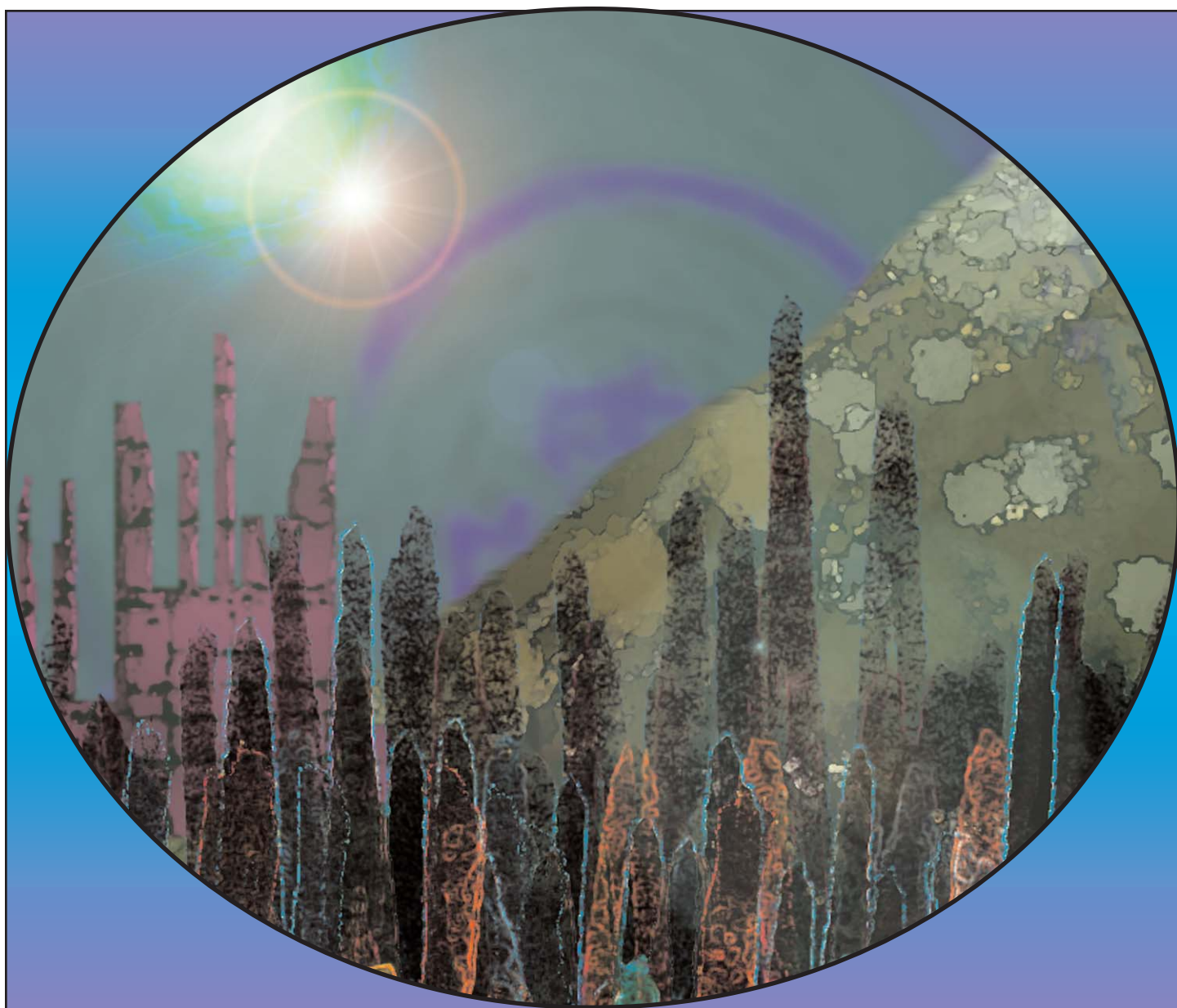


BESTIA: THE SHADES

A SOURCEBOOK FOR DREAD:
THE FIRST BOOK OF PANDEMONIUM



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INTRODUCTION: THE GIRLS OF SUMMER

"Holy Jesus, check out the ass on that," Slashfic moans.

I ash out the window and check my watch. Christ. Nine in the morning. Usually, this is when I get to sleep.

We're camped out in the War Machine, a black '85 Dodge van with no shocks. Slashfic's up front with the binoculars, scoping out the street at the end of the alley, and I'm in back, smoking out the window and wishing I was asleep.

"Hush, man," he yells. "Look, Hush, hot damn, this girl got an ass like an onion."

That gets my attention. Without turning around, I ask, "What the fuck does that mean?"

He was waiting for it. "Make a grown man cry," he says, and I can hear him grinning.

We've been here, parked on Pogue Street, since seven, waiting for the man. Just like Lou Reed said, he's never early, he's always late, first thing you learn is that you always gotta wait. Fucker's two hours overdue, and I'm starting to wonder if he's going to show.

James Earl Proctor, man of medicine, healer of the sick, hope of the infirm, banger of nurses. Yes, Lord, he loves the ladies, and they love him right back. Can't say I'm surprised. Guy's in great shape for his age, which is probably right around fifty. He's rich, drives fast, loves wine and food and all sorts of other nice crap, and he's a two-bit god damn snake, and don't you just know that drives the ladies crazy. Like Mindy, the nurse he was with last night. We learned from Mindy that she spent last night with the old doctor, and that they went out dancing and drinking until the wee hours of the morning. Problem is, she was dead when she told us.

We were on a hunt. Hustling for a Grusce Demon, this repulsive little wretch that looks like the Jolly Green Giant just hawked and spat a fat one. With purple tentacles coming out of it. Dripping. Anyhow, this Grusce, it curls into you, in ways that I would prefer not to discuss, and it inhabits you, and makes you flip out and kill people. Tragically, you're well aware of what's happening during the killings, but you can't do anything about it because you're a passenger in your own body. Like Being John Malkovitch, only not so funny. And no Cameron Diaz. Though, you must admit, she kind of looked like hell frozen over in that movie. I mean, sure--

"Alpha Tango to Blue Leader One, target acquired, engaging, over," Slashfic yells, and I flick the smoke out the window and fling open the door. We bust out and sprint down the alley. I can't see the doctor, but I got faith. Slashfic says he saw Proctor, I believe him.



End of the alley, I can see what he was going nuts over earlier. We're right on North Carolina State campus, and there's about a hundred people walking down Hillsborough Street, most of them females between eighteen and twenty-two. Ouch. Halter tops, short shorts, exposed bra straps. Blondes, brunettes, redheads. Jesus, I love warm weather.

Trying to stay focused, I follow Slashfic as he hooks a hard right onto Hillsborough and pounds down the sidewalk, scattering the college girls like startled pigeons. Heart hammering in my chest, I race after him, lungs dusty and burning.

He's got a bead on Proctor, even if I don't. Without hesitating, he flings open the door at the Record Exchange and busts in. I follow, and yank the Smith & Wesson out of the waistband of my jeans. This could get ugly. No, scratch that. It's going to get ugly, no doubt about it.

We found Mindy in her apartment. Her neighbor, Sandra Parnell, heard a scream and a thud, and she called Council. Apparently, she and Council used to work together, and they still meet for coffee once in a while. So she knows that Edna Council is the person to talk to when things are strange, and so she calls. And Edna gets us together and we check the place out and find Mindy in the bathroom looking like someone just dragged her through a few miles of barbed wire fence. Nothing left of that girl but rags.

A little work, and we figured we had it figured out. Grusce demon. When it killed the girl, it temporarily removed itself from Doctor Proctor -- holy crap, that's kind of a funny name -- and it devoured her. Or parts of her. Soft bits, eyes and lips, like what crabs and fishes go for when you dump a corpse into the ocean. Not that I'd know this from personal experience or anything.

So we get some tissue out from under her nails, Morlock calls in a favor and we get it tested. The Doctor was in, no question. Killed her, ate her. Sure, we could just hand this over to the cops, let them sort it out. They're probably looking for Proctor at this moment. But that would result in some dead cops, or innocent bystanders caught in a crossfire.

Can't have that.

So we do some research, and find out that the Grusce targets the host's loved ones. Proctor's wife is dead, and he's a one-woman man, so after he killed his girlfriend, that left a son and a daughter. So Council and Morlock are across town, hanging out in a high school parking lot, trying not to get mistaken for drug dealers, and me and Slashfic are here, near the record store where Proctor's daughter works. There's four parking spots right in front of the record store if you're heading westbound on Hillsborough, and we figured the doc would roll up on those, which meant he'd have to slow down just as he was pulling in -- putting him right in the line of Slashfic's binoculars. Worked like a champ. Now we have to take the guy down before he massacres his too-hip-for-deodorant punk-rock daughter.

Sweet merciful crap, the girls in the record store are dirty and tattooed and have green hair, which makes them even hotter than the girls outside.



Takes a couple seconds for my eyes to adjust, then I realize that someone's rushing up on me hardcore. I have a second to put my hands up, then I get tackled and fly back. It's the doc, and he's vomiting incandescent green foam all over me as he puts his shoulder into my abdomen, rams forward, and keeps going. The impact lifts me up off my feet, and I have this weird moment of weightlessness, like a theme-park ride just before everything goes down. Then, I'm feeling something ice-cold all over my back, then a thousand cuts scream bloody murder as he puts me through the glass storefront and we both hit the sidewalk, him on top of me. He wastes no time, just starts pounding. I can't see anything but his paisley necktie as he just pounds the living crap out of me. No face shots -- fucker goes for the throat and solar plexus. I close my eyes, detach myself from myself, and cast Malvado. When I open my eyes, there's long hard spines of white bone growing out of every part of my body.

I grab Proctor. "Nothing personal, bitch," I mumble as I drive a seven-inch white spike into his bicep and push. Grunting, he grabs my arm, shredding his palms as he tries to get away. No dice. I slowly get up, hit him with my left, hook him good and tight, and then shove him back into the store. Not sure what this joker did, but Slashfic's face is covered in blood, and he looks mighty pissed. Slashfic whips out the sawed-off pool cue and busts Proctor in the back of the knees. The doctor goes down, but doesn't even seem to feel the injury. The patrons of the record store are conspicuously absent, probably having fled out the back when the shit went down. Proctor's daughter, Julia, is still around, though. She's on the phone, screaming incoherently at the cops.

At least, I think it's the cops. Could be anybody. Doesn't matter. Point is, there's bike cops crawling all over campus like ants at a picnic. The testosterone will surely be at stratospheric heights today, what with all the poontang on display. Yes, Lord, this will be a bad day for a confrontation with the 12-speed brigade. Best to get this shit on the road.

The demon spins Proctor's body around like a marionette, and takes a swing at Slashfic. Slash ducks, and when he looks up, I can tell by the look on his face that it's about to go down. He's getting ready to hit the demon with some Castigation. I take a step back, and the spines slowly retract back into my body. Motherfucker, that really hurts. It's like getting stitches. Feels good, but it's still painful. Then I feel something cold and sharp against my neck. Crap. I look down. A box cutter? Who the hell does that?

Who else? Julia Proctor, riot grrl. Slowly, I turn, to confirm my suspicions. Yes, sure enough. She's quaking in her combat boots, but I think she'll seriously kill me if I don't calm her down. Got to think of a convincing lie that will get us out of this without getting her, me, or some cop killed--

"Your father's possessed, we're exorcists, leather pants do not work for your body type, I'm sorry," Slashfic yells as he dodges back from a vicious blow by Doctor Proctor. The demon is bulging out of its victim -- green foam drips in thick ropes from Proctor's nose, mouth, and ears, and his eyes are glowing a sick, baleful green. Jesus, this is spiraling out of control. The doctor and Slashfic exchange feints, but neither seems to be able to connect with the other. This is a good thing. See, if it gets a hold of him, it might just rip his throat out. Or, if he touches it, he casts the demon out of it. Then, Julia flips out and gives me a Colombian necktie. Bad, very bad.



"*Fuck you, leave him alone!*" she screams, and her arm's shaking with fury and horror. "What did you do to him?"

Christ, she thinks we gave him drugs or something. Okay, party's over. Slash can't hit this guy, a demon's going to kill my partner, screw it. Sure, this angst-filled teenager will need maybe a couple stitches, but other than that, she'll be okay. Usually I don't hit girls, but it's nine o'clock in the god damn morning and I'm feeling short-tempered what with all this war crap on TV.

I grab the wrist, elbow her twice in the gut, spin around and backhand her. Yes, that's the kind of champion I am. My buddy's engaged a merciless demon in hand-to-hand combat, risking his life and soul, but I'm beating the daylights out of a teenage girl with too much mascara.

As she hits the ground, wailing, I dive at the old bastard. He hears me coming and spins around, so I get a full-frontal shot right on him and take him to the carpet. But the spell wore off, and I'm not covered in spikes of bone, so when we get there, the doctor takes me by the elbow and yanks really hard, and about six million flashbulbs go off and everything gets really loud as my shoulder is dislocated.

I roll over, screaming silently, and Slashfic lands on top of me, with his palm right on Proctor's face. There's a sudden rush of air, and then Proctor is absolutely silent, greenish mucus slowly dripping from his open mouth. It worked. The demon's paralyzed. Now we just have to exorcise it. And fix my god damn fucking arm.

"Get off me," I hiss, and Slashfic heaves himself up. He runs a hand through his hair and laughs, in what's probably an unconscious imitation of his idol, Brandon Lee.

"We did it," he whoops. Breaking glass as someone comes in the front of the store. Through the windows.

The first bullet takes him in the shoulder, I think, and the second one right in the chest.

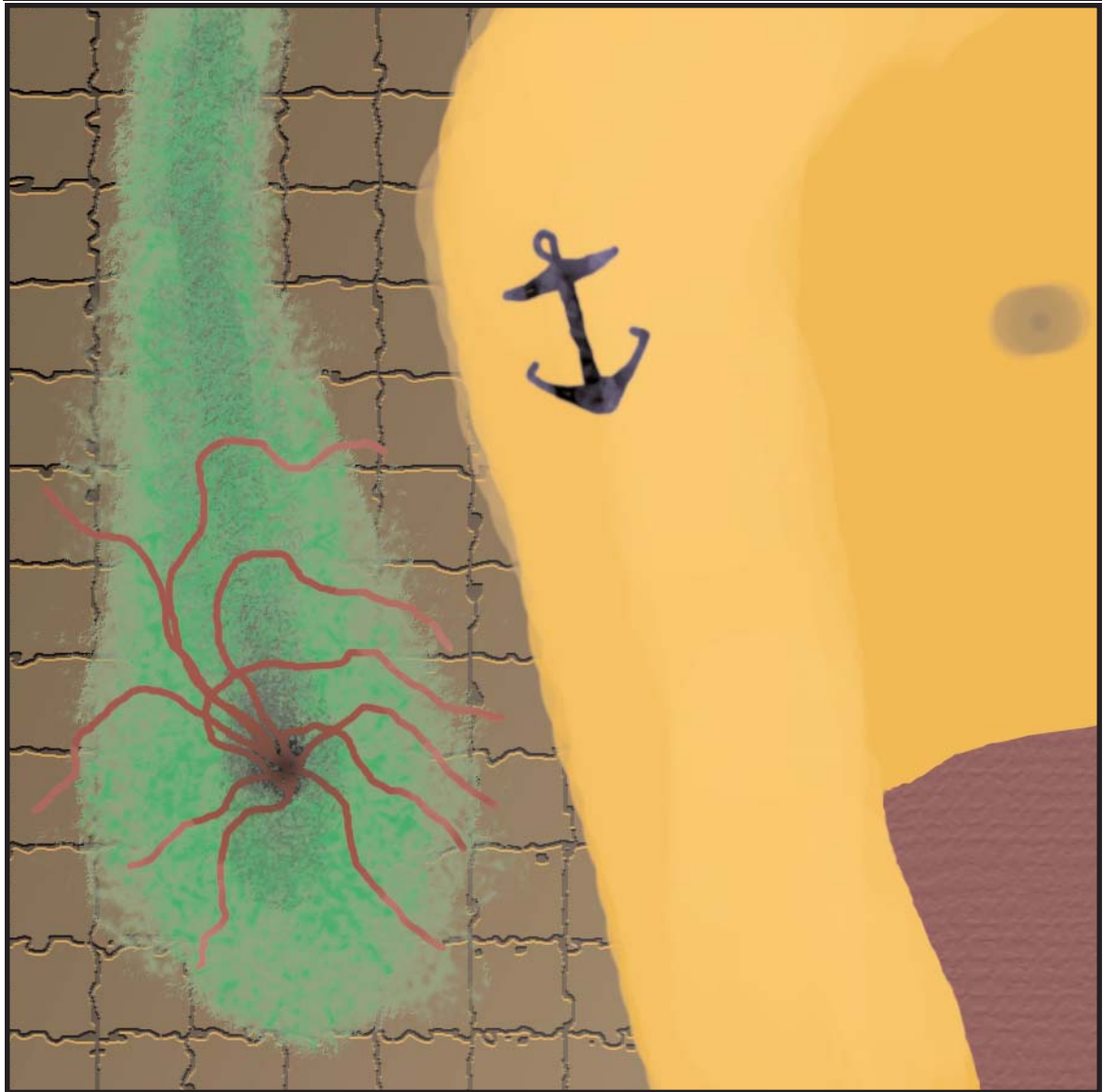
Cops...

This edition of Bestia concerns two demons, the Grusce and the Paikhalix. Both are shades, walking among us, camouflaged as ordinary humans. Unlike the rampaging Vouzire or repulsive Nethasq, these demons can stand next to their intended victims without raising suspicion.

When they strike, however, their obscenity is revealed, and their brutality is limitless...

Word is bond,
Rafael

GRUSCE DEMON



Statistics:

Body: 6
Mind: 2
Spirit: 2
Damage: 4

Imprecations:

Abodonn
Malaq

Grusce Demon

The Grusce appears as a slithering wad of fibrous green tissue, smelling faintly of fish. In this form, the Grusce makes its way through pipes or bodies of water, seeking only a human host. Its very presence alarms and vexes wildlife, so the creature is able to pass unmolested through shoals of fish, or under the eyes of predatory birds.

Making its way to civilization, the demon emerges from manholes, culverts, sinks, toilets, or shower heads. Alarmingly fast for its size, the bloblike creature extrudes long crimson tentacles, which it uses to attach itself to its prey. The creature is unintelligent, however, and has no compunction about where or when it strikes. Therefore, it is just as likely to strike someone in the public restroom at a shopping mall, or in a lonesome lake in the wilderness. Either way, the Grusce is driven to enter its host's body, regardless of which orifice must be employed. Squirring its way within, the Grusce dissolves itself and becomes one with its host, whose mind is suddenly shoved into the back seat, leaving the demon to drive. The Grusce is not intelligent naturally, but once it has entered a victim, it has complete access to his or her memories and knowledge.

Once inside, the Grusce has a single agenda: find and destroy everyone the victim ever loved, starting with whoever's closest. When the creature has killed, the body slips into something like a coma as the Grusce coalesces and excretes itself from its host. It then proceeds to feed upon the flesh of the deceased loved one, favoring the softer tissues. After this ritual, the Grusce re-enters its host and continues with the slaughter until it is exorcised or the victim runs out of loved ones. Throughout the entire process, the host is well aware of what is transpiring, but has no control over the situation. When the victim runs out of loved ones, the demon will begin to kill indiscriminately until caught and destroyed.

Exorcism is the only way to remove the Grusce without killing the host (although that is certainly an alternative).

In combat, the demon tends to rely on brute strength, and has no regard for its host body. When the tide of battle turns against the demon, it uses Malaq and Abodonn to disorient and terrify its enemies. Its Imprecations manifest themselves visually as morbid visions of death and decay, vast landscapes of mutilated loved ones and gore-clotted skeletons.

PAIKHALIX DEMON



Statistics:

Body: 8

Mind: 2

Spirit: 4

Damage: 6

Imprecations:

Condruu

Paikhalix Demon

The Paikhalix Demon is a doppelganger, albeit an incompetent one. Disguising itself as a human, the creature walks in lonely places at night, seeking the blood of self-destructive people.

The demon is drawn to those who abuse themselves, mutilate their own bodies, or continually place themselves in situations where they are sure to come to harm. However, as its appearance looks like a hazy approximation of a real person, it only appears at night, and always approaches from a distance.

When it is close to its intended target, and its sham is discovered, the beast unravels and displays its true form: a vast, horned monstrosity with translucent red and blue flesh. In its true form, the Paikhalix is murderously strong and fast, and takes great delight in tormenting its prey before killing.

Its favorite game is to play cat-and-mouse with a victim, toying with him, allowing him to escape before descending upon him with the final blow.

In combat, the Paikhalix relies on its great strength and the Imprecation Condruu, which it uses whenever irritated by opponents. The Imprecation manifests itself as a seething swarm of insects which emanate from the demon's blurry hands. Flying unerringly towards the victim's mouth, the insects vanish upon contact with the target, only to be followed by a torrent of blood from the victim's teeth and gums.

The beast is not without a weakness: weapons made of silver inflict an additional point of damage against the Paikhalix Demon.