There are four parts to the greater story. The second part of the story begins when the boy is seventeen, and has turned his attention to the study of philosophy, religion and the occult after confirming that science and medicine offered, at best, only a cosmetic solution. Of course, the search for a magical or miraculous solution was not very promising. A priest he confided in accused him of letting *demons* tempt him. While debating the implications of that accusation, he was confronted by a *real* demon and possessed. Divorced from his body, “she” manifested her true spirit while trapped in the depths of the demon’s mind. There, she was hunted by the rogue gods of the inner realm, captive souls in competition with each other for domination over the world they had dreamed up together to escape the nightmare of their enslavement.

The second part follows her through the initial experience of waking up in a nightmare as the person she always dreamed of being. Trapped in the nightmare with her was a young man the demon possessed to get to the boy she had been. Together they face a new existence in a world where gods and magic played an active role in shaping reality, in spite of the rise of technology. They are introduced as lost souls recovered from the rift by the founder of the Order of Aeslyn Tear. Impressed by their ability to function outside of reality, the order recruits and trains them in the psychic, magic and martial arts a rift walker needed to survive missions out on the threshold and among the shattered realms. Several books can be devoted to this portion of the story, supported by existing notes and rough drafts.

The second part includes adventures in reclaiming a haunted mansion won in a hand of cards, being recruited into the order of Aeslyn Tear, rescuing lost souls from rifts in the fabric of time and space, fighting in wars in the shattered realms, and battling an adversary committed to exploiting demons for power. To protect themselves from the predation of rogue gods, they conceive new incarnations of themselves to preserve their psyches in the event of their death or destruction. As members of the order they learn the arts and skills they need to survive an encounter with a rogue god, earning their place among the paladins of the Order of Aeslyn Tear facing threats in the common realm as diverse as demons, dragons, wraiths, vampires, weres, wizards, witches and warlocks. On the threshold, among the shattered realms, they faced even greater challenges.

The second part of the story ends with an attack on a gathering of the order at their home. The order had faced a plague of demon activity they had traced to depths of Aeslyn Tear. The goddess had sacrificed the city in ancient times to seal away a host of demons unleashed in the war that broke out among the gods at the start of the purge. A rogue member of the order was recruiting followers willing to risk their souls to harness demons and become gods. Few, if any, succeeded and the demons they resurrected ended up on the rogue paladin’s leash. This adversary sent the demons to destroy the group before it could find proof of his actions or identity. During the attack, the demon of the realm was provoked into defending its host from a demon assassin’s attempt to possess her. Her daughter took her demon to save her soul, but nothing could stop the dragon that devoured her.

The boy is originally a native of our world. His life can be based closely on mine with the exception of becoming a demon host in his teens and manifesting as a girl in limbo—except when asserting the masculine perspective cultivated by the life he has lived as a boy.

What leads to the boy's possession? The boy was able to refine his female self image through reading, writing, art and role-playing. He also explored the options available for manifesting his true form, including hormone therapy, gender-reassignment-surgery, cross-dressing, acting, psychology, philosophy, biology, bio-chemistry, physics, magic, and religion. His study of religious mysteries and the occult could reasonably bring him into contact with groups the demon was associated with.

The everlasting question concerning a need for the transgender premise can be resolved in terms of how the situation among the captured souls, the inner gods, has developed. When the boy is possessed, the discrepancy between his physical incarnation and his—or rather, her—self-image allows her to escape identification and slip through the antagonists' fingers.

Notes and material that can be used here tend to feature an androgynous protagonist, one that could easily be mistaken for an angel of the goddess.

The tomboy (what else would you call a girl raised as a boy?) was discovered and brought across the threshold by the focus. She was forced to hide among the native, mortal population while learning and mastering the skills and powers she would need to survive as one of the inner gods.

The soul of an individual born and raised on Earth was possessed by a demon and exiled to a nightmare existence in the depths of its mind. The soul was severely maimed fighting the demon’s domination, forced to tear itself free from the memories and identity the demon had claimed for its use. The soul was discovered by the demon’s focus, the soul of its first victim—and the founder of the dream the majority of the captive souls took refuge in. The dream had evolved into the Inner Realm, where the refugees were gods with waning influence over reality. Believing that their power over the Inner Realm was diminished for being divided among them, many of the gods had turned on each other. Some, believing that dominance could only be achieved by conquering the demon, chose to pursue two gods in particular—the oldest, its focus, and the newest, its current host. Fortunately, the focus was the best at finding and retrieving souls from the abyss, and made it her mission to help new hosts find sanctuary through anonymous incarnation in the Inner Realm.

The demon had taken an intermediary host to get close enough to possess the soul of the protagonist, so the goddess found herself with two souls to save, the first thankfully far less traumatized and vulnerable than the second, since the intermediary had been replaced as host so quickly. The intermediary quickly sorted out who he was and decided who he wanted to be in the inner realm. The host, however, had no clue who or what he—or she—was, and experienced difficulty choosing what to become. Which, of course, was a problem since their best chance to avoid being hunted and destroyed by a rogue god intent on achieving absolute power was to reincarnate themselves as inhabitants of Aeirn in the Inner Realm. This way, if they were found and destroyed, their souls would be safe. The host still could not choose between male or female, when it was satisfied with every other detail of its incarnation, so it spent time as each during the two years her companion spent searching for a woman to bear his reincarnation. He managed to convince the host that a female reincarnation was too risky to produce, since the host would be forced to be her mother.

Unfortunately, while attempting to sire a boy, lingering indecision prompted the host to turn female and conceive a girl. The host assumed the girl had been conceived instead of, rather than in addition to, a boy. The intermediary was not so naive. When the intermediary consulted the focus, she shrugged and told him the boy and the girl could both be incarnations of the host, pointing out that three incarnations might be useful, since the host was at greater risk anyway. The intermediary decided to provide the host with a little extra protection by marrying her.

The focus explained that new incarnations of her soul would be a completely new people, but assured them that embracing their new lives, when they were ready, would be like waking up in a dream—and even if they were slain before their new incarnations were mature enough to receive them, one day they would begin to remember who they were. The hardest part, she confessed, would be falling asleep and letting go of their current incarnations.

On this new foundation, most of the developed threads can be built. The first priority is to sort out how each of the reincarnations are established in order to determine what changes are necessary to integrate and support the critical threads.

The host and the intermediary each chose a surrogate mother for their male reincarnations. The host chose a muse who had already had two daughters with the man she loved but could not marry. That man also had children with his wife, a son and a daughter. The intermediary had chosen the wife of a lord who had no other children.

The host and the intermediary married and settled in a manor at the opposite end of the ruins from the city. The host won the title to the estate in a hand of cards, and discovered that the mansion was haunted by things that had moved in from the depths of the ruins beneath it. They cleared out the cursed, damned and undead inhabitants with the help of adventurers that included a few members of the Order of Aeslyn Tear. The host and the intermediary were then recruited into the order, where they were trained and knighted. Although the order provided the host and her daughter with an extra layer of protection, it also put them in conflict with an adversary as dangerous as a rogue god.

The host’s appearance suggested that she was descended from a long line of muses. Many believed that the host had fled from a region where muses had been outlawed. There had been plenty of whispered rumors, but never anything solid enough to identify where she came from.

It occurred to the host and the intermediary that the relationship they had was temporary. They would gradually be absorbed into their reincarnations during their second decade of life. Rather than risk being split up by events in the children’s lives, they arranged for the girl to marry the reincarnation of the rival. The head of the order was a witness to the official betrothal. Upon the deaths of the girl’s parents, it became the family advocate’s duty to inform the girl when she turned seventeen—a year before she could marry, but before she could officially pick a partner for the final year of her initiation.

The most critical event in the girl’s life came in the autumn of her seventh year. The adversary sent a force of demon assassins to raid a gathering of the order at the host’s manor. The host’s daughter watched helplessly as her parents were slain in the massacre, along with their friends and the children they had brought to the city for testing at the academy.

Amid the slaughter, the girl came across one of her friends and the two of them tried to escape together. They watched in horror as a demon assassin attempted to possess the girl’s mother and provoked the demon of the realm into defending its host. After crushing the assassin, killing the girl’s father, and flinging the girl’s friend into a wall, the demon god confronted the girl and discovered that she was a reincarnation of its host. As the demon probed her mind, the girl sensed her mother fighting the demon’s control and took possession of the demon to free her. Unaware of what the girl had done, the mother picked up the wounded friend, grabbed her daughter and fled into the depths of the ruins, where they became caught between a dragon and the pursuing assassins. Urging the girl to take her friend and hide, the mother used herself to bait the dragon into slaughtering the assassins, but ultimately could not escape from the trap she put herself in. When searching assassins closed in on their hiding place, the girl was forced to move, struggling to bring her along, unconsciously forming a telepathic rapport in her attempt to wake the other girl and keep her alert. When her friend finally succumbed to internal bleeding, the girl shared the experience of her death. Only her assimilation of the demon of the realm saved her from a sympathetic death. Drawn to the sound of her mother’s voice, the girl witnessed the dragon devouring her mother. Her cry of loss caught the dragon’s attention, forcing her to flee deeper into the ruins, blind with fear and horror.

Ember had assimilated the demon of the realm almost unconsciously. It never occurred to her to wonder what happened to it, once she succeeded in freeing her mother’s mind from it. The sense of knowledge and power unlocked within her had encouraged her to try helping her mother against the dragon and demons pursuing them. The death of her mother delivered a crippling blow to the girl’s psyche, forced to assimilate her mother’s mind so soon after embracing the demon; its presence tainted and compromised the integration of her mother and Ember’s minds, threatening the foundations of the girl's identity.

Enough damage was done to cause the memory and personality of her mother to become divided along several fault lines before they were assimilated along with parts of the demon's psyche, crippling and incapacitating the girl, as a goddess. After her encounters with the ghosts and spirits of the ruins, it was natural for her to assume new facets of her psyche were the "ghosts" of her mother and the friend she felt die in her mind.

I] INTRODUCTION

The edge of oblivion

A nightmare wide awake

Lost in a shifting wasteland

Another lost soul

It's not the world, it's you; you're all over the place

Gathering my ghost

Wandering in the shadow of reality

A gathering of ghosts

You're not like the other ghosts

II] ESCALATION

Confronting angels

An escort

Gods

The process of realization

The manifestation of my humanity and divinity

A singular duality

A startling revelation

Crossing the threshold

The sanctuary

III] COMPLICATIONS & CONFRONTATIONS

A period of adjustment

The midnight visitor

Confronted by the dragon

A challenge to my humanity

The cost of creation

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The matter of my initiation

The manner of my initiation

Preparing

IV] CLIMAX & CONCLUSION

The eve of my initiation

Confronted by the gods

A test of my immortality

Offering up myself

Death and resurrection

Witnessing the feast

In the company of gods

Drawn into the dance

Allies and adversaries

Once eclipsed by the demon, the girl found herself in limbo, lost in a nightmare wasteland that was a pale reflection of reality.

The demon's realm was an endless and incredibly lucid dream—an eternal prison.

The first person the girl encountered was the soul of the demon's former host.

The former host was drawn to her and took her under his wing.

He was the one who explains to her what has happened, where she was and what it means.

It took an eternity to navigate the wasteland nightmare that enveloped the world within.

The host was able to lead the girl back to the threshold of reality. There, they confronted the gods—other eclipsed souls. As the new living host, the girl was the key to defending the realm from the embodied demon's absolute power. The plan is to attack the demon through her, the way it was attacked through its former host. The attack is led by the former host, using a modified binding to conquer the demon.

A demon's nature - the girl learned about the nature of demons from the former host. Angels fall and become demons, spirits that impose themselves on the souls they prey on. Most souls rebel against the identity forced upon them, so most demons are tormented souls, filled with pain and self-loathing, striking out at others like a wounded animal and driven in search of the soul that will bring them peace.

The host distracted her from the nightmare, and kept her focused, with a string of revelations.

To him, her world was a kind of afterlife.

The depths of the demon's mind was where the souls it collected were imprisoned.

It was also where the nightmare they shared had evolved and solidified into a mortal realm.

The seed souls initially entered a kind of wasteland, a chaotic, shifting amorphea polarized by the surreal and the ideal.

An angel's fall - the boy eventually learns the story of the demon's creation—the events of an angel's fall. On the original aeirn, an angel fell in love with an avon. The avon was slain and the angel, unable to accept her death, clung to and unintentionally took possession of her soul, severing itself from the soul of its creator. As a result, the demon confronted two problems: her soul had become the focus of the demon's existence and her mind was exiled to the unconscious depths of the demon's mind. Her survival depended on the demon's survival and its existence now depended on the possession of her soul—until it could find a soul of its own.

The demon's hope - the demon began to collect souls, searching for the one that could possess it—a perfect melding of mind and soul. The demon's originial hope of ressurecting the avon died when her body was destroyed and the demon was forced to claim a new host. The demon watched with curiosity as dragons shared the discovery of humans on earth with the people of aeirn. The demon fought in the defence of life and in support of the realization of creation against demons who preyed on the living or angels who viewed physical life as a threat to spiritual existence. The demon witnessed the destruction of aeirn, surviving the cataclysm and retreating to earth in a human host with a handful of other survivors.

Their thoughts and feelings created the world they existed in, an unending dream that was difficult to control because it was shared.

In time, they learned how to manipulate their reality.

That reality became stable through the influence of their offspring, replicating the pattern of their host realm

The captive souls had evolved into the gods of the inner realm.

The inner gods took an active role in creating a haven for humanity, bringing the world of aeirn to life.

As in the outer realm, the physical processes of life imposed its natural order and eventually ended the age of creation.

The intimate participation of the inner gods continued though the first age of magic, a period of enlightenment that became tainted by ambition.

The more ambitious gods were turned against each other by the belief that their power derived from a single source and was diminished by division.

In the wasteland, time had no meaning, but once they approached the threshold of the realm, things picked up.

She was introduced to other eclipsed souls, the lost souls...

Instead of thinking of himself as a god, he and many others thought of themselves as exiles.

She learned they had all turned their back on the lure of becoming gods of the inner realm seeking a way back to the outer realm.

Where she came from, she was just a girl; here she could be a goddess.

The host warns her that the inner gods would attempt to pull her into their ranks—and intrigues.

She was in immediate danger because the demon was only vulnerable to attack through her.

Many of the inner gods still sought absolute power in the realm through conquest of the demon.

While the demon possessed her, body and soul, each provided a direct link to the demon—the true god of the realm.

Desperate to exploit the opportunity she represented, the power-hungry blocked her access to the inner realm.

Her body offered a direct, physical avenue of attack.

Her soul—or more accurately, her mind—offered an easier, indirect avenue of attack.

Tormenting her was an indirect way to torment and provoke the demon.

Under this type of abuse, her exile was promising to become a form of hell.

Her mentor had the knowledge and skill to restore the status quo by helping her reclaim her body and unseating the demon from her native realm.

He had been the victim of a plot to conquer the demon—the second that he knew of.

The original plot had been carried out against the demon's focus—the soul claimed at the demon's original fall.

The plot to draw the demon down where it could be confronted was engineered by one of the inner gods and an alliance of lost souls.

The objective was to summon the demon of the realm, conquer it and claim its dominion.

Once in possession of a body within the domain, the demon would be vulnerable to attack by those who conspired to bring it down.

The members of the cabal cooporated to create a situation to their advantage and then competed to exploit it.

The supporters of the conspiracy became adversaries.

Each seeking to dominate and devour the demon in the hopes of becoming the soul of creation

Each needing the help of others to make the demon vulnerable to such an assault.

This contest evolved into a war among the gods known as the purge.

The architects of the purge eventually identified the demon's focus and confronted her.

The problem was that none of them knew how this would affect them or the world they were in.

... Her personal demon survived the annihilation of both souls by taking possession of one of the touched.

In the aftermath of the purge the unstable alliance of opportunistic rivals changed tactics.

An inner god who had been a demonologist in the outer realm had conceived of a plan to attack the demon through its host.

The demonologist claimed that the attack would force the demon to turn its attention inward, allowing the man to regain possession of his body.

As soon as the demon entered the body he had manifested in its realm, it could be banished—its link to him destroyed in the process.

In theory, the plot could be turned to her advantage, instead of drawing the demon down into the realm, draw it up to the edge of the abyss.

By provoking it from there, he believed he could force it to exchange places with her.

After the girl was restored, he would lure it into the abyss, in a race to regain possession of the body he had on earth.

If you believe in demons, or even if you don't, did you ever wonder why they steal souls? More importantly, what happens to those poor souls? Well, I found out when a demon devoured mine. It took everything from me; my thoughts, my memories, my entire mind was devoured and digested as it swallowed my soul and took over my body. Only an echo of me survived, trapped in the darkest depths of the demon’s mind.

I was in pretty bad shape when the goddess found me and nursed me back to sanity. I might have been any trauma victim suffering from amnesia at the start of my new life, if my body did not tell the story of my first act of creation.

I was not the only soul to fall prey to this demon. I was found on the edge of oblivion and brought into a world created by the other souls the demon had devoured. The first soul, the one claimed in the demon's fall and the oldest of this world's gods, became my guide and mentor. As the youngest of this world's gods, I woke up with no idea who or what I had been, but possessing the power to become anything I could imagine. The first soul helped me to recover my humanity, but could not tell me if I had been a man or a woman. Until I could imagine myself as one or the other, I was neither and essentially both. Embodying that little paradox was my first act of creation.

While I pulled myself together and learned about the world I had been thrust into, I discovered that there might no longer be room in it for gods. What had started out as a dream shared by the eclipsed souls had taken on a life of its own, filled with life and populated by the mortal descendants of the gods all participating in the realization of that dream. The mortals noticed the waning influence of the gods and began to question and challenge their power and authority—or even deny their existence. Many of the original, immortal creations, and a full third of the gods, began to see intelligent life as a threat to creation.

War broke out, between those committed to a culling of the mortals and those devoted to the preservation of all life. Under the cover of that war, a tiny faction conspired against all of the eclipsed. The eclipsed had always known that the demon was the true master of our existence, and that it's primary objective was to find the soul that would make it sound and whole. The conspiracy was founded on the idea that a soul could take possession of the demon and possess absolute power and authority over everything in it's dominion. The first part of their scheme required the elimination of all rivals to the demon's claim.

I had arrived in the middle of the war, at a time when the gods were beginning to realize that someone was hunting them down one by one. The hunters were quick to see me as a potential short cut to achieving their ultimate goal, since the most direct way to assault the demon was through me. Some of them believed that the demon could be provoked into a direct confrontation by attacking me, or attacking it through me with my soul as the battlefield.

In the beginning, I was pretty intimidated by the gods and the prospect of being one of them. I knew I was out of my league, and honestly, I was more concerned with just figuring out who I was and what I wanted from life. I needed perspective, and I was not going to find that by playing god.