

MONSTROUS MENAGERIE

THREE ARCANE AVIANS

WIZARDS COMMONLY TEACH THAT the intricacies of arcane magic can only be mastered by disciplined minds of extraordinary intellect, and that any examples to the contrary are the results of artificial enchantments and mad experiments by careless practitioners. Druids believe instead that the creatures men dismiss as mere beasts are just as capable of thought and arcane innovation as any jumped-up plains ape. Adventurers however—those intrepid explorers, spellswords, and warriors—simply down a mug of ale, laugh, and say that the world is full of weird creatures with strange powers, and that expecting them to fall into neat categories is just asking to get eaten.



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Some magical birds seem to be little more than oversized animals with simple hungers aided by supernatural abilities, while others have minds as sharp and cunning as those of men, capable of plots and plans, of whims and jokes as merry or cruel as any bard's sharp tongue. Whether hungry predator, laughing joker, or sinister scavenger, all of the arcane avians that follow have one thing in common: magic makes them much more dangerous.

CACOPHONY COCKATOO

TINY MONSTROSITY, CHAOTIC NEUTRAL

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 7 (3d4)

Speed 10 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (-5)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Wis +3

Skills Insight +5, Perception +5, Stealth +6

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Sylvan

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Flock. When 3 or more cacophony cockatoos are within 30 feet of each other, they count as a flock that acts simultaneously on the highest initiative in the flock.

Innate Spellcasting. The cacophony cockatoo's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components.

At will: *detect magic*, *vicious mockery*

3/day: *counterspell*

1/day: *dispel magic*

Mimicry. The cacophony cockatoo can mimic animal sounds and humanoid voices. A creature that hears

the sounds can tell they are imitations with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check.

Mocking Reversal. When a flock of at least 6 cacophony cockatoos cast *counterspell*, they can use the innate casting of *dispel magic* from every flock member to turn the spell's effects back on the caster.

Resonant Chorus. A flock of at least 3 cacophony cockatoos can cast spells in combination, increasing caster level and spell save DC by +1 for every 3 flock members.

ACTIONS

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage.

Experienced jungle travelers warn spellcasters to be wary of the flicker of yellow-red wings among the sweltering vines and impenetrable undergrowth. The raucous cries of brightly colored birds with too-clever eyes gradually shift to mocking imitations of one's own voice, calling into the brush, luring explorers towards some fierce beast lurking in the shadows. Then once combat has begun and mages prepare to unleash their mightiest spells, those cackling voices suddenly echo the mystical syllables, twisting the power back onto spellcasters and collapsing the magic in upon itself, or worse, turning it back on its source!

Cacophony cockatoos are much more than mere birds. As clever as a human or a halfling, they are a mischievous and greedy flock easily bribed with tasty treats but just as easily tempted into pranks and ambushes for the unwary. Some cacophony flocks make agreements with local tribes and villages, warning of invaders and interfering with enemy spellcasters in exchange for regular feasts of nuts, insects, and seeds but even then their prankster nature occasionally results in minor disasters. They get on particularly well with the fey peoples, especially pixies and sprites, often teaming up with them for elaborate tricks and practical jokes.

A rare few occasionally agree to accompany traveling adventurers on their journeys, some forging friendships that last for decades. The lure

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of exciting new jokes to play, shiny things to rattle, and tasty foreign bugs to eat can be a potent lure—with the right shoulder to sit on—but prospective companions are advised to rely on natural personality rather than magical coercion. Otherwise they risk having their enchantments turned back upon them, becoming a slave scurrying after beetles and berries on the stifling jungle floor.

CARRION CROW

SMALL MONSTROSITY, NEUTRAL EVIL

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 42 (8d6+16)

Speed 5 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +4, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +5, Deception +6, Insight +6, Perception +6

Damage Resistances necrotic

Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Bolster Servants. All of the carrion crow's actively controlled zombie servants have advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead, and on saving throws against spells and other magical effects. In addition, when an actively controlled zombie servant takes the Attack action, it attacks twice, instead of once.

Death's Vision. The carrion crow can briefly share senses with its zombie servants. As a bonus action, until it moves or takes an action it can see through the eyesockets and hear through the rotting ears of all its actively controlled zombie servants. While it is using their senses, it is blinded and deafened in regard to its own surroundings.

Fast Casting. By expending twice the number of innate spellcastings, the carrion crow can reduce the casting time of a spell from 1 minute to 1 round.

Innate Spellcasting. The carrion crow's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components.

At will: *detect magic*

5/day each: *animate dead* (zombies only), *identify*

Turn Resistance. The carrion crow has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

ACTIONS

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Ominous Cry. The carrion crow utters a harsh call that echoes in the ears of mortals in a 30-foot radius. Living creatures in the area that are able to hear the call must make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or make attack rolls with disadvantage for 1 minute.

In murky swamps, misty forests, on abandoned battlefields, and in the wreckage of sacked cities—the carrion crows gather. Not only to feast on the flesh of the fallen, but to raise them from their troubled sleep to fight again, to carry their black-winged masters and protect their nests, their young, and their treasures. Blessed with a wicked intelligence and the ability to raise and control the dead, carrion crows use rotting slaves as both guardians and tools, directing their clumsy hands to build or reinforce nests, hide shiny treasures in secure places, and hunt down fresh replacements when the decay becomes too extensive.

However they are also clever enough to bargain with the living when it serves their greed. Carrion crows love shiny gems and jewelry, especially magical baubles. They can easily identify items that they can use and are willing to trade magic items that are too large or not pretty enough for others more suited to their tastes. Many sinister necromancers and assassin guilds have established long-term relationships with flocks of carrion crows, trading loot and bodies for magic item identification and uncontrolled undead.

Some flocks have been rumored to lurk in the shadows of less wholesome cities, nesting in abandoned buildings and carefully bandaging their undead servants to look like diseased beggars to prey upon the lost and forgotten.

ZOMBIE SERVANTS

The carrion crow's *animate dead* creates only zombies, not skeletons. The carrion crow casts the spell by devouring the eyes of a corpse and then filling the dead flesh with its dark essence. Carrion crows take more care of their zombie servants than is usual for those who raise the dead, equipping them with scavenged armor and weapons that the carrion crow's direct control allows them to use with more skill than one would expect from a mindless corpse. Equipped zombie servants gain a +4 bonus to AC and replace slam with a wielded melee weapon attack of the GM's choice.



EQUIPPED ZOMBIE SERVANT

MEDIUM UNDEAD, NEUTRAL EVIL

Armor Class 12 (piecemeal armor)

Hit Points 22 (3d8+9)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Wis +0

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages understands Common and Goblin but can't speak

Challenge 1/2

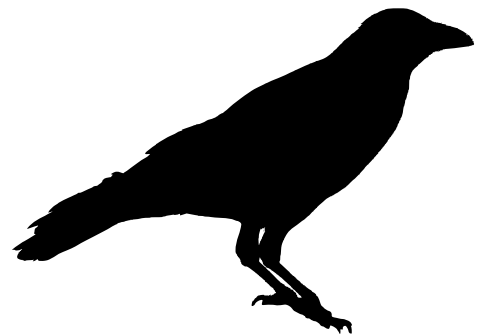
Bolstered Servants. The zombie has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead, and on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, 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 zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The zombie attacks twice.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8+1) slashing damage, or 6 (1d10+1) slashing damage if wielded with two hands.



PALE STRIGANES

MEDIUM MONSTROSITY, NEUTRAL EVIL

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 55 (10d8+10)

Speed 10 ft., fly 70 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	3 (-4)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Wis +5

Skills Arcana +2, Perception +8, Stealth +10

Damage Resistances psychic

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 23

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Keen Hearing and Sight. The pale striganes has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing and sight.

Sense Essence. The pale striganes can use a bonus action to measure mental prowess, sensing the Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores of all living creatures it can see within 100 feet.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The pale striganes makes a fearsome hoot or paralyzing screech. It then attacks twice with its talons.

Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) piercing damage.

Essence Drain. The pale striganes uses an action to focus its mind on a stunned creature it can see within 30 feet. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or the highest of its mental ability scores (Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma) is reduced by 1d6. The target is stunned permanently if this reduces any mental ability score to 0. Otherwise, the condition lasts until the pale striganes is slain or *greater restoration* or similar magic is cast on them. At the end of a long rest the target makes a DC 13 saving throw using the reduced ability score, ending the reduction and stunned condition on a success.

Fearsome Hoot. The pale striganes lets out an eerie hoot that resonates in a 30-foot radius. Any other living creature within the area must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or throw down whatever it is holding and become frightened for 1 minute.



While frightened by the fearsome hoot, a creature must take the Dash action and move away from the pale striganes by the safest available route on each of its turns unless there is nowhere to move. If a creature ends its turn where it doesn't have line of sight to the pale striganes, it can make another Wisdom saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Paralyzing Screech. The pale striganes utters a terrible piercing scream at a creature within 10 feet. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or take 20 (4d8) psychic damage and be stunned for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

In the dark forests of the northern lands the nights are haunted by silent predators that hunger for more than mere flesh, great man-sized white owls with three glowing eyes drifting silently through dark skies and filled with never-ending hunger. These winged hunters seek the very essence of the mind, paralyzing their chosen prey and driving any companions into the trees with fear, then battening down upon their frozen targets and slowly draining their victim's mind, will, and personality down to nothing, leaving only an empty still-breathing corpse behind.

Pale striganes can sense strong minds that will feed them well, often stalking prey for miles through the forests before launching an attack. If driven away from before their sinister feast is complete, these avians hide for days or even weeks waiting for an opportunity to strike again, gliding through the night looking for a chance to glean the last remnants from their target before it is able to recover. 🦉