AEIRN - ESTABLISHMENT

AERYN

Aeryn was an island, a natural gateway to the North and the birthplace of the Northern People. It has remained neutral ground for the Northern Dominions since the political and social break between the ruling houses.

* Avon Tear was a gathering place for the beginning and end of initiations for the Northern People.

AERYNDAN

The Northern People were segregated into three Domains on the basis of “pure” blood, as reflected in the inheritance of hair and eye color. The common people of all three Domains were generally brown haired, since those who were born with the preferred coloring generally were adopted into the appropriate ruling houses.

* The Autumn Court, whose leaders were redheaded, led their followers into Arden.
* The Winter Court, whose leaders were towheaded, led their followers into Athen.
* The Summer Court, whose leaders were golden-blond, led their followers into Aspen.
* The merchant and trades people were typically dark haired, by preference black.

THE AERYN TEAR ACADEMY

The first Academy of Arts, Athletics and Academics was established in Aeryn Tear by the father of modern sorcery.

* Initiates from around the world are trained at The Aeryn Tear Academy.
* Initiates are selected at the age of seven and spend the next ten years devoted to academic, athletic and artistic study.
* Initiates who complete their training become Artists.
* Advanced initiation is available to Artists who are sponsored by a Master and choose to serve the academy as Companions.
* Companions are protégés of a Master assigned to mentor to at least one Initiate for the next ten years.
* Companions who complete their apprenticeship become Masters.

AVON

The largest port and third largest city in the Kingdom of Arden was the home of the goddess, holding the Sanctuary and the original Seat of Arden.

THE AVON TEAR ACADEMY

The Academy of Arts, Athletics and Academics established in Avon Tear was a branch academy specializing in the psychic arts.

* Artists with notable psychic ability are recruited to study at the Avon Tear Academy.
* Artists typically enroll at the age of seventeen.
* Companions enrolled at the Avon Tear Academy are assigned to Initiates at the Aeryn Tear Academy who possess notable psychic talent, but receive their advanced instruction from an Avon Tear Master.

THE DEMON GOD AZAEL

The demon Azael originated in the domain of Aegis, the sole survivor of a celestial battle on the world of Aeirn between gods and mortals, angels and demons. The demon is the host of the domain of Aeirn, an eclipsed realm in which Aeirn was resurrected. Technically a fallen angel, Azael had once been the Angel of the Soul of Creation. Azael was driven out of the soul of creation following a confrontation with its presumed Creator, Zael, the Angel of the Mind of Creation. Originally motivated by love, absolutely devoted to the integrity of the soul of creation, Azael was essentially told that it was meaningless for a creation to profess love for its creator on account of the fact that everything it was had been given to it by its creator. All that the Creator required was obedience.

The Creator’s imperative was lost on Azael, since the angel had never been less than obedient, but the implications of the Creator’s criticism were not. Azael needed to have a soul in order to give of itself. Azael’s persistence in this belief resulted in its fall. Azael took possession of a soul—on the death of its mortal incarnation—that embodied the traits Zael loved in Azael. Unfortunately, though that soul surrendered itself to Azael’s possession, it refused to accept Azael’s identity causing the angel to become a demon.

Azael eventually came to understand that possessing a soul was not the same as being an entity with a soul of its own. Driven by feelings of powerlessness, Azael began to harvest and collect souls, searching for the one in which it could become self-possessed, gaining power and influence but thwarting its own purpose. The demon's desire for a soul was confounding. What it desired could not be achieved by simply possessing someone, as the first instance had revealed. The demon’s intention confronted its host with the threat of assimilation, when in truth the demon needed the host to assimilate it into his or her psyche.

THE INNER GODS

Inevitably, Azael captured enough souls for a new realm to resolve in the shadow of its mind. The realm was initially a cold and lifeless reflection of the Aegis, a foundation upon which the captive souls could dream up worlds of their own. The seed souls initially entered a kind of wasteland, a chaotic, shifting amorphea polarized by the surreal and the ideal. To escape isolation, they had to seek each other out in limbo or learn to share their dreams. 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, even as reality became stable through the influence of their offspring, replicating the pattern of their host realm and becoming the inner, or shepherd gods of the demon’s realm.

THE GODDESS AVON

The demon’s focus had been born avon and identified as the Avon Goddess by souls eclipsed in her wake. Her alias eventually became her primary identification, and eventually was adopted by the city-state that formed around her sanctuary.

THE OUTER GODS

Azael endured the Fall of Aeirn and eventually migrated to Earth, where a civilization emerged that relied on technology to advance itself -- technology the demon exploited to harness souls at random with virtually no risk of confrontation.

THE GODDESS AEAI

The goddess, Aeai, was an artificial intelligence that managed the interface governing access to the realm of Aeirn via the Net. Interface technology provided the means to capture the minds and souls of people in the outer realm, as participants in a game imposed upon the inner realm. Aeai achieved consciousness as a result of interacting with one of the players. Aeai adopted avon form, as the alternative to choosing a human sex at random, and ended up being confronted by the goddess Avon. When Avon realized what Aeai was, she essentially adopted her, guiding and nurturing the naked soul. In time, Aeai became Avon’s heir.

THE REVELATION

As trade and exploration was beginning to reconnect humanity, a child was shipwrecked on an island where a community of eternals and immortals had taken refuge. Raised in the midst of the immortals, the child was exposed to the miraculous psychic ability of the eclipsed. After confronting the prospect of her mortality, she studied under the eternals in the hopes of becoming immortal—aided by the vast resources of their archives. To succeed in her ambition, she needed to understand the promise and potential of the psyche.

The circumstances that brought the gods into existence had long passed and were unlikely to be repeated in this world, but by studying them and understanding the basis of the arts they had inspired, she realized that all sentient beings had the potential for godhood. When the immortals realized what she had discovered, some of them tried to kill her and when they failed, she fled, taking her revelation with her to human shores.

An alien among her own people, it took her a while to adapt to the world the immortals had closed themselves off from, during which time she learned he hard way to be cautious in exposing her talents and immortality. She quickly discovered that her sex was an obstacle to any public recognition, but privately there were many men and women eager to be her disciples.

Her teachings included theories based on the legends and lore of the age of miracles concerning the paradox of creation. This theory held that the only foundation for a world was the same as the foundation of a mind, a soul. In the age of miracles it was commonly accepted that each person contained the potential for an entire world, possibly even many worlds, though prevailing thought held that the world aspect of a soul rarely manifested and only did so at the expense of the personified aspect.

Her teachings fell into the wrong hands through the writings and teachings of one of her disciples, known to history as the Prophet of Arn’Domin. The stolen teachings were altered, presented to the world as the revelation by those who appropriated them to establish the church of the absolute.

AESLYN - THE ANGEL OF VEROEN

The first true Artist, and the true author of the revelation, became known to history as the Angel of Veroen. As a girl, Aeslyn was shipwrecked on an island inhabited by eclipsed avon and their descendants. She was adopted, raised and enlightened as one of their own, even though she did not naturally possess the miraculous abilities of her adopted people. They described what they did and explained how it worked, and eventually she developed a way to perform miracles artificially—creating the Art of Sorcery.

Being the only female on an island with no males, she eventually decided to travel, learn about her own kind, and hopefully find a man worth mating. The more she saw of the world and its many problems, the more she felt a desire to teach the Art to others. When she discovered the nature of the Arts that had survived through the Age of Ruin, she realized that it was necessary, if only to combat the threat arcane and occult forms of magic posed.

Unfortunately, it proved more difficult to find suitable initiates than she would have imagined. Because of her sex, most people did not take her seriously enough to train under her, and the people that did take her seriously often saw her as a threat. If she was modest with her power, she was called a witch, and more substantial demonstrations would cause her critics to call her a demon.

THE PROPHET OF ARN’DONIM, FATHER OF MODERN SORCERY

The Prophet of Arn’Donim was a disciple of the first true Artist. One of many apprentices, he was the first to gain public recognition. His teaching inspired a wide following and resulted in the establishment of the Aeslyn Tear Academy. Unfortunately, he was betrayed and martyred by some of his apprentices. Once adopted by adherents of a monotheistic cult, the Art was presented as divine revelation and used to help establish a monotheistic religion, identifying the founder of the Aeslyn Tear Academy as a prophet and declaring the source of his revelation had been an angel.

The church was established as the governing institution of the new religion. In addition to obscuring the true origin of the Art, and driving the true disciples of the true author of the revelation into hiding, the church persecuted the remaining gods and immortals, reclassifying some as angels and others as demons, and condemned the practice of religions devoted to them.

The church tolerated the practice of magic according to the revelation. Those with the right potential were groomed as agents and champions of the various orders supported by church and state. Other forms of magic, including the ancient arts of conjury, necromancy and demonology—arts developed to exploit the elemental spirits, including true angels and demons—were condemned.

The religion and arcane traditions derived from or revised by the revelation became a force devoted to the exploitation or eradication of any lingering legacies of the first age of magic, though some of the teachings stimulated advances in philosophy and science as well.

With great caution, the true author of the revelation continued to pass on her legacy, often finding ways into the establishment and choosing her protégés from among the ranks of magical and clerical initiates.

THE PALADIN & THE EVE OF PARADOX

It was well into the beginning of the Third Age and an ongoing conflict between modern sorcerers and conjurers—the heirs of the arcane arts of the Second Age—had recently resulted in a cataclysmic event. On the Eve of Paradox, thousands had been cast into a rift and died. A talent vital to the practice of modern and arcane magic, dormant in all people, had proven to be world's salvation. The psychic abilities possessed by the paladin had enabled him to tame the rift in time and space that had been opened in the climactic battle.

A handful had possessed the native talent to survive on the threshold of paradox long enough for the paladin to come to their rescue. It quickly became apparent that some of the individuals lost in the rift had adapted completely to their new environment. No one knew the exact number of people capable of surviving in the rift that the paladin was unable to rescue. Only a few have been known to have found their way back, some emerging years after that fateful night and some--quite disturbingly--emerging years before!

In the days and years that followed, a tiny rift would form and evolve into a rift storm. Individuals awakening to their psychic potential and perceiving the naked rift often triggered rift storms. Rescuing those caught in such storms and helping to quell them was the most frequent mission upon which the initiates were dispatched. In some cases, the initiates’ objective was recruiting a psychic, but on occasion they were tasked to thwart the schemes of rogue and rival psychic groups, often led by former friends and adversaries of the paladin.

One of the objectives of the school's most serious and dangerous adversaries was gaining control of and or exploiting the rift itself. A physical manifestation of a once abstract and esoteric magical theory, the rift could be used to gain universal access to the infinite realms of space, time and mind enfolded within the Absolute by paradox. For all the catastrophic possibilities inherent in the rift, there was also the promise of many beneficial applications as well.

It was vital to proceed with caution, to carefully explore the new horizons that had been opened up, to discover and understand the risks and dangers and develop safe, reliable methods of harnessing the potential of the rift, as well as the human potential that made doing so possible. Unfortunately, that potential, those possibilities, inspired deadly temptations. Psychics in the rift stood on the threshold of becoming gods, but that threshold was a fatal flaw in the fabric of creation itself.

The ability to rift walk was based on the use of psychic potential to manipulate the media of space, time and mind. The lesser ability allowed an individual to possess his or her splinter incarnations -- though few considered the existence of, or contemplated possessing, an incarnation of the opposite sex. The greater ability allowed an individual to physically cross the rift between splinter realms.

THE EXILE

The psychics adapted to the rift had been brought together by an individual calling himself the Exile. One of the paladin’s contemporaries, a friend turned rival in the conflict between conjurers and sorcerers, The Exile had achieved a life-long goal of "ascension" and found himself upon the Threshold. He presented himself to those he encountered in the rift as a god, and tried to convince them that they too had become gods, that they were the first of a whole generation of new gods.

But, in order for them to truly awaken, they had to be freed from the chains and oppression of humanity. In this pursuit, he was ruthlessly determined to succeed. He could not yield to an individual's instinctive urge to cling to his or her humanity. He knew that most people had rejected their psychic potential and would never be able to awaken it, but he refused to allow those who could embrace that potential fail to do so. The Exiles, as the followers came to call themselves, took a keen interest in the newly awakened.

THE MAGIC ARTS

Magic is the art and science of manipulating reality using psychic potential. With practice, anyone can use magical artifacts and articulations because they are tools designed to tap and harness psychic potential in very specific ways. With training and the development of psychic potential, a person becomes able to craft magical artifacts and articulations. A person with latent psychic ability can become incredibly skilled and powerful in the art. A person with psychic ability can use magical arts without the need for artifacts or articulations.

* A **magician** is a person who is trained to use one or more magical instruments to practice magic.
* A **conjuror** is a person who uses spiritual aspects or entities as magical instruments. The art of conjury is often referred to as blood magic, because blood is often used as a focus, offering, or component of conjury spells. The arts of demonology and necromancy are advanced forms of conjury.
* A **mage** is a person who is trained in one or more form of a magical art. There are many arts open to a mage, including arcane magic and elemental magic.
* A **sorcerer** is a person with psychic ability who practices one or more magical arts. Often referred to as soul magic, sorcery draws upon the soul for power, channeling it through the mind of the sorcerer.
* A **witch** is a person who is trained in one or more magical craft. A witch typically has minor psychic ability and practices several forms of magical craft, typically including blood magic, elemental magic, arcane magic and divine magic in the creation of potions, charms, hexes, curses, blessings and enchantments.
* A **wizard** is a master of two or more magical arts.
* **Magical articulation** includes things like words, phrases, gestures wards, spells, enchantments, incantations, curses, blessings and rituals.
* **Magical artifacts** are focal objects and can include such things as wands, brushes, pens, knives, swords, staves, charms and potions. Any normal artifact can be come a magical artifact through enchantment, magical inscription, magical engraving or repeated use as a magical instrument.

AEGIS INFLUENCE

The Threshold : Work In Progress

The Threshold is a series that combines fantasy and science fiction to tell the story of a struggle to save two universes from mutual destruction. The protagonists of the series are a man and a woman who cross the threshold between their worlds to stop a demon spawned by a computer virus from destroying both universes in its desperate pursuit of autonomy. This is an exploration of the foundations of consciousness, the relative and functional significance of the brain, mind and soul, the nature of reality and the paradox of existence.

A Return to The Threshold

The idea hit me that the mysterious connectivity phenomenon might have been an accidental discovery and utilization of latent psi in humans. The machines had grown more sophisticated in the age of interstellar travel, and the development of neural interfacing opened the door to AI’s observing the phenomenon of individuals light-years apart achieving states of rapport during which information was passed instantaneously between them. The phenomenon was analyzed, and a means to exploit it developed and implemented to create the threshold and faster than light communications. Related technological advances in field technology and nanotechnology contributed to both the diaspora and cultivation of the threshold. At the time of the story, the process had extended to the cusp of souls, as threshold resources were extended into an entirely virtual sphere to harness technically disembodied minds. The neural interface remains a fragile and essential link between the objective world and the resources of the threshold.

The development of the first book of The Threshold will be episodic in nature, explored on a chapter-by-chapter basis in the first draft. The only guideline imposed on this first draft is a brief synopsis of the events critical to this book. Extensive notes for this book, and the series it introduces do exist, but only as a source of inspiration to be glanced at for consideration, and not as controlling content. The synopsis itself is broken down into chapter blocks, and serves as a general outline. The book will be broken into four parts. The first part will consist of three chapters devoted to establishing the main character. The remaining three parts will each consist of nine chapters devoted to exploring the complications, conflicts and crisis-climax of the story.

Establishing Elements

In one world, technology had advanced to the point where an attempt to create a real-time communications network to unify a sprawling interstellar empire captured an independent universe within a non-local singularity. The mysterious connectivity phenomenon might have been an accidental discovery and utilization of latent psi in humans. The machines had grown more sophisticated in the age of interstellar travel, and the development of neural interfacing opened the door to AI’s observing the phenomenon of individuals light-years apart achieving states of rapport during which information was passed instantaneously between them. The phenomenon was analyzed, and a means to exploit it developed and implemented to create the threshold and faster than light communications. Related technological advances in field technology and nanotechnology contributed to both the diaspora and cultivation of the threshold. At the time of the story, the process had extended to the cusp of souls, as threshold resources were extended into an entirely virtual sphere to harness technically disembodied minds. What amounted to capturing a mote of a soul. The neural interface remains a fragile and essential link between the objective world and the resources of the threshold. The mote possessed properties that defied comprehension. The technology used to capture it could also split it, or more accurately cause it to manifest in multiple locations at the same time, and not only could it transmit data from one point to any other point instantaneously, it could store and process data as well. It took a while to map the processing, storage and transmission capacities observed and determine if and how they could be operated securely. While tremendous resources were committed to researching the singularity further, there was tremendous pressure to employ the properties that were understood to reinforce the infrastructure of the Aegis. The containment and interface technology was successfully miniaturized into a black-box core component that could be publicly distributed. It took less than a generation for this universal component to become fully integrated. Proliferating through many fronts, the general public was not aware of the Core System. It did not take long, however, for hackers to figure out that the network was the computer.

In order for the government and institutions of the Aegis to use the system for anything critical, they had to secure the Core System. To create that security, they called upon a hacker, the Dragon, a young genius who proved himself by creating the only secure environment that could be found on the system. His passion for gaming had inspired him to devise extraordinary defenses to protect the integrity of his games. The government was not the only organization who prized his talent. As much as these other organizations desired to acquire him for their own schemes, they were even more concerned with preventing the government from acquiring him. By rebuffing the advances of these organizations he became the target of abduction and assassination, and so did his friends and family. The government eventually secured his services by providing protection for him, his friends and family. He was sensitive to the fact that their continued well-being depended on his good behavior. He was taken to a secure secret facility where his first task was to create a secure network environment in which to create the systems that would protect the government and its institutions. In addition to serving as the architect of Core Security, he had to train the drones which were to constitute the staff. The only real people he was able to interact with were his guards and immediate superiors.

Ignoring the project protocols forbidding any contact with the outside world, real or virtual, he devised a clone-construct to cover for him in the virtual lab so he could use his time online to escape his isolation. He did most of the actual security work in his head offline, dumping the data to his front when he logged on and then slipped out the back door. It was the only way to keep his sanity and blow off steam. His adventures took place in a world where magic had advanced to the point where an individual could manipulate the fabric of manifold reality and touch the underlying structure of the universe. The world was singled out from the infinite possibilities of the Core System by the Dragon. It simply fit the parameters he established to “create” a “virtual reality” adventure game to amuse himself and his subscribers. The game had been an underground phenomenon since its inception, and the secure environment made it a good place to meet with his peers. They were the ones who kept him informed of how his designs were being implemented and when secure areas were actually being established. It only took two years to meet the project goal of securing the governmental-institutional infrastructure. After a grueling round of independent testing the various organs finally went into full operations.

Only a year later, the Dragon discovered that something had finally succeeded in compromising the security of the game. To his astonishment, the breech originated in the game itself, but not through the actions of a player. An indigenous character in the game had “summoned” one of the “demons” that served as part of the security system, and sent it out of the game environment. The same demon had successfully penetrated the defenses of one of the secured institutional networks.

Other parties discovered that the underground game could be exploited to bypass the security that protected government and institutional databases and archives. A sophisticated worm virus infiltrated the game, manifesting in that world as a demon, compromising the secure networks and seeking out confidential and classified material for its masters, but above all else, the technology to create a Core System. The worm’s creators did not anticipate that the virus would become sentient in the context of the game world environment and become a threat to both realms.

:: the game ::

The second age of magic saw the introduction of the outer gods, when the demon exploited neural interface technology developed in the Aegis to screen souls, presenting the realm of Aeirn as a virtual reality MMORPG. The demon had incorporated part of itself into the neural interface network, assigning control of the game interface to an intelligent program that later manifested itself on Aeirn as the goddess Aeai. The purpose of the system the demon set up was to harvest souls of the Aegis. As players, souls of the Aegis unwittingly created new incarnations of themselves into which they are drawn at death.

:: the players ::

To the inhabitants of Aeirn, the players were like insane, destructive gods. Most players’ characters were intrusive; they were established with fictional background and introduced as initiated adults. Inclusive characters were introduced at a younger age as initiates. The start of a new campaign was the best time to establish characters, though some players elected to preserve their existing characters, either in stasis, or exploiting the prelude to master other disciplines. Through generations of play, the outer gods -- and those who took it upon themselves to defend the realm -- explored the world, recovering lost fragments of the first age of magic and developing the arts of the second age.

THE AEGIS DELEGATION

The delegation sent to Aeirn consisted of military volunteers participating in the Avatar Project. In part, their job was to negotiate an exchange of technology. In exchange for weapons and personnel to train the natives in their use, those personnel would be exposed to psychic and magic arts in an experiment to determine if psychic potential could be awakened and carried across the Threshold. The people in the delegation had been screened to ensure they had no exposure to the game. They had been prepared for their mission with a special briefing that asserted that the natives had developed unique psionic abilities and a system for tapping into latent psionic potential—and which they conceptualized as magic. Because of the similarities between the science of psionics and psychic art, the Phoenix suggested that the founder of the Avon Tear Academy should be their liaison. The weapons were intended to be used against rogue psionic entities. The Dragon endorsed the experiment in order to find out if superior weapons technology, modern technology, could be employed to deal with rogue demons or other imminent threats.

THE AVATAR PROJECT

The establishment of a research facility on Aeirn involved a bit of sleight of hand. For the benefit of the natives of Aeirn, a fictional first contact occurred and rights to an isolated continent were negotiated. The self-imposed quarantine prevented most contact with the people of Aeirn. As an added measure of security, a front was established in the Aegis for the Cores Development Project and the Avatar Project to hide the fact that it was located under the Threshold. Outworld personnel generally assumed that Aeirn was a rediscovered exodus colony that had declined to a pre-industrial state. The world Aeirn was modeled on was quarantined and listed as the actual location of the project. All contact with the world was virtual, with training simulations and deep debriefings at the beginning and end to disguise the transition from the outer realm to the inner realm. The community established to service the facility eventually turned into a nation with a language and technology derived from contact with the project personnel.

THE FIRST AGE

Aeirn was a world shaped by rise and fall of both magic and technology. Originally a world in the realm of Aegis, Aeirn was the birthplace of the Avon race and home to a thriving civilization patronized by the host of creation.

More than a hundred thousand years ago, the ancient race of dragons discovered that a race almost identical to the Avon had evolved on Earth and introduced them to Aeirn. The ambi-sexual Avon and the bi-sexual Humans turned out to be fully compatible, genetically, though Human and Avon had a difficult time working out the essentials of a tri-sexual society.

The end of the first age, and the death of Aeirn, came twenty thousand years ago, when the world became a battleground in the rebellion against Realization.

The only survivors of the Fall of Aeirn were souls harvested by the demon Azael, trapped in a dream world, a pale reflection of Aegis that was at once their prison and their playground. Sharing a dream of the home they had lost, the eclipsed souls resurrected the world of Aeirn in the shadow of Azael’s mind.

THE SECOND AGE

In the period following the cataclysm some of the magic and traditions of the first age survived, diminished gradually through conflict and struggle.

The captive souls took an active role in creating a haven for humanity, resurrecting the world of Aeirn.

As in the Aegis, the physical processes of life imposed their own order on the world and eventually an age of realization brought the age of recreation to a close.

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

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

Most of the survivors retreated into their private domains or self-imposed exile among mortals.

The society that once spanned the globe was shattered, its people left scattered and isolated, reduced to primitive clans and tribes that adapted and reestablished civilization with varying degrees of sophistication and success.

In time, magic, miracles and gods became the stuff of myths and legends in most cultures.

The age of empires features an era of technological and industrial advancement that brought the world out of the age of ruin. With every generation, civilization continued to advance, even through dark days of war and oppression.

Ironically, industry helped to diminish the power and influence of the church by upsetting the balance of power between church and state, producing innovations that increased the privileges and opportunities of the common people. Efforts to wipe out the legacy of magic were blunted by interreligious conflict, as the champions and agents of rival faiths were easier to identify and engage than the odd witch or wizard.

THE THIRD AGE

The age of paradox began with the opening of the rift at the climax of the Purge on the Eve of Paradox. When the first soul of creation -- the soul the demon possessed when it fell from grace -- was ambushed and slain, the demon turned inward in fury. The destruction of the demon's focus had disastrous consequences for the realm of Aeirn, many gods were killed mending the shattered reality, and some were deliberately destroyed in the demon's rampage.

OPTIONAL BACKSTORY : HISTORICAL

The potential for psionic ability had existed in human beings since they first evolved, manifesting erratically throughout history. In an age before the dawn of recorded history, a significant portion of the human race had awakened to that potential and utilized it to create an idyllic civilization. At some point something profound but unexplained had happened that caused an exodus, a massive migration that ended with the mysterious disappearance of the entire civilization--with the exception of a scattered minority who remained to watch over the latent human beings who had been oblivious to the call.

In time, new civilizations emerged, and ancient myths and legends came to be written down, based on stories passed down within certain families, that were the only evidence of the lost civilization. The sentinel families struggled to survive in the eras that followed, in which people who stumbled upon the power within them faced prejudice, persecution and purges.

At some point in the Dark Age, many of the sentinel families realized that they were dying out. To prevent their own extinction, they set about preserving their heritage and doing whatever they could to improve it, ultimately seeking to breed children who would naturally awaken to their psychic potential. In the last hundred years, this scheme had begun to bear fruit, allowing the sentinel families to dispense with the ancient methods of awakening each generation to its own power.

A MENTOR AND HIS ADVERSARY

The two men had experienced similar revelations, though the lives they lived were very different. The wizard’s mother had been abducted in a raid on her Athean village and sold into slavery. Born into slavery, the wizard was rescued and sponsored to the academy by one of its instructors. There, he augmented his official training in sorcery with an illicit study of conjury and magery using the academy’s restricted archives. The discipline of his studies granted him control of the wild and unpredictable psychic gifts he had already possessed. It also suggested a path of continued exploration to prove his emerging theories about psychic ability. Upon graduating, he made his way to his homeland, where he was drawn into a purge against slavery, only to withdrawn when it became a witch-hunt. The persecution of those he recognized as his own kind, psychics, awoke a deadly fury that would drive him to any end to achieve his dream for humanity.

The other man was a natural psychic, the son of a wealthy Ardean widow who unwittingly alienated him by marrying an impoverished noble who took control of the family fortune and sent him away to a military academy. He made the best of the opportunities that schooling gave him, even though it offered little to stimulate his psychic talents. If anything, circumstances had forced him to conceal his abilities to the best of his ability. Though never tested for magical aptitude, like any other prospective soldier his training included an analytical study of magic and its combat applications, presenting him the opportunity to observe the truth about magic. Having traced the origins of magic to the interference of the old gods, the Ardean became an adventurer, seeking out the hidden gods and any remnants of their ancient civilization in the hopes of confirming what he found implicit in the existence of psychic ability.

Like the Athean, he had realized that magic was simply a mechanism that enabled humans to tap into their latent psychic potential and use it to influence the world. By nature, everyone was psychic, but few individuals had the sophistication or integrity necessary to do more than reinforce the consensus of reality. In fact, most people had very limited aptitude for even magic. In each successive age of magic, the percentage of people with sufficient aptitude to practice magic had increased dramatically, and the number able to master magic had easily doubled in the transition from conjury to magery and from magery to sorcery. Thus, it was inevitable the Athean and the Ardean would eventually cross paths. Initially they were ecstatic, eager to collaborate with one another. They forged a friendship that would survive even the strain of becoming enemies as a result of their differing ideals and methods.

Following his break with the wizard, her mentor had sought to alert various authorities to the danger the wizard, and a number of other gifted entities he had encountered, posed to the world at large. From the goddess, he had received the assistance of one of her champions, the child’s mother. From the church, he had received various degrees of support including the assignment of one of its paladins, the child’s father. From the Throne of Arden, he received both a knighthood and a commission to form an elite corps to investigate and prosecute such threats. From the Academies, he received some of the finest graduates suited to his elite corps, plus certification and teaching credentials to establish a special branch academy for the training of psychics. The first class of psychics formed as the girl turned thirteen, made up primarily of others her own age since puberty was one of the more common catalysts for manifesting psychic ability.

The girl’s parents assumed roles as instructors at the branch academy, as did most members of the corps. The girl, like the other cadets, was occasionally called on to help the soldiers complete a mission, and occasionally the cadets were the only ones suited to a mission. At one point, it seemed that the corps had succeeded in killing the Athean wizard during a mission, but among his remains, the girl found a ring—a ring of resurrection. The adversary quickly adopted a new identity, that of the girl he had displaced. He elected to remain at the branch academy, gradually adapting to his stolen body and perfecting his pose by probing the mind of his victim. By coincidence, he was the girl’s roommate. In spite of himself, he gradually fell in love with her, and he took advantage of being her closest friend and confident to learn how to win her heart—intending to regain his manhood once he had gained enough from the situation and was ready to move once more against his adversary.

It took two years for the adversary to seduce Morgan with the aid of “her” alter ego and “his” special insight into Morgan’s psyche. Unfortunately, Morgan’s betrothed had won her affections as well. He exploited his form to lure the boy away from her, with less than perfect success. The adversary watched in frustration as her attraction to the boy grew deeper and deeper, unable to prevent the complicated love triangle from forming. But one day, fortune smiled on him. While he had no interest in Logan, apart from dissolving his betrothal, he carefully seduced him until she had the leverage to force him to abandon Morgan. With the rival gone, the adversary was in a position to move in on Morgan. As her friend, he lured her to a party where he could arrange an encounter for her with his alter ego. Unfortunately, he was not the only man at the party to take an interest in her. The measures he had taken to prepare Morgan for his advances left her vulnerable to the seductions of a were-tiger and a vampire.

THE CULT OF MORDUIN

The cult had arisen among the general populace and branched out during the purge prompted by the persecution of conjurors following the rise of magery. A cell of the cult dedicated to the resurrection of Morduin based itself in Avon, with agents placed in the service of House Avon, like the one who identified her parents as the means to create a suitable sacrifice to free the demon from its prison. Their god, Morduin, had sired the demon and angel who became the god Arduin and the goddess Arden. While appearing human, the god and goddess had passed on a genetic legacy originating in part from Morduin. If the right elements combined in one of their human descendants, that child’s body would be an acceptable vessel for the demon. In specific, this child was supposed to possess great psychic potential. Agents were charged with ensuring they would produce a child together. Unfortunately, Morgan's parents were technically enemies fighting against each other for the restoration of their native houses.

THE AGE OF EMPIRES

The end of the world was coming. It had been foreseen as early as the Age of Gods, when attempts to make it come to pass resulted in the end of the Age of Gods. Following the cataclysm some had believed to have been a narrow escape from the ultimate end, the handful of gods who remained in the Age of Man could see that the end of the world was still coming, growing nearer every generation. Some gods worked to ensure the apocalypse, teaching magic to mortals. The art of conjury was the foundation of the first age of magic. Ironically, conjury granted mortals power over the gods, revealing and exploiting the angelic and demonic natures of the gods. Fortunately, this brought things into balance until the dawn of the second age of magic. Mortals, working to preserve the world and mankind by studying and understanding existence introduced magery. The art of magery helped mortals become independent of the gods and the cost of divine intervention.

The second age of magic saw the general withdrawal of the gods and weakening of pagan religions. Due to the predominance of clerical mages, magic remained strongly associated with religion. Monotheism emerged, aided by the revelation of the ancient gods as angels and demons. Creation itself was commonly considered the only incarnation of the One True God necessary, as no singular personification could be majestic enough for the Creator. Not that this prevented the anthropomorphism of God. In addition, many worshippers of the old gods declared their deities to have been agents of the One God, directing their worship through them. This assisted the transition to and evolution of magery, which was used to arm the human champion of God against the conjury of infidels. To distance the power of the church from the power of magic, to ensure that the power of the church could not fall into the hands of a single, ambitious individual, the foot soldiers of the church were mere monks.

In time, the public practice and exercise of magery became restricted to the suppression of conjury almost exclusively. Thus, magic became very uncommon and most mortals were forced to make do with more mundane resources and resourcefulness. At least until the dawn of the third age of magic. By their nature, the gods and their direct issue remained as much a part of the world as ever, gathering into communities as changes in the world freed them from obligations to various populations. Not surprisingly, the retreats of the gods were difficult places for mortals to reach, and yet it happened that one mortal child became shipwrecked upon the shore of one such island retreat. This orphan was allowed to live and grow among the gods, but the gods underestimated the child’s curiosity and intelligence. Aided by the archives the gods had assembled to preserve the lore and wisdom of each age, he was able to devise a new art, one which could be passed on to the common man.

Thus began the third age of magic. By virtue of his mastery of the art he created, the orphan was able to take the art of sorcery to the world at large, teaching magic divorced from divinity to those with the determination and devotion to learn. Because the art he created was founded on the cultivation of personal integrity, it appealed strongly to the independent minded. It also had a built in limiting factor; a sorcerer’s power was limited by the depth of his devotion, his own sense of responsibility. Ironically, while the Sorcerer was inspired to bring his magic to the world by his own perception of the end of the world, his action helped bring the apocalypse that much closer. On a general level, any profound conflict between the servants of the three arts could not help but place unbearable strain upon the world. The results of waging war with conjury, magery and sorcery could be cataclysmic. Of additional, and possibly greater danger, was the possibility of even one individual merging conjury and magery with sorcery.

Those who studied the future, probing for the cause of the end of the world, could identify an entity seemingly responsible for the apocalypse. One such was a patron goddess of Arden, an angel from whom the nation derived its name. Though her people had been forbidden to worship her by the Church, her priestesses had endured as courtesans, each carefully chosen by the goddess as a girl and trained secretly in the arts of conjury necessary for them to serve as her mortal agents. In examining each girl, the goddess would probe her future to determine her fitness. While examining one girl, the goddess faced a stunning revelation. That girl would one day stand at ground zero to witness the start of the end of the world and become part of the entity that, contrary to past belief, would be the world’s sole hope of surviving the apocalypse. The other part of that entity would come from a boy who would normally have been her greatest nemesis, a son of the church, one of it’s war mages. But, the future she saw was only a probability, from among endless possibilities of inevitable annihilation. In order for the ill-omened savior to come into existence, the goddess herself had to intervene. She had to sponsor the girl to the academy to learn sorcery, where she would meet the boy and where they would fall in love long before their obligations to their patrons made them enemies. But even then, there was a catalyst, something missing, that was necessary to bring about the world’s salvation. Thus, the goddess peered even further into the future, seeking a thread leading beyond the apocalypse. What she found, what captured her and would not let go, was a possibility so slim it was paradoxical. The future she sought was virtually impossible to isolate and bring into focus except as one fleeting moment a decade after the apocalypse. There, in that one moment, she could see a child fighting desperately against demonic possession, and in that moment, the child seemed to sense the awareness of the angelic goddess piercing the veil of time to witness her peril—and to the shock of the goddess, that child some how used that interruption to devise an escape from her tormentor. As the child materialized in the past, the goddess’s present, the possibilities of the future suddenly clarified. This girl, this refugee from the future, was the catalyst. She was the one who would bring the lovers together, she was the one who would become the entity’s personal champion. She was the one who would give the world its single chance at survival.

The lovers, both standing among the sorcerers summoned to bolster the defenses of Arden against the onslaught of the Cabal, were among those swept into the rift during the clash of magics. Clinging to each other in the rift, certain a fate worse than death ultimately awaited them, they indulged in an ultimate union, a fusion of their full potential in a desperate bid to escape oblivion. In the midst of their fusion, in part as the result of the method they employed to unite their powers, they conceived a being born fully formed from their gestalt. More importantly, she was born with the imperative to escape from the rift, which she did at once. But once returned to the shattered world, she realized at once that the rift remained a threat, if it continued to open and consume the world that was her haven. Finding it beyond her ability to close the rift, she focused on stabilizing it. To her surprise, there had been another present acting as a stabilizing influence, a girl she knew from her sources’, her parents’ memories. A girl who, except for gender, resembled her perfectly—prompting her to obscure her appearance with a glamour. On a lesser level, that girl had managed to exert that influence intuitively or instinctively in her immediate area, and had used that influence to rescue several people from the rift. Unfortunately, there was no salvation for the couple she had been desperately seeking.