

Kritarch, Araniella

By Rafael Chandler (from the "Teratic Tome")

FREQUENCY: Unique

NO. APPEARING: 1

ARMOR CLASS: 3

MOVE: 15"

HIT DICE: 5+5 (45 hit points)

% IN LAIR: 75%

TREASURE TYPE: Personal, 0-3 gems; in lair, d100 gp, d100 pp,  
0-18 gems, 0-3 magic items

NO. OF ATTACKS: 2

DAMAGE/ATTACK:By weapon

SPECIAL ATTACKS: Spells

SPECIAL DEFENSES: None

MAGIC RESISTANCE: 25%

INTELLIGENCE: Exceptional

ALIGNMENT: Lawful evil

SIZE: L (7' tall)

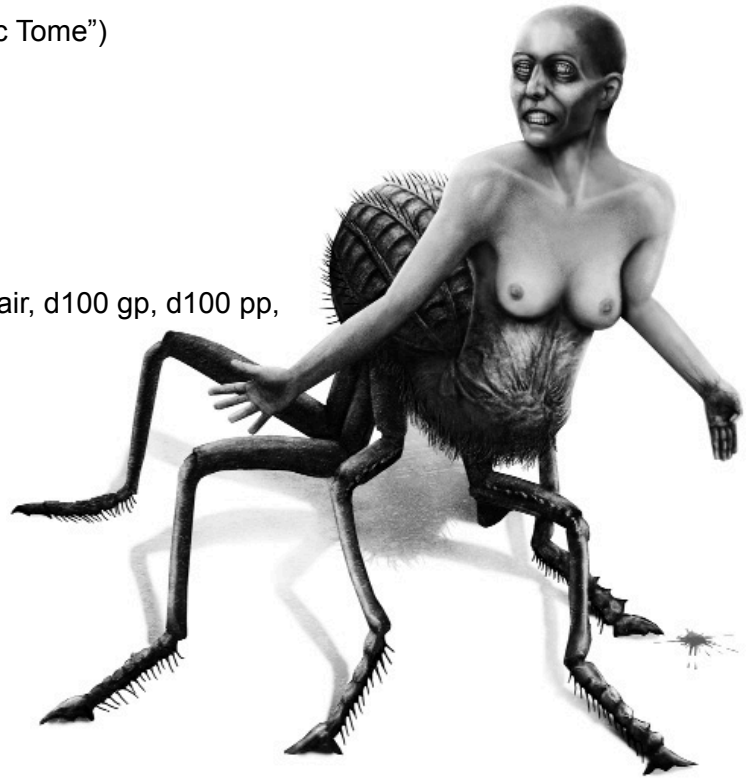
PSIONIC ABILITY: Nil

Attack/Defense Modes: Nil/nil

LEVEL/X.P. VALUE: VII/1,600

2e stats:

THAC0: 14



From the waist up, Araniella is a bald humanoid female; where her eyes should be are two small mouths lined with sharp teeth. Though eyeless, her enchanted nature allows her to see in all directions, making surprise impossible. From the waist down, her shape is insectile, consisting of a bulbous violet body and six bristly red legs.

Araniella is drawn to the treachery of others, and feeds off of the negative emotions that emerge when the truth is discovered. Concealing her cruelty beneath a veneer of piety, she transforms herself into the guise of a religious figure of some kind (curate, abbess, hegumen, matriarch). She becomes involved in the lies, insinuating herself into the conflict, augmenting her natural charisma (a score of 17) with magic when necessary.

Typically, Araniella follows a pattern: when reaching a new location, she conceals herself in a dark place (an old barn, an abandoned silo) and begins her investigation: for days, she studies the inhabitants of the town, creeping from her hiding place at night to eavesdrop outside windows. She feeds on the emotional fallout from lies, and so she uses her magical abilities to find those who live with such falsehood.

When she has found a suitable deceit, she assumes the guise of a holy woman, and explains herself to the townsfolk as a wandering pilgrim. Through ostensible good will and charitable acts, she ingratiates herself to the community, and soon becomes vital to its spiritual well-being.

She uses her influence to gain the attention of those engaged in the deceit, and slowly begins to aggravate the condition. For the abused daughter who conceals her self-loathing and hatred, she feigns concern, and serves as her confessor, prodding her with questions until she

admits her terrible secret. For the cuckquean who turns a blind eye to her husband's infidelity, Araniella is a patient friend and listener who eventually winks out the truth.

Carefully sculpting the woman's anger into a weapon, she then cautiously approaches the father, serving him in a similar fashion, guiding and warping his progress until his shame and guilt are hammered into a vengeful fury at the young temptress who drove him to sin, or she goads the adulterous husband into blaming his cold wife for forcing him to take comfort in the arms of another woman.

By coaxing the truth from the lips of those who are afraid to speak it, and by shaping their confusion and pain into rage, Araniella forces a conflict that can only end in blood and tears. Eventually, these situations end in death, and Araniella is there to speak holy words and bow her head, but the waves of grief, agony, and sorrow have fed and energized the creature, and she then moves on to the next duplicity.

She survives on these complex tragedies, craving the emotional web created when a person harms someone that once felt love instead of fear; the sensation is amplified when the tormentor still has feelings for the victim.

There are countless scenarios: an embezzling almoner and his paranoid duchess, the bloodthirsty thieves hiding out in a remote village with their loot, the brutal murderer and his intimidated witness. In each of these cases, Araniella lurks behind a collar or habit, dispensing platitudes and sympathy, relishing every moment.

Sometimes, she will weave a massive web of hatred and treachery that takes weeks or even months to manifest, resulting in a frenzy of bloodshed in which nearly every one in the town is driven to murder, arson, or suicide. In these cases, it's possible for Araniella to turn a thriving community into a ghost town overnight.

Many religious organizations have dispatched clerics to seek out this monster and kill her, but none have succeeded.

She can use the following spell-like abilities at will: *Change Self*, *Charm*, *Darkness*, *ESP*, *Friends*, *Invisibility*, *Polymorph Self*, and *Scare*.

If discovered, she reveals her true form and attacks with any magic weapons in her inventory. She typically maintains a lair in the form of a religious office befitting her impersonated station. There, she carefully hides any other treasures she possesses.