

Black Goat Games
a wellspring of forlorn hope and grim adventure
presents

Ye Nerterological Abecedarium



...is for Arjetkainen



a system-neutral resource
by Steven G. Saunders

*“I entered the chamber and a horrific sight met my tired and blood-spattered eyes. A man— or what I think was a man— was gone from just below his shoulders, with only part of his ragged spine hanging out from the weeping ruin of what was left. He looked at me. Looked at me! He was still alive! Gods above, I feel sick even thinking about that very moment. He was mouthing something... as he had no lungs to voice his tormented pleas. I knew what he wanted. I knew he wished for release. I approached him, solemnly. Slowly. He tugged at his manacles a bit, but smiled as I raised my sword for a swift, killing blow. I wanted to utter prayers for this poor soul, but all I could busy my mind with was what must’ve done that to him... and if whatever vile perisher who caused this was still around. I don’t even want to tell you that I knew it was still in the chamber. Somewhere.” – **account of Tostiv Knauska, only survivor of Captain Louisa Hartman von Igeldorf’s scouting party***

Contents

(by page)

3

Cursory Survey

where we go over just what the heck an arjetkainen is

5

Gaming Gristle

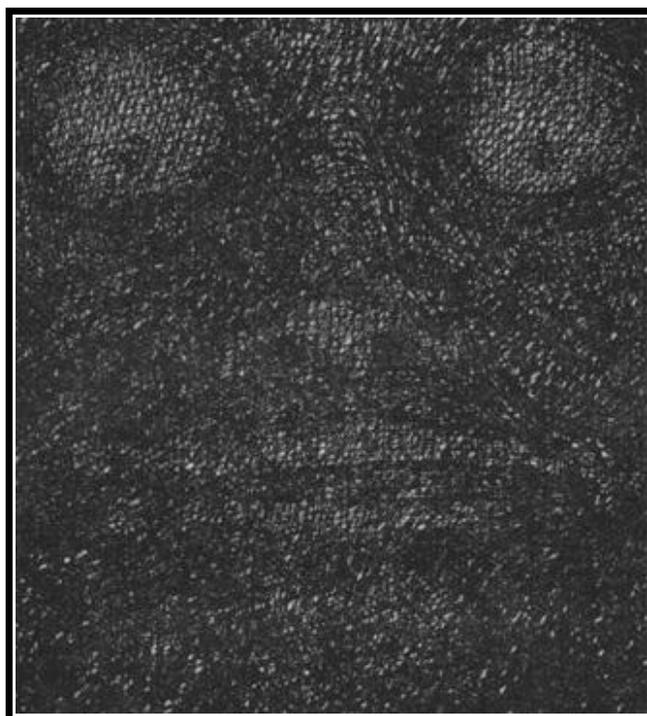
...odds and ends and charts...

hopefully helping the weary GM on how to best include these fiends in their game

8

Last Rites

some final words and such on this offering
maybe a sudden thought on a rules idea or two



Cursory Survey

Whereas some borne upon the undead realm were once mortal, the unpleasant creature known by many as an “arjetkainen” is quite different.

Arjetkainen– its name both singular and plural– hail from another plane of existence entirely, and it’s hotly debated if arjetkainen are actually undead in the first place. Many scholars have fiercely posited that arjetkainen are aberrational beings from an extra-planar realm and are merely seemingly undead because there is no academia to support them otherwise.

Oh, but if that were true, then why would necromancers be able to summon them through grotesque and bizarre rituals? *Oh*, but those are extraordinarily similar to the occult rituals demonologists employ...

And so the debate rages on.

One thing is certain, though, and that is the arjetkainen is an incredibly dangerous, sentient malevolence. Wherever this horror actually comes from, it makes its intentions known as soon as it reaches what is believed to be its maturity (or maturity within the realm in which the coils of the mortal world reside). Once the arjetkainen is within our plane of time and space, it seeks a host. This sort of

behavior is typical amongst dread beings, but the arjetkainen has a special criteria– the mad.

Not just any madman will do, either, as the arjetkainen has a particular species-specific taste that seems to prefer those who are driven by rabid paranoia, all-consuming obsession, as well as those servile to megalomaniacal desires. These details are an irresistible cocktail to the arjetkainen, which itself has no true form and if it is ever seen by those unfortunate to be in that unenviable position, those who live to tell the tale report a humanoid shaped gray mist with translucent amber or yellowish orbs flickering quickly from what seem to be its own eyes... as if to reflect the fear of the witness, forever haunting the poor soul’s nightmares for the rest of their days.

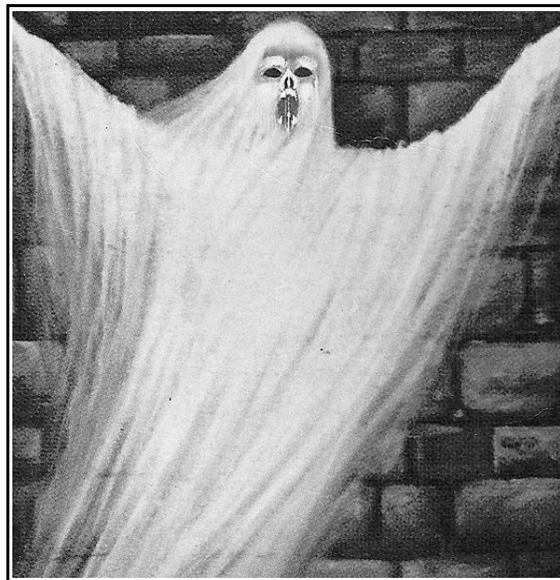
Unfortunately for the arjetkainen, but certainly fortunately for just about everyone else, this creature finally becomes vulnerable once it attaches and bonds to a host. The more it destroys what was once its host’s personality, memories, and life, the arjetkainen becomes, for all intents and purposes, a member of the undead race. It can then be dispatched and be rid of just like any other member of the non-corporeal undead possessing a living host it has turned into an undead abomination: with magic, luck, determination, and guts.

The arjetkainen is essentially a non-corporeal alien entity that enters a host and through some corruption of nature and everything holy it manages to turn its host into an undead organism once said host is killed. Whether the arjetkainen consumes its host for sustenance is unknown, but once the host is dead and the arjetkainen is fully in control of its meat vehicle, it will have a nearly insatiable appetite for victims. At first, the arjetkainen will only carefully capture select

persons it deems fit for consumption. As long as it eats its victims alive, their souls still on their home material plane, the arjetkainen's lust for food will be sated. Many of the smarter and more fortuitous arjetkainen manage to find ways to hold back the hunger so that they might properly gain their most unwholesome of nutrition.

Indeed, the arjetkainen's biggest enemy is its clawing hunger combined with time to ensure its feeding slipping more and more away. Hungry as the grave, the arjetkainen seeks at first the insane and then becomes less and less picky. Most of these foul things are their own undoing, and few overcome the difficulties of their abhorrent biology. The ethereal and native form of the arjetkainen is frightening to encounter, and always causes fear in living creatures. Even some of the more intelligent undead denizens will admit to feeling apprehension- or something akin to it- when encountering an unhosted arjetkainen. Just imagine an ageless, terrifying vampire lord quaking in anxiety it never expected to ever feel again since their original crossing-over. It is a bone-chilling prospect.

In rare circumstances, an arjetkainen can "de-host" and try to find a new ride, as it were. These are almost always extremely powerful beings who will stop at nothing to stay functional and feed. And feed. And feed. They are uncompromisingly cunning, craftily sinister without peer, and not above doing whatever it takes to survive. In this way, they are not much different than any other creature eking out an existence... except for the fact that the individual arjetkainen views itself as a godlike being of the highest import.



Gaming Gristle

In game terms, the arjetkainen is something to be reckoned with when it is considered to have been around for a while; or they could be introduced as a mild nuisance and, long after thought to be taken care of, one of them shows up to be a Big Bad.

Arjetkainen can be used as a Great Evil, too, fully explaining why a series of primary antagonists in a campaign seem to all have the same goals. Ones who can de-host and re-host make a perfect “Scary Sue” GM tool, allowing for the GM to bring back the same mind– even if that mind wiped out the life it hijacked. If that hijacked life was also a Bad Guy before, well, all the better.

The arjetkainen can also be used as a terrible threat to the player’s characters themselves.

Are you a particularly evil Gamemaster? Yeah? Good. Then have a newly arrived arjetkainen start to try to take the most ambitious of the PCs for a ride... while the arjetkainen are drawn to insanity-weakened minds, if they’re trying to get in, then insanity can follow suit.

The usual saving throws or whatever should apply, as suiting what’s fair in the game and rules. As a GM, you could also have this extra-dimensional being begin to appear to the characters in dreams, reaching out for a new home. In some very rare cases, the arjetkainen is welcomed. In terms of NPCs, this can make for some serious nastiness– especially if the creature takes a shine to its host and allows it to bond with it and yet still go on somehow... this new creature is the willing undead host of the arjetkainen.

Best to start praying to your gods now.



The arjetkainen can also be allowed to body-jack intelligent undead, making it the one thing power-mad liches, vampires, and mummies fear. A Gamemaster could even have the arjetkainen “haunting” the powerful undead, hovering about it like a swarm of crazy-flies.

Ever see a lich go mad from trying to avoid maddening and terribly unwilling possession by a being so far removed from its reality that a whole new corner of its dark mind had to be created to handle it?

You don't want to.

If the arjetkainen cannot find a host, it will perish. Whether it returns to its home plane is a mystery, but it can be assumed that many know how to get back and plot to return to the smorgasbord of living souls at what they must term "the fabulous buffet place". As for the arjetkainen's hunger, it can vary as the GM sees fit... the life-starved horror may need to feed often, or rarely, perhaps keeping a "stock" on hand. But the arjetkainen has to feed on life. Many employ magic or technology to keep their food alive so they can eat them from, say, bottom to top.

Feeding rituals are common, which makes it harder for the always fugitive arjetkainen to hide itself. Even worse if it has already been discovered. And more difficult yet if its been discovered and its pursuers know what it is and how to destroy it. The rituals, of course, can radically vary.

Here are just *some* of the ideas one could roll up for feeding rituals...

Ritualistic Table of Random Arjetkainen Rituals (D20)

- 1: Feed only on humans who have seen only so many summers (e.g. 22)
- 2: Feeds only on elves. They must be prepared with dark poetry written by the arjetkainen
- 3: Must best a dwarf in arm-wrestling combat before eating anything.
- 4: Must not allow meal to know it is being eaten.
- 5: Must only feed in one gulp; magically distending jaw is a must.
- 6: Feeding may only occur within the hours of 3 bells and 4 bells, local time.
- 7: Must eat the living meat from feet to head; use magic to keep it alive.
- 8: Must make the food into undead just as it consumes it.
- 9: Feed only on pet owners. Pet must be present.
- 10: Feeds only on happy children. Children must remain happy and unaware of their terrible fate.
- 11: Can only feed during blue moon; must do all feeding then.
- 12: As long as it makes friends with its food, it can feed. No one enjoys rude food.
- 13: Will not feed on anyone who's in a certain color. (D4: 1-Blue, 2-Pink, 3-Brown, 4-White)
- 14: Will only feed upon those it gets permission from. 15% chance it needs to be in writing.
- 15: Will only feed on the pure of heart. Good people always need to be of *some* use, eh?
- 16: Will only feed upon those who have lost their hearts to darkness.
- 17: Must consume those who own a certain kind of animal (D4: 1-Cat, 2-Dog, 3-Pig, 4-Horse)
- 18: The ritual is that there is no ritual.
- 19: At least violinists must be present during the feeding. Yes, they must be playing.
- 20: Must think about how the world must be brought to an end whilst the feeding occurs.

How about another table? I know how you like tables. This one concerns just how an arjetkainen passes its time... it's lonely being an alien wraith-thing...

Even Undead Alien Wraith-Things Need Hobbies... (D20)

- 1: The more cats, the more normal everything seems. Normal is optimal. As are even more cats.
- 2: Woodcarving isn't just an art-form, it is a respected profession, dammit. Carve *all* the things.
- 3: Sure, castle buying and owning is expensive, but there's oh-so-much time to do it!
- 4: Food isn't just food. It should also fight for its life occasionally in the arena. Slash for its supper.
- 5: A lot of time is spent thinking about how to pass all that time. Lists are abundant. Charts, too.
- 6: Maps are an endeavor that no mortal can truly appreciate. Make all the maps. All of them.
- 7: Bugs are neat. There is no such thing as too many insects. The bugs need a good friend.
- 8: Personalities are like souls. Collect both and keep them in orderly containers. *FOREVER*.
- 9: Babbling meat must be stopped. Breeding disease in one's spare time seems to be the answer.
- 10: Insanity is collectable. Also try to relate to insanity on a case by case basis. Also, also: purple.
- 11: There's no such thing as nothing. But nothing makes it all better. Make them understand this.
- 12: Children are wonderful. Collect them all. Give them a nice home. Perfectly preserved.
- 13: Perhaps being one of them is the right answer. Long live the new flesh... and hats.
- 14: One can never have too many books. The books must be read. All of them. In all languages.
- 15: If someone stopped to think about what it is they actually did, madness would destroy them.
- 16: Fire is wonderful. Burning things gives them peace. And a warm feeling inside.
- 17: There is something about glass... If all could be glass, then all bother would cease...
- 18: Geese. So many geese, and so many without someone to sing to them. Sing to them!
- 19: Clothing is much more important than most talking meat thinks. Imperative!
- 20: Everything must be known. All creatures spoken with. Some of them want to give bits.

When an arjetkainen possesses a new host-body, the host may not even be aware of it. The host may be so unaware of the body-jacking process going on, that they may only get clues from dreams. In the case of player characters, this is the method I recommend. Rolling a resistance check or saving throw doesn't have the same oomph, and if you roll it in secret, only you know about it... until it's too late.

If you are rolling in secret to see how the host is managing to resist the body-jacking, take each failure and make it a dream where the hosts sees itself doing things it normally wouldn't do... or doing things it normally would do-- except that even though it looks like them, it *isn't* them.

As for the usefulness of dead arjetkainen, well, they do leave behind something if they are killed outside of a host-body. It's a sort of goo, which many scholars of the dark arts call "necroplasm". This substance is incredibly rare and sought after. It is entirely within the realm of reason that necroplasm gatherers may be looking for hosts to "scrape", as the necroplasm can also be extracted from the dead bodies of hosts, should the arjetkainen be killed whilst still within its unfortunate host. (The creature's necroplasm usually resides in the brain stem.)

Last Rites

You can use arjetkainen in just about any game, but this is directed at those games of the dark fantasy persuasion. Now, it would be super interesting to see how a creature like this would do in another game setting, like say one that's more cyberpunk or interstellar in feel. Or perhaps one that's more steampunk. Ideas are now running on that eternal urchin wheel inside my skull.

One thing I never covered is how these creatures affect their host-bodies stats-wise, and perhaps I'll revisit this with a couple more charts. For now, you can assume it affects them in some manner, should you so choose. Perhaps they are stronger, or have more alacrity, or are simply impervious to non-magical weapons. The idea is to blend in, though, so an arjetkainen will most probably just take the physical punishment and if it survives, it will de-host and attempt to find new lodgings. Let's say that the arjetkainen has a 70% of surviving sudden catastrophic systems damage that results in instant fatality (e.g. the head is pulped in the fine red mist by an armored holy-rolling brute wielding large hammer), with some adjustments made as you see fit.

Necroplasm as a substance will be covered in a future supplement, which I'm thinking will be *Scribendarum: Volume I*.

In the end, it's up to you to decide how it goes down. In the future (I really should be charged for every time I say "in the future"), I hope to cover the arjetkainen more in depth and with stat ideas and such, but this should do for now.

Thanks so much for reading! More to come soon!!



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