applicable - specific

as children they showed little comprehension of the distinction between male and female or the anatomy that dictated which was which.

the boy’s indifference to his own gender provoked his father into constantly confronting him with the demands and privileges of manhood.

ember and ash met face to face for the first time as initiates at the academy.

as was often the case among nobility, their family was not rich in worldly things. the family was heir to an ancient and disputed title, attached to which were vast estates that, as the sole asset, had become split among the branches of the family over many generations. to be sure, there were branches of the family that had recovered their fortunes through ingenuity or industriousness. her immediate family strained to maintain the illusion of wealth, health and prestige.

ember seemed a fairly normal girl, for the daughter of a muse.

following the crisis, she became the protégé of her mother’s mentor.

under her mentor’s private tutelage, she gained mastery of her mother’s gymnastic fighting techniques.

movement was the humble basis for the mastery of dance. the ultimate expression of their art was to transcend movement.

female initiates were allowed to participate in training generally offered only to boys, a situation which stripped the girl of every shred of modesty

though taken in hand by a master of exceptional ability, she recived most of her training from her mentor, who had been shunned by the nobility and forced to survive on the fringes over her dubious fame as a gymnast.

hence she appeared to be the protégé of a nameless dancer while her classmates basked in prestige of their mentors.

her primary training as a psychic created a serious obstacle to learning any kind of magic.

she applied herself to mastering the disciplines of the art.

while lessons in conjury and sorcery were all very inspiring and enlightening, she seemed to have no proficiency for any of them. it somehow escaped her that the problem was not that it was difficult for her to learn; if anything it might have been too easy. what she perceived as the workings of magic seemed frighteningly powerful and intricate, impossibly difficult from her perspective as a psychic. she simply could not allow herself to entrust the process to her unconscious mind as the magic required. intimidated by magic, she also found herself somewhat intimidated by those who were proficient at using it. only the fact that her psychic perceptions gave her an edge in protecting herself from—and dispelling—magic allowed her to be confident in herself.

ember's impetuousness frequently got her into scrapes with older boys, often provoking the protective instincts of her fellow initiate, ash.

ash and ember had a long, if intermittent history together, and while they had each nursed crushes for the other at various points in their history they continued to compete and, on occasions, fight with one another.

partnered in fierce competition, they pushed themselves to the limit of their potential in their efforts to outdo one another.

after an intense, initial rivalry, they became close, intimate friends, their partnership spiced by good-natured competition and uncanny chemistry. because of their compatibility, their mentor concluded they were soul mates, and they received special training to pool their resources.

the two became intimate friends at school, utterly comfortable with each other.

in a sense they were surrogate brother and sister, and this affection was confused by the situation they found themselves in.

they experienced a profound connection neither could fully comprehend.

they became instant, intimate friends, their partnership spiced by good-natured rivalry and uncanny chemistry.

as peers, they trained under different mentors but shared the same masters and headmaster.

they were well matched, equally talented at getting into and out of tight scrapes, some mere mischief but often enough sobering misadventure.

a penchant for exploration and exhibition caused them to become involved in the underworld.

their identification with street orphans—being half orphaned themselves—combined with taunts and challenges they could not resist, or in some cases insults to ember’s gender and ability, conspired to lure them, unwittingly at first, into cat burglary.

once they got in over her head, in danger of being drawn into the shadows, ash compromised himself willingly in order to help ember escape further exploitation.

through his sacrifice, she was able to extract herself from her criminal career, but not before both had been marked.

foremost among the gifts that marked them for initiations were the powers of their minds. the art enabled a mind, with the proper training and tools, to manipulate reality. because their minds showed a capacity to dispense with such artifice to achieve the same ends, they were expected to achieve an extraordinary mastery of the art. as is often the case, the bulk of their initiation was devoted to the disciplines through which a foundation for the art to build upon was laid. at the same time, the ability they already possessed to impose their will directly on reality was being cultivated as part of the general mastery of the three spheres, the body, the mind and the spirit. their ability to touch the hearts and minds of living beings, and so know both the thoughts and feelings of, and impress their own thoughts and feelings upon, those around them, was equal to their ability to grasp and grapple with the fabric of the world around them. this manifested as a kind of intuition, or precognition, in which answers came more quickly to them than questions, and actions even more quickly than reactions—which is to say, they were formidable dancers, and difficult students. in fact, as they possessed a range of actions which exceed that of mere muscle and sinew, they possessed a comprehension of things that outstripped the articulation of words, making it difficult for any to assess their full range of expression and ability.

ember and ash were taken under the wing of their headmaster and became involved in his work with the rift.

ash and ember, like the other initiates, were occasionally called on to help their mentors complete their missions, and occasionally the initiates were the only ones suited to a particular mission.

soon enough, the pair became ninth rank initiates facing the most intimate year of training and testing.

what set ash and ember apart from their peers, was that their potential seemed to defy measure, making it difficult to determine the best course for their training, while other students had been measured and matched to the arts they best suited to. fortunately, their aptitude was more than sufficient for any path they applied themselves to. in spite of that, their mentors never ceased to wonder what the pair of them were ultimately capible of. the question remained even in the last year of their initiation.

their generation did offer at least one other example of such extraordinary potential. that other boy’s master took it upon himself to bring that boy in and attend closely to their final year of training. he seemed to have anticipated the headmaster’s request, informing him that the boy and his mentor had already been dispatched to challenge ash and ember.

he had always been somewhat removed from the world around him, seeming at times to find it impossible to regard those around him as real.

his infatuation with ember was of the sort one might have with a fantasy, and he was most troubled by the evidence, endlessly encountered, of her own personality.

to ember's surprise, he also had a history with ash, and had viewed him as a rival in all their encounters. the thought of this rival having such an indescribably intimate possession of the girl he had all but worshipped, and given the fact that she was nearly the only girl he was not entirely unsettled by, sparked an almost insane rage within him. this rage was such that it blinded him to the fact that she would also feel any wound inflicted upon his enemy.

he was unable to look at her without seeing his enemy possessing her.

as their initiation neared its end, while their parents were working on other ways to break them up, their grandparents were scheming to arrange their marriage.

ash’s father simply tried to match him up with an endless string of potential mates.

ember’s mother drove home the message that intimacy could lead to marriage and that could cost ember her independence.

unfortunately, intimacy had come very easily to them, and it was not long before they viewed themselves as a couple.

they felt an overwhelmingly irresistible attraction, a strange conviction that they made each other complete.

As they became acquainted, they discovered they were more than a good match; they seemed to be two versions of the same person, or two halves. they probed the mystery of their magnetism.

they were curious about their bodies and the differences between them and explored each other as shamelessly as they explored themselves. it was confusing and frustrating for them to be identical in every regard but sex, and puberty was especially hard on them. it widened the rift between them while creating a powerful, magnetic attraction neither could resist. until the thing that divided them became the thing that allowed them to unite in the most incredible way, causing them to become connected to each other more than to their individual selves. complimenting and completing each other, they were inseparable.

they were seen by those around them as valuable pawns in the struggle for power that was the endless game of the nobility. in spite of questionable legitimacy, both of them stood to attain noble status. given their assumed lineage, both had claims to the wealth and power of the slaughtered phoenix house. they were by no means guaranteed such status. it was entirely possible for either to fail in their initiations, which would allow them to be safely dismissed from all concern. given the probability that they would not fail, those who sought the power of the phoenix house would be forced to lay claim to it through them. their guardians were approached with numerous proposals for alliances through marriage.

their friendship evolved as they grew older and more intimate.

they explored their emerging sexuality together and became lovers in the ninth year of their initiation.

she, being quicker, had moved, and he had moved to intercept her.

they were quite startled to realize they had arrived in the same position.

driven by a deeper need, however, he unwittingly did more than move against her, he moved int0 her.

the intimacy forged their rapport.

their minds overlapped almost entirely, thoughts and feelings uncontrollably shared except when one of them retreated into the sanctuary of meditation, or unconsciousness.

ember and ash completed their initiation in the eve of their sixteenth year.

the boy and girl were told they would face trials when they arrived home from aeryn tear.

if they passed, they would begin their companionships in the fall.

the problem was that it put them within reach of their family.

ember returned from the academy at aeryn tear determined to face the demons of her childhood. an only child, ember was orphaned when she was seven years old. the lone witness, and obviously the sole survivor of the massacre that claimed the lives of her parents, she alone knew what the expedition into the ruins of aeslyn tear had unearthed. it had taken ten years of training to master the naked psychic potential unleashed within her that tragic night and fully comprehend the horror her parents unwittingly helped loose upon the world.

armed with the psychic and physical disciplines necessary for her to become a companion, ember hoped to discover who her father had been, find out why he had died and lay his ghost to rest.

ember went back to the place where her nightmare had begun, hoping to find some clue as to the identity and whereabouts of the men responsible for the massacre that had scarred her psyche, intending to track them down and confront them. she did not have the slightest suspicion that the enemies she sought would come to her, once she returned to confront the scene of her childhood nightmare. the demon read her intentions and set about arranging a trap.

the fact was that they were in love and certainly had been lovers.

the boy immediately sought out his mentor in search of an explanation.

it went without saying that they dared not confront their families with what had happened.

the demon had little concern for the men she sought, but they would serve to the demon’s needs.

while the things that haunted the ancient ruins were the monsters of every child’s bedtime stories and nightmares. ember had the distinction of being the first to confront them.

inevitably, she was reminded of what the school was there for.

they spent a day in preparation, going over maps, and discussing the rules and boundaries for the trials. the next morning, phoenix lead a party into the ruins, to confront the reality of the horrors unleashed in the war first hand for the first time. phoenix was surprised to find a kind of peace and beauty amid the ruins. according to legend and rumors, demons and undead infested the catacombs buried under the temples, mansion and fortifications of the ancient inner city.

with little hesitation, they entered the estate proper. the group discovered the horrors that lived, or in spite of death, endured within. a careful tour of the mansion turned up an impressive count of greater undead and even a few demons, all, for the most part, dormant in the daylight hours. they also discovered that the mansion itself did not sleep soundly. locks and keys like none they had known were active, and in them were secrets that could take them apart or redefine them at a glance, opening and manifesting potential buried in their spirits, forcing them to confront themselves, taunting them with the promise of power such as only legends spoke of. such powerful artifacts could only be relics of the age of gods, and no one could imagine how they had failed to be destroyed in the purge.

they encountered nothing they could not handle on their way in, but were forced to retreat when they stumbled into a chamber stuffed with hundreds, maybe thousands of undead. nightmares given flesh and blood, and other abominations. death walked in the shadows, in a wary and armed truce. they raced through the catacombs and emerged within the forbidden section near the mansion at the heart of the ruins. given the true size of the ruins, the forbidden sections were the majority of the ancient city.

alarmed to find undead indeed milling about in the catacombs, she divided the party, instructing the detachment to continue their trial in the upper levels, while she descended with a group of volunteers into the depths to determine the extend of the infestation. ash was the first to volunteer, leaving ash to lead the other party. at one point they came across an inscription etched into a stone wall, a prophetic phrase that sent shills down their spines. “one day death’s gate will open, heralding the beginning of the end of exile and the return of the gods.” while exploring the catacombs, they became trapped underground and a piece of phoenix’s past rose up to confront her, and awaken old demons.

among the many oddities picked up along the way, a deck of keys and a signet ring ended up in her possession. an instinct and a ruthlessness compelled her to seize it even before the power of the deck's keys was discovered. things took an abrupt turn when she indulged in an experiment. taking the keys, she dared query a life path. a divination such as common keys had been contrived for. within the keys she found herself, and opened the doors to her full potential, driving a nightmare out of her mind. her quest was all but forgotten as they walked through the ruins, awakening to grace and guile, swiftness and subtlety, strength and beauty. and yet for all she changed, she remained herself. shaken and awed by her intense transformation, she allowed the others to question the keys. each, awakened to a vision of their full potential, was fearful of the power they had tapped and the deck of keys was returned into her keeping before they set forth again.

the demon was not surprised to find that the cabal had been massing legions of demons and undead in the vast, buried ruins of avon deep.

essentially, all the demon had to do, once the boy began to struggle with his identity, was wait for the girl to let down her guard and then drive the boy's psyche out of his body and into hers, taking advantage of the rapport that had been created between them.

when she opened herself up, the demon thrust him into her mind and claimed his body for himself.

while she was incapacitated by the confusion of forced psychic fusion, the demon raped her.

she decided to make some use of the dragon's hunger before it could devour her.

using herself as bait, she led the dragon into the ruins and ambushed them.

the dragon happily tore through them, snapping them up in its efforts to get her.

the hard part was keeping ahead of the dragon long enough to ensure all of them were taken care of.

the best she could do was see to it that anyone not devoured was at least crippled before her game plan came to its grisly end.

it had seemed possible, for a moment, to escape with her life, and then the dragon got one step ahead of her.

applicable - general

in those rare instances when a child of common birth was deemed worthy of initiation, a noble patron was petitioned to foster the child and sponsor his or her initiation. this spared the child's natural family of the burden of his or her education, and established the child in the circles of nobility. regardless of origin, upon completion of initiation the child would be of equal status with the nobility, from which society he or she could not be excluded without dire consequences.

because the original world-shattering rift had opened in avon, it was typical for new disruptions to originate there. accompanied by their master and his protégés, they collected their belongings to set out to investigate the occurrence of rift storms. it was often necessary for these enigmatic individuals to undertake the rescue of individuals lost to such storms, which necessarily took them away from their usual work to harness the forces of paradox and prevent such storms.

she had been told that reality, like the art, was rooted in three different spheres. this understanding was the key to the art itself. in specific, reality was founded in the collaboration of space, time and mind, and its construction expressed in terms of matter, energy and thought. the three spheres were identical in one essential regard, each being a medium and the information it contained.

the mind had tremendous potential, and social and biological factors often cheated it of its full development.

once the mind began to open up, however, there was no way to stop it from exploring and expressing the potential it could apprehend.

the first resolution of point paradox into time, space and awareness gives power to define limits as structure upon which existence evolves. the limits innate in each do not obey the same boundaries. to either side of the existence with which we believe ourselves best acquainted unfolds a hope for the destiny of our souls.

our potential is so much greater than we realize. in spite of the part of ourselves that strives for that realization, we remain estranged from ourselves until death. there is no one simple diagram of human fulfillment, but it is clear that we deny much of ourselves the expression necessary for us to grow into the awesome potential we possess. life is too short and complicated for the average person to perceive and act on the opportunity life presents us with. and yet, there are those of us who for one reason or another are too sensitive and too curious to numb ourselves to that goading inner voice. especially those of us who are seared by the touch of the unbearable.

existence is a complex weave, and the texture of its fabric is confusing. in an age when the existence of the mind itself is in question, we stand at a much more desperate threshold, rejecting the existence of the spirit–denying our very souls. the closer we come to robbing ourselves of ourselves, the worse the world seems to become. even though it all seems hopeless, we still have time to open our minds to the answers that come from within. there is still time to stop ourselves from a return to chaos. there is still time to awaken to the point of our existence, and redeem the purpose of reality.

touch is the mother of all senses. life is endured because of it. existence is suffered for the sake of a simple contact beyond the isolation of self.

it was fairly common for vampires to claim were familiars to act as their agents and protect them during the day. in most cases, the familiar started out as a human servant or protégé who became infected by a were while acting as the vampire's agent. the establishment of the vampire's patronage prior to the were being turned was the precedent used to overrule the were sire's claim.

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applicable - context needed

they had just discovered that the mind did possess the ability to alter reality, and it was sinking in.

in a story, he could just erase their memories, but in truth, messing with their minds at this point would only guarantee that the potential within them would be awakened.

they would be expecting it and would certainly try to fight it, and that was all it took. instead, he invited them to stay and listen and learn.

in addition to handling her crisis, the other two boys were facing a crisis of their own.

to explain, all he had was the absence of the headache that had been growing worse each day.

he had unusual abilities, but he had no idea why he would suddenly turn into a girl.

it as a dream, a realm too amorphous for a complete version of reality.

if anything, it was a world assembled from different visions of reality.

applicable - pretext needed

the demon's invasion unlocked potential the child used instinctively to annihilate the demon's host, opening a rift in the process.

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clipboard

as the daughter of a muse, ember could only suspect that her father was one of many lovers.

her parents, born into rival houses, were initiated together at the academy, where they were insulated from the religious and political conflict that made them enemies. the enlightened and unprejudiced teachings of the academy encouraged them to become tolerant and open-minded. as their intimacy grew, however, it was inevitable that they would discover each other’s heritage. the revelation of a common foundation for all forms of magic, in contradiction of a belief that played a part in the feud between their houses, helped them overcome the last remnants of their natural enmity. in spite of their differences, they remained intimate friends paired under a brilliant mentor who recognized their extraordinary compatibility. in defiance of their families’ objections, they became lovers and continued their training as companions under their mentor when he advanced to the rank of master.

the houses of dusk and dawn were the ruling branches of the phoenix house, founded to protect and defend the sanctuaries of the goddess. once deeply allied, they became the ruling houses of rival nations bitterly divided over the role of men and women in society. this dispute eventually prompted the goddess to withdraw her support of the two monarchies and establish the neutral domain of avon. the autumn kingdoms became vulnerable to the intrusion of a new religion devoted to the worship of one god. when the houses fell in the purge, heirs from both houses were sent to avon to preserve the bloodlines. in spite of the fact that both houses were under persecution, pride and tradition prevented them from renewing their alliance. when the houses-in-exile turned their attention from surviving the purge to tearing down the new monarchy, the feud between them became more intense.

at the time of her conception, ember’s parents had joined forces with their mentor against a wizard known as the exile, a man who had mastered conjury, demonology, necromancy and sorcery.

their headmaster, formerly a peer of the rogue wizard, was firmly opposed to his radical and elitist views of psychic potential.

the enemy cabal had gained the support of the exile. as the war began to heat up again, the exile gathered the remains of his cult and the allies they had made.

when her parents completed their companionships and turned twenty-seven, they turned down offers to become masters at the academy to serve as adepts, knights in their master’s crusade.

perceiving the institution as a threat, the exile sent a group of demon assassins to destroy the school. in the course of the crisis, an assassin confronted ember and her demon.

ember escaped during the confusion and became lost in the depths of the ruins. grief-stricken terror ruled her mind until she passed out from exhaustion. when she awoke some time later, her eyes had adjusted to the pale, phosphorescent light. with no idea where to go or what to do, she simply wandered at first, exploring the ancient city. in spite of her recent trauma, she found herself marveling over how intact everything was. ember soon discovered there were frightening things trapped in the city with her.

avon deep was a city of ghosts and other spirits; the former wandering freely and liable to follow her everywhere, the latter seemingly bound in place. most were undetectable until she passed through one or stepped into a warding circle and was violently assaulted. the demons were the worst. ghosts chilled her with their touch, taunting and terrifying her while violating her mind, but few were capable of molesting her, body and soul, the way demons did while she was in their spheres of influence. while struggling to defend herself from the demons' ruthless probing, ember realized they were trying to break her in order to possess her body. her fear of becoming trapped with or possessed by one of these entities compounded and evolved into greater horror and desperation with each terrifying encounter.

the demon summoned its familiars and hunted the girl down. desperate to escape, the girl dove into an underground river and was sucked into a flooded channel. caught in the turbulent flow, she hit her head and lost consciousness. when the girl awoke, she was alone in a small cavern with her possessed assailant. there was nothing she could do as the demon invaded her mind, probing the depths of her soul prior to ripping her out of her body.

upon arriving in avon, ember was confronted with introducing herself to ash's family with only a letter of introduction from him. his family was disappointed and displeased with both the messenger and the message. the girl ash had been promised to had claimed his involvement with ember was responsible for making her break the engagement arranged by their families. the timing of ash's marriage and ember's pregnancy only made matters worse, as it convinced the family that she had coerced him into marrying her to legitimize her bastard child. but worst of all, they had received word of ash's murder, for which ember had been arrested and charged, but had not been notified that the charges were dropped when he turned up alive in an athelon port. thus, the family believed him dead, and the mother held ember responsible. ember's presence was only tolerated because she was carrying ash's child. even more disturbing was the reactions of the artist's father and brothers, all of whom attempted to seduce her, and the latter of whom pressured her to remarry with one of them. the sister, whom ash had long believed to have hated him, surprised ember the most by becoming her one, strong ally and confidant. she was the only one who knew ash was alive, and she had perpetrated the illusion of ash's death to mess with her family, and ember had made her mischief even more enjoyable. it was only when the brothers' seductions turned into proposals that ember caught on. by which point, the sister had convinced her to wait until she had found a way to rescue ash, before challenging her family's assumptions.

with only one ally in ash's family, in whom she confided an edited version of her plight, ember had to approach the knights of the order of aeslyn tear (the order of ruins), an odd association of adventurers noteworthy for having survived an expedition into aeslyn tear. in her own time, she had the privilege of being one of them. in the present, however, she was a stranger so gaining entrance to their archives and resources would not be as simple as it once was. still, they had made their fortunes and retired to open up a clutch of businesses, central of which was the sword and sorcerer inn. ember checked into the inn as a guest, and spent the first night wrestling with the nightmares that had plagued her with growing intensity. after a poor night's rest, ember could not escape the assault of nightmares in the bath. caught in the grip of her traumatic memories, she would have drowned but for the timely intervention of another guest at the inn. awakening in his firm embrace, the pair of them utterly nude, ember was reminded of the depths of her loss. pushing him away, she retreated from the bath to reflect on the most recent reminder of her purpose in returning to avon. he pursued her, determined to make sure she was all right and demanding an explanation. ember was forced to restrain her phantom lover as they both recognized the man's obvious arousal in the bath, and easily deduced the nature of his interest. in spite of her rebuttals, the man stubbornly attached himself to her as her protector. in an effort to steel her nerve, ember rode out to the ruins to lay her ghosts to rest.

at the end of the day, ember was glad of her "champion's" company. the strange chemistry between them made a nice distraction from the images that haunted her mind, and fielding his questions kept her mind sharp and tuned to the present. granted, the edited version of her story probably raised more questions than it answered. it was a curious mix of truth and fiction, to explain her obscure origins. she did not want to reveal too much to a stranger, speaking in general terms of a curse, a corruption that had been spawned in her in the ruins, that had been transferred to her mate on her wedding night, and which had driven him away from her. she had returned to avon to investigate what had happened to her, in search of a way to restore her husband to his former self. excusing herself from her escort when they returned to the inn, ember slipped through the layers of blinds and security to enter the group's archive vault. unfortunately, just knowing how to get in and out did not protect her from encounters with any of the knights. caught in the act of raiding the vault, ember was dragged into the exclusive taproom for summary justice. to the knights' distress, ember had demonstrated disturbing knowledge of the order, the layout of their establishments, and the mechanics of their security, including verbal and manual recognition codes. when some of them tried to rough her up, they could not help but recognize elements of their own fighting styles in her. for fear of giving too much away if she remained any longer, or fell into their hands, ember took flight, applying a bit of psychic leverage to ensure her escape. ironically, there were members of the order who were not all they seemed, who were impressed and intrigued by what they had seen from ember.

ember's next attempt to gain intelligence on the ruins involved a trip to the sanctuary, and its extensive archives. there, she was approached by a man from the order. lloyd expressed a general curiosity about her raid on the order's archives. ember weighed the opportunity, realizing that he was approaching her as one rogue to another, rather than a representative of the order. taking a chance that he might be able to help her, she confided her need to return to the ruins to gather information needed to bind or banish a demon. lloyd considered what he had seen, put it together in a way that seemed plausible, and reached a decision. he introduced her to an associate of his. the man seemed intrigued by ember, who was introduced as the solution to a problem their organization had hung up on. endorsing her skill as a cat burglar, he proposed a venture for mutual benefit. to acquire the information she needed, ember was instructed to steal a collection of maps and documents from the residence of a powerful merchant in the port, and bring them back to the temple for delivery to the anonymous associate. she was warned to strike in broad daylight, and to resist the temptation to confront the residents on peril of her life. ember was forced to wait until the next day to scope out the second story job she had been given. a quick survey of the target residence convinced her she could not follow the advice lloyd gave her. the closest she could manage was to strike at dusk, when the evening light provided her some cover. unfortunately, her reconnaissance had not gone unnoticed. ember was confronted by a recent acquaintance, the man who rescued her in the bath, and a knight of the order, who took note of her recent raid on the order, her obvious intention to perform another intrusion, and asked her what she was trying to acquire. in response, she asked him what the order could possibly possess that would make her probe their vaults first and foremost.

that evening, when she broke into the mansion, she was surprised by the ease of the caper. nothing went wrong until she made her escape. with frightening efficiency, ember was stalked into a corner and confronted by a dozen mysterious figures. after swiftly disarming and overpowering her, ember's assailants attempted to question her. to her surprise, the veterans of the order arrived on the scene, and with their assistance ember is able to fight them off. of course she is then dragged back to the sword and sorcerer to face questioning about her activities. ember is forced to give an abbreviated account of her misfortunes. a woman without a past, apart from the traumatic memories released on her wedding night, ember came to avon to explore the ruins in hopes of discovering more about her origins and some means of recovering her husband from demonic possession. her raid on the order's archives was to prepare her for an expedition into the ruins. her only explanation for her uncanny ability to bypass the order's security was her psychic ability, the information had just come to her as she proceeded. the caper she had just completed had also been an attempt to gain intelligence on the ruins. they warn her that it had become very dangerous to probe the mysteries of the ruins. it was dangerous to simply possess knowledge or experience detailing anything about the lost city, and those who pursued either tended to turn up dead. they had pursued her in the hopes that she would lead them to whoever was responsible. having heard the details of her misfortune, and finding truth in her depiction of the ruins, she was qualified to join their order. it was the only protection they could offer her. of course, she was willing to take it just to gain access to the archives, but first she had to recover the material she had stashed and deliver it to lloyd's associate.

on the third day, their quest for the surface brought them to the shores of a subterranean lake.

ember was surprised to find herself alive, still in the private bath where he had captured her. ember investigated the rooms staked out by her party and discovered that they were missing, along with all the gear she and they had brought with them. the taint of paradox permeated the ruins and space and time seemed to have warped around her. she called upon her inner resources, and attempted to find her way out of the maze of rooms the mansion had become. the intensity built as ember confronted her captors, witnessed the death and defilement of a few of her party members and friends, and learned of the fate in store for her.

ember escaped during the confusion and became lost in the depths of the ruins. with no idea where to go or what to do, she simply wandered at first, exploring the ancient city. in spite of her recent trauma, she found herself marveling over how intact everything was. ember soon discovered there were frightening things trapped in the city with her. aeslyn tear was a city of ghosts and other spirits; the former wandering freely and liable to follow her everywhere, the latter seemingly bound in place. most were undetectable until she passed through one or stepped into a warding circle and was violently assaulted. the demons were the worst. ghosts chilled her with their touch, taunting and terrifying her while violating her mind, but few were capable of molesting her, body and soul, the way demons did while she was in their spheres of influence. while struggling to defend herself from the demons' ruthless probing, ember realized they were trying to break her in order to possess her body. her fear of becoming trapped with or possessed by one of these entities compounded and evolved into greater horror and desperation with each terrifying encounter.

in spite of the gestalt, it was as if the male half of her had died--he was simply absorbed into her, a ghost trapped in the corner of her mind.

that blow was followed by the loss of her mentor's support.

ash did not believe the girl was capable of carrying on alone and announced his retirement.

with no assurance of ever reclaiming what she had lost, ember set out after azael.

the trauma of losing her other half had prevented ember from pursuing at once.

at that point, the girl inherits the gestalt and comes into full possession of her potential and manifests psychic and metamorphic abilities.

ash urged ember to find herself a husband and try to have a normal life.

he argued that her training made her dependant on ash and no other partner, not even a man as skilled a ash himself, could work with her as effectively as she had worked with ash.

ember refused to accept that she was helpless without her other half, insulted by her mentor's belief that she would just get herself killed if she continued to hunt demons.

part of her longed to have a normal life, to be reunited with her original family or have a family of her own--to just be a normal girl--but she would never have traded ash for any of that.

she could never live a normal life while that demon wore her other face.

ember struggled to sort out the impressions of ash upon her psyche, uncertain of the exact consequences of such an intense union.

a sense of him becoming a permanent part of her, combined with a sense of having lost him forever, was compounded by his inexplicable departure.

her fear, in the face of his absence, was that they had gone too far, and that it had driven him away.

it helps for her to fear that ash might well be possessed or lost entirely. she was sensitive to the fact that his voice in her originates from somewhere within herself. as if he has become the voice of her conscience, as if her memory of him was all she has left of him. she was convicted of the murder of ash, and condemned to death. ember's only hope was to escape and gather proof of her childhood ordeal, and present the defense she should have from the start. fortunately, ember had gained more from her merge than anyone could have suspected. the power that once took the combined effort of ash and ember to summon came easily to her, allowing her to simply walk out of prison. on the day of her planned escape, as she was prepared for her execution, she was surprised to be brought before the court and exonerated of all charges. ash had been sighted departing on a ship to athelon.

by the time a witness reported the observing the departure of ash on a ship bound for the north, ember had sorted herself out. following her "abandonment" by "ash", ember became obsessed with the memories unlocked during the tragic union, setting out to explore the ruins where her soul was nearly sacrificed a decade ago. ember was forced to begin her pursuit in avon, searching for information about the demon that had stolen ash's body, in the hopes of discovering some way to restore ash to his proper place, before making her way to the north in pursuit of the demon.

released on probation, and tasked to find some proof of her claim of demonic involvement, ember set out to investigate the demon's origins, guided internally by ash.

the process of acquitting herself, her mentors conclude, starts with acquiring evidence to support the story of her abduction and information leading to the part of the ruins where she was offered to the demon.

that much she ought to be able to pursue without delving into the ruins. they encouraged her to explore her contacts in the underground to that end, before petitioning for an expedition of the ruins.

thus, she moves on, facing the prospect of being alone, scarred by their intimacy and the changes it wrought in her, unable to open up to another.

her trial did not go well. unable to state her defense, she was utterly naked before the prosecution. ember defended herself with a slightly altered version of the facts of the demon's attack. ash and ember were predominantly male and female minded up to the point where they merge, after which point they, or rather, ember, must struggle with issues of sexuality and gender. the integration of the memories of both lives takes time, and was integral to the integration of personalities. each personality experiences the memories of the other only second hand. depth was added, and the experiences were there, but time was required to assimilate them. it works best if she does not have access to her metamorphic potential, if she was compelled to think of herself as ember with the memories of her lover and other odd bits of experience imprinted in her mind.

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