

# Daemon Lover

Draft  
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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. 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 really break the rules, and must be kept secret. This is about whatever it's called when "only too far is far enough."

What sort of rules? Moral ones, and that's all. Therefore I'm not talking about awful acts which harm others directly. Nor things which are *only* institutional judgments and rules. Nor socially-organized actions – anything visible or known. Whatever rules apply to private and consensual acts.

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? How can an observer regard the culprit as simultaneously subhuman yet also identify with them so strongly?

## Preparation

Each player gets a single amazon icon, an amazon sheet, and an ordinary bluebook. Set out as well at least one of each Sphere token (The Wild, Battle, Strife), an equal number of two-sided Ending tokens, several Goddess tokens, twice the number of players in Injury counters, a big pile of Risk 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. Choose a basic culture and visual framework for the tribe, which also specifies the local geography and environment:

- Semi-historical Scythian
- Idealized central-eastern African
- Idealized medieval (Malory + Hollywood)
- Mythic-fantasy Greek (most depictions found in the U.S.)
- Unicorn fantasy, idealized ethnicity, elvishness optional
- Pan-Pagan fantasy

These are invocations, not constraints – whatever creates the most striking and productive image for play, as the group collectively decides, without the need to bring in much history or causal world-explaining.

2. Consider these to be fixed: the Goddess, the elements they conceive as fundamental\*, their direct experience of Nature as a perceived whole, the tribe's animal friends, the individuals' celebration of the body, their unmistakable and imposing warrior spirit, their ready and effective violence, the lack of men as meaningful beings in their society, and the proven survival of the community.

\* elements: moonlight, precious metals, growing wood, iron, fresh water, fire, pitch darkness, fertile soil, blood, the sea – choose one to be the most powerful

3. Determine randomly using 1d6 for each:

- 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: 1-2 helotry or similar de-privileged but in-culture practice, 3-5 exclusion excepting ritual mating, 6 almost-ordinary interaction excepting potential partnering
- Age structure and status: 1-2 vertical with privileged elders, 3 vertical with privileged young adults, 4-5 pyramidal with privileged elders, 6 pyramidal with privileged young adults
- Way of life [apply to any ecology]: 1-3 settled agriculture, 4-6 nomadic hunting and herding
- Weapon specialization (twice): 1 lance, 2 bow, 3 axe, 4 throwing axe, 5 spear, 6 short sword
- 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:

- Ethnic distinction from neighboring communities: none, minor, striking
- The tribe's animal friend species: anything dramatic, beautiful, and easily anthropomorphized

- Manner of dress they favor: exhibitionist, puritanic, completely practical, like everyone else
- What they do with male children: infanticide, exposure, expulsion to other community, inclusion in specific status
- Sexuality: puritanic, uninhibited within structured private arrangement, openly permissive
- Motherhood: privileged social status or mundane task
- Romance and matrimony
- Leadership: hereditary single-chief, ruling clan with matriarch, ruling council with appointed chief, representative democracy, referendum democracy

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.* Go ahead and include things which aren't necessarily right or 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 either a named religious status marked by clothing or an emblem, or some experience with outside, non-amazon communities, past or present.

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.

Glue your character sheet onto the front cover of your bluebook.

## How to play

Begin with spoken group play, 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 bluebook 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 follows some rules about content, as the amazon is transgressing against the values of her community.

## Spoken group play

Spoken group play 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. My notes say, "Prince Valiant with unicorns."

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: describe what your amazon is doing relative to what someone else described, extend what you stated your amazon to be doing, invent other characters interacting with your or any other amazon, and color it all up to the nines. Validate one another's input by developing it.

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. Name which of the following **Spheres** is most relevant to this problem.

- 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 circumstances destabilize the tribe, creating factions or aggravating existing ones, prompting extreme actions

Set down the token for this Sphere in front of you on the table. Describe how your amazon is currently in a position to do something about the problem, using the Attribute associated with that Sphere, and set your amazon's icon on top of the Sphere token. This begins a **track** for your amazon.

Move your amazon 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.

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.

Doing this over and over leaves a little trail of dice starting with the attribute icon; that's the track. Although a given track was begun by using a specific attribute, rolls on that track after the first may employ any attribute as you see fit, as long as you describe the amazon taking action appropriate for the one you're using. (Sequences of attribute use within a given Sphere yield very interesting fictional results.)

When beginning a track, you may choose any of the three Spheres; it's perfectly all right if one or more is absent in a given Episode, or to duplicate a Sphere already in play.

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	Inclement weather
	4	Defensive animal / predator
	5	Outsider
	6	Fatigue and pain

BATTLE	2	Trouble with arms or armor
	3	The fog of battle
	4	Difficult terrain
	5	Distinctive foe
	6	Fatigue and pain

STRIFE	2	A hidden hurt finds expression
	3	Someone is unnecessarily hurt
	4	Someone cannot be found

	5	A secret can no longer be kept
	6	Fatigue and pain

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 the track's starting attribute, and bad-ass solutions for yours based on whatever attribute you use. It's all protagonizing; no one is invested in making your amazon look bad or lose. Another way to look at it is that although some minor strategy plays into it, nothing about this set of techniques involves making tough choices.

Everyone is encouraged to write down very brief phrases, one to four words, on slips of paper, called Motifs, which are set out on the table and invoked during anyone's further narrations when and if they feel like it. Anyone is also empowered to remove a Motif, again, whenever they'd like. At the end of the Episode, discard all but one of the Motifs, which will be set out at the beginning of the next Episode.

You may merge tracks to continue as a single line, 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. When a merged track is lengthened, both amazon characters roll into a single dice pool. When a merged track's length is assessed for its 1's, include the pre-merged track portion with less 1's in it.

There is no limit either to the number of tracks merged or to the number of amazons that can be in a track.

The Clear Light of Day may also be used as an ordinary attribute roll, with success permitting the player 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.

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 scenario or add her icon to join another amazon in her current track, at that point adopting the rules for merged tracks above. A Clear Light of Day roll is not required for the latter option.

If you resolve your amazon's track 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, at that point adopting the rules for merged tracks above. A Clear Light of Day roll is not required for the latter option.

When a track is resolved, gather up the dice and set a win/loss token next to the Sphere token that began that track.

The Episode is concluded when all existing tracks are resolved. For the first Episode played, this is likely to be generally successful. For each track, decide as a group how the benefits and detriments apply to the various Spheres, 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 bluebooking, this is likely to change.

### ***Bluebooking***

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 absolutely forbidden interaction with a character who does not otherwise appear in play. It may or may not include sex but must always be intimate. 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 bluebook, 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 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 is 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 bluebooking is kept private – for the moment.

### ***As play continues***

#### ***Time and the tribe***

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

#### ***Shared bluebooking***

After the second bluebooking session, each player chooses one other player in the group to read one of the two entries in his or her book, privately. Then with each Episode, increase the scope of reading by increments, so the next time, let two people read one entry, or let one person read two entries; and so on.

A reader may put Risk marks onto the character sheet, expressed as tally marks in multiples of 3. In other words, add tally marks in three-mark units, but notate them in the familiar slash-five fashion. Doing so is utterly at the reader's option, never articulated whether it's because you want to see the character in action because you like her, or because you think she deserves to die.

After the third bluebooking session, you may permit another person to contribute to your bluebook, but only if he or she has already read anything in it.

### *Risk*

Risk marks are represented by Risk tokens during ordinary play. Collect as many as your sheet indicates when the Season begins.

If you have any Risk tokens at all, 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.

Applying a set of five Risk tokens means the character is injured. It also means those Risk tokens are removed from play and the corresponding number of marks are erased from the sheet.

Injury's fiction depends on the track's Sphere – draw upon whatever has been fictionally happening in that track so far. Pretty easy for Wild and Battle; for Community, consider the range of physical harm such as a knifing in the dark, ritual punishment, untended injury, poisoning ...

An injured amazon has limited options: her track must be merged with another, using the ordinary rules to do so, in order to extend it. A twice-injured amazon may act alone, but death is close – rolling a third 6 will kill her.

Using merely one Risk token means something bad and permanent happens to a non-player amazon tribe member, drawing upon some detail established in play prior to this moment. The Risk token is removed from play, but the corresponding Risk mark remains on the character sheet and therefore will return in subsequent Episodes.

When more than one amazon shares a track, and one or more has Risk tokens, then player of the amazon with the lower amount may transfer however many he or she chooses to his or her own amazon.

### *Death of an amazon*

Directly after your character dies, you continue to play during the Episode. You can still start a track, but they better be joined or merged because they'll automatically fail otherwise; obviously, you can still narrate as normal concerning other players' amazons' tracks.

At the end of this Episode, the group participates in a special scene – 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 brief scene together with respect, and find what confirmation you can in the tragedy of her death.

Conduct the following bluebooking phase 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. 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 gets an amazon one level, and doing so while injured gets her two. A level is mechanically expressed by increasing one of your attributes to the next highest rank. If this 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 so increase an attribute that is already ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, then its rank remains unchanged and you get a Goddess token, which is spent if and when you win a track later. Spending the Goddess token means that the tribe is now Blessed, in harmony with this Sphere, and no tracks may threaten it again.

### *Ending play*

#### *Different ways*

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

- If two Spheres are successfully resolved with the Goddess' Blessing
- If all three Spheres are simultaneously in a failed state
- If all the player amazons are killed during an episode

Play then concludes with a final round of bluebooking.

Alternately, if a person fills up his or her bluebook, 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.

### *Influences and references*

#### *Music*

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

#### *Games*

Inspirations and precedent for the setting and characters include the Unicorn clan from *Legend of the Five Rings* (author John Wick), the Amazon army pieces in *Dragon Dice*, 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 adventure *The Amazons' Gold* for Pulp Dungeons by James M. Wood. System inspirations include *Prince Valiant* by Greg Stafford, *The Pool* and especially *The Questing Beast* by James V. West for the 1/6 dice pool resolution, *Best Friends* by Gregor Hutton, *Annalise* by Nathan Paoletta for the Motifs, *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 bluebooking techniques are inspired by the 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 mythos 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 notable 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 supposed to be physically reinforced – either to be prevented physically (for a wrong thing), or expected to result in some physical consequence (something bad, for a wrong thing). 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. 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.

If you recognize that all of that is merely a subroutine to category error, then it's even more bizarre to consider why sin is sexy, and why sex is so often sin. 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.