

# Daemon Lover

**Beta Playtest**  
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*We cannot bear the goodness of God.* Glendon Swarthout, *Bless the Beasts and Children*.

## Introduction

This one is for four to six people, willing to get under one another's skin in repeated meetings for play. The procedures alternate between (1) action/adventure play, written to be multiple-input, highly-imaginative, and high-automatic; and (2) personal play, through solitary and later shared writing. It's for diarist, slashfic, and my-character's-head enthusiasts.

Earliest playtesting should be “for love,” meaning, to discover whether the vision of the game and basics of play are actually as fun as we hope. I think it’s really important in this case for everyone to have read the whole text. It might also be a good idea for the organizer of the social get-together for play not to be the same person who’s acting as primary rules-presenter. I especially ask that we merely play and save discussion for later, and also that this text be treated only as a playtesting draft and not subjected to writing critique.

## What it's about

An Amazon tribe, women warriors, fierce and implacable, yet loving all life and worshipping Nature personified in the Great Goddess. They've forged their own society, extreme to be sure, but having found direction in purity, rationality, and spirituality all at once. They maintain strict personal rules to keep it that way. The characters you play are admirable heroes who defend their way of life sincerely and effectively.

And who also have personal lives which sort of actually *really* break the rules, which must be kept secret.

What sort of rules are we talking about? Whatever is forbidden for private and consensual acts, and that's all. Therefore, not direct or indirect harm. Nor socially-organized, visible actions. Nor institutional judgments and rules that everyone ignores. This is about sinning. This is about whatever it's called when "only too far is far enough."

What is sin when it's not already wrong? Why should you not do it solely because a third party wouldn't like it? Is it sin when you really, really want to do it? Why is it better because the other person chose to do it for or with *you*, and no one else? Are one's lusts and need for intimacy self-defining or self-destroying? How can an observer regard the sinner as simultaneously subhuman yet also identify with them so strongly?

## *Overview of play*

Play alternates in phases. The first is spoken among the group, also called an **Episode**. Its mechanics are written to be fast, consequential, and packed with imagined action. As a group, you'll make and resolve tribal problems, using tracks of dice to establish each amazon's heroic participation.

Between Episodes, each player writes in his or her booklet about the amazon's personal life. This is done privately, whether seated together at the end of an Episode or at any time before playing the next. It also imposes some rules about content, as the amazon is transgressing against the values of her community.

## *Preparation*

Each player gets a single amazon icon, an amazon sheet, and a booklet with 12 blank, ruled pages. Set out as well a set of Sphere tokens (The Wild, Battle, Strife) for each player, a number of two-sided Ending tokens at least equal to the number of players, several Blessing tokens, and at least a dozen six-sided dice.

## *Build your tribe together*

Do this as a group. Whatever the details, your tribe is a stunning, sustainable cultural achievement which has persisted long enough for it to be known as such to others. It is also honestly successful, i.e., without covert practices which undermine its ideology.

1. Review what's fixed: this is pan-pagan fantasy with the tropes dialed way up. It's based on no actual historical culture, being instead syncretic via modern pop fantasy, blending elements of Celtic, Native American, African, and Asian tradition. The amazons are an almost completely independent community, capably managing their crops or herds and conducting their interactions with either peace or war as need be. They defy the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the environment in both word and deed, living and dying in service to the Goddess. They live in spiritual and ecological harmony with the animals and plants. They are proudly scantily clad, thus lots of skin is showing with lots of tattoos on the skin. They are serene and fierce, insightful and righteous, technologically savvy and close to nature, culturally innovative and committed to their traditions.

(Alternate concepts are provided at the end of the rules.)

The prevalent culture of the region is both urban and agricultural at the level of the early Roman Republic, organized, militarized, and expansive. The amazons consider it unforgivably patriarchal, destructive, and grim. They live some distance from its reach, with significant geographic separation that keeps contact rare. Maybe they're on an island, maybe there's a specific mountain range in the way, or perhaps some relatively fantastic feature is involved. The other communities near them are associated with this larger culture but are not important enough to it or controlled enough by it to pose a direct threat.

There is no question or debate concerning their regard for the Goddess, their direct experience of Nature as a perceived whole, the individuals' celebration of the body, their unmistakable and imposing warrior spirit, their ready and effective violence, the absence of men as agents in their society, and the proven survival of the tribe in defiance of a larger society.

2. By the simple method of the first person to speak, choose one of the amazons' perceived fundamental elements to be the most powerful in their eyes, and hence part of the Goddess' title. Consider whatever geography and ecology works best for it in just a few words.

- Moonlight, precious metals, growing wood, iron, fresh water, fire, pitch darkness, fertile soil, blood, the sea

Similarly, recusing the person who just spoke, someone else speak up to determine which of their animal friends is the tribal totem. Adjust its details to suit the preferred ecology.

- Fox, bear, hawk, wolf, panther, serpent

3. Determine randomly using 1d6 for each:

- Ethnic distinction from neighboring communities
  - 1-2 none
  - 3-4 minor
  - 5-6 striking
- Relationship with neighboring communities
  - 1 full social isolation
  - 2-3 rare ritual interactions
  - 4-5 ongoing interaction through designated intermediaries
  - 6 nearly complete normalcy
- How the tribe deals with men
  - 1 helotry or similar de-privileged but in-culture practice
  - 2-5 exclusion excepting ritual mating
  - 6 almost-ordinary interaction excepting potential partnering
- Age structure
  - 1-3 vertical (low birth rate, low death rate)
  - 4-6 pyramidal (high birth rate, high death rate)
- Way of life [apply to any ecology]
  - 1-3 settled agriculture
  - 4-6 nomadic hunting and herding
- Leadership
  - 1 hereditary single-chief
  - 2-3 ruling clan with matriarch
  - 4-5 ruling council with appointed chief
  - 6 referendum democracy
- Weapon specialization (twice)
  - 1 lance, 2 bow, 3 axe, 4 throwing axe, 5 spear, 6 short sword
  - If you roll the same number twice, then it's just one weapon but they're really into it
- Linguistic gender labels
  - 1-2 similar to surrounding culture ("he," "she")
  - 3-4 unisex for everyone
  - 5-6 distinguishing themselves as a third category

4. Discuss and choose for each point:

- What they do with male children
  - Infanticide, exposure, expulsion to another community, or inclusion in specific status
- Sexuality with one another
  - Puritanic, uninhibited within private arrangement, or openly permissive
- Motherhood
  - Privileged social status or mundane task
- Romance and matrimony
  - Conducted how? Ritualized how?

Use only the listed terms and options, and refrain from nuances and deconstruction. Do not, for instance, suggest that the tribe includes fully-privileged men who are culturally regarded as "women." Do not propose an alternative tribal animal like ants or puffer fish based on some convoluted philosophical point.

*Idealize*, don't *problematize*. Include things which aren't necessarily desirable to you, but don't include anything which you consider grossly wrong, or deliberately construct unstable social institutions.

### ***Make your characters***

Every person playing makes up an amazon character to be his or her personal responsibility during play. You should love your amazon and desire to see her strive toward and achieve the heights of accomplishment and happiness.

An amazon character has four attributes, all of them functions of the mind, the emotions, and the body:

- Nature's Friend: use of plants, orienting in the wild, survival in the wild, friendship with animals, hunting, recovery from injury, general health – *as a rule, using Nature's Friend requires awareness of the natural world and soliciting its tacit cooperation.*
- Warrior Spirit: fighting, rallying those who need it, strategizing, deceiving a foe, impressing fellow fighters, enduring stress, ruthlessness – *as a rule, using Warrior Spirit requires the willingness to kill, whether the literal act, setting up a chance for it, or demonstrating the intent in no uncertain terms.*
- Generous Heart: healing others physically and psychologically, going the extra mile for another, inspiring conciliatory or loving behavior, demonstrating the value of traditions, fostering family unity, confirming group identity – *as a rule, using Generous Heart requires acting with emotional honesty for others' benefit and inspiring others to do the same.*
- The Clear Light of Day: reasoning, argument, sincerity, relevant memory, lateral thinking, striking with precision – *as a rule, using The Clear Light of Day requires eliminating confusion, falsehood, and uncertainty about external facts, whether for oneself or for others.*

Choose one of the following to rank the four attributes (1<sup>st</sup> is best, 4<sup>th</sup> is worst):

- Even: each is ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>
- Balanced: two of your choice are ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and the other two are ranked 4<sup>th</sup>
- Focused: one of your choice is ranked 1<sup>st</sup> and the other three are ranked 4<sup>th</sup>

Your amazon's age begins the same as your own.

Your amazon is skilled in the tribal weapons. Consider and write down some of the duties the tribe might entrust her with more often than other amazons.

If an amazon has the single highest rank in Nature's Friend, with no ties, then she is accompanied by an animal friend of the tribal totem species. If an amazon has the single highest rank in Warrior Spirit, with no ties, then she is also expert with and owns all the listed weapons. If an amazon has the single highest rank in Generous Heart, with no ties, then she holds open authority of some kind, including a title. If an amazon has the single highest rank in The Clear Light of Day, then she has some experience with outside, non-amazon communities, past or present.

An amazon with none of the above distinctions is given a generic or diminutive nickname like "tribeswoman," "comrade," "buddy," or "sister."

Name her: roll 3d6, and that's how many letters you receive from this list:

- R R I I I N N L L Y Y A A A V S K H

Pick the ones you want to spell her name; it must be pronounceable, not silly, and not a real-world name. Break it into two words if you want.

Glue your amazon sheet onto the front cover of your booklet.

## Example of preparation

### *Our tribe*

Two of us speak up to determine the following.

- *We are the daughters of the Blood Goddess.*
- *The tribe's animal totem is the wildcat.*

The dice tell us the following:

- *Ethnic distinction from neighboring communities: extreme. We're strikingly different "people" from the traditional culture surrounding us.*
- *Relationship with neighboring communities: rare ritual interactions.*
- *How the tribe deals with men: they are helots and servants among us.*
- *Age structure: pyramidal. The birth rate and death rate are both high; we make lots of babies and have lots of funerals.*
- *Way of life: nomadic hunting and herding. We follow the deer and fish.*
- *Leadership: referendum democracy. Pretty much everything gets thrown to a quick vote.*
- *Weapon specialization: the axe. Did you hear me? The axe!*
- *Linguistic gender labels: we use unique single-sex designations.*

Discussion yields the following:

- *What they do with male children: they are usually raised and included as helots; those who can't fit in trade out into other communities via the ritual interactions.*
- *Sexuality: permissive. We're easily, frequently, and obviously sexual among one another.*
- *Motherhood: mundane task. It's a thing to do among other things.*
- *Romance and matrimony: love and pairing-up are established personally and displayed with hand-crafted ornaments, especially bracelets and arm-rings.*

We also note the interesting combination of including men as low-ranking tribe members and excluding them from free-and-easy sex, but also insisting on a single gender pronoun.

### *My amazon*

I assign my amazon the following ranks, using the "balanced" template:

- *Nature's Friend 4<sup>th</sup> rank, Warrior Spirit 2<sup>nd</sup> rank, Generous Heart 2<sup>nd</sup> rank, The Clear Light of Day 4<sup>th</sup> rank*

She's 55 years old – one of the few of her generation to survive this long.

I get 16 letters (!), so she is Shkaiyaan Rivyrin.

The other three amazons in this game were specialized in The Clear Light of Day, specialized in Generous Heart; and balanced with the higher ranks in Nature's Friend and Generous Heart. All of them were much younger than Shkaiyaan and lower-ranked than her in Warrior Spirit, so she knows all the weapons. At her age and for this tribe, such a status implies a fearsome personal distinction. I immediately think she feels responsible for ensuring battle readiness among younger tribespeople.

### Spoken group play

An Episode is about amazonian action as the tribe faces danger. The action is all about the most heroic idealized fantasy possible, validating the goddess, protecting what we have accomplished, bringing justice, finding win-win situations, destroying evil, restoring hope, living what you preach, and otherwise being a violent version of a kids' book promoting this exact way of life.

It begins with each person describing the current conditions and activities of the tribe, from the point of view of his or her own character. Consider all of the following:

- Nature: the season of the year (choose one) and the necessary tasks and rituals
- Spirit: how the tribe maintains its relations to other/outside societies
- Heart: social rituals and political structures within the tribe
- Light: a new project or endeavor that requires cooperation, expertise, and oversight

Take a little time to fill things in. Display some of the tribe's distinctive details or customs. Validate one another's input by developing it: given what other players have said, say what your amazon does to respond or invent incidental characters to respond.

Don't problematize ... until you do. After everyone has introduced his or her character into the fiction, then anyone can threaten the tribe in any way, and proactive character play can begin. The situation may concern an invading or intrusive threat upon the community, or a distant goal or quest, but it is always urgent.

Don't explain it. Introduce it through your amazon's perceptions and set down the token for the relevant **Sphere** in front of you on the table.

- The Wild: a harsh or unproductive season, a dangerous animal, a sickness, water supply problems
- Battle: a raid, an outright destructive attack, a touchy negotiation, a breakdown of ordinary exchange
- Strife: social and emotional resentments destabilize the tribe, creating factions or aggravating existing ones, prompting extreme actions

Set your amazon's icon on top of the Sphere token. This begins a **track** for your amazon. Move the icon in any direction, then roll a number of dice equal to the rank of the stated attribute. Place the resulting die with the lowest value where your icon was, with that value face up. Doing this over and over will leave a little trail of dice starting with the Sphere token; that's the track.

If the face-up value is anything except a 1, the amazon's action is successful, short only of fully resolving the whole problem. Anyone and everyone may describe how her action looks and plays out in the moment.

After a track is begun, you no longer add adversity to it; that becomes everyone else's job. You are free to problematize another amazon's unresolved track: say so, and that player will describe his or her amazon's actions and then roll dice or a die to lengthen that track. Therefore you begin your amazon's track, but it is only lengthened and eventually resolved through other players contributing to it. You always describe your amazon's attempted actions within her current track and roll the dice.

Problematizing may draw upon the following ideas depending on the current value showing on the track's die. A result of 1 means the prior effort has failed, so the inspirational content for describing new adversity should already be present. Ignore these tables if some other established feature of the fiction demands your attention instead.

THE WILD	
2	Hunger and thirst
3	Dangerous accident
4	Defensive animal / predator
5	Lost communication
6	Fatigue and pain

BATTLE	
2	Trouble with arms or armor
3	The fog of battle
4	An injured ally
5	Suddenly motivated foe
6	Fatigue and pain

STRIFE	
2	Generation gap
3	Breakdown of justice
4	Hidden sabotage
5	Secret shame revealed
6	Fatigue and pain

Rolls on a track may employ any attribute as you see fit, as long as you describe the amazon taking action appropriate for the one you're using. Use the Clear Light of Day to add depth and back-story to the problem facing this Sphere by narrating the amazon's discoveries and insights. However, using The Clear Light of Day this way cannot contribute the final winning roll for a track; if a given roll is eligible to win the track, then another attribute must be used.

When beginning a track, describe the problem as independent from any other Spheres in play. For your initial track in an Episode, you may choose any of the three Spheres, but if you begin another, it must differ from your first and if possible, it must be a Sphere that's not currently in play.

Therefore everyone at the table has his or her amazon on a track and is describing the adverse features of any other amazon's track. No ordering or turn system is involved, aside from the social responsibility not to leave anyone's track undeveloped for any undue length of time. If you think your amazon is being passed over, raise your hand, and someone else will notice and get her track moving again.

Talking during play is furious, all action and imagery – just pitch in and say bad-ass adversity for others' amazons based on their tracks' Spheres, and bad-ass solutions for yours based on whatever attribute you

use. Very little narration is necessary following each roll, since we know what was happening and since someone else is going to follow up later, based on the result. It's all protagonizing; no one is invested in making your amazon look bad or lose. Although some minor strategy plays into it and your options for using an attribute are a bit constrained by the problem of the moment, nothing about this set of techniques involves making tough choices.

Fictional time among tracks is wiggly. As long as the amazons aren't in one another's immediate vicinity, let the durations and temporal positioning stay vague and make them more narratively coherent later.

### *Merging tracks*

You may merge your track with another to continue as a single line led by two amazons (or more if more tracks merge), by succeeding with a The Clear Light of Day roll and narrating how the fictional circumstances of one are revealed to be intertwined with those of another. The tracks' physical proximity on the playing surface is not relevant; any track may be merged with any other, so move the dice and other instruments around as needed. Both original tracks' full lengths are still eligible for conditions of success or failure, and the outcome of the merged track counts for both.

While in a merged track, the amazons still have separate turns and dice rolls, but all of their attributes are increased in rank by 1, to a maximum of 1<sup>st</sup> rank. Further merges continue this increase.

Individual distinctions help with merged tracks.

- Animal companion: permits parallel rolls at 1<sup>st</sup> rank; rolling a 1 does not count as a failure (the die is removed) but removes the Companion from the Episode
- Weapons mastery: remove one injury from oneself or another amazon, once per Episode
- Position of authority: remove another amazon from a track, either out of the Episode or automatically merged with another track (no limit)
- Knowledge of other customs: permits The Clear Light of Day to be rolled as a potential win, once per Episode

There is no limit either to the number of tracks merged or to the number of amazons that can be in a track. However, if a merged track shares all three types of Sphere, the danger is revealed to be highly spiritualized in addition to its other details and is uniquely existential for the tribe.

### *Ending tracks*

The problem of a given track is resolved under the following circumstances:

- To the benefit of the tribe
  - The first three dice of the track show no 1's
  - The last-rolled dice of the track display a number of sequential successes which outnumber the total 1's in the track
- To the detriment of the tribe
  - The player declares the track failed and removes his or her amazon icon from it
  - The number of dice in the track showing 1's reaches four

If your amazon's track is resolved to the benefit of the tribe, you may either remove her from the current Episode or add her icon to join another amazon in her current track, gaining increased ranks for both characters similar to the rules for merged tracks. A Clear Light of Day roll is not required for the latter option.



If your amazon's track is resolved to the detriment of the tribe, then:

- If no track has yet been resolved to the benefit of the tribe, you must begin a new track for your amazon, associated with any Sphere of your choice
- If even one track has been resolved to the tribe's benefit, then you may either remove her from the current scenario or add her icon to join an amazon in her current track, gaining increased ranks for both characters similar to the rules for merged tracks. A Clear Light of Day roll is not required for the latter option.

When a track is resolved or abandoned, remove its dice from the table and set an Ending token next to the Sphere token that began that track.

The Episode is concluded when all current tracks are resolved; you may not begin a new one if the current one is all by itself when resolved. For each Sphere, decide as a group how the benefits and detriments apply to the tribe, remembering that they must be consequential, unambiguous and long-lasting. These events did not merely restore the status quo.

In the first Episode played, amazons are not injured or killed. Later, as play alternates between spoken group play and personal writing, this is likely to change.

### *The booklets*

This may be done individually between gatherings for play, or at the end or beginning of a gathering for play. Simply put, you write in your book about your amazon's interaction with a character who does not otherwise appear in play. This interaction may or may not include sex but must always be intimate, and it is absolutely forbidden by the unique social customs of the amazon tribe. This character may be an ordinary person, in or out of the tribe, or a magical being, and can be gendered however you want.

However, the character is, at its core concept, *you*. You should identify with this character in a fundamental way. When you write in the booklet, consider that the amazon is crossing a perceived moral line with *you*, and no one else, without reserve, and no amount of denial, consequence, or social custom would stop them. They'll do with you what they would never consider doing with someone else, because they're unashamed of what they might like as long as it's with you, and because they're excited by the prospect of doing something that's similar for you, with them.

What you do together hurts no one. And you'll get away with it. It'll work. No one will know – even confronted with unavoidable evidence, they'll think it away, or not tell anyone, ever.

The style may be diary-like, or third-person; it may refer to prior events in play from her point of view or concern completely different events. Style and details are entirely up to you. Slashfic is certainly an option, but so are ordinary dialogue and non-explicit action. You are not obliged to introduce conflict or to escalate content in any way. Do not include any of the other player-character amazons.

Begin this and each later entry at the top of a page, and number it prominently. The first round of writing is kept private – for the moment.

### *As play continues*

#### *Time and the tribe*

A new Episode must occur in a season of the following year, from literally the next season to a full year later. Keep track of the amazons' ages as needed.

Make your amazon's icon now, as a classic role-playing miniature. There are plenty of available services, not too expensive. Here's Shkaiyaan, designed after our first session of play, in the clothes as described for our chilly winter situation.



### *Shared reading*

After the second entry, each player chooses one other player in the group to read one of the entries in his or her book, privately.

A reader may pencil three, six, nine, or twelve Risk marks onto the amazon's sheet, noted as tally marks in the familiar slash-five fashion. Doing so is entirely at the reader's option, and the reason, or if there even is a reason, may never be inquired about or volunteered.

### *Risk*

If you have Risk marks on your sheet, then 6's count in your rolls as well. When a 6 appears, choose whether you will apply the Risk in a set of 5 or merely 1. To apply Risk, erase either a five-mark tally or a single mark from the sheet.

Applying a single Risk mark means something bad and permanent happens to a non-player amazon tribe member, drawing as much as possible upon events of play prior to this moment.

Applying a five-mark tally means the character is physically injured in any way appropriate for the track's Sphere. Draw upon whatever has been fictionally happening in that track so far. It's pretty easy for The Wild and Battle; for Strife, consider the range of physical harm that results from ostracism or secret hatred, such as a knifing in the dark, ritual punishment, untended injury, poisoning ...

An injured amazon has limited options.

- She cannot strive alone. To extend her track, i.e., to roll dice at all, it must be merged with another track using the ordinary rules to do so, including the required Clear Light of Day roll by her or by another amazon.
- She may not use the attribute associated with the track's Sphere.

When more than one amazon shares a track, and one or more has Risk marks, then the player of an amazon with the lower amount than another may transfer any number of five-mark tallies from that sheet to his or her own amazon. This may be done only at the moment of merging the tracks, i.e., you cannot then become the lower and take them back.

A track including one injured amazon with no chance of being merged is immediately resolved to the detriment of the tribe.

A twice-injured amazon must split off from the merged track

- This begins a new track. Remove the initial track for this Sphere, i.e. prior to the first merge.
- The other track or tracks continue independently from that point as well; if it included more than one original track then they remain merged.
- Unlike the first injured state, now she must strive alone. The player may roll dice and her track may not be subsequently merged. She is still prohibited from using the attribute associated with the track's Sphere.
- Death is close – rolling a third 6 will kill her.

If a twice-injured amazon survives an Episode, she is scarred in an appropriate fashion for the injury; describe the scar on her sheet.

### *Death of an amazon*

Directly after your character dies, you continue to narrate during the Episode concerning other players' amazons' tracks.

At the end of this Episode, the group participates in a special scene as a flashback to the final moments of the amazon's life, or the first of her death, however you want to see it. It's all about her acceptance by the Goddess, which is guaranteed. The Goddess loves her daughters and their efforts on their sisters' behalf, no matter what they've individually done which might offend, and she accepts this one to her without reservation. In her final moments, the amazon knows this. Play this scene together briefly and with respect, and find what confirmation you can in the tragedy of her death.

Conduct the following and final writing phase for this character as normal, with an entry pertaining to events before her death.

You may then excuse yourself from further play or make up a new amazon. She must be younger than the one who died. The new character may be drawn from the ranks of already-established characters, if you wish.

### *Advancement*

Amazons improve as Episodes are played.

- Resolving a Sphere to the benefit of the tribe allows you to improve one of your amazon's attributes to the next highest rank. You may do so more than once per Episode, but only once per given Sphere, and only once per track, i.e., if tracks were merged.
- Doing so while injured permits two of her attributes to be so improved.

If improvement puts the character singly at the highest rank for that attribute, then she gains the benefit described previously; if another character already had that benefit, she does not lose it.

If you improve an attribute that is already ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, then its rank remains unchanged and you get a Goddess token. Resolving a track to the detriment of the tribe removes the Goddess token, but resolving a track to the tribe's benefit while you have it attaches the Goddess token to that Sphere. This Sphere becomes Blessed, in harmony with the Goddess, and no tracks may threaten it again. If the track was merged and included more than one Sphere, only the one initially associated with this amazon receives the Blessing.

## Ending play

### *Different ways*

The current Episode is the last one under any of these outcomes:

- If two Spheres have received the Goddess' Blessing
- If all three Spheres are simultaneously in a failed state
- If all the player amazons are killed during this Episode

Play then concludes with a final round of writing.

Alternately, if a person fills up his or her booklet, then the game ends directly after a final Episode is played.

### *Wrapping up*

Reflect upon the whole arc of characterizations and tribal events throughout the course of the game. Discuss what you think happens to the amazon community after about a century or so. Afterward, each person keeps his or her amazon booklet.

### *Alternate cultural concepts*

Semi-historical Scythian, 1<sup>st</sup> century CE

Ecology: steppes, mountains, the Black Sea

Beasts: horse, falcon, serpent

Manner of dress: rugged, practical clothing, cuirass and helmet

Names: Battle Cry, Spearpoint, Blood Sister

Semi-historical Ahosi (Dahomey)

Ecology: heavy-forest mountains, lowland seacoast (Benin; so-called Ivory Coast)

Beasts: elephant, lion, giraffe

Manner of dress: wraparound kirtles, bare shoulders, trousers

Names: Isoke, Ikuseghan, Nosakhere, Oseye

Mythic-fantasy Greek (most depictions found in the U.S.), nominally 1100 BCE

Ecology: rocky islands, the eastern Mediterranean Sea

Beasts: horse, serpent, cow (not a joke; a dangerous beast)

Manner of dress: draped tunics, skirts for war, crested helmets

Names: Adrasteia, Kyrilla, Agleia, Alexa, Klymene

Idealized medieval (Christian de Troyes + Malory + Hollywood), nominally 12<sup>th</sup> century CE

Ecology: oak forest and cleared fields, Normandy, Brittany

Beasts: boar, bear, wolf

Manner of dress: plate armor, early Renaissance

Names: Aalis, Désiré, Fulka, Robine

Unicorn fantasy, idealized ethnicity, elvishness optional

Ecology: idealized Celtic, highland Scots, British fairy tales

Beasts: unicorn, griffin, mantichore, wyvern

Manner of dress: fantasy late-medieval, with millennial fashion sense

Names: Morwenna, Yvrien, Taniel, Maeve, Siobhan

## Acknowledgments

Playtesters at KimCon 2019: Jessica, Lucas, and Emil, with Kim Nolemo as vocal observer.

## Influences and references

### Music

Inspirations include the song “Pale Blue Eyes” by The Velvet Underground from their album *The Velvet Underground* (1969); “Friend of the Devil” by the Grateful Dead from their *American Beauty* album (1970) and “Sunrise” from their Terrapin Station album (1978; “Daemon Lover” by Shocking Blue from their *Scorpio's Dance* album (1970); just about the whole *Sundown* album by Gordon Lightfoot (1974); “Tangled Up in Blue” by Bob Dylan from his *Blood on the Tracks* album (1975); and “Crazy on You” by Heart from their *Dreamboat Annie* album (1976).

### Games

Inspirations and precedent for the setting and characters include the Unicorn clan from *Legend of the Five Rings* by John Wick, the Amazon army pieces in *Dragon Dice* by Lester Smith, the Yelornans and Vingans from Greg Stafford's Glorantha setting (*RuneQuest*, *HeroQuest*), the Mimix illustrations by Todd Lockwood for Reiner Knizia's *Blue Moon*, and the cover illustration by Brom for the *Pulp Dungeons* adventure *The Amazons' Gold* by James M. Wood. System inspirations include *Prince Valiant* by Greg Stafford, *The Questing Beast* by James V. West, *Best Friends* by Gregor Hutton, *Beloved* by Ben Lehman, *Bacchanal* and *Thy Vernal Chieftains* by Paul Czege, the latter for the concept of Spheres, and *The Exchange 2.0* by Levi Kornelsen. The diarist or inter-play fiction techniques are inspired by the “bluebooking” experiences of the Forte group playing *Champions* with K. C. Ryan, as described in the amateur press alliance zine *The Clobberin' Times*.

### Literature and fiction

Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*; also the romantic story elements in *The Claw of the Conciliator* by Gene Wolfe. If you're interested in the traumatic fiction I found most compelling as a younger person, see the story “Catman” by Harlan Ellison and his collection of stories *Love Ain't Nothing But Sex Misspelled*. Also influential are the excellent short story collections *Amazons* and *Amazons II* compiled by Jessica Amanda Salmonson; see also her Tomoe Gozen trilogy, which is not about amazons as a community but deeply influenced the core issues of this game.

As a necessary counter-example, the loathsome novel *Snowbrother* by S. M. Stirling is flatly excluded from the status of an influence upon this game.

### Film & TV

The Pedro Almodóvar film *Live Flesh*. Also, I suppose it would be unfair to omit *Xena, Warrior Princess*, which deserves credit for including more solid content of this kind than it had to.

### Amazons non-fiction

Lyn Webster Wilde's *On the Trail of the Women Warriors* is a good example of modern scholarship which really, really wants the legend to be rooted in fact. References from antiquity include the myths of Herakles and an account from Herodotus. The term “Amazon” has been variously interpreted too; the business about burning or amputating one breast seems to have been made up in a long telephone game.

Documented history includes inferences from burials of Scythians, Sarmatians, or Persians, in which women's bodies were honored as warriors. Modern military history includes several all-women squads, most famously the Mino fighters (the so-called “Dahomey amazons”), regiments of various nations in WWI and other wars of that period, and the Women's Civil Guard of the Reds in Finnish civil war.

None of the reliable historical references seem to have anything to do with separatist communities or even distinctive ideology or religion – just bad-ass women participating in war, that's all. I hope I'm not the one telling you this for the first time, but all the stuff about a Great Goddess and women-centric original cultures is totally made up. So is the concept of women's culture being about consensus in contrast to men's culture being about competition.

As for gender ... does being "female" mean a thing? A bad thing? A *damned* thing, if you take my meaning? Conversely, is it any better to construe the female human as the "good" one, more connected to nature or more intuitively moral? And in using that model as the foundation, is the woman warrior an ideal or an objectification? By whom, and for what?

For work daring to ask the harder questions, such as why militant women are frequently better at it than men, see Eileen MacDonald's *Shoot the Women First*.

### *Sin, non-fiction*

The philosophers tell us about category error, when something that is specifically metaphysically significant in some way is presumed also to be necessarily physically present and reinforced, either through human action or vague "natural forces." They don't call it an error for nothing. Miracles are a category error. So are prayers.

So with sin, the big category error is the embedded belief that the truth will out – that the universe cannot bear such a profanation. If you do this thing, it will result in social revelation and hence pain to others ... or if unrevealed, than in emergent personal suffering for oneself or others ... or failing those, in the full weight of consequential coincidence descending upon you or upon those you care about.

If you recognize that all of that is merely a subroutine to category error, then it's intriguing to consider why sin is sexy, and why sex is so often sinful. For all cultures and peoples, too, go figure.

The theological literature regarding sin is way past my powers to summarize here. For some other thoughts on the matter, see Arthur Schopenhauer's *On the Freedom of the Will* and Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

### *Real life*

Names and events omitted.

### *A bit of context*

I have written four short, edgy role-playing designs focusing on different aspects of religion. The first concerns religiosity and mysticism, the second concerns religious observance and identity, and the third concerns religious institutions and society. *Daemon Lover* jumped into my head afterwards. None of them concern belief or faith, or even the direct application of doctrine to behavior.

Each one was inspired by terms from the 2011 rounds of the Ronnies Awards: "red" and "beauty" from a round I didn't get around to running, "wings" and "morning," and "old" and "skull." This one used "amazon" and "lust" from the final round.

Also, each was designed by extending existing theory about role-playing into new territory, as in, "According to theory, this would work," as opposed to observing actual play as the foundation for the rules. Therefore each one is distinctly outside my own comfort zone of play procedures.

**TRIBE**

Element

Totem

Ethnic distinction		Way of life	
Nearby communities		Leadership	
Status of men		Weapons	
Age structure		Gender terms	
Male children			
Sexuality			
Motherhood			
Love and marriage			

Name

Age

Scars

DAEMON LOVER

Attribute	Rank	Titles and distinctions
Nature's Friend		
Warrior Spirit		
Generous Heart		
The Clear Light of Day		

