his choice:

- Intelligence score
- Wisdom score
- Charisma score
- Class levels (if any)
- Personality traits (if any)

Evasion. If Jace is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take half damage, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds and only half damage if he fails.

Sneak Attack (1/turn). Jace deals an extra 21 (6d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Jace's that isn't incapacitated and Jace doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Reliable Talent. When Jace makes an ability check which lets him add his proficiency bonus, he can treat a d20 roll of 9 or lower as if it were a 10.

Actions

Multiattack. Jace makes two melee attacks.

Dagger. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.