

# Evil Incarnate

Depiction of Demons in Art History and Mythology

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Demons have been a recurring theme in mythologies around the world for thousands of years. They have provided a source of artistic inspiration because of their peculiar characteristics and the mysticism surrounding them, letting artists express their creativity without limits. The objective of this thesis was to examine the way demons had been depicted historically and if that information could be applied to creating concept art.

The theoretical part of the thesis explores the origins of demons in different religions and cultures and the ways they were portrayed in art. Books and articles written on the subject were used as the main sources of information, accompanied with pictures of historical art pieces featuring demons. A quantitative study was conducted to analyze the occurrence of common physical features in descriptions of demons. A project consisting of two concept art illustrations was produced to demonstrate the application of the ideas covered in the thesis.

The research showed that similarities and common themes can be found between different religions and cultures, suggesting that the mythological imagery arises from deep-seated mental patterns in humans. It was discovered that demons often become manifestations of fears and uncontrollable forces, pictured as terrifying creatures bringing misfortune. The idea that humans represent order as opposed to the chaos of nature was found to be one of the main motifs in depiction of demons. Using those models as abstract guidelines proved to be a resourceful tool for concept art and design.

While this thesis presents only one theme, similar studies that analyze the historical origins of art and mythology could be conducted on other subjects of artistic expression and imagination. Because of the abstract nature of such themes, different research methods should be utilized to reveal other aspects of the ideas discussed in the research.

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Key words: demons, art history, concept art, illustration, mythology, symbolism

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The word 'demon' is derived from the Latin word *daemon* (Chevalier 1996, 284; Valk 1997, 46; Encyclopaedia Britannica 1999). Daemons, or *Daimones*, were godlike beings in Greek mythology (Chevalier 1996, 284; Valk 1997, 46; Encyclopaedia Britannica 1999; Turunen 2002, 76). They were often regarded as beneficial to humans and even acted as guardian angels, but as time passed, the term came to be used for minor gods and eventually evil or malevolent spirits (Chevalier 1996, 284; Valk 1997, 46; Encyclopaedia Britannica 1999). The early Christians gave a new meaning for the word demon as we now know it (Valk 1997, 46; Turunen 2002, 76). Modern interpretations of demons are associated with supernatural spirits that act as evil tormentors and seducers, causing misfortune to humans (Valk 1997, 46; Encyclopaedia Britannica 1999; Turunen 2002, 76).

The history of mythological creatures and characters depicted in art provides an interesting perspective to the cultural development of humans and religions around the world. Demons are one of the most diverse subjects in art history in terms of style and design (Dell 2010, 32). They appear in many different forms, ranging from animals and humans to hybrids of different creatures and surrealistic manifestations (Peltomaa-Katajala & Toivo 2004, 59). Multiple artists have made their legacy based on portrayal of demonic monsters and other religious imagery, inspiring later generations with their imaginative approaches and their ability to express fantastical subjects. The beginnings of fantasy art as a genre can be traced to religious artwork depicting angels, demons, and similar supernatural creatures (Moffat 2008). This thesis aims to discover the common themes and the abstract ideas behind the depiction of demons, analysing the subject from theoretical and practical standpoints.

The symbolism of demonic imagery is rooted in the fears and beliefs of ancient humans, who had genuine reasons to be aware of the chaotic forces of nature and the complex workings of the human mind (Ions 1997, 6-7). There were no plausible scientific explanations available in the early days of civilization, which lead to superstitious world views and religious ideas that helped humans process

the dark and difficult things in their life (Ions 1997, 6; Neil 2011, 52). The feeling of lack of control and power forced people to create physical representations for the abstract ideas that affected the world around them. Demons became the reason for every bad thing that happened – from the droughts and winds that ruined the crops to the diseases and mental illnesses that appeared seemingly from nowhere (Lewis 2001, 64).

Concept art is used as a problem-solving tool in the pre-production phase of games, animation, and movies, enabling artists and designers to develop visual ideas for various assets before committing to the time-consuming process of producing finalized designs. Fictional genres like fantasy or science fiction require visualization for imaginary concepts, ranging from creatures and characters to environments and props. The concept design process usually includes combining ideas, borrowing from other resources, or distorting forms and shapes to create new visual ideas. The abstract side of concept design revolves around defining themes and motifs that could inspire and influence the visualization. This thesis focuses on the thematic aspects of historical and mythological art depicting demons with the goal to provide different starting points for creating interesting concept art illustrations. (Concept Art Empire n.d.; Raymond 2014.)

To understand how the ideas represented in depiction of demons are converted to visual design, we need to break down the different features common to demonic imagery. What are the most identifiable visual characteristics of demons in art and mythology? What separates a demon from natural creatures and humans? How is supernaturalism portrayed in the design of demonic characters? All these questions need to be answered to fully comprehend the process of creating believable illustrations of demons.

## 2 PORTRAYAL OF DEMONS IN ART

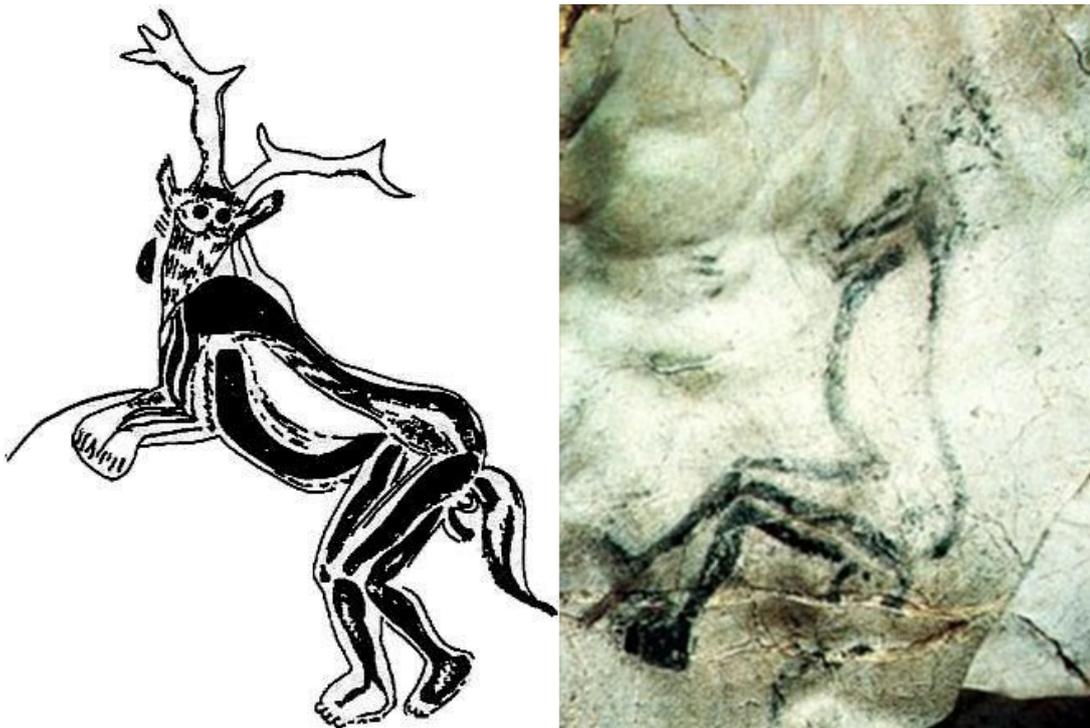
Demons are some of the most familiar types of monsters to us through their depiction in art and literature. They are often fantastical and strange in their appearance, limited only by artists' imagination. Illustration of demons allows painters and sculptors to break away from realism and experiment with unnaturalistic designs and abnormal features, inspiring others to continue exploring the possibilities of imaginative art. The lack of knowledge about natural world combined with the imagination of ancient humans paved way for the portrayal of demons as supernatural monsters with manifold terrifying appearances. Analysing these topics shows how the depiction of demons has evolved historically.

### 2.1 Of monsters and men

Portrayal of terrifying creatures and evil beings has been an intriguing subject for artists throughout history, especially in the ancient times when the world was still full of mystery, and real monsters were present in nature in the form of dangerous animals. It is not unreasonable to think that the appearance of demons and other monsters reflects the visual features of large predators and other dangerous animals that presented a real threat to early humans. Professor of philosophy Stephen Asma (2009, 24) states that in the early stages of human evolution, being "grabbed by sharp claws, dragged into a dark hole, and eaten alive was not an abstraction."

Humans have been drawing pictures of monsters since the birth of art. According to author Ari Turunen (2002, 37), many legends tell that the world was inhabited by monsters before men arrived. This suggests that the idea of monsters must be as old as the idea of humanity, if not older. Depicting monsters has always been a beloved subject for artists since the earliest cave paintings that included animal-human hybrids, sparking the first mythical stories. On the walls of the Trois Frères caves in south-west France are sixteen-thousand years old paintings of liminal beings, combining human and animal elements to create a strange creature (Picture 1). The features of the being resemble those of a monster to modern

humans but could have represented a shaman dressed in ritualistic clothing or even a god worshipped by a group of people. Even though most cave art depicts various megafauna, including carnivores and large herbivores, illustrations of half-human, half-animal creatures – therianthropes – are present in some of the oldest cave paintings ever found. Therianthropes were portrayed in Indonesian cave paintings over 44000 years ago, suggesting that even the early humans were able to imagine supernatural beings. (Turunen 2002, 37; Dell 2010, 7, 12; Ehrenreich 2019; Rigby 2019.)



PICTURE 1. Reproduction of Henri Breuil's drawing (left) of a cave painting from the Trois-Frères cave circa 13000 BC and the original cave art (right) (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1999; Wikimedia Commons 2001)

In addition to channeling the fears and supernatural beliefs of early humans, demons enabled artists to experiment with unrealistic features and be inspired by the imaginative written descriptions of these complex creatures. Demons and monsters often contrast the good gods and heroes of folk stories in both their personality and appearance. Benevolent spiritual beings, such as angels in Judaism, Christian, and Islamic religions, are opposed by malevolent spirits, often known as demons. The juxtaposition between these dualistic forces created a source of inspiration for artists, letting them visualize both extremes of good and evil characters. (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1999.)

## 2.2 Artistic inspiration

Mythological characters and creatures in general have provided a creative outlet for artists as their appearance is not restricted to realism and allows painters and sculptors to push their imagination. Ancient Egyptian gods with their animalistic features are good examples of unnatural physical elements inspiring the portrayal of supernatural characters (Neil 2011, 44). A statue from 680-660 BC Egypt shows the god Anubis having the head of a jackal and the body of a human (Picture 2). The depiction of demons takes this imaginativeness even further (Väisänen 2015, 129). Even the written descriptions of demonic creatures in religious texts are often quite extraordinary. Throughout history, art has been elevated to new heights through the fantastical depictions of devils and demons (Dell 2010, 39).



Picture 2. Part of a statue depicting the anthropomorphic god Anubis from 680-660 BC (Wikimedia Commons 2012a)

Some of the gods of oppressed pagan religions were either rebranded as demons, or their appearance was given to the demons of Christianity, further emphasizing the idea that animalistic features were signs of evil influence (Peltonmaa-Katajala & Toivo 2004, 80). Even though demons are present in many mythologies and religions around the world, the demons of Christianity have been



portrayed in exceptionally peculiar appearances. The Church was not too strict about the visual depiction of demons, which lead to artists inventing their own forms for the monstrous. Along with other religious subjects, demons became a repeating theme in art by the Middle Ages. The creative freedom can be seen in many statues and ornamental carvings from that time, and even more so in paintings depicting biblical stories. (Dell 2010, 32, 39.)

Many legends of the saints included a need to visualize demons and devils, such as the story of Saint Anthony, who was tested by demonic creatures that tormented him. One of the most well-known pieces of art depicting the torment of Saint Anthony is Martin Schongauer's copper engraving from the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Picture 3). Schongauer's work even inspired young Michelangelo Buonarroti to create his own version of the piece (Picture 4). Other examples of art with Saint Anthony's demons being portrayed in interesting forms are *Tentazioni di Sant'Antonio* by Bernardo Parentino from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* by Joos van Craesbeeck 150-200 years after Schongauer (Picture 5; Picture 6). (Dell 2010, 32, 39.)



PICTURE 3. Portion of *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* – Martin Schongauer's engraving from the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Wikimedia Commons 2009)



PICTURE 4. Portion of Michelangelo Buonarroti's painted copy of Schongauer's engraving from circa 1487-88 (Wikimedia Commons 2013)



PICTURE 5. Detail of *Tentazioni di Sant'Antonio* by Bernardo Parentino from the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Wikimedia Commons 2012b)



PICTURE 6. Detail of *The Temptation of St Anthony* – oil painting by Joos van Craesbeeck from circa 1650 (Wikimedia Commons 2015b)

Many artists specialized in the art of portraying demons, paving way for others to push their imagination to new levels. Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch was one of the most influential artists known for his imaginative depictions of demons and other religious subjects. Hieronymus Bosch introduced frightening fusions of animals and humans as demons in his paintings that depicted monsters with birds' heads, fish tails and other animalistic features (Bosing 1987, 35-36). According to Historian Christopher Dell (2010, 39), Hieronymus Bosch was "the master of the monstrous", whose depictions of demons included "bizarre animals, giant birds, limbs mutating into branches or other objects, bodies hollowed out and inhabited". *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, one of Bosch's most notable artworks, is a three-part painting that illustrates Paradise, the Garden of Earthly Delights, and Hell with strange demonic creatures and beasts (Picture 7). Fantasy author Neil Gaiman (Jones 2015, 8) describes Bosch's painting as follows: "It's a painting that grows more interesting as you head left to right, into the darkness, into the horror, mostly because you can see how much fun Bosch was having inventing these things, giving them shape, letting them loose in our heads."



PICTURE 7. Portion of Hieronymus Bosch's painting *The Garden of Earthly Delights* from the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Wikimedia Commons 2005c)

Christianity is not the only religion with a prosperous history of depicting demons in art. Almost every religion has their own visualizations of evil creatures and monsters, some of which have long-lasting traditions of creating art inspired by demonic creatures. Demons have been extensively featured in art and other forms in Chinese, Indian, and Japanese mythologies. Utagawa Kuniyoshi, a Japanese ukiyo-e style painter depicted multiple demon-like figures in his wood block print in 1850 (Picture 8). The ancient Japanese legend of the Night Parade of One Hundred Demons, *Hyakki Yagyō*, has been a source of inspiration for thousands of paintings and prints as well (Picture 9). The parade of demons allowed artists to express their creativity unrestrictedly. According to Dell (2010, 146), the demons depicted include "dancing cats, animated furniture, all manner of ghosts, demon and devil, distorted faces and masks - and plenty of things that defy description."



PICTURE 8. Portion of Utagawa Kuniyoshi's triptych *Ghosts, Devils and the King of Hell* (The Trustees of the British Museum 2008)



PICTURE 9. *Hyakki Yakō* by Kawanabe Kyōsai from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Wikimedia Commons 2006a)

### 2.3 Imagination and ignorance

The monstrous forms of demons are not just the result of artists' imagination. Their appearance is based on stories told by adventurers and people who encountered unfamiliar creatures and humans in distant lands. Ignorance combined with the wild imagination of the people of ancient cultures sparked the myths of demons and other strange creatures. Unfamiliarity and fear of the unknown is personified to extreme in the depiction of monsters. People with different customs and skin colours are thought as abnormal, but people with a dog's head or a mouth in their chest are even weirder. (Asma 2009, 26.)

According to Asma (2009, 22), the Roman natural philosopher Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE) writes about the wonders of India and Ethiopia as follows: "there are men with dog's heads who are covered with wild beasts' skins; they bark instead of speaking and live by hunting and fowling, for which they use their nails." Dog-headed people, *Cynocephali*, have been present in many mythologies around the world. Humans with dog heads, similar to Pliny's description, were illustrated in medieval European publications (Picture 10). Pliny also writes about fast moving satyrs in India that sometimes walk like humans, sometimes on all fours. Asma further suggests that the satyrs may have actually been monkeys that were misinterpreted as "exotic pseudo-human races" by the ancient Romans. Similarly, the dog-headed people could have been Old World yellow baboons of eastern Africa. Even the scientific name of yellow baboons, *Papio cynocephalus*, reflects the old beliefs. (Asma 2009, 36-37.)



PICTURE 10. Hartmann Schedel's illustration of a dog-headed man from 1493 (Wikimedia Commons 2006e)

There are many theories explaining the stories of mythical beasts and creatures of folklore. For example, the fossilized bones of prehistoric creatures were a viable cause for the stories of gigantic beasts in ancient myths. Skulls of mastodons found around the Mediterranean were thought to be the skulls of the legendary monsters, cyclops, because of the large nasal opening, similar to an eye, in the middle of the skull. Today we are familiar with concepts such as evolution and extinction that help us understand why we don't see these monsters walking among us. It is understandable that the ancient humans were baffled by the monstrous bones they discovered. The world was mostly unexplored, and it would have been reasonable to think that dinosaur-like creatures still lived in far-off places. During that time nature was often stranger than fiction as exotic animals were still being discovered by explorers. (Asma 2009, 30, 32, 35.)

### 3 DEMONS IN MYTHOLOGY

Demons are recurring supernatural creatures in almost every mythology and religion around the world. The stories of the origins of demons are often quite similar between different religions, portraying them as betrayers of gods or followers of great evil entities that want to destroy the world of men. Demons represent the physical apparitions of disasters, diseases, and sins, symbolizing the difficult problems humans face regardless of their culture or language. What causes these common themes to emerge in so many different regions of the world?

#### 3.1 Origins of demons

Dell (2010, 164) describes demons as “strange beings in the world of religion and magic.” Sometimes advocates of evil, sometimes just mischievous tricksters – demons are present in many myths and stories around the world. They symbolize controversial subjects such as illnesses, natural disasters, and the darker aspects of human behaviour. According to historian Veronica Ions (1997), myths originated in ancient times with the purpose of setting traditions that connected people and held them together. The dramatic tales of mythology can offer answers to difficult existential questions. (Ions 1997, 6.)

Demons and monsters offer concrete representations to complex or unexplainable issues and phenomena. Fears and instinctual phobias can lead to negative projections and exaggerations, giving birth to tales of evil creatures that exist only to bring harm and suffering to humans. Monsters are metaphors that play an important role in shaping our consciousness. According to Asma (2009, 13-14), theorists Mark Johnson and George Lakoff suggest that metaphors work as lenses for processing our experiences. The idea that metaphors shape our thinking leads to the realization that imagination is an active force constructing our picture of reality. If our entire perception of the world is based on imagination, monsters – products of imagination – might simultaneously really exist in the world and be something we created. (Asma 2009, 14.)



In Christian beliefs, demons are thought to be the angels lead by Lucifer, the angel of light, who later became Satan. They were expelled from heaven and turned evil, planning for the downfall of mankind. The fallen angels became travesties of their original image and purpose. The image of Satan, or the Devil, reflected his evil role as the enemy of God in Christianity – his appearance was commonly that of an ugly humanoid with bat wings, hairy body, horns, and tusks or fangs (Picture 11). Christian demons can be adapted from other religions as well, either directly or relabeled as demons. According to lecturer Carita Forsgren (2020), during her visit in Bangalore, India, in the 1990's, a local Christian theologian argued that they admit the existence of Hindu gods, which are believed to be demons that should not be worshipped by Christians. (Ions 1997, 84; Valk 1997, 46, 57, 90; Peltomaa-Katajala & Toivo 2004, 38; Wickham 2012, 73.)



PICTURE 11. Portion of Hans Memling's *Hell* from circa 1485 (Wikimedia Commons 2011b)

Similar stories can be found in most mythologies and religions. Demons are usually either minions of a greater supernatural being, or sporadic evil spirits that roam the earth. Anti-gods and demons are numerous in Hindu mythology, in which gods often act as protectors of mankind, battling against demons and their armies. In Hinduism, demons are symbols of evil or maliciousness, causing conflicts and disease, depicted as monsters with human and beast-like characteristics. Dakini, savage monsters depicted with blood dripping from their mouths, are a race of demons in Hindu mythology who serve the goddess Kali. Kali's appearance is similar to demons – she wears a skull necklace; her skin is dark as night and her tongue is long and red (Picture 12). In Japan demonic creatures ranged from animal spirits to the ogre-like *oni* and many other supernatural beings with distinct appearances and personalities (Picture 13). (Katz 1995, 36-37, 42; Lewis 2001, 113-114; Dell 2010, 9; Neil 2011, 30.)



PICTURE 12. Depiction of Kali by Raja Ravi Varma from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Wikimedia Commons 2012d)



PICTURE 13. Kiyomasa Kawanabe, 1864 depiction of an oni chanting a Buddhist prayer (Wikimedia Commons 2004a)

### 3.2 Fear

Demons are usually depicted as frightening monsters that thrive on provoking fear in humans. Psychologist Paul Ekman (n.d.) says that fear is a universal emotion shared by all humans. Fear is experienced when we feel the threat of harm and is an important tool keeping us safe from potential danger (Ekman n.d.). According to Asma (2009, 4), fears and phobias could be interpreted as “examples of pre-set mental circuits in the human brain”. For example, arachnophobia is a remnant of our early days as a species when we lived on the savanna. A similar thought was expressed by psychoanalyst Carl Jung who was convinced that we inherit unconscious mental images from our ancestors much like inherited physical attributes (Ions 1987, 7).

Demons, like the monsters of folklore, were often used to protect people, especially children, from the dangers of wilderness. Forests were full of dangerous animals that were demonized because of the threat of getting harmed or killed.

Rivers and lakes were inhabited by mythological creatures that could drown the unsuspecting passer-by, if they weren't cautious enough. The Japanese kappa and the Finnish näkki were similar supernatural water spirits that occasionally tried to drown humans who got too near the water. (Ions 1997, 95; Turunen 2002, 106.)

Turunen (2002, 17) believes fear of the dark is the basis of horror. Fear of the dark is a well-known example of innate fears many of us have experienced since childhood. Because of our maladjustment to darkness, we lose our ability to sense our surroundings in the night and feel vulnerable and unsafe. This could explain why night-time is considered the time of monsters and demons in many mythologies. Swiss artists Henry Fuseli depicted nightmares as demonic phenomena in his famous painting *The Nightmare* in 1781 (Picture 14). Anthropologist Hans Biedermann (1993, 429) acknowledges that evil spirits are believed to live in the dark of night, vandalizing the lives of defenceless humans. Even though we are not in danger of being eaten by trolls on the way home, the fascination with these creatures – and the fear of them – remains (Dell 2010, 10).



PICTURE 14. *The Nightmare* by Henry Fuseli from 1781 (Wikimedia Commons 2006c)

According to Asma (2009, 24), Barbara Ehrenreich (1997) writes that humans are and used to be fragile creatures, more likely to have been prey than predators in the early days of human evolution. Modern psychologists believe it is normal for humans to unconsciously exaggerate perceptions and that these misperceptions are affected by our different emotional and cognitive states (Asma 2009, 22). Evolutionarily, it is useful for humans to see creatures as more dangerous than they really are (Asma 2009, 23). Perhaps this is the reason why monsters and depictions of terrifying creatures came into being. Dell (2010, 10) references to Carl Jung who believed that monsters functioned as essential tools in our development, "relaying to us important messages about our psychological state and representing the 'otherness' within ourselves, the division between 'a bright day-world and a dark night-world peopled with fabulous monsters.'" Demons take the role of monsters in many religions and cultures, reflecting real dangers to us historically, explaining their frightening nature (Ions 1997, 82).

### **3.3 External forces**

Common demonic symbolism revolves around external forces that humans have little to no power over. Natural disasters, diseases, and other uncontrollable adversities have caused fear in humans for ages. One possible explanation for the emergence of monsters and demons is that ancient people were figuring out a language for processing our internal – sometimes monstrous – forces. Asma (2009, 57) quotes classicist Eric Dodds who says that demons "are not truly part of the self, since they are not within man's conscious control; they are endowed with a life and energy of their own, and so can force a man, as it were from the outside, into conduct foreign to him." Similarities to these ideas can still be found in the paradigms of modern religions.

Due to the lack of scientific explanations, demons have been blamed for everything bad that happens from disastrous harvests to plagues since the earliest times (Dell 2010, 30). Turunen (2002) emphasizes that evil spirits and frightening creatures have been important concepts for societal life as they make the processing of communal fears easier due to their separation from humans. Therefore, the internal conflicts of human societies can be reflected externally through

demons and other monsters. Neurologist Sigmund Freud argued that humans project their own qualities they deem dangerous – the “primitive man’s emotional impulse” – to outside beings that are intentionally made daunting and demonic (Turunen 2002, 40; Asma 2009, 57).

There are references to demons representing various external forces and disasters in many cultures around the world. For example, in Japan, Fūjin, god of the wind in Shinto mythology was portrayed as a terrifying elemental demon (Picture 15; Wright n.d.). According to Ions (1997) the unpredictable phenomena of nature were characterized as demons in Sumerian mythology over 5000 years ago. The southern parts of Mesopotamia were subject to floods and parching sun as well as strong winds that needed to be controlled. These destructive forces were symbolized in myths to give people power over chaotic nature. Other examples can be found in Jewish folklore, in which it is believed that demons live in the wilderness and are especially dangerous during the night. Demons of Judaism were thought to be the cause of disasters and illnesses, ranging from headaches to epilepsy and insanity. (Ions 1997, 11; Valk 1997, 21.)



PICTURE 15. Fūjin, the demonic god of wind, from Ogata Korin’s painting from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Wikimedia Commons 2007a)

As stated by Lewis (2001), "the belief that malicious entities lie behind natural disasters and other unpleasant aspects of human life is very old and is still prevalent in many traditional societies." This was before the scientific discoveries that help us understand the irregularities of nature, so it is understandable that people thought such beings were behind the unexplainable disasters and diseases. Demons and devils are still present in the schools of study that interpret them as projections of fear or as hallucinations. (Lewis 2001, 64.)

### 3.4 Dualism

The legendary stories of folklore and mythology need conflict – something to oppose the gods and the forces of good. According to Ions (1997), demons and monsters act as the vicious beings that need to be defeated by heroic figures. Similar concepts of heroes and demons have been subjects in art during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as seen in Frank Frazetta's painting, *Cave Demon*, in which a heroic warrior battles against a gorilla-like demon (Picture 16). The appearance of demons matches their evil nature as they typically appear as deformed or hideous creatures. Demons also need to be powerful in order to make overcoming them more significant, reinforcing the role of gods as protectors of humanity. In some religions, demons are too strong to permanently get rid of and remain a constant threat to the world of humans. (Ions 1997, 8, 78.)

Dualistic concepts are a traditional part of numerous mythologies and religions around the world. Gods and monsters are the main actors in the battle between order and chaos or good and evil (Dell 2010, 7). Usually gods represented order while monsters represented chaos. As Dell (2010) states, monsters are "violations of the laws of nature since they jumble body parts indiscriminately." The Babylonian goddess Tiamat is an example of this concept of chaos being portrayed in physical form. Tiamat was depicted as a sea serpent or a dragon with other animal parts (Picture 17). In the Bible, chaos is represented by Leviathan, a gigantic sea monster. (Dell 2010, 20.)



PICTURE 16. Portion of Frank Frazetta's *Cave Demon* from 1978 (Museum Syndicate n.d.)



PICTURE 17. *Chaos Monster and Sun God* – 1853 reproduced drawing of 883-859 BC Assyrian engraving (Wikimedia Commons 2012c)



The opposition of good and evil or god and demon was portrayed strongly in Persian mythology. Ahura Mazda was a god representing prosperity and fruitfulness, while Angra Mainyu, the god of sterility and darkness, commanded demonic hordes trying to overcome the good creations. Similarly, the demon of drought, Apaosha, fought against the rain god Tishtriyā. The Persians, among other cultures of the ancient world, had many similar opposing pairs of gods and demons, who together brought balance to the world. (Ions 1997, 79.)

Historically, each faction saw themselves as "children of light" and their opponents as "children of darkness" (Ions 1987, 7). Sometimes the gods of the Antiquity were labelled as demons, other times the shapes of the pagan gods were given to demons (Peltomaa-Katajala & Toivo 2004, 80). It was not unusual for different cultures to label the religions of others' as nonsense or proclaim their gods as demons. Even in Finland, shamanism was denounced as Devil worship and the shamans were made demons when Christianity took place in the North. (Turunen 2002, 12.)

## **4 APPEARANCE OF DEMONS**

The appearance of demons often reflects their role as evil or chaotic beings that disturb the order and balance of the world of humans. Sometimes frightening, sometimes beautiful, the physical features of demons represent the extremes of different visual characteristics. Their looks are designed to separate them from other divine beings and humans, combining the features of different creatures and distorting human anatomy. Similar patterns can be found from virtually every mythology. This chapter covers the main attributes of the appearance of demons, presenting various examples of the specific types of demonic features.

### **4.1 Supernatural visages**

Demons often have uncommon features that set them apart from the natural world and emphasize their supernatural essence. In most mythologies, they exist between the world of humans and the world of spirits, and their appearance needs to reflect that concept. Demons come in many shapes and forms, most of which are either terrifying or strange and abnormal. Even in the written descriptions of monsters and demons, their appearance is often emphasized – they can have multiple heads or eyes, spiky tails, or sharp fangs (Dell 2010, 7). In addition to horrifying monsters, many religions describe demons as looking like animals or even humans. For example, Burmese demons were depicted in various appearances, ranging from animal demons to chimeras and humanoids (Picture 18). In the same way, the evil spirits of Christian mythology were tormentors with diverse appearances, such as beautiful women, beasts, reptiles and sometimes even troops of soldiers (Peltomaa-Katajala & Toivo 2004, 52).



PICTURE 18. Burmese depiction of supernatural beings from 1906 (Wikimedia Commons 2010a)

In her book *Encyclopedia of Demons in World Religions and Cultures*, vampirologist Theresa Bane (2012) catalogues nearly three thousand demons from the different religions, folklores, and mythologies of the world. Many of the entries in the book include descriptions of the physical appearance and visual features of the demons. I categorized the features for this study based on the types of characteristics described (Table 1). Some of the demons had multiple different features ranging from animal legs and horns to fiery eyes and shapeshifting, all of which were counted as their own separate instances. Demons appearing as regular humans or without description are left out of the comparison.

TABLE 1. Visual features in descriptions of demons (Bane, 2012)

<i>Features</i>	<i>Instances</i>	<i>%</i>
Abnormal anatomy	194	20,2
Abnormal size	60	6,3
Animals	183	19,1
Animalistic features	216	22,5
Attractive or beautiful	69	7,2
Chimeras and dragons	52	5,4
Monstrous or hideous	49	5,1
Shapeshifting	84	8,8
Surrealistic	52	5,4

Demons depicted as animals and humanoids with animalistic features are mentioned most often in the physical descriptions of demons in *Encyclopedia of Demons in World Religions and Cultures* (Bane 2012). Another distinct section of the visual properties covered in the book are abnormal physical features, which include strange anatomy, multiple body parts, and other uncommon physical characteristics. Demons described as attractive or beautiful are not as common, but still show up notably often. Shapeshifting is one of the more frequent abilities of demons, appearing in 84 entries in the book. Rakshasa, a demon of Hindu mythology, is an example of a shapeshifting demon with evil intentions of luring humans with an attractive form (Dell 2010, 32). Even though demons portrayed as monstrous, ugly, or hideous are mentioned only 49 times, it could be assumed that it is only because those features are commonly associated with demons regardless and were left out of the descriptions. (Table 1.)

Demons are often depicted as monsters with animalistic or other bizarre features that meant to terrify the viewer. According to historian Veronica Ions (1997, 78, 93), the evilness of demons is displayed through their ugliness or abnormality, which is often achieved by picturing them as strange amalgams of human and animal, or other beings of hideous aspects, such as chimeras and giants. Monsters of the Greek mythology – Cerberus, the three-headed dog, and the Gorgon Medusa, whose hair was made of snakes, are well-known examples of monstrous hybrids (Picture 19). (Ions 1997, 93.)



PICTURE 19. Giuseppe Arcimboldo's sketch of Cerberus from 1585 (Wikimedia Commons 2011a)

Historian Christopher Dell (2010, 12) compares the visualization of demons to the ancient Egyptian gods, who were often depicted with animal heads on human bodies in order to appear intimidating. The combination of animals and humans also emphasizes the idea that they don't belong to this world (Dell 2010, 12). In addition to the frightening visages with multiple heads or other abnormal features, demons were sometimes able to change their shape at will to disguise themselves – some of them could even appear beautiful (Ions 1997, 78).

## 4.2 Beauty and seduction

Demons are not always just physically powerful and terrifying; they can also have the power to deceive and subvert (Ions 1997, 95). Beauty is associated to sin and sexual urges in many mythologies and therefore connected to demons (Wickham 2012, 73). According to Turunen (2002) abnormally beautiful people have been a subject of fear and mistrust because of their unusual looks. A beautiful person is frightening and enviable due to their perfection. In many of the ancient legends, monsters have been depicted as dangerously beautiful, for example Medea and Sirens from the ancient Greek myths, and Lucifer from Christian writings. (Ions 1997, 94; Turunen 2002, 73).

Commonly in mythologies around the world, female demons were portrayed as seductresses who tempted men through their attractive visage or magical powers (Ions 1997, 94). One of the first female demons in ancient Jewish texts was Lilith, a night demon who tried to seduce Adam (Wickham 2012, 251). Lilith is also described as possibly being the first wife of Adam in other Jewish texts (Lewis 2001, 64-65). A character with the same name, Lilith, appears in the video game series, *Diablo*, in which she is portrayed to be similarly seductive and manipulative as her historical counterpart (Picture 20).



PICTURE 20. Portion of the art depicting Lilith for *Diablo* © Blizzard Entertainment, Inc. (Creative Uncut n.d.)

In Christian demonology, seductive demons called *incubus* (male demon) and *succubus* (female demon) tempted men and women with their attractive appearances (Picture 21; Valk 1997, 80). Another type of deceiving and tempting demons appeared in Hindu and Buddhist mythologies, called *Yakshas*. They were forest dwellers who took the forms of beautiful women and lured men to pursue them deep into the forest, where the Yakshas would turn into trees, leaving the men to wander without hope. (Katz 1995, 43.)



PICTURE 21. Painting of an incubus from 1870 (Wikimedia Commons 2006b)

### 4.3 Abnormal physicality

Abnormal physical features are common characteristics in descriptions of demons. Some of them have distorted features, such as long teeth or claws; some have multiple heads; some look like rotting corpses or skeletons (Bane 2012). Strange anatomy has influenced the designs of modern depictions of demons as well, as can be seen in the concept art for *Doom*, a game from 2016 that portrays demons in a sci-fi setting with fantasy elements (Picture 22). Associating abnormal anatomical features to demons might originate from the fear of malformations and diseases. Gods of evil and magic were often portrayed as crippled or malformed (Turunen 2002, 44). According to Asma (2009) deformed or physically abnormal children were often demonized in ancient times, possibly because the "monstrous offspring" presented a burden on the family. Asma says "it's reasonable to expect laws and taboos to emerge in a society that reinforces the ecological survival needs of its families." (Asma 2009, 40.)



PICTURE 22. Concept art illustration of *Mancubus* from *Doom* © Bethesda Softworks LLC (Bethesda 2016)

Different variations of abnormal physicality are featured 194 times in the descriptions of demons in Bane's (2012) book (Table 1). Most of those cases fall into the vague category of miscellaneous because of the large amount of variation. A more distinct feature of demons is abnormal or rare skin colour, which is mentioned 33 times, making it the most frequent type in this category. Another common characteristic is a mouth full of sharp or long teeth or fangs, which could also be considered to be partly an animalistic feature but was counted as an abnormal physical feature for this study. Having multiple legs or arms seems to be less of a common feature among demons than expected with only 11 instances, even though especially the demons of Hindu mythology often were depicted with multiple arms. (Table 2; Bane 2012.)

TABLE 2. Abnormal physical features (Bane, 2012)

Features	Instances	% (of all features)
Abnormal skin colour	33	3,4
Glowing or fiery eyes	18	1,9
Long nails or claws	18	1,9
Miscellaneous	44	4,6
Multiple heads	23	2,4
Multiple legs or arms	11	1,1
Scales	5	0,5
Sharp teeth or fangs	28	2,9
Skeletal or corpse-like	14	1,5

Having an abnormal number of body parts is a fairly common feature shared by demons of various mythologies. For example, the Japanese mythological demons, oni, were humanoids in shape but had three eyes, three fingers on each hand, and three toes on each foot (Katz 1995, 65). In Christian depictions, many demons had fantastical appearances and multiple heads or arms. Bedargon, a small demon is an epitome of such demons with abnormal features. It had 50 heads, 65 eyes, and it had letters of the Hebrew alphabet decorating its skin. (Valk 1997, 23.)

Some demons are depicted extraordinarily large or even gigantic in their form. Abnormally large humans culminate in the tales of giants, terrifying figures that



are represented in myths from around the world. Ions (1997, 86) believes giants "emanate universally from childhood perceptions of grown people and their omnipotence." The stories of gigantic humans or beasts could have potentially originated from ignorance; According to Asma (2009, 30-32), ancient people mistook the fossils of prehistoric beasts as the bones of giants and believed that they still existed in remote corners of the world.

There are references to giant demons in many mythologies around the world. In India gigantic demons called *daityas* live in the underwater realm of Patala. They were told to be so large that they wore jewels the size of boulders. The rakshasas of Indian mythology had multiple different appearances, some of them having an abnormal number of body parts. They could be one-eyed, one-legged, three- or four-legged, or have animal heads. Ravana, a giant demon from Indian mythology, was a ten-headed and twenty-armed rakshasa of immense size (Picture 23). According to Ions, Ravana was "as big as a mountain and strong enough to break off the summit of a mountain and churn the seas." (Ions 1997, 87, 93.)



PICTURE 23. Ravana – Demon-King of Lanka, painting from around 1920 (Wikimedia Commons 2004b)

Sometimes demons appeared in shapes that defied our normal expectations. Demons could take forms of surrealistic visions, clouds, or even man-made objects (Bane 2012). There are records of evil beings manifesting themselves as different animals or creatures as well as disturbing apparitions. The Christian monk Evagrius mentions visions of demons appearing as a sword, a torch and a repugnant blood-soaked creature. (Peltomaa-Katajala & Toivo 2004, 52.)

#### **4.4 Animal demons**

Demons taking the forms of animals were common to most mythologies. Human societies had the tendency of separating themselves from animals and nature, which represented evil and chaos. In many cultures it was believed that the world outside the boundaries of civilization is a place of chaos where ghosts and demons live. The dualistic idea of the separation of man and nature gave a clear structure and order to the world. (Turunen 2002, 38.)

Ignorance comes into play in the depiction of animal demons as unfamiliar creatures from foreign lands were discovered and only written descriptions of them were available. Sometimes the depictions of exotic animals were based on stories and folklore. Animals were conceptualized as monsters on a continuum of strangeness from non-native species to hybrids of different animals to shape-shifters and indescribable creatures (Asma 2009, 26).

Demons with animal forms, ranging from wild beasts to domestic animals, were common in Christianity. According to Valk (1997), Saint Aegidius (650-710) saw the Devil in the form of a tortoise of immense size, and Saint Colette (1381-1447) witnessed demons appearing as foxes, snakes, toads, snails, flies, and ants. In Christian and Islamic beliefs, the Devil often appears as a domestic animal, usually as a dog or a goat, which was associated with lust and the ancient Greek god, Pan. The Devil could also take the form of a serpent, scorpion, or even a dragon. Bats and ravens were symbolized as demonic creatures because of their nocturnal activity. (Valk 1997, 94, 96.)

#### 4.4.1 Snake

Based on the study of demonic features in *Encyclopedia of Demons in World Religions and Cultures* (Bane 2012), snakes are the most common type of animals appearing in myths and often they are demonized because of their frightening disposition. The Assyrian primordial goddess Tiamat, the symbol of chaos, was often depicted as a gigantic serpent (Picture 24). According to Ions (1997, 26), snakes are a prevalent motif in many mythologies because of their dangerous nature and their "miraculous ability to slough their skins (die) and be renewed". Their rejuvenating abilities have given snakes the role of symbolizing immortality in myths, making them sacred creatures in some religions. The Greeks used the venom of a snake as a medicine, which led to the symbol of a snake being used in honour of the god of medicine, Asclepius (Melina 2011). Snakes are associated to demons for their stealthiness and the ability to kill by poison or strangulation. They are featured in numerous mythologies in different shapes. (Ions 1997, 90.)



PICTURE 24. Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal depicting the slaying of Tiamat from the 8th century BCE (Wikimedia Commons 2007c)

Snake-like demons have been characterized in mythologies around the world. According to Ions (1997), in Egyptian myths the dark underworld of night and death was filled with serpent monsters. In old Norse beliefs the monstrous World

Serpent lays in the depths of the ocean. Similar creatures can be found from ancient Greek, Canaanite, Hindu, Chinese, and Japanese mythologies. Monsters ranging from *hydras*, enormous swamp snakes with nine heads, to *nagas*, cobra-like demons with five to seven heads, have snakes as their main motif. (Ions 1997, 90.)

The combination of snake and human is another well-known type of monster in some mythologies. The Devil of the Christian religion is often portrayed as a snake or a snake-like being with human hands and the face of a woman (Väisänen 2015, 22). In the Old Testament, Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden after a serpent tricked Eve into eating the forbidden fruit, which could have symbolized sins or sexual desires (Pruitt 2020). In Greek and Etruscan myths some monsters were depicted with a hair made of living snakes. Gorgons, three sisters with snakes growing out of their heads, were terrifying characters of the ancient myth. The most famous of the Gorgons was Medusa, a monster whose gaze could turn people into stone (Picture 25). (Biedermann 1993, 59, 377.)



PICTURE 25. Head of Medusa by Rubens, circa 1617-1618 (Wikimedia Commons 2006d)

#### 4.4.2 Goat

Goat is another familiar animal often associated with demons or evil creatures. Its role as a mythical animal has changed from its original meaning since its adaptation to later religions. Goat was considered as the symbol of masculinity and insatiable lust even before Christianity, but it was not demonized in ancient mythologies. Baphomet, or the *Sabbatic Goat*, is an occult icon that was originally a pagan deity with goat-like features that the Knights Templar were accused of worshipping (Picture 26; Bauer 2019). The appearance of the Devil of Christian religion was influenced by the Greek divine entities Pan, the god of wilderness, and Charon, the ferryman of the underworld. Charon had the beard, horns, feet and tail of a goat, accompanied with wings and a nose that looked like the beak of a vulture. (Turunen 2002, 44-46.)



PICTURE 26. Eliphas Levi's illustration of Baphomet from 1854 (Wikimedia Commons 2005a)

Fauns or satyrs were creatures of the forest in ancient Greek mythology. They were half-humans, half-goats with long ears and small horns on their head. According to Turunen (2002, 46), Saint Augustine wrote that fauns were demons of the night who tried to lure women into performing acts of fleshly temptations. They were the followers of Pan, the god of forests and wilderness, who also had a goat-like appearance. In art satyrs were depicted as creatures devoted to desires such as drinking wine and dancing. (Turunen 2002, 46, Väisänen 2015, 197.)

#### 4.4.3 Fox

The role of the fox in demonology and myths is more complex than most other animals. It is associated with intelligence and cleverness rather than animalistic behaviour and pure evilness. Foxes are supernatural beings of the spiritual world in many mythologies that act through their own will instead of being the minions of some greater evil entity. In many folktales, the fox has symbolized guile and treacherousness. It has also been connected to the Devil because of the red colour of its fur, that reminds of the fires of Hell. Even in ancient Rome the fox was thought to be a demon of fire. (Biedermann 1993, 124.)

In Eastern mythologies, the fox's cunning nature has been associated with shapeshifting and deceitfulness, and the animal was treated with suspicion. Ions (1997) writes that in Chinese mythology, demonic spirits were believed to be able to disguise themselves as animals or as beautiful women. Foxes used this might to seduce humans only to consume them. Similarly, in Japanese myths, foxes with the ability to transform themselves into human form were a type of *yokai*, a supernatural spirit, called *kitsune*. As the fox spirits grew older and stronger, they gained up to nine tails (Picture 27). The kitsune often appeared as beautiful women to lure men. (Ions 1997, 93; Dell 2010, 119.)



PICTURE 27. Cropped version of *Prince Hanzoku terrorized by a nine-tailed fox* by Utagawa Kuniyoshi from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Wikimedia Commons 2005d)

#### 4.4.4 Other animals

Many different types of animals appear as demons in the mythologies of the world; In Persian myths, the demon of drought, Apaosha, appeared in the form of a black horse, and in Aztec mythology, jaguars represented agents of destruction that lived between the earth and the underworld (Ions 1987, 55; Ions 1997, 104). In Christian religion, toads had the role of symbolizing the embodiment of evil and sin, often associated with witches as their familiars (Valk 1997, 97). Rats and mice were thought to have demonic powers because they spread diseases and destroy food supplies (Biedermann 1993, 74). Even monkeys are associated with demons and sin in Christian imagery, depicted as epitomes of vanity, greed, miserliness, and unchastity (Biedermann 1993, 23).

There are numerous mentions of various animal demons in Hindu mythology. Mahishasura was a buffalo demon, who was so strong he could drive the gods out of their kingdom. Mahishasura was killed by Devi, a reincarnation of Parvati, the wife of Shiva. Devi also fought against another great demon called Durg. Durg was able to change his shape into a mountain-sized elephant and to a gigantic

buffalo, "whose breath alone tore up trees." In his final form in the battle against Devi, Durg appeared as a demon with thousand arms. After defeating Durg, Devi took the name Durga. (Kinsley 1986, 96-97; Ions 1997, 81.)

According to Ions (1997), "some animals have powers that mystify humans." Spiders are a good example of a creature with mysterious abilities, often appearing in myths as creators or tricksters. The Earth Spider, a type of yokai, of Japanese mythology is a gigantic spider commanding demonic armies (Picture 28). The light-adjusting eyes of many animals were thought to be signs of treacherousness, which, accompanied with the nocturnal activity, made the people of the Middle Ages fear and hate animals such as owls, frogs, snakes and cats. (Ions, 1997, 108; Turunen 2002, 58.)



PICTURE 28. Portion of a Japanese illustration depicting the Earth Spider from 19<sup>th</sup> century (Wikimedia Commons 2005e)

#### 4.5 Liminality

Demons are usually depicted as mixtures of different animals, humans, or both. Sometimes they have abilities that allow them to change their shape or infiltrate human minds. Supernatural creatures and beings, such as demons, exist between our world and the spiritual world. According to Asma (2009, 40), the word



'liminal' comes from the Latin word *limen*, meaning 'threshold'. Liminality symbolizes the state of being in-between worlds, neither inside nor outside. To emphasize the idea that demons exist in this liminal state, they are often portrayed in a way that makes it clear they do not belong to the world of humans.

*Kappa*, 'water-child', is a good example of liminality being depicted in the appearance and behaviour of a demon. Kappa is a small Japanese demon, the size of a child, with shapeshifting abilities and strange talents; they are stronger than a grown man, practice sumo wrestling and games, and able to eat almost anything (Yokai n.d.). They have a humanoid shape with webbed hands and feet, some look like frogs or tortoises, and some have duck bills or scaly skin (Picture 29). They can disguise themselves as harmless children and are known to be exceptionally polite and very intelligent, specializing in the art of medicine. Despite their virtues, Kappa are dangerous demons that try to lure people and animals near water, where they can drown them or drink their blood. All Kappa have a depression on their head that contains water to which their strength is bound to. They can be disarmed by tricking them into bowing, causing the water to trickle off, or by bribing them with cucumbers, which they crave even more than blood. (Ions 1997, 95; Dell 2010, 98.)



PICTURE 29. Painting of a Kappa from 1853 (Wikimedia Commons 2010b)

### 4.5.1 Animalistic features

Animalistic features, such as horns, wings, or tails, are popular attributes in depiction of demons. Combining human anatomy with animal parts is a way to separate their appearance from natural creatures and humans (Turunen 2002, 44; Dell 2010, 7). Bringing those features to the appearance of demons and fusing them with the shape of a human makes them look more frightening, mirroring their evil and unpredictable personalities.

Half-human, half-animal demons are featured in folklore and religions around the world. The appearance of rakshasas, demons of Indian mythology, is often a combination of human and animal parts (Ions 1997, 93). *Tengu* is a Japanese demonic spirit, part human and part bird inhabiting trees with the wings, claws and talons of a bird (Katz 1995, 64). In ancient Greece, *sphinx* – not to be confused with the Egyptian sphinx – was a demon of death with the head of a human, the body of a lion, and the wings of an eagle (Turunen 2002, 113). In Christianity, demons, who were originally angels, lost their beauty and turned into grotesque creatures with animalistic physique (Valk 1997, 88).

Monsters are often hybrids, many of which are depicted having a human body combined with the head of an animal – the Minotaur of the Greek mythology and the ancient Egyptian gods are good examples of this (Dell 2010, 115). The idea of a human mind inside the head of an animal was an unsettling concept in many mythologies, even though the distinction between animal and human consciousness was not very defined yet. According to Dell (2010, 115), "we find the combination of animal savagery with the cunning and malice of a human mind particularly terrifying." One example of a demon with an animal head and other animalistic features is Andras, a demon depicted in medieval Christian demonology. Andras is portrayed having the body and wings of an angel with the head of an owl, riding a black wolf. (Picture 30.)



PICTURE 30. Illustration of the demon Andras by Louis Le Breton from 1863 (Wikimedia Commons 2015a)

Wings are a common feature of demonic characters. The Assyrian demon Pazuzu was a combination of animal and human parts with two pairs of wings on his back (Picture 31). Wings on human characters, such as angels and demons, connected them to heaven or the spiritual world like birds that could fly above the world of humans (Biedermann 1993, 335). Angels were messengers of the gods, as the word *angelos*, Late Greek for ‘messenger’, suggests, traveling between the heaven and the earth (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1999). Some descriptions of angels in the Bible were similarly to demons terrifying in their appearance. Fallen angels were depicted with bat wings because of their shared abhorrence towards light (Biedermann 1993, 193). According to Turunen (2002), wings were often included in depictions of evil gods. The Persian god of darkness, Ahriman, flew to earth in the form of a fly, which was the symbol of Beelzebub as well. Flies were thought to be the embodiment of demonic powers because no one could wipe them out. It could be argued that another reason the fly was associated to death and demons was for its behaviour – eating dead animals or corpses and laying eggs in them. (Turunen 2002, 44.)



PICTURE 31. Statue of the Assyrian demon Pazuzu from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC (Wikimedia Commons 2007b)

Horns are another animalistic visual trait often seen in depiction of demons. According to Biedermann (1993, 323), horns are seen as a symbol of strength and aggressiveness. There are references to demons with horns in many mythologies. The minions of the Chinese god of death, Yen Lo, had two horn-like bumps on their foreheads (Ions 1997, 123). The Japanese oni, demons resembling ogres carrying clubs, similarly had horns on their heads (Dell 2010, 3). Animal horns can also be found in the portrayal of gods in many mythologies (Neil 2011, 44). The Christian Devil got his horns from the Greek god Pan and possibly from the gods of the underworld in Etruscan mythology, who were depicted with horns and long ears (Biedermann 1993, 71; Neil 2011, 44). Animalistic features, especially wings and horns, have been used in modern depictions of demons as well, such as in Justin Sweet's card illustration of *Pestilence Demon* for Magic the Gathering (Picture 32).



PICTURE 32. *Pesticence Demon* by Justin Sweet from 2009 © Wizards of the Coast LLC (MTGPics n.d.)

#### 4.5.2 Chimeras and dragons

The combination of diverse animal features was another way of breaking the natural order (Ions, 1997, 88). Monsters such as griffins and dragons are examples of creatures with parts of different animals put together (Dell 2010, 7). *Chimeras* – creatures combining the features of multiple different animals – have been depicted in art and books throughout history. Examples of chimeras and other strange creatures can be found in medieval Islamic publications on zoology (Picture 33). According to Ions (1997), hybrid creatures are named after Chimaera, a monster of ancient Greek mythology. It had the head of a lion, the body of a goat and a serpent-like tail. Chimaera personified storms and breathed fire. Similar composite creatures of Greek myths were Harpies, who had women's faces, bodies of birds and ears of bears. (Ions 1997, 88-89.)



PICTURE 33. Chimeras depicted in an Islamic book on zoology from the Middle Ages (National Library of Medicine 2004)

Dragons, fantastic monsters common in many mythologies around the world, are often depicted as mixtures of several creatures. Dragons are usually portrayed as destructive monsters, but in some mythologies, they have not been demonized and have even beneficial roles (Ions 1997, 92). European dragons were seen as hostile demonic beasts, while the Oriental versions of dragons were mostly seen as good-natured animals (Lewis 2001, 73). In Japanese and Chinese myths dragons bring good fortune and help get rid of drought and other disasters (Katz 1995, 64; Ions 1997, 9, 92).

Dragons are mentioned in numerous myths and religions. In Hebrew scriptures, dragon often symbolized the enemies of Israel – the Assyrians, the Babylonians, or the Egyptians (Lewis 2001, 73). Dahak, a Persian arch-demon of evil and lies, was depicted as a three-headed dragon (Ions 1997, 82). Dragon-like serpents were present in Greek mythology in the form of Typhon, a monster that terrorized the gods, and Hydra, a multi-headed snake that was destroyed by Hercules (Mythology 2018). In Christianity, demons sometimes took the forms of dragons. A

seven-headed and ten-horned dragon was a symbol of Satan in Christian depictions (Biedermann 1993, 324; Valk 1997, 23; Väisänen 2015, 93). The Christian Devil was partly derived from the Babylonian female dragon monster, Tiamat (Lewis 2001, 73). Leviathan, a massive dragon-like monster with the wings of a bat is described in the Book of Revelation, which was written around 90 CE (Picture 34; Turunen 2002, 48; Asma 2009, 67).



PICTURE 34. *Destruction of Leviathan*, engraving by Gustave Doré from 1865 (Wikimedia Commons 2005b)

## **5 ILLUSTRATING DEMONS FOR CONCEPT ART**

This section covers a concept art project done as the practical part of the thesis. I wanted to apply the ideas and topics analysed earlier in the research part to a fictional project with a modern setting. The illustrations are based on similar themes and symbols as the historical depictions referenced to in the other parts of the thesis, with the goal to base the designs on these abstract concepts. The technical process of creating the illustrations is left out of the analysis because it is not the focus of this thesis, and the reader is expected to view the report as a theoretical standpoint of the creative process instead of a tutorial on how to paint digitally or how to use specific software.

### **5.1 Project: Demons of the Modern Era**

My goal for this project was to create two concept art illustrations that rely on the theoretical ideas discussed in this thesis. The project was done for personal use as portfolio material. As the research part indicates, there are common themes connecting the depictions of demons between different cultures, and they are often symbolizing the physical representations of abstract concepts, such as fear, forces of nature, or diseases. I designed the demons for this project with the objective to implement these abstract themes with modern twists, while maintaining the monstrous appearance of traditional demons.

I have over three years of experience from working in game development as a concept artist. The projects I have been a part of have ranged from pitches and prototypes to longer art research projects and finished games. Most of the games I have worked on have focused on the fantasy genre, fitting the theme of this thesis. Furthermore, the work experience has helped me understand the process behind creating concept art and illustration on a professional level. My aim was to create art on similar standards for this project with the idea that the illustrations could be used in a pitch or a presentation.



The project is targeted for a fictional game or movie with demon characters that need to be designed and illustrated. I decided to create two separate designs with different themes to experiment with various unique elements. I treated the process a bit differently than I would with a real production, which would have required more iterations for each design and is often based on a specific style guide depending on technical and artistic choices. For this project I focused on refining the illustrations to a higher level of finish to make them more presentable as standalone pieces of concept art. Some of the thumbnails and early sketches for the designs were included to demonstrate the ideation process behind the finished illustrations.

## 5.2 Demon of Pollution

I wanted to come up with a modern counterpart of a fearsome force of nature for the theme of the first design of this project. Instead of picking a natural disaster I based the theme on the effects of human society on nature. Pollution is a well-known topic that raises concern and anxiety among modern day humans and could easily be seen as an uncontrollable external element that affects us on a higher level. Pollution causes health problems and even kills people and animals, which fits the criteria of reflecting the work of evil demonic forces.



PICTURE 35. Notes and thumbnail sketches for the design of Demon of Pollution

The appearance for the Demon of Pollution was inspired by depictions of animal demons and liminal monsters that combine different creatures into one. I also wanted to include man-made elements and machines in the design to emphasize the idea that the demon is both the cause and the result of pollution, even though such literal representations were not typical in traditional imagery. My first notes before starting the sketching process included most of the visual features I wanted to use in the design (Picture 35).

The thumbnails show the main proportions and the gesture of the demon, focusing on the combination of bird and human elements (Picture 35). To create a connection between three main features related to the design – human, animal, and machine – I fused together parts of each one to create a being that is clearly not from nature but exists in-between the worlds. The different elements were defined during the value sketch process before applying colour to the image (Picture 36).



PICTURE 36. Rough silhouette and value sketch for Demon of Pollution



PICTURE 37. Final version of Demon of Pollution

Animalistic features – a common attribute in depictions of demons – are a major part of the design. The head of the demon is that of a bird, resembling an albatross or a seagull with a cord wrapped around its neck to reflect the waste and garbage that ends up in the ocean (Picture 38). The neck of the creature connects to a metallic torso that resembles a machine releasing smoke through exhaust pipes on its back (Picture 38). The wings are covered in oil similarly to birds trapped in oil spills (Picture 39). A human head comes out of the chest of the

creature, symbolizing humans being burdened by the influence of the demon (Picture 39). The feet and the cloth wrapped around the lower part of the demon are stuck in the ground and turning into dust (Picture 37).



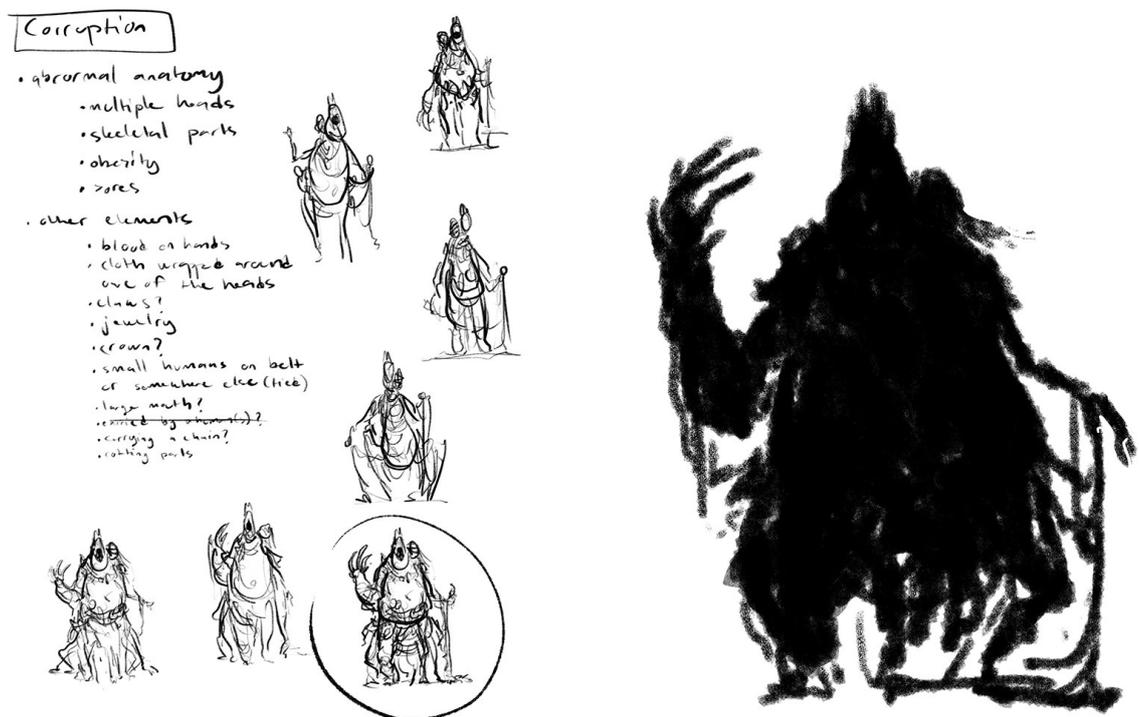
PICTURE 38. Close-up of Demon of Pollution – head and torso



PICTURE 39. Close-up of Demon of Pollution – oil covered wing and human head

### 5.3 Demon of Corruption

To contrast the Demon of Pollution, which was based on the idea of an external threat, I chose an internal element for the theme of the second design. Diseases, mental illnesses, and strange behaviour were referred to as signs of demonic activity in the earlier parts of the thesis, inspiring the theme for Demon of Corruption. The concept of corruption is similar to sinful desires, which were thought to be the work of demons, in the sense that it is only visible through an individual's behaviour and actions. How could a person be ready to sacrifice the lives of others and forget their sense of morals for the sake of power and wealth? An evil spirit affecting the thoughts of susceptible humans, turning them into his puppets, could be the embodiment of this abstract concept. To achieve this symbolism, I wanted to show the dualistic nature of the demon in the design with various juxtaposing elements. Corruption has existed for as long as there have been human societies, which is why I chose to make the design for the demon more timeless and not include too modern features.



PICTURE 40. Notes, thumbnails, and a rough silhouette for the design of Demon of Corruption

I wanted to emphasize the mindless hunger that is the main driving force behind corruption in the portrayal of the demon. The hunger represents the insatiable craving for more despite being full already. An individual possessed by the Demon of Corruption would be hungry for more and more power and money, no matter the cost. The notes for the design focused on the anatomical features, like the number of heads (Picture 40). I also pushed the idea of dualism in the design by contrasting the side that is in control with the oppressed and emaciated half, as seen in the thumbnail sketches (Picture 40). Elements of wealth and poverty are both represented in the design, which were refined during the black-and-white painting stage (Picture 41).



PICTURE 41. Value block-in and a black-and-white sketch for Demon of Corruption

Abnormal physicality was the major design choice in conceiving the Demon of Corruption. Changing the normal proportions and distorting different parts of the anatomy were used in the historical depictions of demons as well. The demon's body is exaggeratedly obese to reflect the excessive wealth brought by corrupt use of power (Picture 42). A king's crown adorns the primary head of the demon to show that those in positions of high power are the main targets for the Demon of Corruption (Picture 43). Similarly, a large necklace made of gold and gems is

worn by the demon (Picture 43). The small human skeletons suspended on the demon's hips, hanging from its belt, represent the powerless people under the rule of corrupt individuals (Picture 42.)



PICTURE 42. Demon of Corruption



PICTURE 43. Close-up of Demon of Corruption – upper body

A common type of abnormal anatomical features in depiction of demons is having two or more heads. In this design, the second head with a piece of cloth wrapped around its head represents the silenced moral side of an individual that succumbs to corruption (Picture 43). The primary head is the one in control. I decided to make the face of the demon look less human-like by changing the shape of the mouth and by removing the nose to make it appear more terrifying and monstrous (Picture 43). The dualistic juxtaposition continues with the distinctively different limbs – one arm being almost skeletal and tied up with a chain attached to the leg, symbolizing the subdued humane part of the creature, and the other arm transforming into a monster-like claw covered in blood (Picture 44; Picture 45). The tentacles pushing out of the demon's body were added to emphasize that the being is turning from what used to be a human into something more hideous and monstrous. (Picture 42.)





PICTURE 44. Close-up of Demon of Corruption – skeletal hand



PICTURE 45. Close-up of Demon of Corruption – monstrous hand

## 6 CONCLUSION

The role of demons in mythology and art is an intricate subject that requires deep understanding of cultural development of humans and religions. Demons are not merely monsters with sharp teeth and claws – they are the symbolical manifestations of complex problems that arise in human societies. Their appearance is purposefully designed to emphasize their part as bringers of misfortune and conflict. There are references to demons in mythologies around the world because the themes they represent are common to all humans and cultures.

The effect of depiction of demons in art has probably been one of the main factors in the emergence of fantasy art and imaginative art in general. The possibility to create images of supernatural creatures has allowed artists to expand their expressiveness through generating physical representations of imaginary subjects. Most of today's concept art revolves around creating the visuals for non-existing subjects and modifying existing designs and forms, similarly to religious and mythological imagery that paved the way for imaginary art. Theories explaining creativity could be applied to similar studies by analysing the methods of designing fantastical creatures and characters. Historically, artists used exaggeration and combination of different elements to portray the demons that could not be studied from real life or nature. Animal and human features mixed together created strange but relatable monsters. Combining the fear of unknown with the familiarity of a human character enables the depiction of the dark and displeasing themes that demons represent.

It could be argued that the subject is too broad to be studied in the manner of this thesis, but art history and mythology in general are rarely the main subjects for theses, leaving the starting point somewhat difficult to define. The themes covered in this thesis are generalized and formed into abstractions that can easily be applied to different settings and ideas. Based on the amount of material I browsed through for this thesis, just the differences and similarities between Eastern and Western mythologies should be researched on their own. Even the mythological art of single religions could be analysed separately, for example Hinduism or

Christianism, which have numerous demons and other supernatural spirits. Another aspect worth researching separately could be the influence of hallucinogenic substances during early history and the Middle Ages. Visions experienced by shamans using specific mushrooms and plants to achieve a trance-like state, and even regular humans who accidentally ingested ergot or other similar substances, could explain some of the stories of strange creatures and demons.

Concept art is widely used in the entertainment industry to create new fantastical creatures, characters, and environments, but it often relies on reusing the same motifs and designs, easily leading to predictable designs with no depth if the abstract ideas and themes are not properly researched. Studies of the origins of mythological creatures can bring new ideas to modern artists and designers, providing them with methods and abstractions that have naturally developed in early cultures.

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