

## Goddess of Rape

by Ron Edwards

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“Hello, my name is Ron Edwards, and I’m a rabid advocate for playing *HeroQuest*.” Everyone else: “Hi, Ron!” This article is intended to illustrate just what you can get from playing the game, and it’s pretty deep-end. *HeroQuest* isn’t about swinging swords and improving your character’s abilities, although that does happen. Playing this game is about stuff, and the good news is that ultimately, what the stuff really means is up to you. What do you need to know, to read this article? Not much. The name of the setting is Glorantha, and there are lots of cultures involved. Gods and goddesses are a big deal, very much like what you’d find in reading *The Iliad*. The essay is about one of them: Thed, the Gloranthan goddess of Rape.

In my role-playing group, during our very first discussion of the setting’s mythology and cultures, the other players’ initial reaction to this concept was probably similar to most people’s: “Whaaat? You must be kidding me.” I saw their point. It doesn’t sound good, does it? Especially the “of” part, which means what it sounds like – this goddess represents, facilitates, promotes, and rewards the act in question. To worship her is to perpetrate rape and its associated agony of all kinds. I was looking at my players, and they’re giving me that No Freaking Way look back. Now, years later, I’m writing this article to show that the Gloranthan setting is built to prompt these kinds of responses from people, and that *HeroQuest* has the guts, as a game, to take even such a difficult ball and run with it for some outstanding, uniquely powerful play. In many other games, such a response means, “Avoid this issue from now on.” In *HeroQuest*, it can mean, “Go there, now.”

So here we go, on a discourse about Thed. She isn’t a very powerful deity. Her primary worshippers are the broo, or goatkin, a stock monster for the setting and arguably the most debased kindred ever invented for a fantasy-world. They propagate exclusively through rape, and they are cross-fertile with just about anything. The offspring may have features of the victim-parent, but it’s a broo, usually male, and usually riddled with “Chaos features” (i.e. magical mutations) and diseases. They worship Thed in animistic terms as an ancestor-spirit, and probably through misapplied theistic worship as well, using all manner of sacrifice and vicious evil-doing as currency.

The broo are found in all published versions of Gloranthan role-playing. They’re always the same: humanoids with nearly-random animal features, although with a tendency toward goat-parts, festering and stinking with diseases, displaying all sorts of deformities and wild magical features, running around intent on rape and pain. On occasion, united by a shaman or the occasional debased human, they may be involved in more subtle plots, on the scale of “poison the village well” or “steal ten babes for sacrifice.” They’ll hire out as mercenaries, although their employer would certainly be ostracized by his or her other potential allies. Broo vileness shows up everywhere. Check out any edition of *RuneQuest* (The Chaosium 1977, 1978), and the supplements *Snakepipe Hollow*, *River of Cradles*, *The Big Rubble*, *Dorastor: Land of Doom*, and *Shadows on the Borderland*.

The role-playing source material on the mythos can be found in *Cults of Terror* (The Chaosium, 1981). Its text was recapitulated in the Avalon Hill publication *Lords of Terror*

(1994) and also in the first three chapters of *Glorantha: Introduction to the Hero Wars* (Issaries Inc, 2001). From the Thed section in *Cults of Terror*:

### ***Before Time***

*Prior to the Lesser Darkness, Thed was an important goddess. She was the wife of Ragnaglar, who later was called the Mad God, and their children were the broos, then untainted by chaos. Together with Ragnaglar and Mallia, she schemed to introduce chaos into the world in the form of the Devil [clarification: this is a slight misstatement; previous text establishes that chaos already existed in Glorantha before this event - RE]. The three had found jealousy and pride in themselves, and they dreamed of usurping the functions of the world, and of becoming its unchallenged rulers. Thed herself was the mother of the Devil, and his malevolence twisted and distorted her in childbirth. She participated in the ways of Chaos and her broos aligned with her.*

### ***Since Time began***

*Though protected in her existence by the Great Compromise, Thed was on the losing side, and occupies a distinctly minor place in the vast pantheon of deities. It is probable that only her initial role as Mother of the Broos has been effective in maintaining her powers.*

*Regardless, she is overwhelmingly significant to Gloranthan mythology and magic. Thed is one of the main bad guys. She is the central member of the Unholy Trio, who in the cosmology, birthed the Devil to begin The Greater Darkness.*

From the general section in *Cults of Terror* and repeated in the later texts listed above:

### ***Cosmology***

*These murderers [of Rashoran - RE] were the Unholy Trio. Hatred, selfishness, greed, and jealousy motivated them. These short-sighted emotions are now considered to be symptoms of chaos in the world, and they were originated by the three, who concentrated their forces and wills to create something new.*

*The first of the trio was Ragnaglar, whom some called kin to Storm Bull, driven to hatred by jealousy and dishonorable acts. The second was Thed, said to have been wife to Ragnaglar at one time. The third was Mallia, another goddess who had great properties to aid birth and growth. These three joined together and perverted their natures to make their weapon of hatred and vengeance.*

*The Unholy Trio made the end of the world. ... The product of the ritual was the Devil, the product of poisoned souls .... Wakboth the Devil is the moral evil of the world.*

From *Lords of Terror* (in addition to the above text):

*Wakboth's first act in the world was to slay his father, so that none could be born to rival him. He then forced Thed and the broos to aid him as he destroyed the world. Thed's willing submission to rape [I'll have more to say about this later -RE] provided him with other, more powerful, brothers and sisters, and these monsters served him as lieutenants or champions during the Darkness.*

And from *Anaxial's Roster* (Issaries Inc, 2000):

### **Broo (goatkin)**

*Broo are humanoid, but have many animal features, especially those that derive from their mother. Ragnaglar, the broo ancestor, was goat-shaped ...*

*... Thed, goddess of rape, is their favorite, for she was the mother of the first broo, after her violation by Ragnaglar, the Mad God.*

All right, that's not too out-of-line for a villain deity, albeit a vile one. But ... what's all this about "she"? How can a female figure play this kind of theistic role? On the face of it, the concept sounds frankly awful – mean-spirited, at the least, or insensitive to the issue, or all manner of similar things. Why not have the broo god be Ragnaglar, the rapist perp? No, it's Thed – the goddess who was violated, including the birthing of the rapist's child, who itself proceeds on to further abuse. Not only the plain physical violation, but the trauma. A goddess who claims ownership of rape. Is Gloranthan myth assigning the responsibility for rape to its victim?

Even worse, you can't ignore it. Thed is a major element of Glorantha, mythically speaking and also in terms of potential foes for role-playing; if you house-rule this stuff out of the setting, you leave behind gaping holes. Thed's actions gave a face and intent to Chaos (previously fairly neutral, if disturbing), and that intent necessitated the Great Compromise and the birth of Time. It set up the relationships between gods and mortals that define the theistic rules of Gloranthan role-playing, most especially those of *HeroQuest*.

### **Close examination**

Clearly there are some fuzzy areas in the texts quoted so far. For example, just to pick a detail, the origin of the broos' goat-ness is ascribed to both parent gods in *Anaxial's Roster*. When getting hip-deep into philosophical and cultural issues in Glorantha, the place to go is Greg Stafford's novel *King of Sartar: How one man became a god*, which is sort of a deconstructionist collection of after-the-fact documents about the events of the Hero Wars. My copy is from *The Chaosium* (1994); here's what it says. Bear in mind that every "document" in the collection is intended to reflect the writer's bias to an extreme degree.

[Orlanth and the other gods] *had never thought that the very things that were good could be turned upon them.*

*Orlanth discovered that there was too much justice when the goddess named Thed came to his court, demanding her share of it. Orlanth granted it, of course, but regretted it when she revealed that she was the victim of his brother's aggression. He had overcome her and taken her by force against her will. She showed everyone her gaping wound, which had never healed, and demanded full recompense. Orlanth, of course, agreed, even though it brought him great shame. And Thed considered what would be the worst thing she could do to her enemy, and she said that she wanted to be the Goddess of Rape, so that Orlanth's own wife and daughters would fear the same thing forever. And they did. ...*

*And he was horrified to discover that even his most sacred progenitive urges could become vices. Orlanth's brother Ragnaglar was so overcome with sexuality that he had no limits to what he would take as a partner, and he was so fecund that everything he mated with bore children. In this way a horrible race of monsters was born, the broos, who are like their father and have no sisters.*

It doesn't sound to me like she was Ragnaglar's wife. Furthermore, Ragnaglar is kin not only to Storm Bull, but directly to Orlanth himself. A previous section in the book describes how he fails an initiation in "the sex pit" and is driven mad, but his brothers rescue him and put up with him thereafter. I'll discuss this fellow later.

I should also explain the fictional writer's bias as well. All this occurs during the Storm Age, in the Lesser Darkness. Orlanth has usurped the rulership of the gods by killing Yelm the Emperor. That's significant: there is no rule of established, community-supported law. Orlanth's justice is all about a "king" being a chief of chiefs, and to such a chief, justice is a matter of case-by-case judgment and assigned compensation (e.g. weregild). And bear in mind that all this is before the advent of Andrin the Lawgiver, who provided a better structure for negotiating justice and establishing precedent. Therefore Orlanth presents judgment by saying to Thed, "Here's the culprit. Name your punishment."

What does Thed do? She ignores Ragnaglar and turns her attention to the world itself. She chooses to become a full goddess of what happened to her. She inflicts the crime that was perpetrated upon her onto all of reality – i.e., she brings rape into the world as a potential subject of worship, which includes transforming her goat-people into their current form. Through her decision, and through the broo's atrocious activities, all women and indeed all beings must now fear this act to a vastly greater degree. The net total of suffering and torment in the world jumps up a notch. And as stated above, her story continues with her alliance and coupling with Ragnaglar and Mallia, to create Wakboth.

So the whole Unholy Trio story is really Thed's. Ragnaglar and Mallia are secondary; they make no particular decisions and do nothing she's not involved with. Unlike the *Cults of Terror* text, which introduces these three as already-malevolent conspirators, this material tells us who did what before that, and how Thed came to be the center of the Trio. Her whole Godtime saga proceeds as follows: (1) she is raped by Ragnaglar, (2) she seeks justice from Orlanth, (3) she chooses to deify rape, (4) she allies with the other two deities of the Unholy Trio and they are first exiled and then killed by Humakt, (5) they kill Rashoran, (6) "they did what they could do to each other" (*King of Sartar*) and Thed births Wakboth, (7) she fights with Chaos during the Greater Darkness, and (8) she is defeated and skinned by Kyger Litor.

Keeping in mind the central question (why a goddess of rape?), what does all this imply in moral, mythic terms? Some possible initial reactions include: "Bullshit – what kind of woman would do such a thing?" And, "It's all Thed's fault, eh? Sounds like the same-old 'Blame Eve' story." And, "The men are being let off scot-free in the whole issue." One might even peg Stafford as an outright sexist pig, to use the terminology of my upbringing.

However, our game-play, my thoughts on the issue in question, some careful reading of the texts involved, and much input from the men and women in our group has yielded a more complex reaction. In play, it turned out to be the entire thematic motor (Premise) underlying our game, and indeed, our Glorantha.

As I see it, the crime of rape is Ragnaglar's and the crime of injustice is Orlanth's. He does not enlist the community/society in passing judgment on the rapist. He says, "Oh, you were raped? OK, here, justice is your problem, you take care of it." Orlanth does not acknowledge the responsibility of the community to pass judgment on the rapist, as a representative of the injured party. By hard-line Orlanthi mores, established community values play no role in justice. Everything is taken case-by-case as an individual revenge issue. This is one of two

issues (the other is kinstrife) where Orlanthi culture falls flat on its face. For these issues, such “justice” only yields further harm.

Orlanth does not acknowledge that the act was itself wrong, in a generalized sense, and that it needs a standing penalty that will be enforced even in the absence of the victim’s power to enforce it. Even worse, the *King of Sartar* text strongly implies that if Orlanth had known his brother was the perpetrator, he would not have offered justice at all. Thed’s response suddenly takes on power and meaning – she rightly pegs the existing society as insensitive to, even dismissive of, the crime of rape that exists within it. Thed did not invent rape. It already existed, and she suffered it. Nor did she invent its atrocious, explosive properties (as expressed in the broo); they are the result of society’s inability to admit to the rape within it. Instead, despite her appeal, she was isolated by that community. She invents neither rape nor its societal denial. Nor does she invent Chaos. She reveals them. “You think *this* is judgment? *I’ll* show you judgment. You think *this* is Chaos? *I’ll* show you Chaos.”

I then reviewed all the literature again to make sure that I was not sugar-coating or rewriting – this was not out of a sense of purism, but rather to see whether some inkling of the conclusion was there ... and you know what? *The King of Sartar* writeup never assigns Thed guilt (unlike the *Lords of Terror* text which mentions her later willingness to be raped by Wakboth). Although it’s not articulated in the terms I outline above, I’m convinced that Stafford knew exactly what he was doing.

Now for Ragnaglar, for a moment. His brothers knew he was an uncontrollable rapist, and they knew he was crazy. But Orlanth perceived justice against his acts as “shame”? And to project some of my reading onto the text, I think Ragnaglar’s own view toward Thed is, “She must have liked it.” Nowhere is any commitment of Thed to Ragnaglar mentioned, and the phrase “said to have been wife to Ragnaglar at one time” becomes especially interesting.

It also strikes me that the the ritual of the Unholy Trio, which refers very directly to a sexual threesome in my reading, is still rape; it had to have been, to produce the Devil. Given that Thed entered into the ritual (and quite likely organized it), the act signifies, to me, an internalization of the abuse on her part – gaining “power” through trying to own the suffering she experiences, rather than empowerment per se. It’s sex whose power is generated through hate.

Is Thed a heroine, then? Emphatically not – a vengeful victim is not automatically a hero. But neither is she a Disney villainess who mucks up reality just because her ego is wounded or a bitch who does it just because she can. Nor is she lacking in insight. She effectively tears the veil off the notion that rape is an individualized, isolated indiscretion. The crime she suffered always existed, and now, it never stops. Her spawn, Wakboth, prompted the end of Godtime; he will also prompt the climax of the Hero Wars and provide the transition to the world to come, as hinted in *King of Sartar*. Thed is literally Glorantha’s “open wound.”

Gloranthan mythology is not wholly original. It is syncretic, incorporating elements of many, many real mythologies: Celtic, Persian, Native American, Scandinavian, Greek and more. Whether this is good or bad is up to the individual, although I know some folks who find it aggravating. However, this issue stands out. I am unaware of any real mythos that deals with the issue of rape in the sense I’ve described here. The only parallel I find is in literature, in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, which similarly brings up rape and the origin of moral evil in the character of Sin. From *Paradise Lost (Book Two)*:

*Before the Gates there sat  
On either side a formidable shape;  
The one seem'd Woman to the waste, and fair,  
But ended foul in many a scaly fould  
Voluminous and vast, a Serpent arm'd  
With mortal sting: about her middle round  
A cry of Hell Hounds never ceasing bark'd  
With wide Cerberean mouths full loud, and rung  
A hideous Peal: yet, when they list, would creep,  
If aught disturb'd thir noyse, into her woomb,  
And kennel there, yet there still bark'd and howl'd  
Within unseen. ...*

[The other "shape" is Death, who gets snippy with Satan and almost prompts a fight, except the "Snakie Sorceress" intervenes; Satan asks who she is. She describes her birth from his (Satan's) forehead long ago. - RE]

*... back they recoild affraid  
At first, and call'd me SIN, and for a Sign  
Portentous held me; but familiar grown,  
I pleas'd, and with attractive graces won  
The most averse, thee chiefly, who full oft  
Thy self in me thy perfect image viewing  
Becam'st enamour'd, and such joy thou took'st  
With me in secret, that my womb conceiv'd  
A growing burden. Mean while Warr arose,  
And fields were fought in Heav'n; wherein remaind  
(For what could else) to our Almighty Foe  
Cleer Victory, to our part loss and rout  
Through all the Empyrean: down they fell  
Driv'n headlong from the Pitch of Heaven, down  
Into this Deep, and in the general fall  
I also; at which time this powerful Key  
Into my hand was giv'n, with charge to keep  
These Gates for ever shut, which none can pass  
Without my op'ning. Pensive here I sat  
Alone, but long I sat not, till my womb  
Pregnant by thee, and now excessive grown  
Prodigious motion felt and rueful throes.  
At last this odious offspring whom thou seest  
Thine own begotten, breaking violent way  
Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain  
Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew  
Transform'd: but he my inbred enemy  
Forth issu'd, brandishing his fatal Dart  
Made to destroy: I fled, and cry'd out Death;  
Hell trembl'd at the hideous Name, and sigh'd  
From all her Caves, and back resounded Death.  
I fled, but **he pursu'd (though more, it seems,  
Inflam'd with lust then rage) and swifter far,***

*Me overtook his mother all dismaid,  
And in embraces forcible and foule  
Ingendring with me, of that rape begot  
These yelling Monsters that with ceasless cry  
Surround me, as thou sawst, hourly conceiv'd  
And hourly born, with sorrow infinite  
To me, for when they list into the womb  
That bred them they return, and howle and gnaw  
My Bowels, their repast; then bursting forth  
Afresh with conscious terrours vex me round,  
That rest or intermission none I find. [emphasis mine - RE]*

[Then Satan tells her:]

... know

*I come noemie, but to set free  
From out this dark and dismal house of pain,  
Both him and thee, and all the heav'nly Host ...*

... [Sin responds:]

*The key of this infernal Pit by due,  
And by command of Heav'ns all-powerful King  
I keep, by him forbidden to unlock  
These Adamantine Gates; against all force  
Death ready stands to interpose his dart,  
Fearless to be o'rematcht by living might.  
But what ow I to his commands above  
Who hates me, and hath hither thrust me down  
Into this gloom of Tartarus profound,  
To sit in hateful Office here confin'd,  
Inhabitant of Heav'n, and heav'nlie-born,  
Here in perpetual agonie and pain,  
With terrors and with clamors compassst round  
Of mine own brood, that on my bowels feed:  
Thou art my Father, thou my Author, thou  
My being gav'st me; whom should I obey  
But thee, whom follow? thou wilt bring me soon  
To that new world of light and bliss, among  
The Gods who live at ease, where I shall Reign  
At thy right hand voluptuous, as beseems  
Thy daughter and thy darling, without end.*

*Thus saying, from her side the fatal Key,  
Sad instrument of all our woe, she took;  
And towards the Gate roulding her bestial train,  
Forthwith the huge Porcullis high up drew,  
Which but her self not all the Stygian powers  
Could once have mov'd; then in the key-hole turns  
Th' intricate wards, and every Bolt and Bar  
Of massie Iron or sollid Rock with ease  
Unfast'ns: on a sudden op'n flie  
With impetuous recoile and jarring sound*

*Th' infernal dores, and on thir hinges great  
Harsh Thunder, that the lowest bottom shook  
Of Erebus. She op'nd, but to shut  
Excel'd her power; the Gates wide op'n stood ...*

That's powerful stuff, and Gloranthan mythology probably borrowed a thing or two from it. But in that mythology, Thed takes the issue much further, specifically to those of the community, justice, and denial. Since it's a solid, sobering, and narratively-inspiring treatment even in comparison with Milton, I stand in awe. In this instance, the fictional mythos of Glorantha rears up on its own hind feet and says, "I am myth, derived from none other." It speaks uniquely to our reality, to our problems, and to our self-image.

### **Our game**

The player-characters were some back-woods Heortlings whose community history includes inadvertent incest. After a few sessions, their loyalties centered on Aething, a modified Antigone character, as the clan leader, and that decision became the core of everything to follow. They discovered their clan myth included a Thed-Daimon named Eech'ya, specialized to issues of incest-abuse. Eech-ya, a stalking figure with long clawed hands but beautiful features, cloaked in pale, soft leather, became a station in their heroquest to establish themselves as a Hero Band. This quest "crossed" other heroquests, including those by exceptional broos. Later play saw more servitors or aspects of Thed-worship, such as Sheth the anti-Lunar, hard-line-Thed broo shaman, and his rebel son Tenslayer, a broo who struggled to contain his own defiled nature through the help of the Seven Mothers and who suspected that Thed had received a raw deal in the core myths.

The original plan had been to play out a story over perhaps five or six sessions. But when the players established the Graming Hero Band and determined upon their political goals, there was no stopping. As I prepped for our tenth, then our eighteenth, and eventually our twenty-seventh session and beyond, with yet more to work with each time, I considered the myths more and more. My watchword for myths, whether taken whole cloth from the Gloranthan source material or made up by me or a player, is always to look for the gaps, because those become unexpected stations during heroquesting. Eventually, I came upon these questions which I could not answer based on the texts and myths: Why did the women goddesses not speak for Thed? Especially, why didn't Vinga? And regarding Thed, where were her kin?

These questions powered the final story of our game. I introduced a historical character, Kistralde, based partly on the real-life legend of Boudicea, but bringing in spousal rape as well, as the fellow on the other side who rapes her, although not her daughters, is her husband. I further included the splintering of the three daughters' loyalty to their mother over the fate of the resulting child. This scenario was set in Far Point, and I decided that both Vingan and Yelorman heroquesters were attempting to co-opt the history of the event into a myth. Both cults (one anti-Lunar, the other pro-Lunar) rely on denying sexuality as a basis for power, and they wanted to "own" the story for that purpose.

Our heroes learned that Kistralde's chaos-tainted child was the problem at the center of the history, and that's why two of her daughters, one a Vingan, wouldn't help her, and that's where Manslime comes from. This is a bit of canonical fun on my part, as in *Dorastor: Land of Doom*, Manslime is a significant character in Ralzakark's broo army. (As a side note, that's why Sheth was such a powerful shaman, as he knew this as a subcult Secret.)

Our heroes' interaction with this conflict provided the climactic sequence and heroquest for the whole game. They invented the myth of Kistralde themselves, defying the other two cults' attempts to do so. Unlike the others, they acknowledged the child instead of suppressing his existence. Here's where things got hinky. Acknowledging a chaos child of this sort crossed this heroquest into another one, which was a big deal in our story as well. Women and women-cults all over Far Point were conducting a very deep, shared heroquest to determine who Ernalda's husband is, Yelm or Orlanth. Basically, our heroes crashed this heroquest and said, "Listen up, this 'husband' business masks a serious problem." This permitted them to crack open a still "deeper" heroquest into the Storm Age itself, forcing the participators in the women-ritual to enter into the judgment of Thed.

It was time for me to consider what Thed might be like in visual terms, especially early in the myths. Thed is not described physically in the primary *RuneQuest* material (few gods are), so I checked out the secondary *RuneQuest* literature that arose through intensive game-play during the 1970s and 1980s. A lot of it is in fanzines and fortunately a lot of that has made it onto the internet, so a search for "Thed Glorantha" or anything similar yields a lot of stuff. Some of the scenarios and stories troubled me greatly, as they relied on Thed being all about manipulative, uncontrollable lust, a kind of evil Venus or Ishtar. The similarity of this viewpoint on the part of role-players to my interpretation of Ragnaglar is frankly appalling. As far as descriptions/imagery goes, what I mainly found was fairly predictable: a goat-headed female broo, with a distended belly, and with an oversized, toothed vagina from which tentacles issue, and similar. I think it's mainly derived from Lovecraftian pastiche images of Shub-Niggurath ("the goat with a thousand young").

The same kind of thing can be found in the additional text in *Lords of Terror* (1994):

*Thed is usually pictured by her children as an bestial female broo, often with snakes for breasts or a gaping fanged mouth where her vagina should be. The Praxians and Orlanthe picture Thed as a gigantic, slim figure with a long, tufted tail and two deformed, clawed arms. Her head has four curved horns, ropy hair, and five antennae or tentacles arrayed about her mouth. Her eyes or vagina are usually ritually disfigured as a ward against her power.*

I'm relatively certain that this published text, as well as the reference to her willing submission to rape (!) are derived mainly from these fan-based sources. As such, I decided that all of these implications could be jettisoned with little loss. Significantly, in *Glorantha: Introduction to the Hero Wars*, the *Cults of Terror* text is repeated but the *Lords of Terror* text is not.

I interpreted Thed as a maiden with goat horns, as I figured the goat-affinity didn't have to be all negative at this point in the myth, but otherwise quite human. We figured her twisted and misshapen qualities originated in the later ritual and the birth of Wakboth. As this portion of the heroquest began, it was a terrifically unsettling experience to play the raped goat-maiden, occasionally slipping in her own blood as she climbed the harsh path alone to Orlanth's Hall. When she displayed her wound, it was of course her vagina, and I played the scene full of shame, yet with desperation for justice just barely strong enough to overcome it.

Orlanth's hall is a scary place, full of Storm Warriors' roistering and Orlanth's justice handed out left and right. When Thed presents herself, Ragnaglar cackles and leers, hiding behind his brothers. Orlanth is sincerely shocked by the evidence of rape, but also uncomfortable with

allowing judgment, and he makes excuses for Ragnaglar. Vinga turns away but will not speak up. For the characters, in game-mechanics terms, this was an ugly situation. They were losing affinities and suffering greatly in acquired penalties to be defying their King this way. Their only hope was to shame the goddesses with the lesson of the new Kistralde myth.

Because the heroes had included women priestesses and followers from all around Dragon Pass into witnessing these events, they could then, in the myth itself, enlist the women of the pantheon as Orlanth struggles with his decision. They told them: marriage will not save you from rape (here we brought in the “husband” issue of Ragnaglar, as one of the goddesses suggests that Ragnaglar and Thed be married to solve the problem), and motherhood will not provide you with automatic morality (strong words to Ernaldans!). The climax of the story, then, arrived when Tenslayer and Aething spoke up: “We are the children of the damned, and we have come home.”

I won't say what happened then in detail. I will ask, instead, if you and other people you know were playing in this scenario, “What do you think?” What abilities would you roll, and what Action Points would be bid, about what? The answer is crucial for your Glorantha.

### **Conclusion**

I submit that the issue of rape in Glorantha cannot be ignored in the long term. In play, if you meet and fight broos, rape enters the story. If rape enters the story among non-broos, Thed is there as well. Certainly one might avoid both of these entirely, but to do so is to avoid a primary monster-race of Dragon Pass and Dorastor, and to gut the mythological setting of one of its central back-story elements. And to remove rape and sexual abuse of any kind from a desperate wartime setting seems disingenuous or worse.

The mythology in question is especially key to Dragon Pass play. Broos are all over the place. A Lunar worshipper must be confronted with the expectation to “include” broos in *We Are All Us*, and a Heortling must be confronted with the ethical and judicial limitations of his or her culture, which are responsible for the broos' existence. Yes, Thed is a minor, grubby goddess, but as I played her in our game, I heard her crone-cackling, poisoned laughter at the Lunar conceit that Chaos can be included and controlled, and also at the Orlanthe conceit to fight Chaos using cultural mores which themselves perpetuate the wrongs that Thed represents. Unlike the more powerful gods, she knows that the Devil (moral evil) can be neither embraced nor beaten. That's why the Old World must end. I don't think I can role-play in Glorantha again without knowing that abused, vicious laughter is in the background.

I submit that Thed represents one of the primary Mysteries of Glorantha, which is to say, an issue for which a Hero Band must literally invent the New World's morality, as past myth and cultures failed to do. In our game, we did that, and we spoke for Thed for a brief moment of glory, and assigned the injustice where it belonged. We couldn't save her entirely, nor stop the Great Darkness, which was “set” in the story too deeply. But the characters were heroes who would not let Thed face her fate alone. That's why my deluxe copy of *HeroQuest* bears the rune of Thed, which on the face of it seems obscene. But for our group, it's a badge of pride.