1. a. In ancient Greek mythology (= δαιμόνιον): A supernatural being of a nature intermediate between that of gods and men; an inferior divinity, spirit, genius (including the souls of ghosts or ghosts of deceased persons, esp. deified heroes). Often written daemon for distinction from sense 2. 1569 J. SANDFORD tr. Agrippa Van. Artes 2 Grammarians..doo expounde this word Daemon, that is a Spiritie, as if it were Sapiens, that is, Wise. 1587 GOLDING De Mornay xiiii. 303 And vnto Cratylus again [Plato] saith, when the good man departeth this world..hee becometh a Demon. 1638 MEDE Gt. Apest. iii. Wks. (1672) III. 627 et seq. 1680 H. MORE Apocal. Apoc. 252 Demons according to the Greek idiom, signify either Angels, or the Souls of men, or any Spirits out of Terrestrial bodies, the Souls of Saints, and Spirits of Angels. 1774 J. BRYANT Mythol. 1. 52 Subordinate demons, which they supposed to be emanations and derivatives from their chief Deity. 1846 GROTE Greece i. ii. (1862) I. 58 In Homer, there is scarcely any distinction between gods and demons.

b. Sometimes, particularly, An attendant, ministering, or indwelling spirit; a genius. (Chiefly in references to the so-called ‘daemon of Socrates’. Socrates himself claimed to be guided, not by a δαιμόνιον or daemon, but by a δαιμόνιον, divinium quiddam (Cicero), a certain divine principle or agency, an inward monitor or oracle. It was his accusers who represented this as a personal daemon. Felix thought the daemon of Socrates was a devil. 1387 TREvisa Higden III. 279 We have i-lerned of Socrates, that was alway tendaunt to a spirit pat was i-cleped demon. 1603 HOLLAND Plutarch’s Mor. 1222 The soule..that obeith not nor hearkeneth to its owne familiar and proper daemon. 1606 SHAKES. Ant. & Cl. ii. iii. 19 O Anthony!..Thy Daemon, that thy spirit which keepes thee, is Noble, Courageous, high vnmatchable. 1758 HOME Agis 11, Inspiration, The guardian god, the demon of the mind, Thus often presses on the human breast. 1768-74 TUCKER Lt. Nat. (1852) I. 222 If the moral sense does not check, if the demon does not warn. 1865 LECKY Ration. (1878) I. 378 note, Minicius Felix thought the daemon of Socrates was a devil.

2. An evil spirit.  a. (Representing δαιμόνιον of the LXX and N.T. (rarely δαιμόνιον); in Vulgate demoniwm, daemon). Applied to the idols or gods of the heathen, and to the ‘evil’ or ‘unclean spirites’ by which demoniacs were possessed or actuated.

A Jewish application of the Greek word, anterior to Christianity. Δαιμόνιος is used several times by the LXX to render še’ēm ‘lords, idols’, and še’ēm ‘hairy ones’ (satyrs or he-goats), the latter also rendered μούσος ‘vain things’. It is also frequent in the Apocrypha (esp. in Tobit), and in the N.T., where in one instance (Matt. viii. 31) δαιμόνιος occurs in same sense. In the Vulgate generally rendered daemonium, pl. -ia, but once in O.T. (Lev. xvii. 7), and in 10 places in N.T. (8 in St. Matthew) daemon, pl. -es. These words are indiscriminately translated devil in the Ags. Gospels, feend or deuil in Wyclif, and in all the 16-17th c. versions devil; the Revisers of 1881-5 substitute demons in Deut. and Psalms, but in the N.T. retain devil, -s, in the text, with the literal translation demon, -s, in the margin. Quite distinct from this word is the proper translated ‘Devil’, δαιμόνος, which is not used in the plural. It is owing to this substitution of devil in the Bible versions, that daemon is not found so early in this, as in the popular sense b, which arose out of this identification.

1706 PHILLIPS (ed. Kersey), Demon..in Holy Scripture, the Word is always taken for the Devil or a Bad Genius. 1727-51 CHAMBERS Cyc., Daemoniac is applied to a person possessed with a spirit or daemon. 1767 T. HUTCHINSON Hist. Mass. II. i. 16 A young woman..supposed to be possessed with demons. 1865 MOZLEY Mirac. 201 note, The relation in which these persons stood to demons and evil spirits. 1881 N. T. (R. V.) John x. 20 He hath a devil [marg. Gr. demon] and is mad; why hear ye him? 1885 O. T. (R. V.) Deut. xxxii. 17 They sacrificed unto demons, which were no God.—Ps. cvi. 37.

b. In general current use: An evil spirit; a malignant being of superhuman nature; a devil.

[1398 TREvisa Barth. De P.R. ii. xix. (1495) 45 For Demon is to vnderstonde knowynge And the deyll hyghte soo for sharppenes..of kyndely wytte.] a1400 Cov. Myst. (Shaks. Soc.) 399
Blow flamys of fer to make hem to brenne, Mak redy ageyn we com to this demon. 1599 *Shakes. Hen. V., ii. ii. 121 If that same Dæmon that hath gull’d thee thus, Should with his Lyon-gate walke the whole world. 1699 W. DAMPIER *Voy. II. iii. iv. 32 [They] fired their Guns to kill the old Dæmon that they say inhabits there to disturb poor Seamen. 1782 PRIESTLEY *Corrupt. Chr. I. i. 8 A malignant dæmon had brought [them] into his power. 1813 SCOTT *Trierm. II. Concl. vii, But wouldst thou bid the demons fly Like mist before the dawning sky. 1865 WRIGHT *Hist. Caricat. iv. (1875) 69 The three special characteristics of mediaeval demons were horns, hoofs..and tails.

c. Applied to a person (animal or agency personified), of malignant, cruel, terrible, or destructive nature, or of hideous appearance. (Cf. *devil.) 1614 B. JONSON *Barth. Fair III. v. Wks. (Rtldg.) 322/2 ‘A caveat against cut-purses!’..I' faith, I would fain see that demon, your cut-purse you talk of. 1821 T. G. WAINEWRIGHT in *Ess. & Crit. (1880) 127 The grim demon of a bull-dog who interrupts the cat. 1822 SCOTT *Pirate xl, The Boatswain used to be staunch enough, and so is Goffe, though an incarnate demon. 1829 CARLYLE *Misc. (1857) II. 4 The Tartar Khan, with his shaggy demons of the wilderness.

d. *fig. An evil passion or agency personified. *spec. an alcoholic drink. Also *attrib.
1712 ADDISON *Spect No. 387 11 Melancholy is a kind of Demon that haunts our Island.
1754 CHATHAM *Lett. Nephew v. 39 Beware..of Anger, that demon, that destroyer of our peace. 1809 N. PINKNEY *Trav. France 86 The dæmon of anarchy has here raised a superb trophy on a monument of ruins. 1884 in *Africana Notes & News (1961) 295 A good many of them would have..made their mark in the musical history of this country, had it not been for the demon—drink. 1887 [see METHGLIN]. *a1895 Mod. Led astray by the demon of intemperance. 1922 JOYCE *Ulysses 348 Had her father only avoided the clutches of the demon drink. 1936 MENCKEN *Amer. Lang. (ed. 4) vi. 244 An Englishman..never uses *rum in the generic sense that it has acquired in the United States, and knows nothing of *rum-hounds,..the *rum-trade, and the *rum-evil, or of the *Demon Rum. 1948 PARTRIDGE *Dict. Forces' Slang 54 *Demon vino, Italian wine of the cheaper sort.

e. Applied to a being of superhuman or ‘diabolical’ energy, skill, etc. (cf. 3a *spec.); also to an action, etc.
1876 Coursing Calendar 21 A demon of a hare got up for Rose and Bar Girl. *Ibid. 315 It was hard lines indeed for Mr. Watson to meet with such a demon of a hare for the decider. 1899 Westm. Gaz. 6 Feb. 3/1 He is a demon of accuracy. 1961 *Times 4 July 11/4 ‘Demon’ services were, by custom, reserved for male opponents.

f. *Cards. (Also *Demon Patience.) A simple, one-pack patience game, which rarely comes out. Also *Racing Demon, Demon adapted for several players, each with his own pack, but played in competition.
1893 M. W. JONES *Games of Patience 3rd Ser. ix. 19 Demon Patience. 1900 ‘L. HOFFMANN’ *Patience Games 36 The Demon. 1918 H. G. WELLS *Joan & Peter xi. 388 A new card game, Demon Patience, a scrambling sort of game in which you piled on aces in the middle. 1919 K. MANSFIELD *Lett. (1928) I. 245 You know how, when we get hungry, we are at last even unable to play Demon for wanting the hash-hammer to sound. 1936 ‘P. QUENTIN’ *Puzzle for Fools xii. 95, I began to wonder whether she stole cards from a concealed pack... Her demon came out three times running. 1948 G. GREENE *Heart of Matter I. iii. i. 84 I’ve never played cards—except demon..and that's a patience.

3. *attrib. and *Comb. a. appositive (= that is a demon), as *demon-companion, -god, -hag, -king, -lover, -mole, -snake; *spec. applied *colloq. to one who seems more than human in the rapidity, certainty, destructiveness, etc. of his play or performance, as a *demon bowler at cricket; *demon star, Algor [Arab., the demon: see *GHOUL], the star β Persei. b. simple attrib.
and attrib. comb. (of, belonging, or relating to a demon or demons), as *demon altar, -doctrine, herd, -land, life, -trap, -ship, -worship; *demon-bird = DEVIL-BIRD; *demon-kind [after mankind], the nature of demons; the race of demons; also c. *demon-like adj. d. instrumental, etc., as *demon-infested, -scooped, -stricken.

1863 W. PHILLIPS Speeches iv. 57 The *demon altar of our land.

1840 J. FORBES 11 Years in Ceylon (1841) 353, I first heard the wild and wailing cry of the gaulawa, or *demon-bird.

1883 Harper's Mag. Nov. 900/1 We do not want our boys..*demon bowlers.

1814 BYRON Corsair II. iv, Some Afrit sprite, Whose *demon death-blow left no hope for fight.

1677 GALE Crt. Gentiles III. 177 Al those *demon-doctrines..introduced by Antichrist and his Sectators.


1814 Prophetess III. iv, Like the *demon-hags of Tartarus.

1774 J. BRYANT Mythol. I. 141 Among all the *dæmon herd what one is there of a form..so odious..as Priapus.

1933 W. DE LA MARE Fleeting 169 *Demon-infested rank morass.

1890 E. H. BARKER Wayfaring in Fr. 15 That small *demon-insect, the mosquito.

1904 BEERBOHM Around Theatres (1953) II. 50 In the 'seventies pantomime was flourishing still. *Demon King and Fairy Queen..were familiar. 1954 ‘N. BLAKE’ Whisper in Gloom II. xi. 148 Alec Gray is..a cheap snake, a proper young Demon King.

1895 Funk's Standard Dict., *Demon star. 1909 Daily Chron. 1 Sept. 7/3 Algol, the Demon Star.

1936 Discovery June 187/2 The newly-made spirit-doctors proceed to exorcise the pepo..from the scores of *demon-stricken people.

1677 GALE Crt. Gentiles III. 56 The *Demon-theology..was brought into the Christian Church.
first by the Gnostics.

*Ibid.*, By this their *demon-worship.*