DANIEL
BIG BAD
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Concept Creator Andrea Bruce

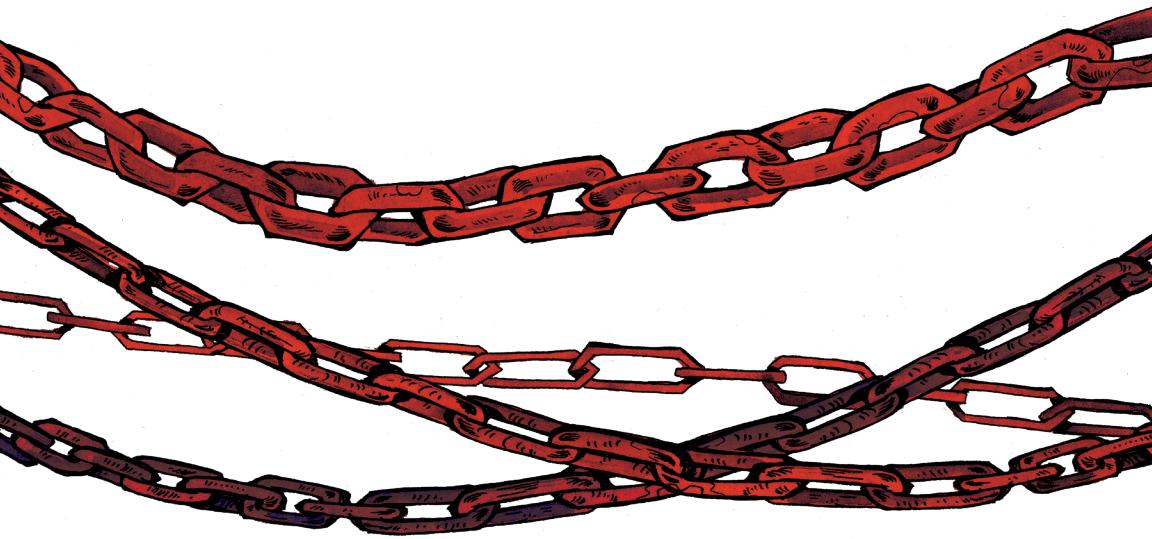
Writing & Game Design Andrea Bruce, Ricardo Evangelho, Jordan Richer

Graphic Designer Rajaa Al-Subairi

Editors TR Rowe, Misty Bourne

Cover Illustrator Svetoslav Petrov

Interior Illustrator Kayla Cline



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ITS JOY, YOUR DEMISE!

A gentle breeze blows through a small opening in the wall. Daniel does not stir within its dungeon cell. It would take more than a puff of air to awaken the golem, motivate it to do something. Knowing its nature, this is best—still and resting. It wasn't always like this. There was a time when the golem wasn't quiet. Its loud, metallic movements brought violent nightmares and twisted tableaux.

You don't want Daniel to do anything. Correction, if Daniel did anything you wouldn't want for much longer.

Daniel's memory is long. Long ago, ages before the golem was named, before it was imprisoned, Daniel learned how to remember. There on the mesa's hard ground, folded over itself, it started to remember, the sensation of its flesh rubbery and moist. For generations, Daniel remained on the stone plateau. If Daniel was lucky, a curious carnivore scouting the golem's desolate surroundings would nudge the golem to evaluate if it was a tasty meal. Sometimes the animal moved the malformed mass just enough. Nerves firing, Daniel felt something and remembered.

The span of time between these infrequent chance encounters was antagonizing. The golem hungered to feel more. What if it didn't need assistance? What if it could animate itself? What if—the aware pile shifted. *Ooh!* It shifted again. *Ugh!* Again. *Ah—ouch!*

Pain shot through the golem. *That's new.*

Years later, Daniel would understand the offender was a sharp rock, but that never mattered to Daniel. What mattered was that it felt. Daniel was changed. Sure, the other sensations were fun, but this was all consuming. The golem craved more.

Patiently and with practice, a motivated Daniel struggled to understand its body. Crude limbs, malformed trunk, and a soft dome meant locomotion was not easy or elegant, but grace wasn't necessary. What was important was the golem could feel.

At first, rocks and other elements of its environment sufficed. Daniel harmed itself, and the pain brought purpose to the golem's existence. Disappointingly, the agony eventually became mild discomfort and therefore uninteresting. Daniel had unwittingly adapted.

The golem sought out new inspiration. Lusher lands speckled with populated areas provided Daniel with the tools he required. For some time, inserting sharp metal objects into its body brought on new happiness. Blades, needles, forks, razors, anything that would tear flesh, the golem embraced with its body. The heavy clanging sounds Daniel's trinkets made when it moved pleased the golem. Inevitably, the intoxication from piercing its flesh faded. Discouraged and without direction, Daniel inhabited the woodlands near a modest settlement.

Mutilated from its thrill-seeking habits, the golem was a disgusting sight: cartilage and sinew corrupted by metal. The monster's

frightening appearance was used to caution overly eager youth yearning for adventure: *If you hear the sound of steel on steel, you had better run.*

Having grown up with tales of the flesh-and-metal monster, one heartbroken, unlucky soul developed an interest in the creature. Initially, the melancholy human studied the creature from afar, but his observations did not go unnoticed. The golem, now dulled from years of a mundane existence, was entertained by its admirer.

Daniel wasn't very familiar with humans. Although it didn't know why, the golem knew living things feared him. But for some reason, this young man wasn't wary.

Concerned that it might scare him, Daniel did not approach the human. It let the man, hidden among the trees, feel safe, until he became accustomed to the golem's presence. As they got comfortable with each other, the distance between them diminished. Eventually, trusting the golem wouldn't harm him, the human left his leafy cover and sat a few feet from Daniel, intently gazing at the golem. Twilight to dusk, this became their ritual until one day, the admirer leapt up and decisively stepped close to the golem.

"I had a brother," the human began as he stood in the golem's shadow. "He… he… everyone loved him." The human looked at the ground as he choked back tears and continued, "I tried to save him, but...life's not fair. He, Daniel, was quiet. I can tell you have a gentle spirit." The human looked up to where the golem's face would have been, if it had one, and smiled kindly. "Just like Daniel."

The golem, with only a basic grasp of language, didn't fully know what to make of the human's words. Daniel's brother's rapid breaths warmed the golem's skin. Five fingers nervously reached out and touched the left side of the golem's chest. The creature flinched. Nothing had ever touched it so carefully. Marvelled by the unlikely connection it felt with its new companion, the golem shifted slightly closer. Another human hand reached out and touched it. The human exhaled the name, "Daniel…"

The golem couldn't contain its glee. It was going to show this new friend all the wondrous things it had learned. It had taken eons to perfect joy, and now it was going to share all of it.

Daniel didn't hesitate. It enveloped the human, its clumsy arms wrapping warmly around the man.

The human's eyes went wide. "Daniel!" he cried out. *This is good.* Tears rolled down its friend's cheeks. This did not concern the golem. It knew humans cried in times of happiness. *Yes, this is good.* The golem pressed its body into the human, its shiny metal collection puncturing, and warm human fluids drenched the golem. The human shook while Daniel celebrated its affection for its new friend. It pressed harder.

Abruptly, the human stopped moving. Daniel let go of the body, slowly recognizing that its friend was no longer there. Stepping back, it admired the remains scattered on the forest floor. The lifeless corpse was a mess. Strips of skin and other human matter were torn carelessly from the bone frame. The ground was stained and wet with things that were supposed to be on the inside.

For a second, Daniel was sad that its friend was gone. But then, as it considered the human's expression, it became overwhelmed with a boundless delight. A wide-eyed, teary gaze eternally lingered on its friend's face, and Daniel knew that he had died blissfully. This moment transformed the golem. Even though the golem could no longer feel any awe-inspiring tactile sensations, it could bring these gifts to others.

With new intentions, Daniel was determined to bring joy to all it met. A bear in the woods, a surprised mountain ogre, a small dwarven village—Daniel shared what it had learned.

Accounts of the golem spread quickly, and adventurers were tasked with stopping the creature. Immune to pain, the golem wasn't slowed by the adventurers' initial assaults, and it remained free to wander and spread its love for every living thing. Finally, an effective strategy was devised. Twenty men and four dozen harpoons, a dozen per cardinal direction, stopped Daniel.

Incapacitated, Daniel wallowed in the reality that the world wanted to remain a joyless void. Full of grief, it collapsed, folding upon itself.

Now, locked in a dungeon, Daniel does not move. A dozen hooks immobilize the golem within its prison. Any pleasure derived from the suspension is felt rarely, and only as a slight tingle.

A gust of air hits Daniel's back, strong enough to cause some of the remaining embedded metal trinkets to collide. Clink, clink, clink. The golem notices the casual chimes but, nowadays, in this state, Daniel tries not to remember. Remembering overwhelms Daniel with so much sadness.

Drowning in its own misery, the golem wonders about the moaning creature locked in the next cell. What rejected beauty did this other being try to bring into the world? These questions are not pleasant. Too much remembering. Another stream of air breaks against the golem, interrupting Daniel's thinking. Daniel detaches from its thoughts and goes numb, swiftly relaxing as it stops remembering.

Daniel, the Failed Flesh Golem

Failed Experiment. The result of a failed attempt to create a flesh golem, Daniel is a unique creature. It wanders as though it were lost, a rolling mass of flesh and bone, accumulating debris as it goes.

Daniel has a limited sense of self. It knows itself to be Daniel from its first encounter with humans, but beyond that it doesn't know or understand its existence or the limitations of its being.

Raw Emotions. Since being abandoned by its creators, Daniel has developed a skewed view of joy. Its first sensations were pain, which it now equates with positive feelings. Daniel believes that other creatures haven't felt pure joy like it has. It believes it can spread this joy if only these creatures would trust it. Daniel doesn't intend to harm anyone; it thinks maiming is a kindness.

Daniel has no capacity to manage its emotions. As soon as it senses that a creature is not enjoying its gift of kindness, Daniel becomes despondent and volatile. Its only form of communication is through transmitting its emotions, and when Daniel gets into this state, its psychic emanations can turn deadly.

Roleplaying Daniel

Daniel's only true drive is to spread its version of joy and happiness to others. If no creatures are nearby, Daniel attempts to lure creatures to it by sharing emotions and memories telepathically in all directions in hopes of hooking someone with its lonely pleas.

Daniel does not immediately come off as aggressive. To an onlooker it will seem like a mindless monster that, if ignored, will go away.

On a simplistic level, Daniel is aware that most creatures are afraid of it. Daniel attempts to send soothing and calm memories to nearby creatures, but its twisted outlook means that these images are terrifying and strange to anyone receiving them.

Daniel's emotional state can quickly devolve into that of a petulant or scared child. If it is unable to share its joy it will stop whatever it is doing and tremble, emitting psychic energy of its pain and sadness to all who can feel it.

Daniel's Tactics

Inevitably, any prolonged interaction with Daniel will end in combat. Daniel is almost always surprised that a fight has started. Unless it has previously been harmed by its attackers, the only action it will take on its first turn is Emotional Lure to try and convince someone to come closer.

Once combat is in full swing, Daniel will mindlessly threaten and attack whatever creature is nearest, attempting to pull it in and engulf it. Daniel has no capacity to think strategically and no interest in fleeing. It will fight until the death, taking every opportunity to inflict "joy" on its attackers.

As soon as Daniel is reduced to 20 hit points or fewer, it locks down into a ball of sadness and fear. The psychic energies it radiates are extremely volatile, and anyone caught inside will feel Daniel's sorrow wash over them.

Daniel's Traits

Ideal: Joy**.** I have discovered unimaginable joy and I want to share its beauty with all creatures.

Bond: All creatures, great and small, deserve to feel my joy.

Flaw: When someone refuses to feel what I feel, I am inconsolable.

Adventure Hooks

Consider introducing the following scenarios if you wish to include Daniel in your campaign.

The Collector. The party is approached by a stranger who introduces themselves as a collector of rare and unique creatures. One of the creatures in their collection has freed itself and is wreaking havoc in the collector's underground menagerie. This creature is Daniel, and the collector offers the party a tidy sum to recapture it—alive.

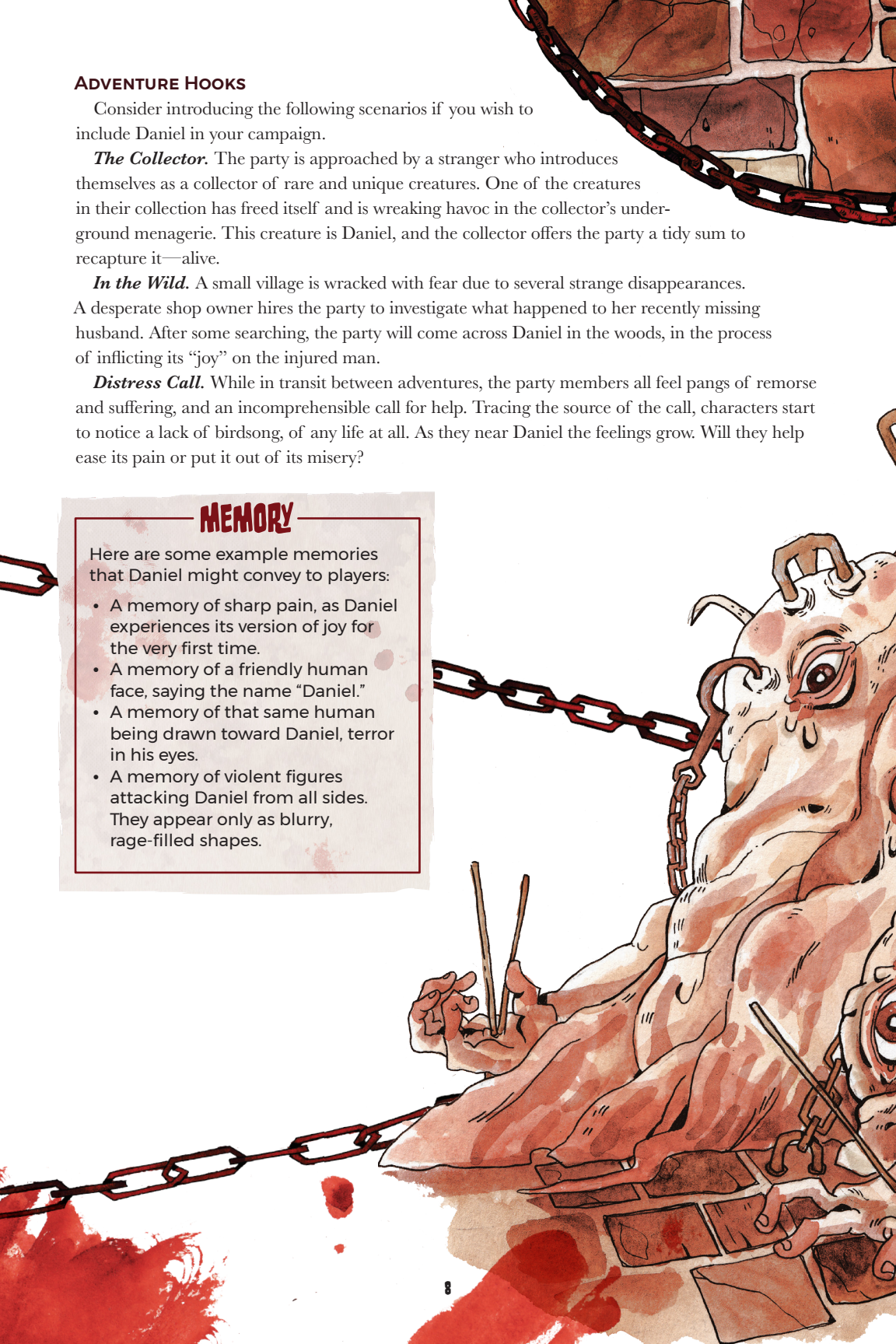
In the Wild. A small village is wracked with fear due to several strange disappearances. A desperate shop owner hires the party to investigate what happened to her recently missing husband. After some searching, the party will come across Daniel in the woods, in the process of inflicting its "joy" on the injured man.

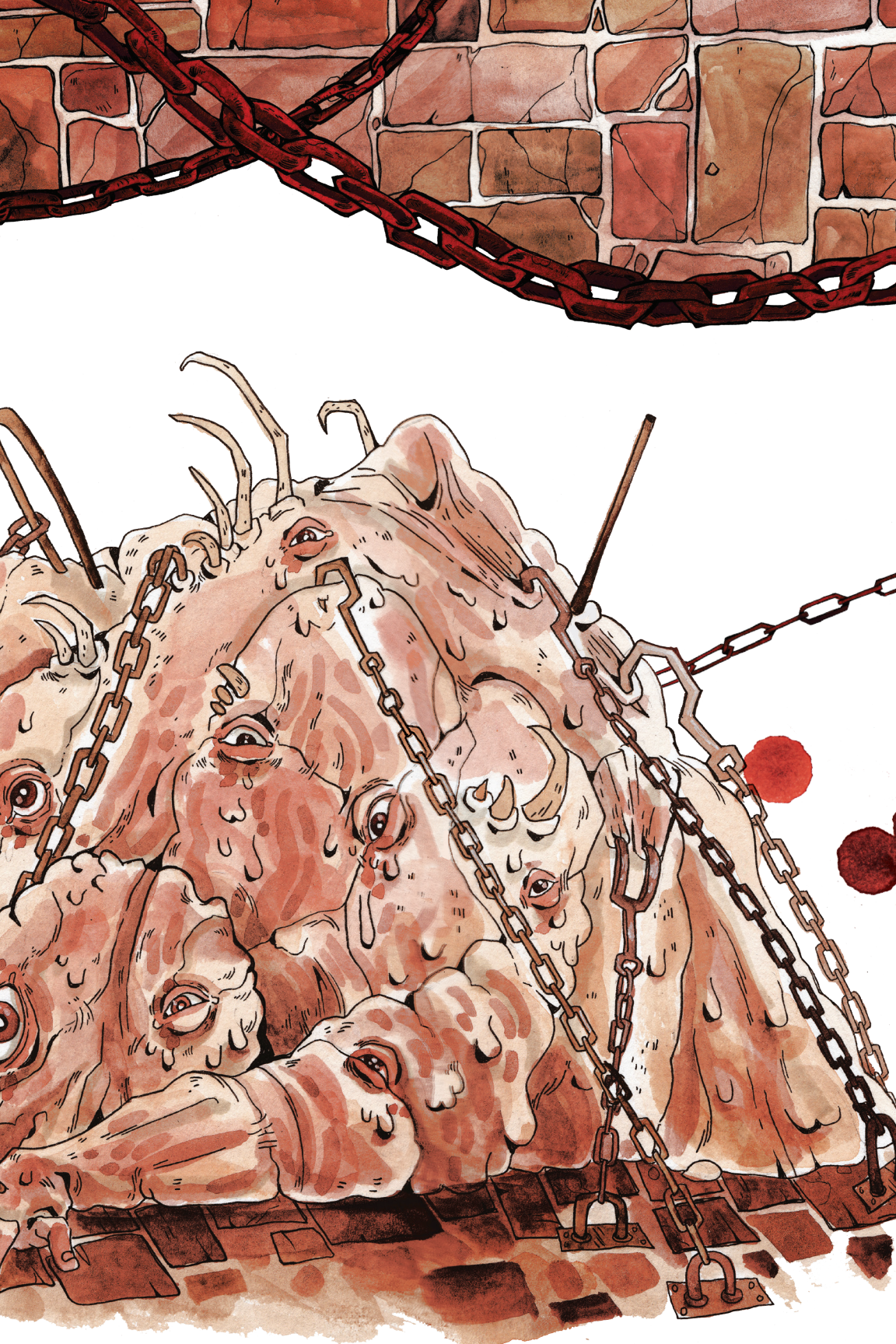
Distress Call. While in transit between adventures, the party members all feel pangs of remorse and suffering, and an incomprehensible call for help. Tracing the source of the call, characters start to notice a lack of birdsong, of any life at all. As they near Daniel the feelings grow. Will they help ease its pain or put it out of its misery?

Memory

Here are some example memories that Daniel might convey to players:

- A memory of sharp pain, as Daniel experiences its version of joy for the very first time.
- A memory of a friendly human face, saying the name "Daniel."
- A memory of that same human being drawn toward Daniel, terror in his eyes.
- A memory of violent figures attacking Daniel from all sides. They appear only as blurry, rage-filled shapes.





DANIEL

THE FAILED FLESH GOLEMN

Large construct, neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 157 (15d10 + 75)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	5 (–3)

Saving Throws Str +11, Con +10, Wis +5

Skills Athletics +11, History +6

Damage Immunities poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands Common but can't speak, telepathy 60 ft. (can only transmit memories)

Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

Immutable Form. Daniel is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Daniel fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. Daniel has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. Daniel's weapon attacks are magical.

Thick Hide. Anytime Daniel is hit by a melee weapon that inflicts piercing damage, the attacker must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or have the weapon get stuck in Daniel's hide. A creature can use its action to try and remove a stuck weapon by attempting a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check while within 5 feet of Daniel. Any arrows or bolts that are removed from Daniel break immediately when removed.

Unbridled Emotions. Whenever Daniel starts its turn with 60 hit points or fewer, roll a d6. On a 6, Daniel goes berserk. On each of its turns while berserk, Daniel attacks the nearest creature it can see. If it cannot use its movement speed to reach a creature, Daniel attacks the nearest object, with preference for objects smaller than itself. Once Daniel goes berserk, it continues to do so until it is destroyed or regains all its hit points.

If Daniel is reduced to 20 hit points or fewer, it stops taking actions or reactions. Instead, Daniel takes on a defensive form, increasing its AC to 17 and radiating a field of anxiety-inducing psychic energy. Any creature who moves into or starts its turn within 10 feet of Daniel while it is radiating psychic energy must attempt a DC 14 Intelligence saving throw, suffering 16 (3d10) psychic damage on a failure, or half as much on a success.

Actions

Multiattack. Daniel makes two slam attacks. If at least one of the slam attacks is successful, Daniel can also use Engulf.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 16).

Shrapnel (Recharge 5–6). All creatures within 20 feet of Daniel must attempt a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 20 (8d4) piercing damage on a failure, or half as much on a success.

Engulf. Daniel engulfs a Medium or smaller creature grappled by it. The engulfed target is blinded, restrained, unable to breathe, and must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw at the start of each of Daniel's turns or take 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage. If Daniel moves, the engulfed target moves with it. Daniel can have only one creature engulfed at a time.

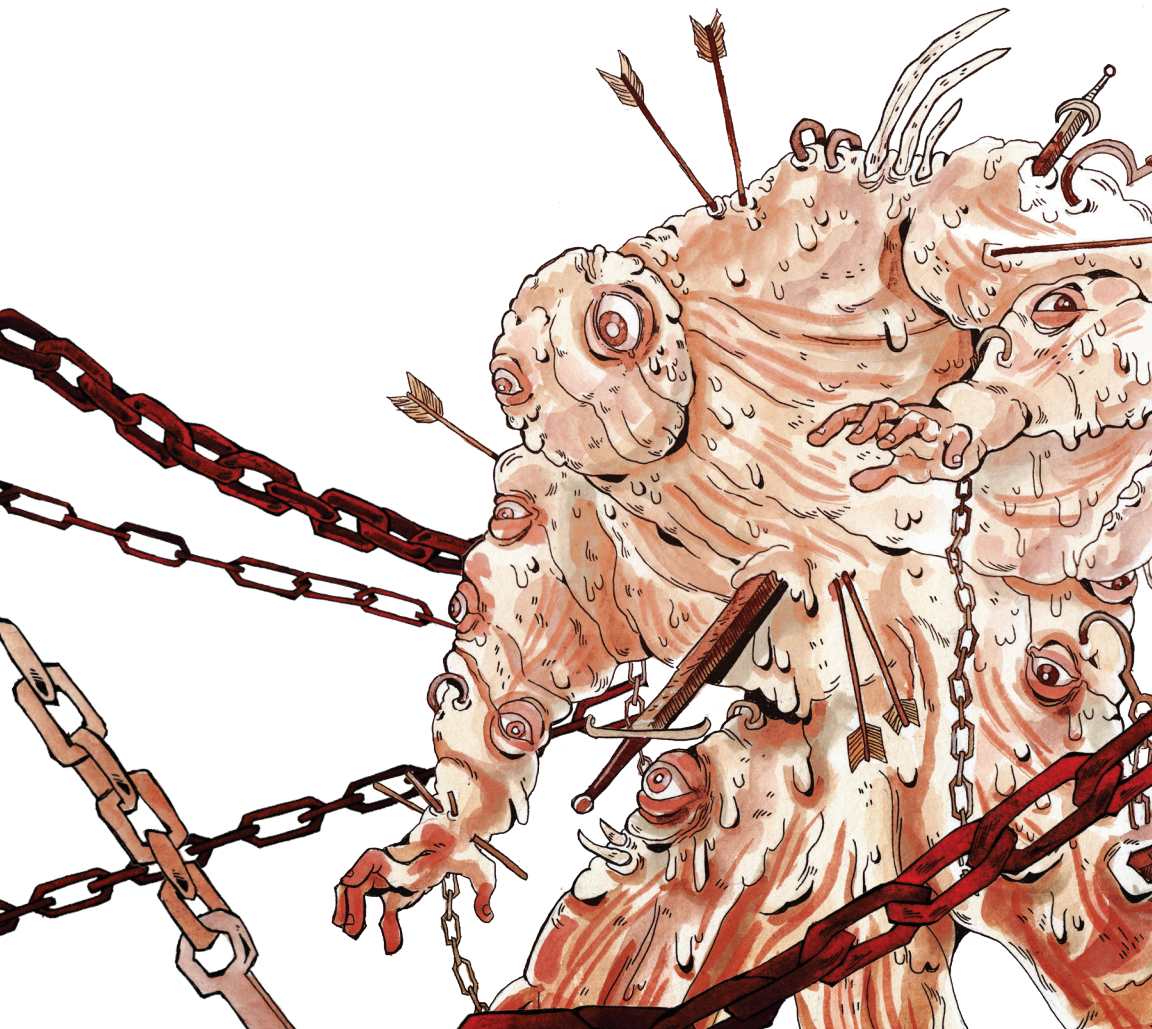
Emotional Lure. Daniel chooses a creature within 60 feet of it that it can see. The target creature must succeed on a DC 14 Intelligence saving throw or be charmed by Daniel for 1 minute. While charmed in this manner, if the charmed creature is more than 10 feet away from Daniel, the target must move on its turn toward Daniel by the most direct route, working toward getting within 10 feet of Daniel. If a source other than Daniel does damage to the charmed creature, the charmed creature can attempt the same saving throw, ending the charm effect immediately on a success. If Daniel does damage to a creature it has charmed, the charm effect ends immediately.

Legendary Actions

Daniel can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Daniel regains all spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Slam. Daniel makes a slam attack.

Squeeze (2 Actions). Daniel crushes a creature it has engulfed. The creature must attempt a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 33 (6d8 + 6) piercing damage on a failure, or half as much on a success. The physical contact invigorates Daniel, and it recovers hit points equal to the damage dealt. If this damage reduces the engulfed creature to 0 hit points, the hit points Daniel recovers are doubled and its Shrapnel action is recharged.



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