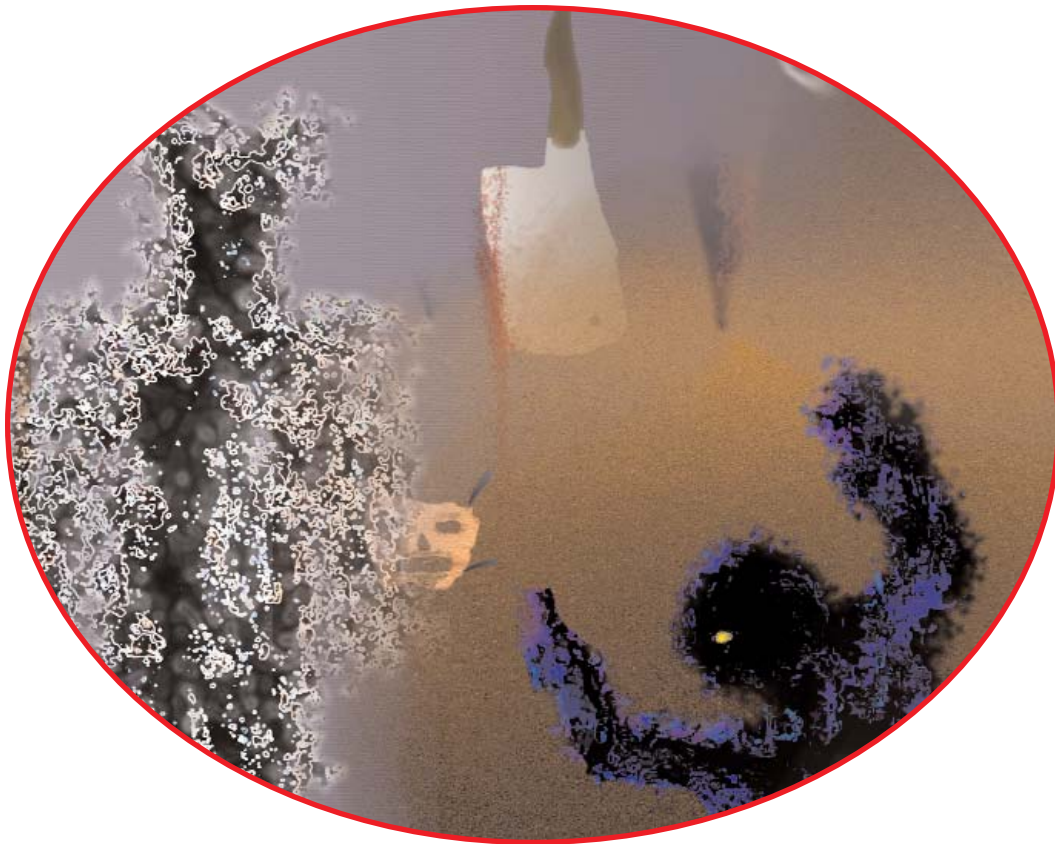


BESTIA: THE DEFILERS

A SOURCEBOOK FOR DREAD: THE FIRST BOOK OF PANDEMONIUM



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carnation

The cold February sun rose moments after Christina Mason stepped out of the shower. Her suitemates were still asleep next door. In her room, she dressed and opened the blind, permitting dim light to settle in the room's corners. Christi looked down at the brown slush on the sidewalks seven stories below, and she knew that she was exhausted. After she combed dirt-brown hair and brushed slightly discolored teeth, she took the stairs.

Outside, the mordant wind yanked at her trenchcoat while she plodded through the filthy drifts, a plain scarecrow girl in clothes that neither matched nor fit properly. A mud-colored Datsun cruised past slowly, cautious on the icy road. The car rounded the corner and suddenly she felt like the only person on campus. But there were a few other students in the dining hall when she arrived.

She laid her battered paperback ("Thank God For The Atom Bomb") on a table and went to get a tray. As she picked one up, she saw a slim-waisted blonde, whose large breasts were restrained only marginally by a tight t-shirt advertising the sorority to which she was devoted with a fanaticism bordering on the maniacal. The girl scurried up beside Christi and cornered her near the trays with a smile.

"Jennifer," Christi said.

"Hey, girl," Jennifer chirped. She pursed well-lubricated lips as she looked Christi up and down. "God, don't you ever wear anything except grey and black? And Jesus, what did you do to your face? You're all bruised-looking, you know?"

Christi put a hand to her face.

"Anyhow," Jennifer continued. "I heard about you this weekend. Somebody said you hooked up with Rick Owens. So, what's up? Is it a thing now? Are you doing anything with him for Valentine's Day?"



She paused for air, so Christi seized her moment and interrupted. "Rick and I are just friends. I haven't seen him since Saturday."

"So you didn't hook up?"

Christi arranged utensils on her tray.

"See, I talked to him and he was like, you guys fucked around Saturday night, you know? I mean, I'm not calling you a liar. I'm not. I'm just curious. I mean, he's cute. Was he drunk, or what?"

Christi studied the stained coffee pots. Finally settling on decaf, she bared teeth at the blonde -- "Later, Jennifer" -- and went to get a cup. She took her coffee black, relishing the bitterness. Her toast she took dark and plain, her eggs without salt or pepper, her bagel without butter, and her grapefruit



unsweetened. As she sat down, however, she realized her appetite was absent. In fact, she felt nauseated. Perhaps it was the stress she'd been under. Or perhaps it was the morning sickness of pregnancy. Or cancer. Or a tapeworm. If any of the three were the case, she supposed she was eating for two now, but even that couldn't convince her to risk solid food.

After breakfast, she went to class. Dr. Jordan, the grey-bearded Anthropology instructor, lectured with a sort of adolescent glee masked thinly by his scholarly mien. In one hand, he brandished a small red piece of polished stone.

"Hematite," he announced. "Also known as bloodstone, this mineral was--"

Christi jotted notes listlessly from her seat in the back of the class. Jordan was so enthused; however solemn he might appear to be, his love for his work was obvious. Why didn't she ever feel that sort of desire, that kind of passion? At best, she felt a vague itch between her thighs once in a while. That was easy enough to remedy, but she was rarely content with the satisfaction.



She never tried that hard; perhaps that was what truly bothered her. She'd had her heart set on casual sex that night. There was no denying it, or her goal upon meeting Rick at the Pi Kapp party. But it would have been nice if he'd been a better lover. What wouldn't she give for a patient, sober lover? Why were all men sixteen-year-olds when undressed?

Bad enough that Rick was a sloppy and selfish; why did he have to check his watch and mumble his excuse after? Couldn't he have stayed? Christi stared at the lined page before her. It would be so sweet to sleep beside another, to wake beside another, to embrace for hours, to feel a heartbeat through warm skin against her own. But they never stayed. They allotted themselves just enough time for crude coupling and returned to the party, appetites unabated. She could tolerate sleeping alone if the sex were good, or miserable sex if he shared her bed after, but to wake alone and unfulfilled? It was too much to ask of any woman.

She emerged from class bewildered. A new itch had awakened, a subtle vibration in her lips and tongue. She ached to assuage it, but wasn't sure how. Outside, by the fountain, she smoked a Lucky Strike and wondered at the sense of anticipation that charged her body. What revelations did her flesh contain? She lacked the patience to wait, so stood and walked off in search of them.

Her roommate had moved out over Christmas break, and now lived in an off-campus apartment. No new roommate had been assigned by the housing office, so the room was Christi's. She decorated accordingly. The wall was decorated with posters: Cradle of Filth, Shape of Despair, Opeth. The black comforter on her bed looked entirely too inviting. Hungry, but exhausted, she decided to skip lunch altogether and get some rest. She would need it later. She stripped and crawled into bed naked; the sheets (also black) parted to accept her like vast necrotic lips. In the fetal position, Christi fell asleep almost immediately. She didn't dream.

Hours later, she emerged from bed tired and cold. She went straight to the bathroom, drawn by some ineffable urge that she didn't know how to ignore.



She turned on the light and stared at herself in the mirror. Jennifer had been right; her face was dark in spots that resembled bruises. Yet, she had no recollection of being struck. Were they hickeys? She didn't think Rick had kissed her hard enough to leave marks, and she hadn't had enough to drink to explain any kind of memory lapse... so? What, then?

It was something to ponder on another day. Something was amiss, just beneath her skin. The way her jaw rang, like some bell struck gently, was strange, somehow alien, and yet vaguely familiar. She imagined her mouth full of loose teeth, the roots turned to rotted strands of stringy flesh, gums bleeding. Absently, she probed an incisor with her tongue, and stiffened as the tooth gave way, accompanied by the coppery tang of blood. She spat a crimson wad into the sink, mystified, and opened her lips.

In her reflection, she saw blood oozing from her gums, trickling over teeth which pointed in various directions, skewed at odd angles. Curious, she reached up and took hold of one tooth, slippery with blood and saliva. Clutching the sink with one hand, she carefully wiggled the tooth. There was no pain, only a numb warmth mixed with spurts of guilty pleasure. She tore the tooth from its socket.



Leaning over so that the now steady stream of blood would trickle into the sink, she lay the tooth on the ceramic toothbrush-holder under the mirror.

Trembling with anticipation, Christi yanked out the cuspid adjacent, and then the next tooth and the next. For moments, the only sounds were her rapid breathing, occasional gasps, and the soft wet wrench of sundered roots, followed by the tiny clink of enamel on porcelain.

When it was done, Christi stared at the glistening strawberry ruin of her mouth, bleeding worse than before, but pure and soft and scarlet, devoid of intruding white bone. The purple spots had intensified and were now spreading with alarming speed. At their origins, about her cheekbones and mouth, the skin was softening, like that of a plum ripened past maturity. Yet, under the skin, did there not lurk more intransigent bone? Christi began to grasp the significance of what she was doing. Gently, she tucked two fingers under her tongue and pushed the heel of her other hand under her upper jaw. Eyes squeezed shut, braced for agony, she shoved. There was no pain.

Instead, she felt an almost unbearable frisson that ran along the inside her mouth and down the length of her esophagus. Gasping, jaw askew, she again grabbed the sink, this time with both hands, nearly unable to stand.

Waves of pleasure washed up her thighs and ran warm, strong fingers under her rib cage and across her belly, bringing muffled cries from the red wreck of her mouth. Shuddering, she ripped the clumsy jaw off and dropped it into the sink. Too good, too sweet, too bright; tears of ecstasy blossomed in her eyes and she unknowingly ground her hips against the cold white ceramic of the sink. Awed by the sudden exposure of flesh's mystery, Christi stared at the wound. Her tongue, thick and purple, dangled from it; irritated, she ripped it out and dropped it into the sink.



Bliss. This cleansing was bliss. For several minutes, Christi just admired her handiwork. Warmed by afterglow, she neatened the hole by tearing off wet strings of flesh surrounding her cheeks and throat. Her bra ricocheted off the beige tile on the wall and hung from the hot water knob; her shirt landed in the bathtub. Satisfied, she ran her palms up and down her ribs, preparing herself.

What use were men to her? What pleasure might a mortal afford, compared to this discovery, self-gratification, re-invention? Who needed another voice, intruding hands, other needs, insensitivity? This was Paradise: a mirror and her body. No man knew her flesh the way she did, and when she tried to explain, they never listened. All inhibitions abandoned, she dug into the meat just above her larynx and pulled. The sensation was akin to that of removing a splinter from her flesh, minus the pain.

She continued to yank gobbets from her throat, peeling back skin to expose ropes of maroon muscle, yellowish fatty tissue, and bluish veins. Her nipples hardened as she felt the slow wet warmth of blood spreading down her breast to her belly, her thighs. Had she been capable of sound, she might have moaned, but she could not; she lurched and trembled, and her eyelids fluttered. Finally, she reached the last impediment: her sternum. As if acting on their own volition, her fingers peeled the flesh from the hard breastplate with a veteran surgeon's skill. The spasms of delight that exploded in her nerve endings weakened her knees and hastened her fingers. Intent on savoring each surge, she forced herself to pause and catch her breath.

Could Rick but see her now, he would flee from her nakedness, horrified and sick. He lacked the strength to understand what she'd experienced, understood, endured. He was useless; weak, callous, limited, and useless.

She left him and all of his ilk behind, and closed the door on them forever as her hands sought her liberation. They opened another door, sliding under the sternum, the left hooking between the clavicles, and the right cupping her xyphoid process from beneath. With a grunt, she yanked the plate of hard bone from her chest and dropped it into the sink. This dark red fruit, this fluttering delicacy, was her salvation. There, pulsing amidst the carnage, was her sweet heart, her true love, and she stared at its reflection in the mirror with wondering eyes. This was the absolute bliss of self-love, self-discovery, and it was her happiness that guided her fingers now.

Tears of joy streaming down her face, she eased herself from her cavity and lifted herself up to the light.



Exhumilat Demon



Statistics:

Body: 7

Mind: 5

Spirit: 3

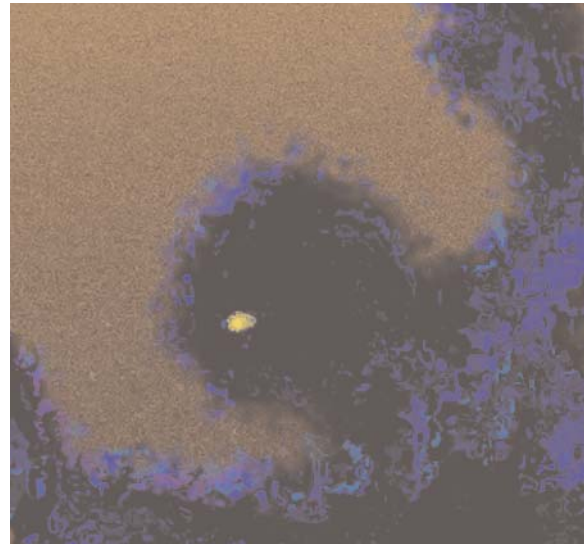
Damage: 3

Imprecations:

Jenda

Exhumilat Demon



The Exhumilat Demon does not think of itself as a predator. Rather, it regards itself as a liberator, a messiah, a benefactor. It seeks out those who have given up on life, and it offers them a moment of pure bliss, a way to find meaning and fulfillment. The demon feels that this single (albeit fatal) pinnacle of sensation is preferable to a long and fruitless life, so it actually derives satisfaction from the happiness of others. Unfortunately, the only way that its victims can achieve this personal zenith is to tear themselves apart.



The demon passes unnoticed through our world, observing the interactions of men and women until it has selected its quarry: someone without anything to live for, someone without hope. Having chosen its prey, the creature waits for some new abasement to present itself: a humiliating experience at work, perhaps, or a lover's betrayal. When its victim feels that life cannot get any more frustrating, the demon strikes.

It guides the mind of its victim, and the body, and drives its prey to self-mutilation on an epic scale. While the demon watches, invisible, the victim begins to rend her flesh, inflicting grotesque wounds on her own body. However, the experience is painless. The victim feels enlightened and vindicated, and derives great pleasure from the wounds. Some victims feel Christlike, whereas others feel that they are stripping away a veneer of some kind. The victims never suspect the presence of the demon, and are swayed by the Exhumilat that they never question what they're doing to themselves.

While under the demon's influence, the victims are stronger than ordinary humans. In addition, a telltale skin discoloration marks the dissolution of the softer tissues, which facilitates the mutilation to come. For several hours before a victim begins to tear herself apart, one can see the dark patches about her throat, face, and abdomen.



Ultimately, when the carnage has begun, the victim doesn't stop until a goal of some sort has been reached. Each victim finds a single part of her body that symbolizes pain; typical selections include the face, the heart, or sex organs. After the victim finds and removes the offending body part, she typically dies. The death is prolonged unnaturally by the sorcery of the Exhumilat, but while under its spell, the victim is able to inflict damage that should have been immediately fatal.

When the blood has been spilled, and the body part extracted, the demon takes it gently from the hands of the victim, and leaves without disturbing anything else. It feels serenity, because it feels that it has somehow touched another soul, and brightened that soul, even if for only a few minutes. The Exhumilat will bask in this feeling of contentment for days, or even weeks, before seeking out another lost soul to comfort.

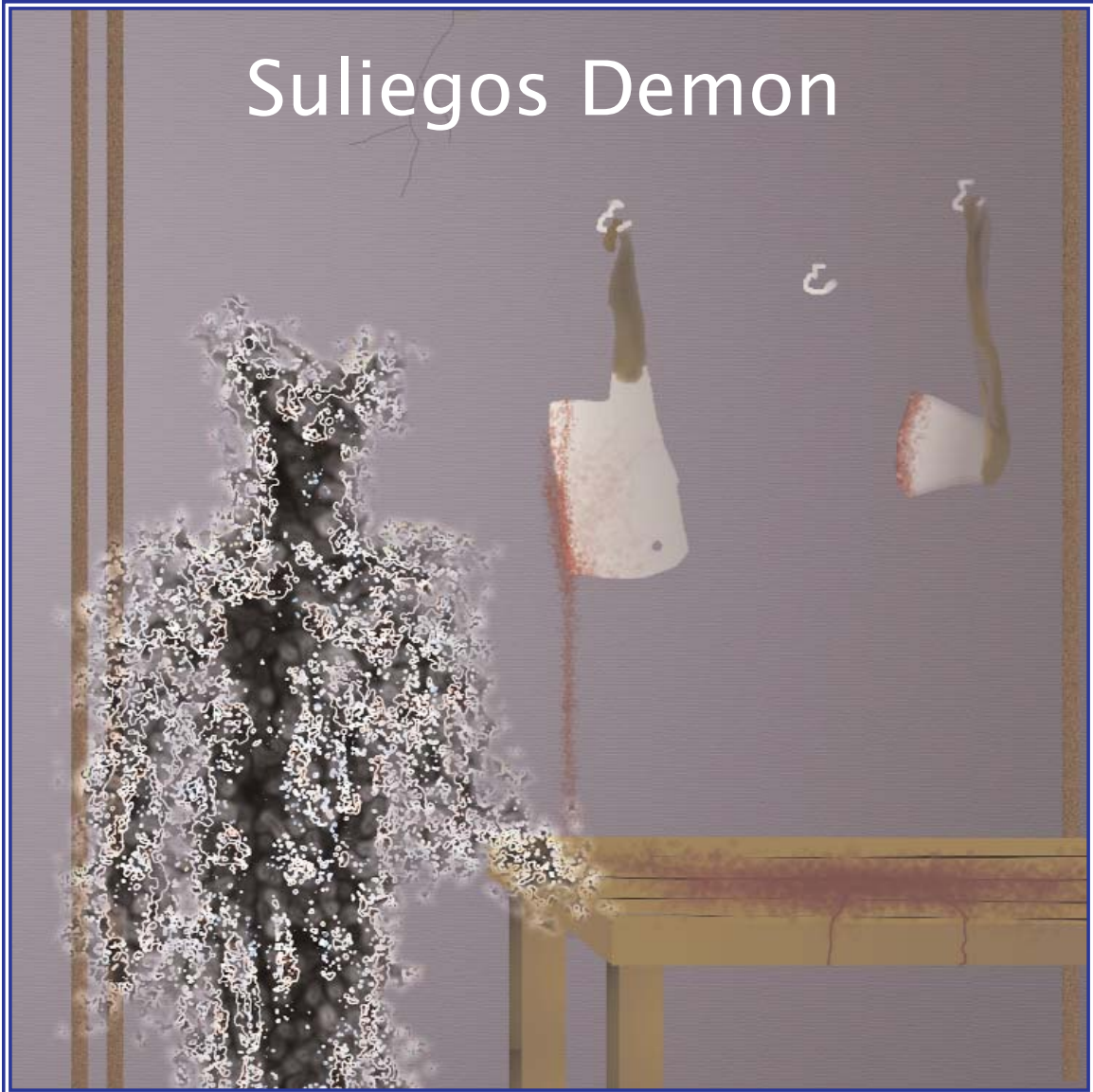
It keeps the body parts that its victims extract as souvenirs. It is a sentimental beast, and its subterranean lair is full of such keepsakes. The demon spends most of its time staring at the collection, reminiscing. Typically, the Exhumilat's lair is trapped in some way. When not daydreaming about the suffering that it has ameliorated, the creature devises spring-loaded spike traps, tripwire-activated hammers, and false floors that give way to bladed pits.

When stalking its prey, the demon is typically invisible. However, in combat, it shrugs off its invisibility and reveals itself. In its natural state, it is approximately seven feet tall, and appears as a wide humanoid with burning yellow eyes. Closer inspection will reveal that the creature's body is actually nothing more than a charred black skeleton buried under a writhing layer of dark blue insects. The insects themselves will scatter if the Exhumilat is struck, but will immediately return to swarm about it. Its eyes are fixed in the blackened skull, however.

When the demon has chosen a victim, it stays close by, and rarely leaves the person's side. It will eavesdrop on its victim's conversations, and if it recognizes Disciples or other interlopers, it will begin to lay traps for them around the victim's home. The demon's first priority is to make sure that the victim is able to complete the self-mutilation. The Exhumilat's second priority is self-defense.

If attacked, or if the Exhumilat believes that someone is trying to prevent it from easing the pain of a lonely soul, the demon will move to destroy its antagonists swiftly. Fast and strong, the demon augments its combat skills with the Imprecation Jenda. When the Imprecation is spoken, the myriad insects covering the demon's body take flight, and begin to bite and sting the demon's enemies. The stings and bites inflict no damage, but cause the nausea and vomiting (as described on page 126).

Suliegos Demon



Statistics:

Body: 10
Mind: 1
Spirit: 2
Damage: 5

Imprecations:

None

Suliegos Demon

The Suliegos Demon lives to torment its victims. Typically, it will actually invade their home, taking an entire family hostage for a period of several hours. During this time, it will inflict unspeakable tortures on them, and when it has finished, it will dispatch them all before leaving.

The fiend, a shadowy blur of dark energy, is quite tangible. It rarely bothers with stealth, preferring to kill any human that sees it. A nocturnal demon, the Suliegos spends most of the day lurking in a quiet place, unseen by human eyes. When darkness falls, the creature finds a human home in a remote location, and it enters. There is no prevarication or stealth involved; the demon kicks in a door and walks in, and immediately begins to round up the humans. It tears phones out of their hands, pummels anyone who tries to flee or fight back, and herds them all into a single room. It incapacitates them, binds them, and takes one, typically the youngest, to another room. There, the demon torments the victim, and frequently devours it when finished. After that, it extracts its next victim from the impromptu cell, and so on, until they are all dead.

The Suliegos tends to use whatever is available. For implements of torture, it relies on the tools that it finds in the homes of ordinary people: knives, saws, cheese graters. It is not terribly imaginative, and is happy just to know that innocents are suffering. This impulsive behavior is typically its undoing.

In a fight, the demon is a ferocious opponent. It knows no Imprecations, but is unbelievably strong. It will fight to the death if cornered.

